

THE TIMES



Scotch Plains - Fanwood

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VICTIM'S FORMER HOME...Doris Koues, 88, was murdered in her home on Skytop Drive in Scotch Plains in 1993. Kevin Conley went on trial last week.

NEIGHBOR ON TRIAL IN TOWNSHIP WOMAN'S SLAYING

Murder Trial Features Expert FBI Testimony, Allegations Accused Killed Was Framed

The trial of a man accused of killing an elderly Scotch Plains widow in her home more than three years ago included testimony last week from several FBI forensic experts, as well as a friend of the victim whom the defendant's attorney alleged was involved in the grisly slaying. Further arguments were being heard by the jury this week.

The defendant, Kevin Conley, 33, of New Brunswick, is being tried before Judge John Triarsi in Superior Court in Elizabeth. He has been charged with murder, aggravated sexual assault, burglary and unlawful weapons possession in the death of Doris Koues, an 88-year-old invalid, whose body was discovered on July 10, 1993, in her Skytop Drive home. Conley, who was staying with his parents at their home directly behind the victim's residence when the crime occurred, was charged in the slaying after authorities determined that his fingerprints, which had been sent to the FBI for analysis, matched those which had been found on a baby oil bottle on a night stand in the victim's bedroom.

The defendant, who had submitted his fingerprints to Scotch Plains police investigators at their request, was arrested on November 2, 1993. Conley's attorney, Robert Armstrong Lord of Mountainside, charged that authorities unlawfully obtained his

client's prints without a court order and had sought to have the evidence excluded at the trial. A judge ruled last February, however, that police had "valid consent" from Conley to collect the fingerprints.

Mrs. Koues, whose semi-nude body was discovered in her bedroom, had been bludgeoned with the base of a telephone, stabbed in the forehead and behind the ear with a knife, and ultimately strangled, according to Dr. Joan Obe of the Union County Medical Examiner's Office. Dr. Obe, who was called as a state's witness against Conley, told the court that she also discovered bruises which indicated the victim had been sexually assaulted. During questioning by Assistant Prosecutor William Kolano on January 13, Dr. Obe testified that an autopsy she performed on Mrs. Koues two days after her body was discovered revealed that the victim sustained fractures to her cheekbone, nose and ribs. Jurors viewed autopsy photographs which showed the extent of Mrs. Koues' head and neck injuries.

The medical examiner said the victim's knuckles and wrists were severely bruised, apparently from struggling with her assailant, whom Dr. Obe ascertained had restrained Mrs. Koues by her wrists. However, she acknowledged under cross-ex-

amination by Mr. Lord that she could not determine the assailant's build based on the victim's injuries or whether he was right or left handed.

Christopher Hopkins, an FBI expert witness in hair and fiber analysis, testified the following day that hair samples found on the victim's bed sheet, body and clothing, which he analyzed at an FBI laboratory in Washington, D.C., could not be positively identified as having come from the defendant. He added, however, that such an absence of hair at a crime scene was not an uncommon occurrence.

The witness also observed that while arm and body hair from someone other than the victim was found at the scene, head or pubic hair is generally needed for a positive identification.

During the first week of the trial, which began on January 7, an FBI expert specializing in DNA evidence testified that test results on semen samples found at the crime scene did not positively link Conley to the homicide, but did not rule him out either.

At the beginning of the trial, Mr. Lord argued that evidence pointed to the crime having been committed by someone who was very familiar with the inside of the Koues home. He had also questioned why police did not find Conley's fingerprints on either the telephone or the knife used in the killing, and said there were two fingerprints on the back door to the victim's home which could not be identified.

Last Thursday, Mr. Lord accused Alice Schiller, 71, a longtime friend of the victim and a witness at the trial, of having either arranged or taken part in the crime. He alleged that her motive was that Mrs. Schiller was the administrator and sole beneficiary of the victim's estate, which was described as worth more than \$96,000.

The defense attorney accused Mrs. Schiller of having had his client's fingerprints planted on the baby oil bottle in Mrs. Koues' bedroom. An FBI expert had previously testified that there was no evidence that the fingerprints had been planted at the scene. During two days on the stand, Mrs. Schiller fiercely denied any involvement in the death of her friend, whom she said she had devotedly cared for.

Herman "Tex" Brooks, 86, who has lived with Mrs. Schiller for 10 years, testified on January 16 that the latter took care of shopping, doctor's appointments, and all important household decisions for the victim. Mr. Brooks said Mrs. Schiller loved her friend, and reported that the murder had had a long-term emotional impact on his companion.

Although Mrs. Schiller was among those people questioned by police during their investigation, she was later dismissed as a suspect, authorities said.

Fanwood Adjustment Board Names Kathleen Rice as New Chairwoman

By SUZETTE STALKER
Specially Written for The Times

The Fanwood Board of Adjustment designated a new chairwoman last Thursday during its annual election of officers, with former Vice Chairwoman Kathleen Rice now at the helm of the seven-member body, which also includes two alternates. Board member Edward Ryan was named to succeed Mrs. Rice as Vice Chairman, and Ruth Page was reappointed as Secretary. All the appointments were unanimously supported by the board.

Saying he "had a good run and I think it's someone else's turn," former Chairman John Celardo, who had led the board for five years, nominated Mrs. Rice to take over his position, which was seconded by Mr. Ryan. Mr. Celardo also nominated Mr. Ryan as the new Vice Chairman, a motion which was seconded by Mrs. Rice.

Mrs. Rice nominated Mrs. Page, who has served the board for five years, to be reappointed as Board Secretary, which was seconded by Mr. Celardo. The board also approved its 1997 calendar and announced its proposed \$6,235 budget for the new year.

The requested budget, which must be approved by the Fanwood Borough Council, includes \$6,000 for the services of Board Attorney Charles H. Brandt. The remainder covers the costs of registration and dues, books and periodicals, and miscellaneous expenditures.

In a move which surprised members of the board, a variance application by Mr. and Mrs. Yuri Gokhin of Midway Avenue, who came before the board last month seeking permission to modify their single-family home by adding a kitchenette and doorway, was suddenly withdrawn by Mr. Gokhin during the conclusion of a public hearing on the matter last week.

During the initial hearing on December 19, the couple, who share

their home with their two children, Mrs. Gokhin's parents and her 95-year-old grandmother, testified that they wanted to convert a section of their family room on the first floor into a kitchenette so that the grandmother, who resides with Mrs. Gokhin's parents in the downstairs area of the house, would not have to climb the stairs to the family's second-floor kitchen.

They explained that they also wanted to create a doorway in the entrance hall in order to provide a measure of privacy between the two floors, and also to better regulate the circulation of heat and air conditioning in the bi-level residence for the comfort of all family members.

Board members, along with several neighbors from nearby North Avenue, had voiced concern last month that the proposed modifications could pave the way for the home to become a two-family dwelling under a future owner. There are currently no provisions under the Fanwood Borough Code for two-family residences.

While they postponed actually voting on the application on December 19, officials concluded that the proposed modifications represented more of a "mother-daughter" situation, in which all occupants of the house are blood relatives, rather than a two-family dwelling.

Board members did, however, incorporate several conditions into a resolution which would have approved the application. The Gokhins would have been required to include these conditions in the deed for the property before being issued a building permit for the work, in order to notify any future buyers of the board's requirements.

Among the provisions which had been set down by the board were the required removal of the second kitchen and the doorway once the downstairs occupants were no longer living there or if the current owners

moved; a limit of three cars due to restricted parking ability on the property and the danger of trying to maneuver cars onto Midway Avenue if there were more than three vehicles in the parking area, and no alterations to utility services for the property.

After perusing the resolution last week, Mr. Gokhin stated that "under these conditions, it would be foolish

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Township Officials to Unveil \$14 Million Municipal Budget

By JEANNE WHITNEY
Specially Written for The Times

Scotch Plains Township Council members heard from township officials at a conference meeting Tuesday that a \$14 million-plus budget proposal for 1997 will be ready for council review by next Wednesday, January 29. The council has scheduled three meetings so far, to hash out any changes to the proposed budget. Last year's adopted budget was \$14.7 million.

Municipal Manager Thomas E. Atkins, who is responsible for compiling the annual budget, said, in referring to township department budget requests, "Everybody wants everything. Nobody wants their budget cut. But that's not what government is about today."

Councilman William F. McClintock explained to township high school DECA marketing students attending the conference meeting that two-thirds of township property taxes support the township schools, while one-sixth goes to the Union County budget and the remaining one sixth, or roughly \$2.4 million, pays for township services and government. Seven Scotch Plains-Fanwood

High School juniors and one sophomore sat in on the council meeting, as part of a two-week "Youth In Government" program. The students will perform the roles of mayor, council, township attorney, manager and township clerk during next week's televised council meeting on Channel 34. Township Attorney Donald T. DiFrancesco said a vote of the "true council" at the end of the meeting will validate the action taken by the students. The students will be briefed on the issues and procedures before the meeting, officials said.

The Township Council polled the eight DECA students about a recent change to eliminate street parking on Happel Court near the high school and discovered none of the students favored it. Junior Brian Spitzer observed that Happel Court was the only convenient location that juniors, who drove to school, could park their cars. Only seniors may park cars in the school lot, students said. Councilwoman Joan Papan said the council would reconsider the decision on the parking ordinance.

In a separate matter, the township resolved a grade of "B-plus," 87.12 points out of a possible 100, in "build-

ing code effectiveness" from the Insurance Services Office (ISO). The grade is useful as an insurance underwriting tool, officials said. ISO, a private organization, began the rating system 18 months ago and has rated 20 percent of New Jersey's towns, according to Mr. Atkins.

Councilman Dr. Martin Marks said he would like to compare the township's itemized report card with other towns that have been rated.

According to the report, the township's building code and the administration of the code scored high but lost points on continuing education of officials, even though Construction Official Robert LaCosta said department officials attend more than the state-required minimum number

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Zoning Board Elects Mr. Barth Chairman Again

By JEANNE WHITNEY
Specially Written for The Times

The Scotch Plains Board of Adjustment reelected Thomas P. Barth Chairman last Thursday at its annual reorganization meeting. Alice Agran will continue to serve as Vice Chairperson. Mr. Barth said he looked forward to serving the township again on the board as Chairman.

This is the fourth year that Mr. Barth and Mrs. Agran will serve as board officers, officials said.

Frank Rossi was newly appointed to serve as second alternate to the board for a two-year term. Mr. Rossi, an attorney with a pharmaceutical company in New York, said he was a former Councilman in the Borough of Fanwood for several years. He said he returned to the township in 1993, where he grew up. His father was a former Police Chief in the township.

The board appointed member Jane S. Lorber to chair one Site Plan Committee and Mrs. Agran will chair the other Site Plan Committee. Mr. Barth will chair the Budget and Finance Committee. Board member Gail Lammattico will chair the Personnel Committee and Paulette Coronato will chair the Rules and Procedures Committee. Other returning board members are Kenneth Anderson, Timothy Livolsi and long-time resident Thomas L. Perrucci.

No new date was set for hearing the Scotch Plains Zoo violation pending before the board.

Anthony D. Rinaldo was reappointed attorney to the board for the year. His office is in Elizabeth.

The monthly board meetings will continue to be held on the first Thursday of each month, in the Municipal Building starting at 7:30 p.m.

County Manager Unveils \$276.5 Million Budget With Zero Tax Increase Over '96 Spending Plan

By PAUL J. PEYTON
Specially Written for The Times

Union County Manager Ann M. Baran unveiled the county's executive budget of \$276.5 million last week which shows no increase in the county tax levy. Last year's executive budget of \$274.1 million contained an increase of 1 percent which was reduced to no tax hike in the budget adopted by the Republican majority.

Control of the board reverted back to the Democrats on January 1 for the first time in six years. During the campaign, Democratic Freeholder candidates said the board should have actually delivered a tax cut last year.

Democratic Freeholder Finance Committee Chairman Walter D. McNeil, Jr. said last week that he would like the Freeholders to adopt the 1997 budget by the end of March. The budget will go now to the committee, which will make any changes it foresees before presenting it to the full board for introduction. A public hearing will then be set for public comments and a vote by the board.

In her report dated January 15 to the board, Mrs. Baran noted that since 1990, when she was appointed County Manager, the county's reliance on property taxes to pay for its budget has been reduced 17.9 percent.

In fact, she estimates that by 1999 the county may actually witness a 2 percent tax reduction, based on current projections. The reliance on property taxes has dropped by 5 percent of the total budget over the past six years. The tax levy was 3.50 percent in 1994 and 2.99 percent in 1995.

A total of \$152.5 million, or 55 percent of this year's proposed budget, would be supported by taxes. Other county revenue sources would chip in an additional \$80.2 million (29 percent of the budget), with state and federal aid accounting for \$23.7 million, or 9 percent of the total spending plan.

The largest percentage of the budget, \$87.7 million, or 32 percent, is for health and welfare followed by general government, which accounts for \$51.6 million, or 19 percent of the total budget.

A total of \$22.3 million, 8 percent, is slated for maintenance and repair of roads and bridges, while \$13.7 million is destined for education and recreation costs.

In an effort to save dollars, Mrs. Baran said the county has encouraged department managers to keep positions vacant "when immediate replacements are not critical" to the daily operation of their offices. Also, programs are now funded based on a "careful analysis of program require-

ments and its level of priority." In the past, funding was based on the previous year's expenditures.

One area the county has seen a reduction in costs is the courts. Under the Judicial Unifications Act, which became law in January of 1995, this cost has been reduced over the past three years. Funding for the county courts this year is slated at \$8.6 million, a reduction of \$2.2 million from last year's budget.

This is the last year the courts will be included in the county budget, as the state will assume the complete costs in 1998 following approval of a referendum by voters state-wide several years ago.

Among the major capital projects which the Freeholders need to make final decisions on this year are the proposed Juvenile Detention Center, improvements to the Trap and Skeet facility in Cranford, construction of a new clubhouse at the Oak Ridge Golf Course in Clark, development of a driving range on the Galloping Hill Golf Course in Union, and a Magnet High School in Scotch Plains.

Last year the Democrats, which held four seats on the Freeholder board, managed to defeat the juvenile detention center project. They stated at the time that the estimated \$45 million cost was too steep. They wanted the project scaled down with the proposed parking garage and co-

generation plant eliminated.

The existing facility was built in 1968 over a parking garage in Elizabeth and designed for 27 juveniles. The current population is 55 detainees. The county was directed last year by the State Department of Community Affairs to retrofit the existing facility to meet safety codes and requirements.

Under the Republican majority in 1994, the board decided to build a new facility. The county purchased an existing building on adjacent land on Rahway Avenue in Elizabeth for the site of the new complex. The plan, developed with recommendations from various county departments, called for a facility with 72 beds.

The Public Safety Building, estimated at \$10 million, has been proposed at the county's complex on North Avenue in Westfield. The new facility would house the county police headquarters, the prosecutor's forensic crime laboratory, and the communications network for the county's 9-1-1 emergency system, along with the Office of Emergency Management.

The Magnet High School, for intensive study of science, mathematics and technology, is proposed to open this fall, although action will be required by the Freeholder board. The

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Deadlines Told For Submittals To The Times

Those persons preparing press releases for submission to The Times are reminded that copy should be E-mailed or faxed by 4 p.m. on the Friday prior to publication. The Times' E-mail address is goleader@aol.com. The fax number is 232-0473.

Releases, pictures, and letters to the editor can also be dropped off at our office located at 50 Elm Street or through our mail slot. To ensure that submittals reach our office prior to deadline we encourage E-mail or faxed material.

Sports stories which occur prior to the weekend should be in by the Friday deadline. Weekend sports events must be submitted by noon on the Monday prior to the publication date. Obituaries will be accepted up to 5 p.m. on Tuesdays.

All copy must be typed, double-spaced, no more than 500 words in length, and include a daytime telephone number where the submitter can be reached.

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

Please note that in addition to making our deadlines, the publication of submittals may be delayed due to space considerations. All submittals are subject to being cut due to length, edited for style and clarification at the discretion of the editor.