

THE TIMES

of

Scotch Plains - Fanwood



1927 Bartle Ave.
Scotch Plains, NJ 07076

OUR 38th YEAR - ISSUE

USPS 485300
Periodical - Postage Paid at Scotch Plains, N.J.

Thursday, April 17, 1997

Published
Every Thursday

232-4407

FIFTY CENTS

SCOTCH PLAINS-FANWOOD VOTERS SUPPORT 1997-1998 SCHOOL BUDGET REFLECTING 2.64 PERCENT INCREASE

Mr. Ruggiero, Mrs. Larkin, Mr. Russo Win Race for School Board; Mrs. Dettmar Loses Sixth Term Bid as Voters Give Nod to Newcomer

By SUZETTE STALKER
Specially Written for The Times

Scotch Plains chose a combination of experience and "new blood" Tuesday by electing incumbents August A. Ruggiero and Theresa Larkin, along with newcomer Thomas Russo, to the Scotch Plains-Fanwood Board of Education. Board Vice President Lillian M. Dettmar lost her bid for a sixth term on the board.

Sixty-seven percent of the voters in Scotch Plains and Fanwood supported the \$36,935,929 tax levy for the school budget with a vote of 1,965 to 955. The total \$41.8 million spending plan represents a 2.64 percent increase over last year's figure. In the township, property owners will see a 1.64 percent increase in the school portion of their tax bills, while Fanwoodians will see a 2.47 percent increase.

The Scotch Plains-Fanwood budget was among 14 out of 19 school spending plans in Union County to be approved by voters. In Scotch Plains, voters supported the budget by a vote of 1,429 to 536. In Fanwood, the budget was approved by a vote of 657 to 298. Assistant Superintendent for Business and Board Secretary, Richard J. Marshall, confirmed

that the last time a school budget was defeated in Scotch Plains-Fanwood was in 1994.

A total of eight candidates had sought the three available seats held by Mrs. Dettmar, Mr. Ruggiero and Mrs. Larkin, all from Scotch Plains. Besides the three incumbents, they included newcomers Frances Gonzalez, Jean McAllister, Kristen Croag Paparella, Norman J. Ross and Mr. Russo. There were no Fanwood vacancies this year.

According to unofficial tallies, Mr. Russo garnered the most votes, with 1,019; Mrs. Larkin received 970 and Mr. Ruggiero captured 964. Of the other candidates, Mrs. Dettmar received 819; Mrs. McAllister, 782; Mrs. Gonzalez, 464; Mrs. Paparella, 413 and Mr. Ross, 336. The final results, including absentee ballots, were expected to be certified by Union County Clerk Joanne Rajoppi's Office by early next week.

During his campaign, Mr. Russo had called for the need to bring a fresh perspective to the board, and said that if elected he would serve no more than three terms. Although he commended veteran board members for their years of service, the father of two young sons maintained that resi-

dents who currently have children enrolled in school ought to have a greater say in how the district is administered.

Mr. Russo, who practices law in Scotch Plains and has lived in the township for more than 30 years, has served on the Scotch Plains-Fanwood Public Schools Citizens Budget Committee, the Strategic Planning Team and the Scotch Plains-Fanwood School Funding Task Force. He also is counsel to the Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School Alumni Association.

Mr. Ruggiero, who was elected to his sixth term, had argued the importance of having experienced representatives on the board, particularly as the district faces such challenges as maintaining quality education in the face of reduced non-restricted state aid.

The professor of mathematics and physics at Essex County College in Newark has been a member of the board since the 1970s and has been elected board President five times. He focused his campaign on the need for fiscal responsibility and improving education while strengthening ties between the board and the community.



Thomas Russo

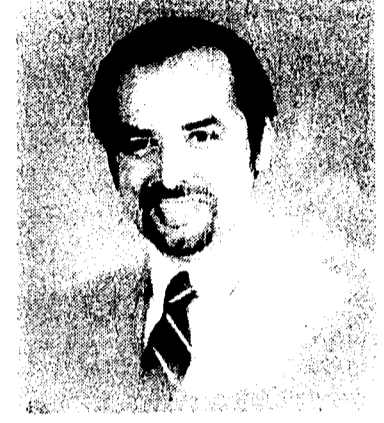
Mrs. Larkin, who was elected to her second term, also had advocated responsible use of tax dollars as part of her campaign platform. She additionally stressed the need to maintain current class sizes and to keep the lines of communication open between the school board and the public.

Last year, she represented the board during contract negotiations with the Scotch Plains-Fanwood Education Association and is board Liaison to the district's Parent-Teacher Association Council and the Municipal

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12



Theresa Larkin



August A. Ruggiero

Council Pays Tribute To Groups and Causes

By SUZETTE STALKER
Specially Written for The Times

The Fanwood Borough Council saluted several organizations and causes during its regular meeting last Thursday, which was broadcast live over Cable Channel 35. Officials subsequently discussed various agenda items, including concerns over liability for property damage caused by fallen trees, as well as flooding problems on Vinton Circle.

Proclamations were issued designating Sunday, April 20, through Saturday, April 26, as Organ and Tissue Donor Awareness Week and International Building Safety Week; Thursday, May 1, as National Day of Prayer, Sunday, June 1, through Saturday, June 7 as Hunger Awareness Week and Saturday, May 10, through Saturday, May 17, as Fanwood Civic Beautification Week, for which the Scotch Plains-Fanwood Garden Club was commended for planting flowers at La Grande Park. A proclamation was also put forth recognizing Saturday, April 19, as Clean Community Day.

The seventh annual Earth Day Cleanup, this year featuring the slogan "Pick Up Litter, Help Fanwood Glitter," will kick off at 8:30 a.m. in the southside parking lot of the Fanwood railroad station. Volunteers will be given Earth Day T-shirts, gloves and garbage bags to pick up litter, and refreshments will be provided by local merchants at the conclusion of the event. Flowers donated by Parker Greenhouses in Scotch Plains also will be planted at the train station and at Fanwood Borough Hall.

Resolutions were adopted honoring the American Cancer Society and congratulating both the Terrill Road Baptist Church in Scotch Plains and the Washington Rock Girl Scout Council on their recent milestones. The church celebrated its 30th anniversary last weekend while the Girl Scout Council, which encompasses 24 communities including Scotch Plains and Fanwood, marked its 40th year on March 20.

In the most poignant moment of the evening, Councilman William E. Populus, Jr., a cancer survivor himself, presented the American Cancer Society resolution to John Fitzgerald, Assistant Vice President and Branch Manager at the United National Bank in Fanwood, who is also a volunteer with the organization. The councilman, saying that "all of us are connected to someone afflicted with this dreaded disease," praised the efforts and dedication of American Cancer Society volunteers.

Mayor Maryanne S. Connelly remarked that although the Terrill Road

Baptist Church is located in Scotch Plains, it has long been part of the Fanwood community as well. She also commended the Girl Scout Council for its positive influence on the lives of girls, noting that participation in the organization "really set me off on the right path." Councilwoman Karen M. Schurtz, a Girl Scout leader, echoed the Mayor's sentiments concerning the impact scouting has had on her own life.

Officials continued to discuss potential liability for property damage caused by trees or branches which fall from borough-owned land, in response to several incidents which recently occurred in the municipality. Council President Bruce H. Walsh reminded residents to report any problems, particularly with trees which are in borough right of ways, to members of the Shade Tree Commission.

He noted that unless the borough has been notified about trees which are in need of repair, residents may not be eligible for compensation in the event that a tree owned by the municipality causes property damage. During a previous discussion of the issue at the council's April 2 agenda session, Borough Clerk Eleanor McGovern reported that, unless a complaint had been received about a tree, the borough is generally not considered liable for damage.

In a separate matter, Shaun Cherewich, a resident of Vinton Circle, spoke on behalf of several of his neighbors who, along with himself, have been experiencing serious flooding on their properties, and asked for the council's support in remedying the problem.

Mr. Cherewich, who had written earlier to the governing body about the problem, said he and his neighbors are willing to pay for the installation of a catch basin and pipes to be connected to the main pipeline which serves the area. He reported that the extensive flooding has prevented his young children from playing in the backyard and that his neighbor's garage floor is "under water."

Councilman Louis C. Jung, Chairman of the council's Public Works Committee, told Mr. Cherewich that he already had spoken to Borough

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12

Scotch Plains Officials Discuss Potential Impact of Revised Welfare Regulations

By JEANNE WHITNEY
Specially Written for The Times

The Scotch Plains Township Council heard from township Welfare Director Maria Santo, Tuesday, about changes in state and federal welfare laws that could take responsibilities from local offices and hand them to the county. Council members wholeheartedly agreed that taking the personal aspect out of welfare in the township would spell disaster.

Officials said that some towns with higher welfare bills welcome turning over welfare costs to the county in order to reduce their local budgets. The Scotch Plains Welfare Department spends under \$40,000 per year, officials said, for disbursements and part-time staff.

Ms. Santo told the council that although she is still struggling to understand the far-reaching effects of the "Work First" legislation, as of April 1, three major changes took hold.

The new policy sets a five-year life-time limit on receiving welfare benefits. There is now a mandatory two-month drug treatment program for recipients convicted of drug felonies. Legal immigrants now have a six-month time limit in which to become a United States citizen in order to collect benefits. In addition, immigrants who entered the country after August, 1996 must now wait five years to be eligible for benefits according to "Work First."

Local Assistance Board member Thomas Green told the council that local handling of welfare makes it "more humanitarian." Lorraine Gicas, a member of the same board, told the council, "I think it's really important to keep it (welfare) local and for people who otherwise might fall through the cracks. Some people need information about where to go for other help."

Under the old laws, the county has been responsible for recipient families with children, Ms. Santo said, while local agencies handle single recipients.

Officials said that neighboring towns might agree to share welfare services in order to avoid centralization. Ms. Santo said the state now requires 20 hours of community service per month for food stamp recipients on top of the 28 hours of service required for welfare grants.

"I haven't seen funding for any of this," she said. "Where are we going to get community service jobs for this?" The council said it was anticipating clarification from the state.

In other business, the council considered shortening the flagpole structure on the Front Street Liberty Island monument by at least 25 feet.

Thomas Perucci, Chairman of the World War II Commemorative Committee, said township fire department equipment cannot reach the top of the existing flagpole for maintenance nor can flags be raised to fly at full mast.

David Floyd of the American Steel Erector Company recommended lopping off the top portion of the steel tower and adding a new 40-foot pole

at a cost of \$6,450. The new pole will withstand 160 mile-per-hour winds, Mr. Floyd said. The work would take one day and require closing one lane of traffic on Front Street, he said.

Mr. Perucci told the council, "Maintenance-wise, this will save the town a lot of money."

Mr. Perucci said the township currently uses the Town of Westfield's fire equipment to reach nearly 100 feet to the top of the pole.

The council said it will decide on a plan after getting several price quotes and confirming the height reach of the township fire equipment. On a separate matter, the council said it would consider funding for improvements to Brookside Park. Officials indicated a bond ordinance would be necessary to fund the estimated

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12

Permanent Custodian Appointed To Oversee Scotch Plains Zoo

By SUZETTE STALKER
Specially Written for The Times

A judge appointed a permanent custodian last week to oversee the operation of the Scotch Plains Zoo, although zoo owner Harold Kafka will continue to play an active role in running the popular establishment, which has been in the township for approximately 50 years.

Judge Frederick C. Kentz, Jr. in Superior Court in Elizabeth named Union Township attorney Martin B. O'Connor, 2nd, as permanent custodian on April 10, after the latter submitted a lengthy report on the facility, in which he reviewed the zoo's financial records and the condition of the animals at the 6.5-acre spread, as well as safety issues.

In January, the state Division of Fish, Game and Wildlife declined to renew Mr. Kafka's operating permits after citing him for multiple violations related to public safety and animal welfare. The zoo owner and his wife, Deborah, who bought the facility three years ago from Mr. and Mrs. Franklin Terry, are appealing the state's decision.

The Kafkas have also been struggling against outstanding debts, including a bill for several thousand dollars owed to Elizabethtown Gas Company, which had shut off natural gas service to the establishment on February 24 because of non-payment. Service was restored to the facility the next day after the New Jersey Associated Humane Societies of Newark agreed to pay the heating bills for the zoo for the duration of the winter.

Mr. O'Connor was appointed as temporary custodian on March 5 after an injunction was issued by Judge Kentz at the request of the Terrys, who now live in Florida but still hold the mortgage on the zoo. The injunction prevents the Kafkas from selling, transferring or removing any animals from the site without the court's permission.

The attorney, who was scheduled to meet with Mr. Kafka last weekend to discuss the specifics of the new arrangement, reported that the zoo owner has been "cooperative" since he was appointed as custodian. He

added that he and Mr. Kafka hope to work with the Fish, Game and Wildlife Division as well as the township in ironing out problems facing the zoo.

"We want to address safety concerns which have been expressed so that there is no question about the safety of the public or the safety and care of the animals," Mr. O'Connor remarked. The attorney has been asked by Judge Kentz to submit a progress report within 60 days.

The report presented by Mr. O'Connor in court last week included evaluations by several veterinarians and a reptile expert regarding the condition of the animals at the zoo. The Scotch Plains Zoo is home to approximately 150 animals, including some exotic and endangered species. Among the inhabitants are elephants, giraffes, large cats, primates, llamas, deer, wolves and birds.

The attorney stated in his report that each of the animal experts concluded that there existed "varying degrees of deficiencies with respect

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12

Four to Run in June Primary for Two Expired Borough Council Seats as Dr. Chester R. Lindsey Decides Not to Seek Third Term

By SUZETTE STALKER
Specially Written for The Times

Two Republican and two Democratic candidates will run uncontested in the June 3 primary for two available seats on the Fanwood Borough Council, one of which is currently held by Republican Councilman Dr. Chester R. Lindsey, who opted not to seek reelection this year. The general elections will take place on Tuesday, November 4.

Councilman Lindsey said last week that he decided not to seek a third term in order "to give Fanwood residents the benefit of other Republican opinions and ideas and to broaden representation of areas of Fanwood not currently represented on the council." The councilman, who has lived in Fanwood nearly 40 years, served on the governing body from 1989 to

1992 and was reelected to a second, three-year term in 1994.

The Democrats presently have a 4-3 majority on the governing body, including the Mayor's position, which the Republicans hope to reverse by acquiring an additional council seat in November. In last year's general election, Republican Councilman Louis C. Jung and his runningmate, Stuart S. Kline, defeated their Democratic challengers, with Mr. Kline winning the seat held by former Councilman Andrew J. MacDonald, who did not seek reelection.

Councilman Lindsey, who ran unsuccessfully for Mayor in 1995, currently chairs the council's Education, Health and Welfare Committee and also is a member of the Public Safety and Public Works Committees. He has served three terms as President of

the Fanwood Lions Club and has been active in other community organizations as well. He has had an optometry practice since 1958.

The Democratic slate includes Councilman William E. Populus, Jr., who is seeking a second, three-year term on the council, and newcomer Patricia Plante. Mr. Populus was elected to his first full term in 1994 after having been appointed to fill a vacancy in 1993. The married father of three has resided on La Grande Avenue for almost 27 years, and is the founder and President of Populus and Associates, a real estate appraisal firm, which has offices in Westfield.

Councilman Populus is Chairman of the council's Administration and Finance Committee and is a member of the Public Safety and the Recreation and Community Services Com-

mittees. He also serves as Fire Commissioner for Fanwood, and in January of last year he was named as Fanwood's first representative to the Plainfield Area Regional Sewerage Authority, where he is Chairman of the Engineering Committee.

A resident of Fanwood for nine years, Mrs. Plante lives with her husband and 6-year-old daughter on Oakwood Court. The candidate is a real estate agent with Burgdorff Realtors' Westfield Office, and is currently a member of the Fanwood Board of Health. She also was a member of the borough's Centennial Committee, which organized Fanwood's 100th anniversary celebration in 1995.

Mrs. Plante, who attended Kean College and Union County College, spent 18 years working for the fed-

eral Social Security Administration, with her last position having been operations supervisor. She is a member of the National and New Jersey Association of Realtors, the New Jersey Association of Realtors' Million Dollar Club and the Burgdorff Realtors' President's Club.

In addition, she assists the Parent-Teacher Association at Brunner Elementary School and is active with the Scotch Plains-Fanwood YMCA.

On the Republican ticket this year are David Trumpp of Arlene Court and Joel Whitaker of Marian Avenue. A lifelong resident of Fanwood, Mr. Trumpp is the son of Fanwood Republican Municipal Chairman and former Mayor Ted Trumpp, who served three terms between 1972 and 1983. The candidate is a member of

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12

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 gleader@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.

For events 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.