

# Democrats Seek to Retain Freeholder Seats While GOP Looks for First Victory Since 1994

By PAUL J. PEYTON  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

ELIZABETH — Union County Democrats will attempt to extend their streak of victories for seats on the County Board of Chosen Freeholders to seven years this Tuesday, November 6. Democrats have held the majority since 1997 and have had a 9-0 advantage the past four years.

This year incumbents Daniel P. Sullivan, a freeholder since 1995, and Mary P. Ruotolo and Lewis Mingo, Jr., both of whom joined the nine-member board in 1998, are opposed by Republicans Ricky Badillo, a Roselle Park Councilman; Andrew MacDonald, a former Fanwood Borough Councilman, and J. Robert Schundler of Westfield, the older brother of GOP gubernatorial candidate Bret Schundler.

Mr. Sullivan has served in leadership capacities as Chairman and Vice Chairman of the board four of the past five years. Mrs. Ruotolo, the widow of former Union County Prosecutor Andrew K. Ruotolo, was the top freeholder candidate vote getter in 1998.

Freeholder Ruotolo notes that the board has been "fiscally responsible four of the last five years" by delivering either a flat or cut in the countywide purpose tax.

During what has been a fairly quiet campaign, Republicans have attacked their opponents on everything from their support for a barge-to-trash facility and medical waste facility in Linden to "secret" decision-making behind the scenes due to the Democrats 9-0 majority.

"People are appalled that this freeholder board not only voted for a trash transfer station in Linden but in 1999 they also voted for a medical waste facility in Linden," responded Mr. Badillo.

"So they are making Union County the waste capital of not only New Jersey but the United States. Coupled with the fact that Meisel Park is closed (for environmental testing), these are not environmentally-prudent freeholders," he charged.

"The issues that we have presented to the people are resonating with them. They are true issues that people can relate to," Mr. Badillo stated.

Republicans have charged the Democratic board with receiving new Crown Victoria automobiles just weeks after the board laid off nearly 100 corrections officers at the Union County Jail. Democrats have defended that action, saying the county had to close a \$12 million shortfall in the county budget following the pullout by the state of its inmates. They also have said the bulk of those officers, including Mr. Badillo,

have received jobs at other correctional facilities in the state.

Mrs. Ruotolo explained that the board's closing of the old jail facility "saved the county millions of dollars" following the pullout of state prisoners. Union County won a lawsuit against the state after charging that the county was not being reimbursed for the true cost of housing state inmates. The county won a \$2.5 million court settlement. Mrs. Ruotolo said closing facility and the laying off the officers saved the county \$8 million.

The state pulled its prisoners out of the jail after realizing they could no longer guarantee 50 prisoners, as per a contract with the county, after the state

increased the number of beds statewide inmates to 3,000. A fall in crime was given as a reason for the drop in state prisoners held at the county jail.

During her four years on the board, Freeholder Ruotolo noted she has concentrated on enhancing the arts in the county through awarding of \$500,000 in HEART (History, Education, Arts — Reaching Thousands) grants to individuals and groups; education and programs for seniors.

"The arts really enhance the quality of life but are also a viable economic development tool. It brings people in (to Union County)," she explained.

Democrats have cited their efforts to put the county back onto solid finan-

cial footing following what they charge were years of economic bliss under Republicans.

They have cited their efforts over the past five years to improve county and municipal parks, playgrounds and to enhance senior transportation. They also cite their initiatives to increase technology in the public schools by providing funds so all classrooms have computers and access to the Internet.

Also on Tuesday's ballot is the county sheriff's race. Republican Nicholas J. Berkey of Union, a certified fraud examiner and accountant, is challenging eight-term incumbent Ralph G. Froehlich, a former Elizabeth Police Department lieutenant.

# Schundler Vs. McGreevey Called Campaign Of Varying Contrasts

By STEVEN KRAKAUER  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

TRENTON — This year's New Jersey gubernatorial contest is one being watched closely by political analysts and could be a pre-view of next year's mid-term Congressional elections.

While Republicans are seeking a third consecutive victory in the race for the Governor's Office, Democrats are hoping to recapture the highest elective office in New Jersey. They have not held it since 1993, when then-Governor Jim Florio was defeated by Christine Todd Whitman.

Mr. Florio's victory in 1989 prevented three consecutive GOP wins following the two terms of former Governor Thomas H. Kean, Sr.

This year's race changed dramatically on at least two occasions. The first time occurred on April 25, when current Acting Governor Donald T. DiFrancesco suddenly dropped out of the race and opened up the Republican nomination to other hopefuls.

The favorite to take over for the enigmatic exit of Mr. DiFrancesco was Bob Franks, who entered the race with Mr. DiFrancesco's backing on April 26.

However, the former Congressman was ousted in the GOP Primary — which was held three weeks later than normal due to a dispute over redistricting — by Jersey City Mayor and native Westfielder Bret Schundler.

Mr. Schundler began an uphill battle to gain points back from Woodbridge Mayor and Democratic

candidate Jim McGreevey, and has since closed the gap to 12 points, according to the most recent poll taken last week.

The race this year between Mr. Schundler and Mr. McGreevey has been called one of varying contrasts. Mr. McGreevey is said to be an extreme liberal, while Mr. Schundler a hardcore conservative.

"There is only one candidate devoted to fighting for New Jersey working families, and that person is Jim McGreevey," said McGreevey Campaign spokesman Sean Walsh.

Meanwhile, in the other camp, David Krell, a Schundler Campaign spokesman, said, "The biggest contrast between the two candidates is that Bret is a proven leader with experience in cutting taxes."

While the opposing campaign teams boost their candidates' superiority, the issues for which the candidates say they are fighting are not always so dissimilar. Both campaigns report that the issue of reforming teacher tenure is a major concern for both sides. Also, the issue of lowering property taxes is, in some way or another, a problem that both sides want to take on.

Mr. McGreevey noted in campaign statements that he will "expand the property tax freeze to include more seniors," as well as "return a portion of state tax revenues directly to property taxpayers."

Meanwhile, Mr. Schundler explained in his statements that if he is elected, "you will get lower municipi-

## More Letters to the Editor

### Voting Is Important Way to Show Support for U.S. Government System

Displaying the American flag is a great way of showing one's faith in America. Voting in next week's election is an even more important way of showing support for our system of government.

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The League of Women Voters commends *The Westfield Leader* and *The*

*Times of Scotch Plains-Fanwood* newspapers for their excellence in election coverage. In addition to the papers' complete local area election coverage, please visit [www.dnet.org/nj](http://www.dnet.org/nj), the League of Women Voters' non-partisan service for the voter.

Exercise your right to vote on Tuesday, November 6. Polls will be open from 6 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Merry Wisler  
League of Women Voters  
Westfield Area

### Blaming Council for Future Accidents At High School Called Irresponsible

I would like to respond to the letter recently written by the Parent Teacher Student Organization (PTSO) regarding their dismay over a future temporary shortage of parking on Westfield High School grounds. I am not quite sure what is more troubling about their letter, their misguided sense of entitlement or their irresponsible inference that the Town Council is to blame for any future pedestrian accident.

I would welcome any PTSO member to point out to me where in the town's charter does it say that students of the high school are entitled to have parking provided for them. It is a shame, but no surprise, that these students don't recognize that the school extends them the privilege of parking there. It is not an inalienable right for them to have park-

ing so they should stop acting that way. It is not surprising that some kids, who are accustomed to getting everything they ask for, would act this way. Instead, this issue should be used as a reality check that sometimes in life things don't go your way and you just have to adapt.

In their example, someone rushing to school across several busy streets would be at risk for an accident. In order to avoid what they describe as a future certainty, I would like to suggest that the rushing student wake up five or 10 minutes earlier so they are not pressed for time. Is getting up a few minutes earlier that much of a hardship? If they feel that it is, perhaps they should meet some of my friends whose commute is now an extra half an hour to 45 minutes every day or other friends who have no offices or jobs to go to anymore.

To the students who will be temporarily affected I offer this advice, maybe you should consider carpooling or walking. Somehow the ninth and 10th graders get to the high school every day without driving.

Furthermore, I find it just plain irresponsible to infer that any future accidents in the area would be the Town Council's fault. The Town Council is a very dedicated group who make a lot of difficult decisions that are in the best interest of the entire town. Trying to blame an accident that didn't even occur is just wrong. Many of these council members are parents themselves and they fully understand how important it is to create the safest environment for all of the children in our town.

Perhaps the parents and teachers of the PTSO should be teaching the students to focus on the bigger picture rather than attacking the volunteers who are working hard to deal with this and many other equally, if not more important, issues.

The temporary displacement of driving privileges will give way to improved building facilities which in turn will assist current and future high school students in receiving a better education. A strong education system is one of the primary reasons why Westfield's housing values are so high. In my opinion, the PTSO's complaining about student parking is just a ruse for a group who wants to have their cake and eat it too. It's sad, truly sad.

Bret Cummings  
Westfield

### Houses of Worship To Help Promote Organ Donor Registry

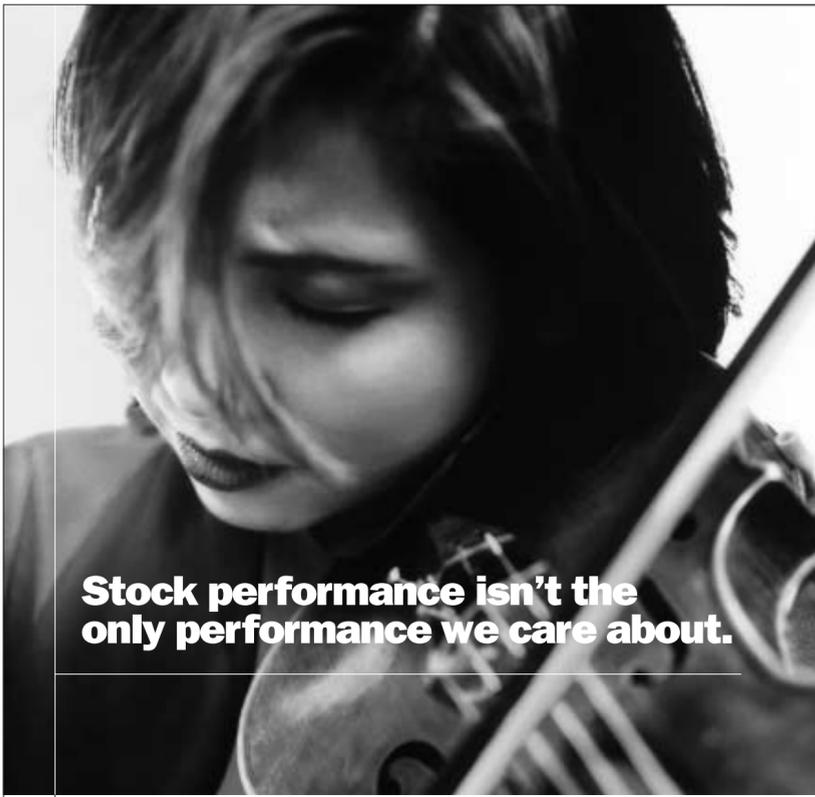
AREA — The New Jersey Organ and Tissue Sharing Network (The Sharing Network), the state's organ and tissue procurement organization, has announced that over 2,000 houses of worship across the state will participate in National Donor Sabbath Week, which will be observed November 9 to 11.

"On behalf of the 2,000 men, women and children in New Jersey currently on waiting lists for life-saving transplant operations, we thank our religious leaders for their determination in helping us get the word out to members of their congregations," said Joseph Roth, President and Chief Executive Officer of the non-profit organization.

The Sharing Network, based in Springfield, has shipped out thousands of donor registry brochures that encourage individuals to sign up with the New Jersey Organ Donor Registry.

In addition, Sharing Network volunteers will speak at houses of worship and some members of the clergy will deliver a message on the subject of organ donation, according to Mr. Roth.

For more information on how to become an organ donor or to join the New Jersey Organ and Tissue Donor Registry, please call the Sharing Network at (800) SHARE-NJ or visit [www.sharenj.org](http://www.sharenj.org).



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