

## County Unveils Contents From 1903 Time Capsule

ELIZABETH — Union County unveiled the contents of a century-old time capsule as it opened a one-of-a-kind exhibit of rare artifacts and memorabilia honoring the 100th Anniversary of the Union County Courthouse during ceremonies at the historic building in downtown Elizabeth on February 25.

"Today begins a series of year-long celebrations to showcase the courthouse's century as a center of law, justice and government in Union County," said Union County Clerk Joanne Rajoppi. Chairwoman of the Union County Courthouse Centennial Committee.

Ms. Rajoppi joined Freeholder Chairman Rick Proctor and Freeholders Chester Holmes and Bette Jane Kowalski, who serve on the Centennial Committee, in unveiling the contents of a time capsule that had been embedded near the cornerstone of the courthouse when construction began on July 30, 1903.

The contents, housed in protective display cases, include: photographs of the old courthouse, keys to the 1811 and 1903 "dungeons," the 1857 Union County charter, and 1903 newspapers and other documents.

"For more than 330 years, a government building and public meeting house has stood at Broad Street and Rahway Avenue in Elizabeth. The past 100 years has seen amazing changes in our county. In celebrating the Courthouse Centennial, we honor this rich heritage," Freeholder Proctor said.

Just prior to the unveiling, Ms. Rajoppi showed a short video, which documented a demanding and long search for the cornerstone capsule, or time capsule.

The courthouse builders left no in-

structions as to where; exactly the time capsule was located. After months of research with architects, engineers and public records, agents from the U.S. Customs Agency used state-of-the-art tools to locate the buried capsule — inside four feet of granite.

The present courthouse opened on May 5, 1905. The three-story, Classical Revival structure replaced a smaller brick building built in 1811, before the formation of Union County in 1857. As Union County continued to grow in size and complexity, the courthouse saw many additions, including: an annex and jail in 1925, a 17-floor tower in 1931, and a modern, two-story atrium in 2000.

The Centennial Committee includes a broad range of Union County residents with great enthusiasm for history. Members include elected officials, local historians, leaders of veterans' groups, law enforcement, cultural and heritage representatives and others with specialized expertise and experience.

"In Union County, we take pride in honoring our historic legacy. We honor our past while we continue to build a better future," Freeholder Kowalski said.

The Cornerstone Capsule Exhibit and a Centennial Courthouse Exhibit will be on display through the end of the year. Other events will include: March — Women's History Month Display; Thursday, April 7, — Centennial Poster Contest for fourth graders; Thursday, May 5, — Centennial Anniversary Birthday Party; Tuesday, June 14, — Flag Day Ceremony; Thursday, November 10, — Veterans Day Ceremony.



AGES AGO...Freeholder Nancy Ward peers through the looking glass at artifacts from the 1903 time capsule.



TRYING THE BULL...A group from the Westfield Post Office and friends try their luck with the mechanical bull on February 10 at the Colorado Café in Watchung. Amy Edge poses in her cowgirl outfit and Travis Redd is shown in the inset shortly before the bull triumphed in resounding fashion.

## Freeholder Bd. Abolishing Operations, Facilities Dept.

By PAUL PEYTON  
Specially Written for The Leader and The Times

COUNTY — The Union County Freeholders took action Tuesday to abolish the Department of Operations and Facilities. The functions of the department will be redistributed to other departments. The department is responsible for maintaining the county's offices and facilities as well as its fleet of vehicles.

The department includes the Division of Operations, which entails the Bureaus of Administrative Support, Construction Management and Motor Vehicles, and the Division of Building Services, which includes the Bureaus of General Trades, Stationary Engineers and Telecommunications.

"For reasons of efficiency and effectiveness we are breaking it into departments," said County Manager George Devaney.

Under the restructuring, building services will be transferred to the parks and recreation department, telecommunications will move to the economic development department and motor vehicle services will now be located with the department of administrative services.

"People (department directors) are starting to prep for it (the changes)," Mr. Devaney said.

He said the department's previous director, Richmond Lapolla, has been reassigned as the director of construction and facilities management at the Union County Vocational-Technical Schools in Scotch Plains. The restructuring resulted in no job losses increases in costs to the county, Mr. Devaney said.

With the change, the county will now operate with eight departments: administrative services, economic development, finance, human ser-

vices, engineering and public works, parks and recreation, public safety, and Runnells Specialized Hospital. The board will take final action to adopt the ordinance at Thursday, March 10 meeting.

The board also introduced and a \$20 million bond ordinance to pay for renovations to Baxel and West Halls to house the new allied health and medical science program at Union County Vocational-Technical Schools. The school last year opened its new \$14 million academic services building.

The 47-acre Raritan Road campus already houses Academy for Information Technology, the Magnet High School for engineering technologies with intensive study in science, math and technology and the Adult Vocational Technical High School. The public hearing and final vote on that ordinance will also be held on March 10.

The board also approved a resolution awarding arts grants to organizations throughout the county as of the Union County Arts Grant Program. The program is fully funded through a grant from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts tallying \$112,395.

The board remembered former State Senator, Assemblyman and Union County Freeholder Joseph Suliga, who was killed in an auto accident in his hometown of Linden on February 18 at the age of 47.

Mr. Devaney, the nephew of Senator Ray Lesniak who served with Assemblyman Suliga in the 20th legislative district for several years, was one of the last people to speak to Mr. Suliga.

"To know him was to love him," Mr. Devaney said. "(Joe Suliga) always gave 110 percent or more to everything. (His death) is going to leave a huge hole for me both politically and personally."

Freeholder Nancy Ward, a Linden resident, described Mr. Suliga as "a very ambitious man." He served as Chief Financial Officer for the City of Linden the past 18 years. He and

## Building Homes in Westfield Is No Simple Development

By CHRISTIE STORMS  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

WESTFIELD — It seems to happen almost overnight. Sizeable new homes rapidly sprout up where old ones once stood. For Sale signs swiftly yanked to make way for markers boasting builders' plans for magnificent new dwellings.

But according to former Westfield resident Chris Daunno, managing member of the Mystic Development Company and its housing company, Majestic Homes, building in Westfield is anything but simple.

"The State of New Jersey has become extremely difficult. There are a lot more rules and regulations to follow. Building codes have changed, engineering requirements have changed, and land has become less available," said Mr. Daunno, a graduate of Westfield High School who now resides in Scotch Plains.

While Mr. Daunno and Mystic's construction director Chester Mosco, a Westfield resident, are relatively new builders in town who started their company just one and a half years ago, they have 41 years combined experience in the construction business. Mr. Daunno added, "We grew up here. We know what's going on. We see what's happening."

According to Mr. Daunno, what's happening begins with tremendous competition from other builders and buyers vying for the same properties, with an average of five to 10 multiple bids per lot, sometimes before it's even made public.

"You have to make yourself the best buyer," he said. "They have to win by coming to us and know what makes us different."

Mr. Daunno stated that sellers consider a myriad of factors including whether buyers are pre-approved or whether they can pay cash instead of mortgaging. Majestic is also hoping that fostering a positive reputation will help make them attractive buyers.

Working toward that goal, in the past Majestic has helped sellers as they relocate by recommending qualified painting contractors or carpeting vendors as a thank you. Mr. Daunno

Freeholder Bd. Cont. his wife, Annmarie, were planning a fundraising event for several non-profit organizations on March 4. "I hope that he does rest in peace," she said.

Freeholder Alexander Mirabella of Fanwood described Mr. Suliga's death as, "a tragedy for Linden, Union County and the State of New Jersey."

Freeholder Chester Holmes of Rahway said Mr. Suliga was "very instrumental" in his political career.

"We're grateful that he shared a part of his life with us on the board," Freeholder Holmes said.

Freeholder Bette Jane Kowalski of Cranford said the former senator's death was "a great loss to all of community."

"Union County has lost a true friend," concluded Freeholder Chairman Rick Proctor.

commented, "That contractor will do a decent job for them because we give them repeat business, so they have an assurance there...and they typically thank us by spreading out our name."

Mr. Daunno, who admits to sometimes losing in multiple bid situations, maintains a philosophy not to overpay. "You have to take the value that somebody is willing to sell their house for, the value the improvements cost for you to either remodel or knock down and rebuild, and make sure the market can handle that new value plus a profit."

Finding properties suitable for tearing down and rebuilding is a task in itself. "Houses come on the market and then there's your own network world, which is better than the housing market," Mr. Daunno said. "If you're a decent person and you can make friends, you can find connections just like the real estate brokers do."

Once a property is secured and architectural drawings are made and approved, it's time to file for permits, which, depending on the nature of the project, can take several months.

Mr. Daunno's strategy is to stay within town ordinances, and Majestic hasn't had to file any variances for changes, which would delay projects even longer. "It's expensive to do. It requires a lot of preparation and a lot of time, and then if you own the property first, you're also carrying the property and if you're denied, you get nothing," he said.

Regarding permits and approvals, Mr. Daunno stated, "Westfield is fair, and fair is all you want. We want somebody to make sure that the people who are building houses build a safe environment. You don't want the structure to fall down. You don't want it to burn. You don't want people out on the street. But you also want them to have confidence that the builder knows what he's doing."

Even when the paperwork runs smoothly, Mr. Daunno said, "It's probably six months from the time you find the spot to the time you can actually go and begin the project. And then it's usually five months to actually reconstruct."

During that time, local residents tend to make their presence known, which can also be trying. "In general, nobody likes anything to happen near where they live," Mr. Daunno explained. "But we try to make friends and improve the neighborhood by what we're doing."

He cited the new home Majestic recently built on Salter Place in Westfield as an example, adding that he grew up playing baseball in nearby Gumbert Field. He and the neighbors got together to have several trees pruned, and by purchasing through Majestic, all parties enjoyed a discount.

"You can't make everybody happy," Mr. Daunno conceded. "Much of the public does not understand what is going on, and they also think all builders are rich and that we have no financial commitments. But we're just trying to make a living."

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