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of

Scotch Plains - Fanwood



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BOARD OF EDUCATION IS SCHEDULED TO VOTE ON SETTLEMENT TODAY

Teachers Ratify New Three-Year Contract Giving Union Members Annual Increases And Retaining Current Benefits Package

Agreement, Retroactive to 1995-1996, Wraps Up 17 Months of Negotiations, Restores Optimism for Successful Year in Scotch Plains-Fanwood

By SUZETTE STALKER
Specially Written for The Times

The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Education Association ratified a new three-year contract September 5 which gives union members annual salary increases for each year covered by the agreement while maintaining an existing benefits package for employees. The district Board of Education was expected to vote on the pact today, Thursday, September 12.

Education Association President Barbara McGuane reported the majority of union members voted in favor of the long-awaited settlement, which was tentatively reached on August 28 following 17 months of often tense negotiations between the association and the Board of Educa-

tion. The prolonged contract talks primarily involved salaries and benefits.

Prior to casting their ballots, union members reviewed details of the tentative agreement at a special meeting held on September 3, the day before Scotch Plains-Fanwood schools opened. Mrs. McGuane reported the association, which represents approximately 427 district teachers, secretaries and aides, as well as coaches and co-curricular guides, were "very much in favor" of the pact.

"There were very few no votes," she added.

Mrs. McGuane explained the union actually approved two separate contracts last week, one of which is retroactive to the 1995-1996 school year and the other a two-year agreement extending until June 30, 1998. Union members will receive annual raises of 3.92 percent, 3.34 percent and 3.59 percent, respectively, over the three years covered under the dual settlement.

She added, however, that these percentile increases could change during the latter two years of the contract, particularly the third year, depending on staff members who retire or new employees hired at lower salary levels.

The association president reported the union will retain its existing indemnity medical plan, noting that "we were looking to improve it but we decided to keep what we had. We wanted to keep our benefits intact."

Association members, whose pre-

vious contract had expired on June 30, 1995, had prepared to go on strike if a settlement was not reached by the start of the 1996-1997 school year. In the event of a strike, district officials had planned to open schools on schedule on September 4 using substitute teachers. The last time union members went on strike was in 1983.

The union had staged several job actions last year as the labor dispute wore on, including picketing outside the district's administrative offices before the Board of Education's September 21 meeting; refusing to work most Back-to-School nights and exercising their legal option to take Election Day as a paid holiday, which resulted in the closing of schools that day.

"I'm just glad we were able to reach a settlement and get the contract ratified so school could open on a positive note," the association president remarked. "I think it creates a good feeling for the community, the staff, the administrators and everyone else."

The pact was reached after both sides agreed to accept a report by fact finder Daniel Brent of the state Public Employee Relations Committee (PERC), which was received August 20. Mr. Brent was assigned to the negotiations in May after the union and the board failed to reach a settlement with the assistance of a state mediator. The board declared an impasse in the negotiations last September 13 following a dozen unsuccessful contract talks.

Heading up the union's negotiation team were Mrs. McGuane and Past Association Presidents Sonya Martin, Elaine Kolker, Grace Klimko, Judith Massimo, Mary Salinard and Irwin Kauer. Past Association Vice President Camille Berkowicz and current Vice President Theodore Wurster were non-voting members who represented Mrs. McGuane during negotiations when necessary.

The union team was assisted by Ronald Harvey of UniServe, a regional arm of the New Jersey Education Association, which is the state teachers' union. UniServe advises local teachers' unions during negotiations.

The board's negotiation team was chaired by Morris H. "Butch" Gillet and included the Board of Education's President, Dr. Donald E. Sheldon; Mrs. Theresa Larkin and August L. Ruggiero, with assistance from Raymond Cassetta, an independent contractor with the South Plainfield firm of Cassetta, Taylor and Whalen. The firm has been retained by the board to provide negotiation and follow-up services. Mr. Cassetta served as the board's official spokesman during the negotiations process.

Conley Trial Set for January Story on Page 10



David B. Corbin for The Times

TEAM LEADERSHIP... This year's Tri-Captains on the Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School Varsity Girls Soccer Team, left to right, are: Seniors Kristi Morse, Michele Giambalvo and Christine Boyle. Pictured in back are Head Coach Frank Butz, right, and Assistant Coach Dave Moser. Please see story on Page 11.

Township Council Withdraws Resolution On Right-of-Way Use for Optic Cables

TCG Has Proposed Installation of Trunk Line for Telephone, Fax Service

By JEANNE WHITNEY
Specially Written for The Times

The Scotch Plains Township Council unanimously agreed Tuesday night at its regular meeting to withdraw a resolution that would grant a 10-year right-of-way use of township roads to Teleport Communications New York (TCG) for installation of fiber optic cables. Councilman William P. McClintock, Jr., who made the motion to withdraw the resolution, indicated the council was acting on the advice of the council's Technology Advisory Committee, chaired by resident Kenneth Anderson, and its legal counsel.

"It will take some time to study what we're going to do," Councilman McClintock said.

Mayor Alan M. Augustine added, "This is a very, very complex topic and there is no question that we need more information."

At last month's council meeting, member of the Technology Advisory Committee Leland S. McGee said it was possible, for example, that township libraries, schools and municipal offices could be "hooked up" as part of the cable installation agreement. Other officials indicated during a council conference meeting Tuesday that the proposed 96-strand trunk cable should be viewed as only the beginning of a huge network of fiber optic lines for telephone and fax.

Officials representing the township who had been in contact with TCG said that the telecommunications company appeared to be willing to work with the township on an agreement.

Township Attorney Donald T. DiFrancesco said he wanted to make clear that his particular resolution was dead, however, the council indicated it would consider a similar yet

different resolution in the future.

In a separate move, the council unanimously agreed to an ordinance that sets the wage range for part-time computer operators in the township at \$10 to \$13.50 per hour.

In other action taken, the council agreed by resolution to award Elliot Palmer Paving Company, Inc., the contract for \$207,633 worth of improvements to Raritan Road between Rahway Avenue and the Edison Township border. Scotch Plains received a \$201,000 grant from the State Transportation Trust Fund for the work. Township funds will make up the \$7,000 difference, officials indicated.

According to township Principal Engineer Dennis J. Harrington, Palmer Paving submitted the lowest bid, about \$26,000 less than the next lowest bid for the job, of the three bids considered.

The decision on another set of bids for purchase of a \$72,000 dump truck with a plow and spreader has not yet been finalized, according to officials. Municipal Manager Thomas E. Atkins said Public Works Director Walter DiNizo will have a decision within the next few weeks. Both bids received by the township offer a \$1,000 trade-in on the old 1979 truck, Mr. DiNizo indicated.

With an October 1 deadline, the council introduced a resolution to renew a three-year membership in the Suburban Municipal Joint Insurance Fund (JIF), with Mr. Atkins continuing to serve as Fund Commissioner for the township. Through the shared or group insurance rates, Mr. Atkins said the fund has saved at least \$650,000 over the past three years and perhaps as much as an estimated \$843,797 in premiums.

"I really feel that the taxpayers are being well served," Mr. Atkins said in a letter to the council.

The JIF includes a major portion of the township's general insurance coverage, not including health insurance. The council decided last month to provide health insurance for township employees through CIGNA by Friday, November 1, leaving the New Jersey State Health Benefits Plan.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10

Borough Council Considering Agreement With Township for Construction Office

Fanwood Officials to Determine If Merging Services Would Be Economically Feasible to Community

By SUZETTE STALKER
Specially Written for The Times

The Fanwood Borough Council will likely make a decision within the next several months on whether to enter into an Interlocal Agreement with Scotch Plains whereby the township would assume the duties of the Fanwood Construction Office, it was revealed during the council's agenda session on September 4.

The council's Building and Zoning Committee, which has been reviewing data on the proposed agreement, is scheduled to meet next on Monday, September 23, when it will begin preparing information and recommendations to help officials determine if the pact would be economically feasible for the borough.

Members of the council acknowledged that while an agreement with Scotch Plains would save Fanwood the expense of operating the Construction Office at Borough Hall, there are additional financial con-

cerns, as well as other aspects to the proposal, which the governing body would need to consider before making its decision.

Councilwoman Karen M. Schurtz, Chairwoman of the Building and Zoning Committee, told *The Times* this week that Fanwood officials have been studying whether merging certain municipal services with Scotch Plains would be "fiscally prudent" to the borough. The two communities previously had an interlocal agreement for three years, which has since been dissolved, for the services of the court administrator.

She reported that while the proposed agreement concerning the construction office is under discussion, "there are some issues which have not been completely resolved," including what the fee schedule would be, how much the borough would have to pay Scotch Plains and whether Fanwood would receive any revenue from the arrangement.

"We would like Scotch Plains to come back with some more information, particularly about fee schedules and how much it would cost," the councilwoman remarked. "We're still in the fact-finding part of this venture."

During the council agenda meeting, Mrs. Schurtz described several advantages and disadvantages to Fanwood residents of having such an agreement with the township. Among the benefits would be that the Scotch Plains Construction Office is open 40 hours a week, while the Fanwood office has 21 business hours.

The borough's construction office is open for an hour on Monday and Thursday evenings, however, for those people unable to come in during regular business hours, and Fanwood residents also would lose the convenience of having the office in their own community, the councilwoman said.

The Scotch Plains office has a larger staff, with some members having

more than one license, according to Borough Clerk Eleanor McGovern, who explained this makes the township "more flexible" in terms of the level of service it can provide. The Fanwood Construction Office has a staff of four people, including a clerk responsible for handling paperwork.

Officials emphasized that discussions concerning the proposed agreement are still preliminary, and that they are still in the process of gathering information. Mrs. McGovern noted that fees paid to Scotch Plains would have to be allocated in the municipal budget, and the council does not know yet what it would be charged for those services.

If they did enter into an agreement with the township, council members indicated they would lean toward a short-term arrangement with the option of renewing it on an annual basis. Councilman William E. Populus, Jr. recommended borough officials state

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10

Police Chief Formally Introduced at Meeting

Chief O'Brien Took Over Township Force in August

By JEANNE WHITNEY
Specially Written for The Times

Newly appointed Scotch Plains Police Chief Thomas O'Brien was formally introduced to council members before a standing-room-only crowd of well-wishers Tuesday night at the council's regular meeting. Former township Police Chief Robert A. Luce, Westfield Police Chief Anthony J. Scutti and Fanwood Police Chief Anthony J. Parenti were recognized in the audience by Mayor Alan M. Augustine.

Chief O'Brien, who was sworn in as Chief on August 1 after 32 years on the force, admitted, "Although every officer at some time thinks of being chief, it came as quite a shock."

After thanking everyone for the opportunity to serve the community, Chief O'Brien introduced his wife, mother, four daughters and a son.

"You don't get to this position on your own. My family has always been there for me," he said, his voice wavering momentarily with emotion. When Councilman Robert B. Johnston asked Chief O'Brien

whether the room was so crowded as a result of the Chief's direct order for officers to attend, an officer responded in good humor, "No, it's overtime," to the delight of Chief O'Brien and the audience. Chief O'Brien then hinted with a smile that his golf game might suffer as a result of the additional duties and time his new position requires.

Mayor Augustine noted Chief O'Brien's experience as Commander of the Patrol Division, the largest division of the department and his 1987 graduation from the selection Federal Bureau of Investigation National Police Academy in Quantico, Virginia. The Mayor thanked him for taking on an "awesome responsibility" as Police Chief.

Chief O'Brien concluded his remarks to the council by saying, "True leadership is bestowed by those you lead."

There will be a dinner Friday, September 20, at Shacknaxxon Golf and Country Club honoring former Chief Luce. The event will start at 6:30 p.m.

DEADLINES HELP PAPER SERVE YOU

Those preparing press releases for submission to *The Times* are reminded all copy should be in the hands of the Editor at 50 Elm Street, Westfield, by 4 p.m. on the Friday before the Thursday on which they wish it to appear.

Times releases also may be mailed to Post Office Box 368, Scotch Plains, 07076 to meet the above requirements.

For events which happen the weekend prior to publication, press releases should reach the Editor by Monday of the week of publication at 10 a.m.

Obituaries will be taken until Tuesday at 5 p.m.

For events which are planned weeks or months in advance, we encourage submission of stories as early as possible prior to the event.

The above deadlines are meant to enable us to prepare your copy carefully.



McGINN YARD SALE PREPARATION... McGinn Elementary School students, shown left to right, Max Young, Ellis Lieberman, Darrell Ann Smith and Gaby Young, help prepare the toy area for next weekend's Parent-Teacher Association Yard Sale. The sale is being held at 48 Fourth Street, Fanwood (off South Avenue) on Saturday and Sunday, September 20 and 21 (rain date September 27 and 28) from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Proceeds from the sale will directly benefit all McGinn students through PTA funded activities.