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Scotch Plains - Fanwood



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FOR THE CHILDREN...Students, shown left to right, from the Brunner School in Scotch Plains, Nicholas Jastrzebski, William Fiedler, Mary Ellen Pliotowski and Robert Jastrzebski, display some of the gingerbread cookies that they made for the children in Children's Specialized Hospital in Mountainside.

Mayor Augustine Looks Back Fondly On His Years on Township Council

By JEANNE WHITNEY
Specially Written for The Times

As Scotch Plains Township Mayor Alan M. Augustine finishes out the year as Mayor and his tenure as Township Councilman, he will be completing a career in township government that spans 26 years, including three terms as Mayor.

After winning election to an unexpired term in 1970 on the then Township Committee, Mr. Augustine, a Republican, has gone on to serve as Councilman, Mayor, Union County Freeholder Chairman and State Legislature Assemblyman for the 22nd District.

A former district manager with Chrysler Corporation and now a marketing consultant with Subaru Distributors Corporation, Mr. Augustine says his years in public service have been an education as well as a great honor. "You really do have an opportunity to make a difference in people's lives," he said.

Born in Montclair, Mayor Augustine moved to Scotch Plains with his wife, Jeanne, in 1962. They have three grown children. Mr. Augustine said he remembers being a part of student government and an officer in various college clubs as an economics major at Lafayette College in Easton, Pennsylvania.

During his first years of public service in the township, Mr. Augustine remembers how 11 candidates ran for five seats when Township Committee rule changed to the present Council system in 1973. The first year, he said, a Council member's term length was determined by lottery. "I drew a two-year term. I ran three years in a row at the beginning because of all the changes," he explained.

Mayor Augustine remembers that in 1971 was when the Township Committee set up "The Listening Post" on the first Saturday of every month, when residents could talk to a committee member privately about their concerns.

"It was the complaint bureau," he said. "Today, it is still around, on Tuesdays, and may not be as well attended as in earlier years," he said.

In 1973, Mr. Augustine saw the construction and dedication of the present Municipal Building on Park Avenue after the township had "outgrown" the former building which stood next door, where the present Municipal Building parking lot is now. "We discussed several different options for the building before deciding on the one we have now — we called it 'The Listening Post,'" Mr. Augustine said. "It cost \$1 million at the time." Referring to a photo of the old township hall, Mr. Augustine said that even the township fire department had been housed in the same building, behind two garages on the side.

Mr. Augustine lost his seat on the Council for two years in 1975 and 1976.

Back on the Council by 1977, Mr. Augustine served his first term as Mayor in 1979. He said a lifelong love of music led him to create the Scotch Plains Cultural Arts Committee during his tenure, that in turn led to a long series of summer concerts as "Music on the Green." Another "first" that Mr. Augustine

likes to recall is the celebration of Scotch Plains Day, when the township honors its volunteers and retired municipal employees.

"The first Scotch Plains Day in 1979 began with the dedication of the Village Green," he said, referring to the park next to the Municipal Building. The annual event has grown to include the business community, a health fair, animal clinic, entertainment and other activities every fall, he added.

Not seeking re-election to the Council for 1985 but returning to the Council four years later in 1989, Mr. Augustine also served concurrently as a Union County Freeholder for eight years. His years as a County Freeholder saw much growth with the building of a \$50 million correction facility in Elizabeth, the Runnells Specialized Hospital in Berkeley Heights, the solid waste incinerator in Rahway, the new Watchung Stables in Mountainside and the John H. Stamler Police Academy in Scotch Plains.

After serving as Freeholder Chairman in 1987, he resigned from the board in 1992 in order to fill an unexpired state Assembly term of current Congressman Robert D. Franks, a seat Mr. Augustine has continued to hold through two subsequent elections to this day.

Serving jointly on the Council and at county and state levels of government has been "very helpful," Mr. Augustine says. "I feel so much more prepared. I understand why there is a need for the legislation," he says.

Meanwhile, Mr. Augustine continued to serve as a Township Councilman, serving again as Mayor in 1991 and 1996.

During his 1991 stint as Mayor, Mr. Augustine says he started what is now the annual Mayor's Charity Gala Ball fundraiser to prevent substance abuse and also honor volunteers and organizations each year. "It is my hope that it will endure," he said of the fundraising event. "We started this when it seemed some of the other charity events here had fallen away, for whatever reasons. It's for everyone."

Mr. Augustine said his many years on the Township Council have allowed him to see many worthwhile projects through to completion. This past spring, he saw the completion of the \$8 million Senior Citizen Housing facility in the township. "There has been a need for affordable housing for this very valuable segment of our population," he said.

He remembers the Council's success in making vast improvements in flood control in the township during the 1970s.

The township is a founding member of the Suburban Joint Insurance Fund that was created with neighboring towns three years ago, that, he said, saves over \$350,000 for the township.

This year, Mr. Augustine highlighted the township's certification from the state Council On Affordable Housing as important progress in meeting housing needs in the state.

Repairs were made to Raritan Road with grants from the Department of Transportation. An irrigation system was installed at the Scotch Hills Golf Course. The township purchased new



Mayor Alan M. Augustine pumper fire trucks while two old ones were donated to needy towns in Nova Scotia and Mexico.

Glancing around at the commemorative plaques and photographs on

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Andrew J. MacDonald Looks Back on His Years On the Fanwood Council

By SUZETTE STALKER
Specially Written for The Times

As he prepared to bid farewell to his colleagues on the Fanwood Borough Council, Andrew J. MacDonald reflected this week on his long career with the governing body, the major developments which have impacted the community during his four non-consecutive terms and his hopes for the municipality as it approaches the end of the century.

Councilman MacDonald, one of three Republicans on the evenly-split Council, has served on the governing body from 1982 to 1984, 1986 to 1988, and 1991 to 1996. He opted not to run for re-election this year, however, and will be succeeded on New Year's Day by Councilman-Elect Stuart S. Kline. Mr. Kline and incumbent Councilman Louis C. Jung, both Republicans, won the two available seats on the Council in the November general elections.

Discussing his reasons for not seeking another term, Mr. MacDonald explained that he believes in term limitations and that he wanted to devote more time to his family, which he called "the most important aspect of my life," as well as to his job as a Corporate Sales Manager at Computer City in Springfield. The councilman, who has been employed in computer sales for 24 years, previously worked for such companies as IBM, Bell Atlantic and Digital Equipment.

He also plans to direct his energies toward his new role as Grand Knight of Father Nelligan Council No. 5730 of the Knights of Columbus, a position to which he was named in November. Councilman MacDonald, who has been a member of the Knights of Columbus since 1990, said his planned goals include attempting to persuade more young members to join the Catholic men's organization and convincing current members to become more actively involved in projects sponsored by the Knights.

Of the myriad issues the Fanwood Council has dealt with since he first came on board in 1982, Councilman MacDonald said one of the most pivotal was a ruling by the New Jersey Council on Affordable Housing (COAH), which mandated that the borough had to provide 87 units of low and moderate income housing in accordance with Mount Laurel



Councilman Andrew MacDonald

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SWITCH IN COVERAGE WILL SAVE BOROUGH \$27,000 Borough Council Drops Out Of JIF Insurance Group, Goes With Commercial Firm

By SUZETTE STALKER
Specially Written for The Times

The Fanwood Borough Council voted 4 to 2 during a special meeting December 16 to withdraw from the Suburban Joint Insurance Fund (JIF), of which it had been a member since 1994, and to contract with a commercial insurance company for the municipality's general liability coverage.

The borough's contract with the American International Group (AIG) would only be for a year and would have to be renewed for 1998.

Officials had to decide by Wednesday, January 1, whether or not to renew the borough's membership in the JIF, a regional insurance pool which was created three years ago to provide lower cost insurance to area municipalities. Besides Fanwood, participating communities had included Scotch Plains, Westfield, Mountainside, Summit, Watchung, Bedminster and Bernardsville.

Councilman Andrew J. MacDonald, Chairman of the Administration and Finance Committee, and committee member Councilman William E. Populus, Jr., both recommended during the governing body's December 4 agenda meeting that the borough drop out of the JIF and acquire its general liability coverage instead through the AIG.

They argued that although the JIF had offered members reduced cost coverage at a time when municipalities were facing what Mr. Populus

called "a hard insurance market," the Council now had an opportunity to save \$27,000, which equals more than one tax point, by switching to AIG.

Councilman Louis C. Jung, the third member of the Administration and Finance Committee, was opposed to the idea of switching insurance coverage, however, maintaining that the borough had so far enjoyed a successful relationship with the JIF. He was also concerned that if officials decide after a year that they want to renew membership in the JIF, there was no guarantee that the borough would be accepted back into the regional organization.

Borough Clerk Eleanor McGovern, who represented the municipality as a JIF Commissioner, also cited several advantages of remaining with the JIF. Among the benefits, she said, were that the JIF provided stability to counteract cost fluctuations in the insurance market; that it was probably better to stick with one insurance provider rather than jumping around, and that the community would possibly be eligible for a \$10,000 rebate.

She also reported that the JIF sponsors valuable safety programs which the community would lose by transferring coverage to the commercial insurance carrier. Councilman MacDonald said there were people in Fanwood who were equally qualified to offer the same programs locally and therefore the municipality would not be placed at a disadvantage.

A resolution authorizing the governing body to enter into an agreement with AIG had been placed on the Council's December 12 regular agenda, but was postponed while officials reviewed additional information on the matter.

During the special meeting last week, Councilman Jung and Councilwoman Karen M. Schurtz voted against switching from the JIF to AIG, with the remainder of the Council supporting the measure. Workmen's compensation insurance, which had also been part of the JIF package, now will be provided through the North Jersey Intergovernmental Fund.

Borough, Township Slate Reorganizations For New Year's Day

The Scotch Plains and Fanwood governing bodies will hold their reorganization meetings on New Year's Day.

In Scotch Plains, Dr. Martin Marks will be sworn in on the Township Council along with current Councilman William F. McClintock, Jr., at 1 p.m.

Fanwood Councilman-Elect Stuart S. Kline take office at noon along with current Councilman Louis C. Jung, who will take the oath for another term.

Bagelmerica Owner Receives Board Approval for Pizza, Extended Hours

By SUZETTE STALKER
Specially Written for The Times

The owner of Bagelmerica Inc. on South Martine Avenue was granted a use variance by the Fanwood Board of Adjustment last Thursday, permitting him to expand his menu to include pizza and to extend his hours of operation. The applicant told officials he needed to make changes in order for his establishment to survive among a growing number of competitors.

Ken Chang of Edison, represented by Metuchen attorney John Wiley, told the board that his business was facing stiff competition from several

other area businesses which serve bagels, including one in Scotch Plains and the Dunkin' Donuts on South Avenue in Fanwood, and felt he needed to compensate by diversifying. He asked to extend his business hours from 5 p.m. until 10 p.m. in order to serve customers coming in for pizza in the evening.

The applicant confirmed that there would be no change to the exterior of the building and no need for additional signage, adding that the only significant change to the interior would be to rearrange the counter space in order to accommodate a pizza oven. He said there would be no increase in the number of seating booths, and that customers would order the pizza themselves from the counter and then either bring it to their seats or take it out.

The proprietors of two other Fanwood businesses spoke in opposition to Mr. Chang's petition during last week's public hearing, claiming the applicant's plans for a pizza menu and additional hours would hurt their own establishments. John Urso, the owner of South Street Café Pizza and Pasta on South Avenue, protested that "It's going to affect my business. If he can't make it with bagels, he can buy my place or relocate. I've got a lot of money invested in my place."

He also produced a menu he said he received while visiting Bagelmerica, Inc. as a customer, and which advertised the store as being open until 11 p.m. Mr. Chang responded that the time had been printed on the menu by mistake and would be corrected.

Jack Shah, the owner of The Corner Store on South Martine Avenue, complained that the applicant's plans to expand his original menu of 14 to 15 items would infringe upon his own business. Board Attorney Charles H. Brandt responded that the Board of Adjustment can not regulate competition, and remarked that the Town of Westfield, for example, currently has "seven or eight pizzerias and three bagel shops."

Board members postponed their vote on a second use variance application, in which Mr. and Mrs. Yuri Gokhin of Midway Avenue appealed for permission to convert a portion of their family room into a second kitchen on the ground floor of their home. The applicants explained that they wanted to build the kitchenette so Mrs. Gokhin's 95-year-old grandmother, who lives with them, does not have to climb the stairs to the family's second-floor kitchen.

The couple lives on the second floor of the bi-level home with their two children, while Mrs. Gokhin's parents and her grandmother occupy

the ground floor. The primary concern among board members was that if the family should ever move, a second kitchen could lead to the home one day becoming a two-family dwelling, possibly with an absentee owner. The Fanwood Zoning Ordinance currently contains no provisions for two-family residences.

Mr. Brandt defined a two-family residence as one which generally comprises two separate units, including bedroom, bathroom and kitchen facilities, as well as separate utility meters. The Gokhins stated there will be no additional utility meter accompanying their proposed renovation.

Based on a suggestion by board member James Watson, the board attorney recommended that a provision calling for removal of the kitchenette be included in the deed for the property so that when it is sold, the new owner would be aware of the board's intent for the house to remain a single-family home.

Several North Avenue neighbors, however, expressed concern that the proposed kitchenette would eventually lead to the residence being rated as a two-family house. Dean Pratt, who lives about 150 feet from the

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Deadlines Are Told For First '97 Issue

Persons preparing press releases to The Times should note that all copy for the issue of Thursday, January 2, is due today, December 26, by 4 p.m.

Sports articles will be accepted through noon tomorrow, December 27. Obituaries will be accepted up until 1 p.m. on Saturday, December 28. Please note the offices of this newspaper will be closed on New Year's Day.

Deadlines will return to normal the following week. Copy must be received in our offices by 4 p.m. on the Friday prior to publication. Sports stories which occurred over the weekend will be accepted until noon on Mondays. Obituaries will be taken up until 5 p.m. on Tuesday.

To ensure that copy reaches our offices on time, we recommend that it be either e-mailed or faxed. The Leader's e-mail address is golender@aol.com. The fax number is 232-0473. Copy may also be dropped through the our door, when the newspaper's offices are closed.

All copy must be typed, double-spaced, with a maximum of 300 words in length, and include a daytime telephone number where the submitter can be reached.

Please note that in addition to making our deadlines, press releases and/or letters may be delayed in publication due to space considerations. All copy is subjected to being cut due to length and will be edited for style and clarification at the discretion of the editor.