



TAKING THE GOSPEL TO THE STREETS (April 20)...Timothy Burke stands in public for what he calls 'Gospel Theatre for the Streets' in Westfield at the north-side train station parking lot. He carried a cross to symbolize the story of Jesus during Easter. The cross is constructed of timbers from 1952 of the original Moeller organ salvaged when Mr. Burke helped construct the new organ at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Westfield in 2004; SEEING RED (May 4)... Jeanette Maraffi hands out protest signs to Mountinside educators demonstrating at Deerfield School. Teachers alleged poor treatment by Chief School Administrator Richard O'Malley. The teachers union dubbed a "Wear Red for Respect Day" and handed out the Educators Bill of Rights to arriving parents; RAISING FUNDS (April 27)...Area residents enjoy themselves during a "Casino Night" fundraiser for the Frazee House restoration project. The fundraiser for the 18th-century farmhouse was held at the Shackamaxon Country Club in Scotch Plains; GENEROUS TOWN (May 18)...Westfield United Way (WUW) representatives chant "Thanks Westfielders," as they celebrate completion of the 2005-06 goal of \$700,000.

# The Year in Review 2006: Part 1 - January to June

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tax levy was \$68,772,526. "This budget is the maximum allowable amount," Superintendent William Foley said. On March 28, the board adopted the final 2006-2007 school budget of \$79,491,415. The budget increased 4.05 percent (\$3,016,041) over the previous year.

On March 13, two 16-year-old Westfield teenagers were reported missing by their parents. After missing for five days, the girls returned home. The police learned that they were following a band's tour schedule.



FARM OUT (February 16)...Crowds of residents gather at the Scotch Plains Municipal Building to protest the proposed petting zoo to be developed by the county on 'Open Space' land at Cooper Road. With attendance estimated around 400, the hearing was shut down by authorities and was rescheduled.

## Scotch Plains

A sixth-grade Scotch Plains student suffered burns to the inside of her mouth after tasting a substance from her Gatorade.

With word still pending on state aid, the Scotch Plains-Fanwood BOE adopted a tentative 2006-2007 school budget. BOE Business Administrator Anthony Del Sordi outlined the \$67,533,630 budget, which represented an increase of \$448,942 over last year. The proposed tax levy of \$64,627,481 was up \$5,964,687 over last year. On March 28, the board of education approved a budget of \$71.4 million through a unanimous vote.

The spending plan was 4.42 percent larger than the 2005-2006 budget, but about 1.5 percent less than the state-determined budget ceiling, for the current academic year. BOE members Norman "Trip" Whitehouse and Sasha Slocum presented the 2006-2007 school budget to the SPFHS Parent-Teacher Association. The total budget for the upcoming academic period was \$71 million, with 90.5 percent of that figure, or \$64,627,481, presented to the public as a ballot question on April 18.

## Fanwood

The Department of Smart Growth, in conjunction with the borough council, held a Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) workshop. The workshop allowed residents and business owners to brainstorm ideas regarding the development of the South Avenue corridor while learning about the proposed plans to implement the TDR program. The proposed revitalization area runs along South Avenue to the south of the Fanwood Train Station and Downtown north of Martine Avenue, between South and LaGrande Avenues. This corridor was currently a mixture of zones, including light industrial, general commercial and residential.

The investigation into Fanwood Police Officer Brian Bartiromo continued after the officer was suspended without pay in the fall of 2005 after two women filed separate complaints accusing him of sexual misconduct.

## Garwood

The borough council introduced a \$6,164,871 municipal budget on March 28, representing an increase of \$240,215 over the 2005-2006 budget. A total of \$4,157,80 was to be raised in local municipal property taxes, an increase of \$257,636, representing an 11.5-point increase, or \$115 for an average home assessed at \$100,000, over last year.

## Mountainside

Former Mountainside residents Blanche and George Watts established

a foundation to benefit the borough. Patterned after a community foundation, the organization would not only solicit grant requests but also entertain funding initiatives to meet community needs. To be funded with approximately \$3.5 million, the foundation anticipated making grants each year in excess of \$140,000.

The BOE submitted a \$13,908,910 budget to the Union County Superintendent of Schools for approval on March 13. On March 28, the board of education approved a \$13,966,844 budget for the 2006-2007 Fiscal Year. Mountainside resident and former

ring the repeal to the full council. "This is the final nail in the coffin of the proposed parking decks of old," he said.

## Scotch Plains

Residents of Scotch Plains and Fanwood approved the BOE's \$62.1-million school tax levy budget for the 2006-2007 academic year by a margin of 2,182 to 1,727 on March 18. BOE seats were also filled. Board President Linda Nelson was re-elected with 1,484 votes; as well as incumbents Norman "Trip" Whitehouse, 1,220, and Betty Anne Woerner, 1,086. Incumbent Thomas Russo ran unopposed for the one-year unexpired seat currently held by Mr. Whitehouse and received 1,480 tallies. There were no Fanwood school board seats up for election this year.

The Scotch Plains library's \$825,000 improvements were completed. Renovations began late last fall, included a new roof to replace one that was prone to chronic leaks that would necessitate covering bookshelves and computers in plastic sheeting and spreading buckets throughout the 39-year-old facility on Bartle Avenue. In addition, the project involved five new ADA-compliant restroom facilities, new handrails on the stairs and new thermal-paneled windows.

## Fanwood

In a 6-2 decision, the planning and zoning board of adjustment approved a plan by Station Square, LLC, to construct 24 townhouses on the 1.1-acre property known as the former Dean Oil Site. The proposed complex would be bordered by LaGrande Avenue on the southern side, Second Street on the west, a public parking lot to the east and public parking on the northern side, to be developed for retail stores fronting on South Avenue. The proposed plan includes five buildings with self-contained two-car garages on the ground floor of each unit. A condition of approval, imposed by the board, stipulates that no more than 50 percent of the units have three bedrooms; the remainder would be two-bedroom units.

## Garwood

The BOE ratified a new three-year contract with the local teachers' union that gave educators a 3.75-percent increase in salary for the 2006-2007 school year and a 4.5 percent salary increase for the 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 school years. Borough voters passed the \$5.2-million local school tax levy by a margin of 260 to 106. The tax levy supports an overall spending plan of \$7,408,099. In a contested race for an unexpired BOE seat, Lisa Marano defeated incumbent BOE member James Matheson by a tally of 259 to 108. Mr. Matheson filed to run for borough council as a Republican. Incumbent board of election members Barbara Greet, Susan Groning and BOE president Adele Lewis were unopposed in their quest for reelection. They received 290, 289 and 290 votes, respectively.

The borough council adopted a 2006 municipal budget of \$6,164,871 on April 25, reflecting an increase of more than \$240,000 over last year. The amount to be raised from taxes will rise from \$3.9 million in 2005 to \$4,157,800 this year - an increase of \$257,000.

## Mountainside

On April 18, Mountainside residents passed school district's \$11,276,433 tax levy by a tally of 518 to 452. The tax levy will support an overall budget of \$13,966,844. Voters also re-elected Mary Beth Schaumburg and elected Geraldene Duswalt and Joseph Timirella to open board seats. The average borough homeowner will pay an increase of \$392 in school taxes. About 81 percent of the budget is funded by the local tax levy.

## Regional

Cranford resident David Robinson filed a lawsuit against Governor Jon Corzine and State Treasurer Bradley Abelow to block distribution of \$25 million in so-called "Christmas Tree" or slush funds. Mr. Robinson, who was later elected to the Cranford Township Committee, charged that \$128 million in grants were illegally administered in the Fiscal Year 2005 and 2006 budgets.

Sunil Garg of Summit was hired as the new executive director of the Union County Utilities Authority, replacing Joseph Spatola, who resigned. The county freeholders unveiled a \$400.8-million budget, which was \$10.3 million lower than the executive budget by County Manager George Devanney, but \$10 million greater than the 2005 spending plan. The \$226.6-million tax levy raises taxes in 18 of the county's 21 municipalities.

## MAY

### Westfield

Naomi McElynn became the new executive director of the Chamber of Commerce, replacing Allison O'Hara.

During the second week in April, students from Hillcrest Academy vandalized a house and stole a car in Westfield. All four students involved were taken to the Union County Juvenile Detention Center; meanwhile, flyers began circulating around Westfield stating: "Lock Your Doors."

WHS Assistant Principal Noah Tennant announced his plan to leave the Westfield school system after eight years to accept a principal position at a South Jersey middle school.

The planning board unanimously rejected the town council's proposed ordinance to change the zoning regulations for residential housing at a special public meeting. The capacity of the council's chambers was filled to standing room only as Fourth Ward Councilman Jim Foerst, council liaison on the board, presented a PowerPoint presentation to the board and the public.

The proposed ordinance would have changed the building code to call for a maximum of three habitable floors of space, limited the height of homes to 35 feet, created a sliding scale of homes with smaller side yards to 32 feet and required a minimum of a five-to-12-foot roof pitch.

The ordinance would have also changed the definition of habitable FAR (floor-to-area ratio) to gross FAR, thereby removing technical exclusions to the size of homes, such as attached garages, while excluding porches, decks, gazebos, accessory buildings, attic areas and basements.

U.S. Army Air Force Captain Douglas Wight of Westfield, reported missing in action during a World War II mission 60 years ago, was buried on May 9 at Arlington National Cemetery.

### Scotch Plains

Scotch Plains reached a settlement regarding four township police officers (Kevin Lonergan, Brian Cheney, Matthew Fugett and Brian Garbinski) who filed a reverse-discrimination lawsuit against the Scotch Plains Police Department, an African-American police chief and the chief's white predecessor. Under the settlement terms, \$210,000 in attorney's fees would be paid to Steven Adler, who represented the four officers. Township Attorney Brian Levine told the council at its conference meeting that the payment to the attorney represented less than half of the total costs incurred by Mr. Adler. The four officers each received \$25,000 as part of the settlement. The root of the lawsuit dates back six years ago involving a traffic stop of four African American men in April 2000. The four officers claimed they were improperly reprimanded by Chief Nelson.

The Scotch Plains-Fanwood BOE elected Thomas Russo as board president and Linda Nelson as vice-president.

Carol Choye announced her retirement as superintendent of the Scotch Plains-Fanwood public schools after 13 years.

Authorities in Arkansas officially charged a convicted killer with the brutal murder of a 25-year-old Scotch Plains resident that occurred near an Arkansas highway rest area six years ago. Ronald James Ward was charged with first-degree murder of Kristin Ann Laurite; Mr. Ward's link to Laurite was found through a DNA match.

Michael Chemidlin, 58, a Scotch Plains missionary and former sergeant with the Army National Guard, was arrested on April 29 on allegations of espionage for plotting to free former Liberian President Charles Taylor from a United Nations court complex in Sierra Leone, a West African country located north of Liberia. Mr. Chemidlin and two Sierra Leoneans were initially charged with conspiracy for taking pictures of Sierra Leone's war crimes court, according to an MWEB (an African Internet news agency) press account. After initially being released on the lesser charge, the men were re-arrested the next day on espionage charges.

The planning board voted not to recommend that a piece of township-owned property on Park Avenue be re-zoned because no firm development plans for the property were yet in place.

## JUNE

### Westfield

A Westfield police officer faced a six-day suspension on allegations that he failed to back up another officer on a motor vehicle stop and was sleeping in his patrol car at a local cemetery.

Officer Gregory Kasko, a 16-year veteran of the town's police force,

said he was innocent of the charges. During a departmental disciplinary hearing, he said he never received the radio transmission of the backup call and that he was conducting radar at the time and reviewing and making notes on summonses he had written a few days earlier.

Fourth Ward Councilman Tom Bigosinski told the council the town could save upwards of \$47,000 on its estimated \$230,000 legal budget by amending the hourly rates of attorneys working under Township Attorney Bob Cockren and Labor Attorney Rick Danser.

Following a budgetary discussion on lowering the town's legal expenses, Town Administrator Jim Gildea told *The Leader/Times*, "The hourly rate doesn't tell the whole picture. You have to look at the bottom line expenditure. In 2006, the legal expenses are \$230,000, not including salaries (which add another \$100,000, according to Mr. Gildea). We're always looking to be as cost-effective as possible. At the end of the day, the legal budget remained flat, and saw no increase."

Gina Lewis, 43, a Scotch Plains woman and former employee of the Tri-County Chapter of the American Red Cross, was arrested May 24 and charged with theft of services for allegedly pretending to be a disaster survivor to obtain a room at the Best Western Westfield Inn on North Avenue in Westfield. Police said the bill for her stay was \$11,493.

Ms. Lewis began as a volunteer at the Red Cross and then became an employee with disaster services under the direction of Norm Jenkins at the Red Cross Elizabeth office from November until her arrest in May. She allegedly forged the signature of Mr. Jenkins to obtain a room at the Westfield Inn for several months, according to Trish Mulligan, executive director of the Tri-County Red Cross.

"We never put people up [in hotels] for more than three to five days," Ms. Mulligan said.

Ms. Mulligan also alleged that Ms. Lewis was living in the hotel with her



SUCCESS!...An SPFHS student rejoices after receiving his diploma.

For years, township officials and the downtown business community had considered what to do with the so-called "hedge property," a rectangular-shaped grassy area adjacent to the municipal building that was situated between the municipal parking lot and Park Avenue. Many downtown property owners favored selling the property to a private developer so that some type of a mixed-use building could be built on the site. No action had been taken due to a lack of a consensus among township officials over what to do with the property.

## Garwood

The U.S. Department of Labor charged that a Garwood parking services company violated federal law by paying its drivers below minimum wage. Prestige Parking Services President Clifford Hoinowski and Vice-Presidents Robert Lalor and Peter Johnson agreed to pay \$57,500 in back wages to settle a labor department lawsuit alleging that the company failed to pay workers federal minimum wage in violation of the Fair Labor Standards Act.

## Mountainside

On May 3, borough teachers demonstrated in front of Deerfield School to protest poor treatment of the staff by Chief School Administrator Richard O'Malley. Teachers participated in a "Wear Red for Respect Day" demonstration. They greeted parents dropping off their children with copies of the Mountainside Education Association's (MEA) Bill of Rights "to make them aware of what is expected in a professional relationship between educators and the administration," said Jeannette Maraffi, president of the MEA.

On May 16, the municipal budget was unanimously adopted. The \$9,461,532 budget represented an increase of \$141 per average accessed home of \$159,000. A total of \$5,336,965 would be raised in local taxes, up \$453,883 from 2005.

The BOE approved the Connected Math program for Grade 8 and the Rebecca Sitton Spelling and Word Skills program for grades 1 and 2.

## Regional

County Director of Public Works and Engineering Frank Dann retired.

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Robert Petix



Carol Choye



RIDING HIGH (June 15)...McKinley Elementary School Principal Claudia Andreski takes a ride around the school's field in the Black Widow monster truck. She did so as a reward for the students, who met her reading challenge by reading 11,218 pounds of books for the annual read-a-thon.



REDEVELOPMENT BEGINS (May 11)...Work begins on the first project of Fanwood's Downtown Redevelopment. Plans call for the demolition of two buildings at Second and South Avenues. The buildings were previously occupied by M.I.P. Printing and the Brass Works. Sanguiliano Enterprises is conducting the demolition and recycling the concrete, metal and wood. Ron Marcovechio, proprietor of the Fanwood Clipper, is developing the property, which will feature first-floor retail space and two floors of apartments.