



**TAKING THE REINS...**Fanwood Mayor Colleen Mahr accepts the gavel as the new president of the New Jersey Conference of Mayors (NJCM) from Malcolm Fraser, former president and mayor of Cape May Point Borough, at the annual spring NJCM meeting in Atlantic City.

## Union County Taxes in Preparation by Freeholders

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operations at the golf courses. According to an outline obtained by *The Leader*, officials estimated the cost to the county at \$180,000 per year, plus a percentage of the gross revenues.

The board also considered having a private company operate the courses. The company would operate the courses and collect all revenues in exchange for a "fixed rent." The company would pay all operating expenses and some of the capital costs. Officials estimate a lease would generate \$100,000 annually for the county in addition to a percentage of the profits.

Jonathan Williams, who serves as counsel to the Union County Improvement Authority (UCIA), said the UCIA would be in charge of facilitating a procurement process to receive proposals from private companies, as well as handling the negotiations. He said the county could require that all employees of county golf operations be placed on the operator's payroll, thus enabling the employees to stay in the state's pension system.

Mr. Mirabella said he was pleased with the options presented to increase revenue, stating he is interested in doing "what's best for the fiscal health of the county."

In the area of human services, Director Frank Guzzo said he needs an increase of \$400,000 to maintain services offered through the county's Paratransit system. The program provides rides to senior citizens and disabled passengers.

His department's budget request, paid through county tax dollars, excluding salaries and overtime, is \$11.9 million — a 3 percent increase over 2007. The total department budget, including salaries for 744 positions, is \$46.2 million, an increase of \$4.1 million over last year. Mr. Guzzo said 115 of those positions are paid through county taxpayer dollars, with the rest funded fully or partially with federal and state grants.

Undersheriff Joe Cryan proposed a

\$15.8-million sheriff's department budget, an increase of \$959,331 over last year, according to the executive budget, mostly due to an increase in salaries. He said through such programs as municipal prisoner transports to the county jail and the S.L.A.P. (Sheriff's Labor Assistance Program), the sheriff's office provided towns with \$3.9 million in "taxpayer savings."

Board of Elections Deputy Administrator Dennis Kobitz noted, per a May 18 hearing on a lawsuit brought by a voter advocacy group, that a judge will rule if the electronic machines used by Union County can be used in the General Election in November. If the judge says the machines cannot be used, voters might have to fill out paper ballots at the polls. Sequoia Voting Systems manufactured the voting machines in Union County, as well as most of the state.

Mr. Kobitz also said that Assemblyman Jerry Green (LD-22, Plainfield) was asked by Assembly Speaker Joe Roberts to merge several pieces of legislation on moving school elections from April to November. He said the county would save money if the elections were moved to November.

The combined budget for the board of elections and the election division of the county clerk is \$4,049,563, an increase of \$845,857 over last year. Officials said the county and towns would be reimbursed by the state for costs from the Presidential Primary, one of the main reasons for the budget increase.

Union County Executive Superintendent of Schools Carmen Centuolo requested a meeting with the freeholders to discuss "consolidation" of some school districts. Her office's budget request of \$299,528 is \$8,554 over last year. All but \$12,500 of that is for salaries. Part of her budget is supported by county taxes, however, Ms. Centuolo is a state employee appointed by the governor.

## Downtown Westfield Bus. Group Opposes Parking Fines

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Brunswick in the number of parking tickets [issued]," he said.

David Martone, former DWC chairman, when reached Wednesday morning, did not want to comment on the event but said figures quoted at the meeting, such as the amount of tickets issued in 2007, were taken out of proportion.

"You can cut through rhetoric with facts," Mr. Martone said, adding that there was "only a 5-percent increase in tickets issued from 2006 to 2007." Reached on Wednesday morning, Gary Goodman, chairman of the WACC, said, "One can understand the anger [of business owners in town]. I believe the role of the chamber is to reflect the views of its constituents to the mayor and council."

He said the Chamber is in opposition to raising the penalties on parking tickets and that the town should not "be in the parking business." Mr. Goodman called the feelings expressed on Tuesday "honestly felt beliefs" and said the town should focus on "facilitating a healthy downtown," not "seeing if it can maximize its revenue."

He said the council "takes for granted the viability of downtown Westfield" and should not "play games with it."

Downtown businessman Gary Whitman echoed those sentiments at the rally.

"Somewhere along the line, the town got into the parking business,"

## Garwood

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work would most likely begin next summer to avoid interfering with school traffic.

During the public portion of the meeting, resident Bruce Paterson inquired about the possibility of the borough conducting a reassessment of homes in Garwood.

Borough Attorney Bob Renaud said a reassessment was unlikely both because of the high cost of the reassessment and the fact that the borough's ratio of assessed value to true value is still acceptable.

he said. "They really want to see how much revenue can be generated."

Downtown merchants said current parking ticket enforcement policies are discouraging employees, as well as customers, from coming downtown.

Mayor Andy Skibitsky, reached Wednesday morning, responded to comments made about the vibrancy of downtown Westfield.

"First of all, the parking infrastructure did support a healthy downtown until the economic downturn," he said. "We had record property sale prices and lease rates when the economy was healthy."

The mayor said the condition of the state economy and the increases in mandated costs has led to decisions such as the one to raise parking ticket fines.

"Municipalities, like businesses, are not immune from the [poor] economic conditions," he said. "We need to figure out how to cut expenses and increase revenue. We're working hard to balance the needs of all constituencies."

On the threats of people, upon receiving tickets, not returning to town, the mayor said he receives "one letter a year" from a citizen saying he or she will not come back to Westfield.

"I don't think that's a sign of a major problem," the mayor said.

In discussing next steps, Mr. Greco said cash pledges made Tuesday night by action group members will be collected in a new bank account, while options for creating a website, posters, public involvement meeting attendance, and follow-ups are planned.

Mr. Greco also said the group wants the town to "roll back" the hourly parking rate from 50 cents to the old 25 cents per hour rate, noting that the higher rate was enacted as part of subsequently cancelled plans to build a downtown parking deck.

Overall, when commenting Wednesday morning, Mr. Greco said the evening was an inspiring success. "I was impressed...a baby was born, so to speak," he said. "I'm very excited."

Michael Pollack contributed to the story.

## Mayor Mahr Elected President of NJCM

ATLANTIC CITY — At its annual spring meeting in Atlantic City, the New Jersey Conference of Mayors (NJCM) has elected Fanwood Borough Mayor Colleen Mahr as NJCM President for 2008-2009.

Mayor Mahr has been an active member of the NJCM since she first took office as Mayor in 2003. She has served as one of Union County's representatives to the board of the NJCM and served as treasurer and vice president.

Mayor Mahr was the youngest person elected as mayor of Fanwood and the fourth woman to hold that office in more than 100 years.

In 2007, Mayor Mahr was selected as one of Union County's Women of Distinction and was recently re-elected in an uncontested election.

In her remarks at the convention, Mayor Mahr said that Governor Jon Corzine's proposed state spending plan calls for significant reductions in municipal aid and reiterated that mayors will remain vocal in their collective opposition to these reductions. She cautioned the governor that reductions need to be applied in a "fair and equitable manner" and tied to efficiencies as an incentive. She said reductions should not be based upon an

arbitrary population number.

Mayor Mahr stated that under her leadership, the mayors will fight for balance, equity and demand fairness on those issues that directly affect the mayors of New Jersey. She said the NJCM will raise the voices of mayors to help address issues and present solutions designed to improve the quality of life for all citizens.

She outlined several goals for the upcoming year. They include "raising the bar" for all mayors on what it means to be a member of the organization. She pledged to engage the membership in ways that have never happened before.

She will establish a mayors governing institute to create a forum for ideas and have open discussion of issues and solutions. The institute will serve as a central resource for information and referrals on issues that are faced by mayors every day. She said it will serve as a central repository that will assist mayors to govern their communities more effectively and efficiently.

Mayor Mahr, her husband George, and their three sons: Liam, 4, Daniel, 3, and Colin, 1, reside in Fanwood.

The New Jersey Conference of Mayors was founded in 1963 to represent the interests of the mayors. For more information, see njcm.org.

## Fanwood Calls For 18 Percent Salary Cuts

By JOHN MAGUIRE  
Specially Written For The Westfield Leader

FANWOOD — The borough council held a special budget meeting Monday to address a \$500,000 shortfall in the coming year's budget, currently projected at \$8.5 million. The council unanimously called for an 18 percent cut in municipal salaries to come from administration, police and public works departments.

Fanwood, like many communities, is facing a large increase in property taxes, a reduction in state aid, increased costs and reduced revenues. State aid will be \$186,669 this coming year, down 17 percent from last year.

Mayor Colleen Mahr set the tone by saying, "We have to make decisions now" and that "draconian measures" were in order. She implored the council to address the issues and not wait to see if Fanwood would receive additional funding from the state. The mayor received support from the council with many members expressing the need to plan "for the worst-case scenario."

"It's time to make decisions," agreed Councilwoman Donna Dolce. Anticipating the response from affected departments, she stated that "no" is not an answer.

Councilwoman Joan Wheeler agreed. "I would not give them the option to cut from their total budget — this 18 percent needs to be from labor costs," she said.

Fanwood has applied for extraordinary aid, which the state disburses through a separate program, but word on whether Fanwood will receive it will not come until June. The council agreed that was too long to wait to make cuts.

There was a debate on whether to ask for cuts strictly from personnel.

Questioning whether asking the department heads to make the decisions was appropriate, Councilman David Valian said, "We have to see what their proposal is." Whatever the department heads come up with, "we have a lot of work ahead of us," he added. He asked the council to give the police chief and the other affected managers enough time to think through their proposals.

The bleak state of the borough's revenue projection was discussed. Revenues from the fire inspector and construction office are expected to decline. Pet licensing is expected to yield a meager gain. The council projects a \$20,000 increase in parking fees as a result of increasing daily parking rates at the Fanwood train station.

"There is no good news anywhere," Mayor Mahr stated, adding that it was time to look at everything — including salaries.

Councilwoman Dolce was strong in her conviction that the number of staff members had to be reduced. She said that the council did not have "the luxury of

## Westfielder on County Gov.

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ment editor Paul Peyton, who has covered the Union County Freeholder beat for years.

First Ward Councilman Frank Arena stated that he would attend Wednesday's budget meeting [last week] and last Saturday's budget session. He also said it was "helpful" that Mr. Cook has attended meetings and reported his findings.

Mr. Arena, after attending the county budget meetings last week, told *The Leader* that it was "very worthwhile to go."

Despite being in "listening and learning mode," Mr. Arena told *The Leader* that attending meetings afforded him the opportunity to speak with county officials about how the two entities can work together. Mr. Arena talked to the county about the potential of Westfield commuters utilizing a "handful" of parking spots at the Ralph Froehlich Public Safety Building on North Avenue.

At last Tuesday's meeting, Fourth Ward Councilman Tom Bigosinski said, "Having a physical presence [in Elizabeth] increases Westfield's visibility."

He added that it reminds freeholders that Westfield citizens and municipal government are not "indifferent" to what goes on in the county.

Speaking on another matter, Sharon Stockwell, chairman of We Care, said an ordinance is needed to address the "growing trend" of vacant buildings in town. She said such an ordinance is necessary in order to "remedy any public nuisance problems and to prevent deterioration, unsightly blight and adverse impact on the value of nearby properties."

Ms. Stockwell had, last month, sug-

gested the possibility of addressing the issue through the modification of the property maintenance code to include vacant buildings.

She presented the findings of We Care's research, which showed that there are three towns in the state that use the term "vacant" in their property maintenance codes. Other towns address the vacant building issue through a separate ordinance — New Brunswick is one example.

"Many towns" that have a vacant building ordinance require these structures to be registered on a vacant building list, she said.

Ms. Stockwell, at the end of her report, said We Care "respectfully requests" that the town's Code Review and Town Property Committee consider creation of a separate ordinance addressing the duties and responsibilities of owners of vacant buildings.

She said the ordinance, among its many functions, would define the term "vacant building" and establish a permit process for registering such buildings with the town.

Ms. Stockwell noted, especially in difficult fiscal times, permits could become a possible revenue source. Mayor Skibitsky thanked Ms. Stockwell for her presentation and turned over the issue to the code review committee. He did offer a caveat, however, that the committee has a 27-item-long agenda and that it might take some time before this comes up for consideration.



**WIRED AND READY...**Scotch Plains local access TV34 Manager Bill McMeekan organizes equipment in the basement of the Township Municipal building in preparation for expanding programming for the public.



## POLICE BLOTTER

### Westfield

Tuesday, April 8, a burglary was reported at a Stoneleigh Park residence. The owner returned to find her home had been ransacked and a computer, two iPods and miscellaneous jewelry taken. The value of the missing items is approximately \$28,000. There was evidence of forced entry through a rear door.

Tuesday, April 15, Sharon Greenbaum, 57, of Westfield was arrested and charged with driving while intoxicated (DWI) following a motor vehicle accident investigation on the 300 block of South Avenue, East. No injuries were reported. Greenbaum was released to a responsible individual.

Wednesday, April 16, a burglary was reported at a home on the 100 block of Vernon Terrace. Two white gold diamond wedding bands, valued at a total of \$6,000, were taken from a bedroom.

Thursday, April 17, Larissa Luciano, 24, of Mountaineer was arrested and charged with DWI on New Providence Road in Mountaineer after committing a motor vehicle violation in Westfield. She was released to a responsible individual.

Friday, April 18, while investigating a one-car motor vehicle accident at South Avenue and Drake Place, police arrested Deborah DeSimone, 45, of North Plainfield on charges of DWI, possession of heroin and possession of drug paraphernalia. No injuries were reported. DeSimone was released on her own recognizance.

Saturday, April 19, James Fischer, 50, of Westfield was arrested on the 800 block of Central Avenue and charged with unlawful taking of means of conveyance. Fischer, who allegedly took a motor vehicle without the owner's consent, was processed and released with a summons.

Sunday, April 20, Aaron Quade, 22, of Hammondsport, N.Y. was arrested at North Chestnut and East Broad Streets and charged with DWI. He was processed and released to a responsible individual.

Sunday, April 20, the owner of a motor vehicle reported that an attempt was made to damage the vehicle while it was parked in his driveway on the 200 block of Gallops Hill Road. He told police he saw several female suspects near the vehicle, who then fled.

Monday, April 21, Shaka M. Campbell, 38, of San Francisco, Calif. was arrested during a motor vehicle stop on the 400 block of West Broad Street on active warrants out of Orange, with \$39 bail; East Orange, with \$77 bail, and South Orange, with \$268 bail. Campbell was released after posting bail.

Tuesday, April 15, Alfred J. Smith, 46, of New Brunswick was arrested on outstanding warrants out of Plainfield, Fanwood, Piscataway, North Hunterdon, Mountaineer and Berkeley Heights after a field investigation. According to police, he was turned over to the Union County jail.

Tuesday, April 15, Jillian N. Wilchez, 26, of Roselle Park was arrested after a motor vehicle stop on Midway Avenue and charged with disorderly conduct, obstruction of justice, resisting arrest and two counts of aggravated assault on a police officer. According to police, she was released in \$11,000 bail with a court date scheduled for Thursday, April 30.

Wednesday, April 16, Brian Gifford, 45, of Derry, N.H. was arrested for an outstanding warrant out of Bloomingdale after a motor vehicle stop on Midway Avenue.

Sunday, April 20, Rafael E. Gomez-Baldiris, 60, of Plainfield was arrested and charged with driving while intoxicated after a motor vehicle stop on LaGrande Avenue. According to police, he was processed and released to a responsible adult.

Sunday, April 20, Lamont Nevius, 37, of Newark was arrested on a no-bail warrant out of the Union and Essex Counties Sheriff's Departments. According to police, he was turned over to the Union County Sheriff's Department.

Sunday, April 20, Ann M. Kutlik, 27, of Plainfield was arrested on an outstanding Middlesex warrant after a motor vehicle stop on Terrill Road.

### Scotch Plains

Friday, April 18, a resident of Willow Avenue reported a suspicious vehicle parked in front of her house. According to police, the vehicle was later identified as being stolen out of Woodbridge. The owner was notified, police said.

Saturday, April 19, John Wesley, 29, of Rahway was arrested for an outstanding warrant after a motor vehicle stop. He was transported to headquarters where he was processed and released, police said.

Saturday, April 19, a resident of Hunter Avenue reported that her neighbor walks his dog across her lawn several times a day.

Saturday, April 19, Reginald Johnson, 51, of Irvington was arrested on an outstanding warrant after a motor vehicle stop. He was transported to headquarters where he was processed and released, police said.

Saturday, April 19, Eric Cole, 39, of Piscataway was arrested for an outstanding warrant after a motor vehicle stop. He was transported to headquarters where he was processed and released, police said.

Sunday, April 20, Misty Pugliese, 23, of Elizabeth was arrested for an outstanding warrant after a motor vehicle stop. She was transported to headquarters where she was processed and released, police said.

Sunday, April 20, Gerald Polite, 32, of Newark was arrested for an outstanding warrant after a motor vehicle stop. He was transported to headquarters where he was processed and released, police said.

Sunday, April 20, Nicole Exum, 30, of Elizabeth was arrested for an outstanding warrant after a motor vehicle stop. She was transported to headquarters where she was processed and released, police said.

## Authorities Round Up 23 Gang Members

ELIZABETH — The Union County Prosecutor's Office announced on Tuesday a major take-down of the "Almighty Latin Kings and Queens Nation," (aka the Latin Kings criminal street gang) in Union County.

Twenty-three members and associates of the gang were taken into custody Sunday night after a nine-month investigation into the gang's activities. Over 300 members of law enforcement and six SWAT teams took part in the pre-dawn raids.

The investigation was done in conjunction with the New Jersey State Police, U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, Division of Criminal Justice, Union County Police and the Union County Sheriff's Office.

## DWC Resignation

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Westfield was evident during his eight-year DWC tenure, including the last three years as chair[man]. He was a very effective DWC leader, but knowing David, I am sure that he will continue serving Westfield in other volunteer capacities," the mayor said.

DWC board member Diane Barabas said it was important that rules are followed when it comes to eligibility to serve on the board of directors.

"It's extremely important that we abide by the rules of the SID to serve its members," she said.

Of Mr. Martone's tenure, she said, "David worked really worked hard to facilitate some of the new [DWC] programs."

DWC Executive Director Sherry Cronin had similar comments. "David Martone has been a tremendous asset to the Downtown Westfield Corporation as a board member, committee member and chairman of the board. He has spent countless hours over the last many years volunteering to make downtown Westfield a better place to be and always conducts himself with the highest standards of integrity.

"He always has a balanced perspective and took the time — whether it was to provide guidance on an emerging issue, lend a hand with a

downtown promotional event or to attend training sessions or workshops on Main Street management and downtown revitalization," Ms. Cronin said. "His perspective as a resident and business owner will be sorely missed by the staff and by the board of directors."

Mr. Verdic said Mr. Martone's resignation "all came as quite a shock for me."

"Stepping into David's shoes is not going to be easy," he said, adding that, "David did a great job for us."

Mr. Verdic said if elected chairman, he would like to concentrate on seeing the south side streetscape project completed, noting that the town has gone out to bid on the work.

In addition, Mr. Verdic wants to explore having retail space on the second floors as a way to spur economic development in the downtown, noting that this could attract "Mom and Pop" stores that cannot afford street-level floor rents. In addition, he also wants the DWC to look at recruiting multiple vendors for second floor spaces.

"As a downtown landowner and builder, Dominick has done a great job in providing leadership and direction on many of our façade improvements and has participated in numerous DWC committees. Dominick certainly has the experience to be the next chairperson," Mayor Skibitsky said.

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