

2007 Year In Review: Part 2 - July to September

Workers Face CO Poisoning, Voters Decide, Berry Entertains



ROCK AND ROLL MUSIC(FEST) (September 20)...Chuck Berry displays some of his time-tested moves during his performance at Nomahegan Park in Cranford in mid-September. The musician appeared as part of Union County's annual MusicFest event. LOOKING BACK OVER TIME (November 29)...Sharing many great football memories on Thanksgiving Day are, left to right, former Raider football player Andrew Pavoni (Class of 2002), Scotch Plains Police Chief Brian Mahoney, retired detective Carl Sicola, Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School head football coach Len Zanowicz (1968) and SPFH Athletic Director Robert Harmer. The game marked the last contest played on the Scotch Plains field before it was turf. After the game, football players were able to take home squares of the old field in styrofoam containers. RESCUE EFFORT (July 19)...A Channel 2 news helicopter circles above while Union County HazMat workers prepare to enter HomeCare America on South Avenue in Westfield. Three contractors were overcome by carbon monoxide on July 11, while using a gasoline-driven power washer to remove mold in the basement of the building. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) investigated the incident to see if any workplace violations occurred.

JULY
Westfield
The second half of the year began with a close: the Westfield Municipal Library closed its doors for renovations on June 30. On July 9, the children's section alone reopened; the rest of the library remained closed until its grand reopening on December 9.

The Westfield Police Department investigated the drowning of a 6-year-old Brooklyn boy at the Manor Park Swim Club in Westfield. The boy, David Konig, was pronounced dead after he was found face down in the club's pool, located at 2 Laurel Place. A fire broke out in a storage area in the basement of the Westfield Post Office at 3:20 p.m. on July 7. The incident did not disrupt local mail deliveries.

Westfield firefighters, whose headquarters is located two blocks from the post office, arrived on the scene within two minutes and encountered heavy smoke and heat when they entered the basement.



Victoria McCabe for The Leader/Times
FIREWORKS GO 'FOURTH' (July 12)...A spectator watches Nomahegan Park's annual fireworks display from Union County College's Cranford campus. The fireworks, delayed by rain on the Fourth of July, went off on July 6.

Westfield Deputy Fire Chief David Kelly said the post office's basement has no windows and only two access points - an emergency exit and a staircase leading to the only non-emergency exit. Postal authorities continued to investigate the fire.

In other news, an incident at HomeCare America on South Avenue sent at least three men to the hospital with carbon-monoxide poisoning. The men worked at a South Avenue medical supply company. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) launched an investigation into the incident.

A 36-year-old Westfield man faced multiple charges after allegedly stealing two motor vehicles and then becoming involved in accidents in Westfield and Garwood. According to Westfield Police Chief John Parizeau, the man, Michael Okpych,

was charged with stealing a 1989 Oldsmobile Cutlass belonging to a Westfield resident from the south-side NJ Transit parking lot in Westfield sometime during the day.

State Assemblyman Jon Bramnick (LD-21, Westfield) asked the state's Board of Public Utilities (BPU) to mediate a dispute about local-cable-channel access between local franchise Comcast and Verizon, which began offering cable service.

Garwood
The borough council unanimously approved the \$2.1-million James V. Guerriero Memorial Field project for the borough's Little League field, located on Myrtle Avenue. The expected project will consist of funding a new athletic field with synthetic turf, a town fieldhouse, walking track, multipurpose field and other upgraded recreational amenities at the cost of \$50.41 annually on a house assessed at \$100,000 for about 20 years.

In addition, officials confirmed that Superintendent of Schools Wilfred Murphy's present medical condition would prevent him from returning to his position for the 2007-2008 school year.

Mountainside
Two people were killed on Route 22 East at the New Providence Road exit in a double-fatality motor-vehicle accident. The driver, 18-year-old Konstanti Potouridis of New Providence, and passenger, 20-year-old Paul Carbone of Milburn, were riding in a 1994 Chevy Camaro going eastbound on Route 22 when Potouridis lost control of the car, causing it to spin out of control, go airborne and hit a utility pole.

Scotch Plains
Scotch Plains' official website got a facelift, leading to a host of new and updated information for residents and site visitors to access, after an upgrade overseen by City Connections,

LLC, which received \$7,000 this year to manage the revamped site.

Construction projects at Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School began in preparation for the 2007-2008 school year. The various projects included an expansion of the senior parking lot and the addition of side walks around the building, as well as further renovations to the girls' locker room.

Nearly 100 neighborhood residents attended the zoning board of adjustment's July 12 meeting to debate the construction of a 120-foot high Omni-Point wireless communication tower at Willow Grove Swim Club on Roosevelt Avenue. Residents waited nearly four hours for the Omni-Point hearing to begin because five other applications were higher on the board's agenda. By the time the Omni-Point hearing got underway at 11:20 p.m., there was time for one witness to appear. The discussion resumed in September.

Mayor Martin Marks said officials from Scotch Plains, Fanwood and the board of education were "on the precipice of having something really good in place" to alleviate the student parking problem at SPFH. The plan includes the ability to secure permits to park on certain streets in both communities for a limited number of students.

Residents living near Southside Park expressed concern about the Scotch Plains Recreation Commission's proposed renovations to the park at a commission meeting. Concerns included the addition of lights, the number of parking spaces, installation of a playground and buildings for bathrooms, storage and concessions.

Fanwood
The borough council decided to put its Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) program on hold while exploring other alternatives for historic preservation, officials said.

The Fanwood Republican Committee named former Borough Police Chief Anthony Parenti as one of its two candidates for borough council in the fall. He replaced Janek Anthony Skutnik, who withdrew his candidacy.

Area
The Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders and the Township of Berkeley Heights opposed a state Department of Transportation (DOT) interchange project on Route 78 at Diamond Hill Road. Scotch Plains supported the project.

In other news, the New Jersey State Legislature voted to repeal the 7-percent sales tax on municipal parking and facilities, as well as member-

ship fees to not-for-profit fitness organizations. The new tax exemptions reversed budget measures imposed in October 2006.

A man matching the description of the "Mad Hatter," a robber who struck 18 different banks in New Jersey and accumulated more than \$60,000, was found after a bank robbery in Union Township. Eileen Walsh, executive assistant prosecutor for Union County, confirmed that the suspect, James Madison, 50, of Maplewood, was arrested after allegedly robbing a Bank of America inside a shopping center on Route 22 West in Union Township.

AUGUST
Westfield
The town council unanimously approved a \$3.19-million special-bond ordinance to authorize improvements to the Memorial Pool complex and awarded a contract to reconstruct the main and wading pools. Town Administrator Jim Gildea deemed the undertaking, which officials projected would be completed in the pool's off-season, "a very major project."

The abandoned property at 121 Cacciola Place faced raccoon infestation for more than a year, neighbors said. The neighbors aired their grievances about the dilapidated state of the abandoned property, which Joseph Penyak Sr. had purchased in 2005, at the July 31 town council meeting before going to court on August 8.

An alligator found refuge in Gregory's Pond in Westfield, located on Clark Street past the Brightwood Park intersection. The town administrator and Westfield Police Department (WPD) confirmed the reptile's

presence; a police sergeant said the alligator is not a "significant threat to public safety" at this time. A week later, the New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife caught and took custody of the animal and sought a home for it out of state.

Mountainside
William J. Biunno, 71, of Mountainside was charged with stealing up to \$28,000 from his church, Our Lady of Lourdes Roman Catholic Church in Mountainside. Officials announced the charges following an in-depth investigation headed by the Union County Prosecutor's Office and Detective Michael Jackson of the Mountainside Police Department.

Police accused Biunno of stealing from the church's collection plate during Sunday Mass, beginning in January 1995. Biunno is a longtime member of the church, serving as a trustee, an usher and a choir member. A fire caused extensive smoke and water damage to a borough home at 1203 Wyoming Drive. Police officers found Lena Amos, 77, downstairs in her home after a fire started in an upstairs bedroom, police said.

Additionally, defacement occurred on multiple borough-owned properties, including the community pool and Deerfield Elementary School's bathroom. During a council work session, Mountainside council members addressed the vandalism: "If you're caught, you or your family will pay for it," said Mayor Robert Vigilanti. "We are not going to put up with it."

Scotch Plains
The Scotch Plains and Fanwood libraries received a state grant of nearly \$150,000 to look into the feasibility of a joint library which would serve both communities. Officials have been exploring the idea for some time, with an eye toward better consolidating resources and improving services.

Rep. Mike Ferguson (R, New Providence) announced the House of Representatives' approval of \$80,000 in federal funding aimed to improve communications equipment for the Scotch Plains Police Department. The funds come as part of the fiscal year

2008 Commerce Justice Science Appropriations Bill and would increase the efficiency and reliability of day-to-day operations, as well as help the department during emergencies, Scotch Plains Police Chief Brian Mahoney said.

The Scotch Plains Recreation Commission signed off on a plan to renovate the Scotch Hills Country Club building in order to create a senior and community center.

Residents and parents raised concerns at a board of education meeting about the Omni-Point application received through Scotch Plains township to build a cell-phone tower on the Willow Grove Swim Club property, questioning the location's proximity to McGinn Elementary School.

Fanwood
Borough officials received word from the state's Department of Community Affairs that Fanwood would receive \$325,000 in extraordinary-municipal-aid.

Following the approval of extraordinary aid, the borough council adopted an \$8.3-million municipal budget, with nearly \$4.6 million to be supported by taxes, after a public hearing. The new spending plan - up from \$7.9 million last year - called for a 4.3-percent total increase in the tax rate, which includes municipal, school and county taxes.

Mayor Colleen Mahr announced Councilman Joseph Higgins' resignation from the governing body. Mr. Higgins said his decision to resign was "due to personal issues unrelated to anything involving [his] role as a councilman or [his] participation in borough activities."

Borough Republican mayoral candidate Patricia Lyndsey withdrew from the race, according to Ted Trumm, Republican municipal chairman for Fanwood.

SEPTEMBER
Westfield
Margaret Dolan stepped into

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see additional regional and government news on page 13

DAVID B. CORBIN FOR THE WESTFIELD LEADER
TAKING THE HEAT (July 12)...Westfield firefighters, with support from neighboring towns, extinguished a July blaze in the basement of the Westfield Post Office. Westfield Fire Department Captain Michael Brennan seeks fresh air and hopes for a cooling breeze upon exiting the inferno. Lieutenant Anthony Tiller, right, provides support along with letter carrier Travis Redd, background.

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COURTESY OF BILL JORDAN; COURTESY OF WESTFIELD POLICE CHIEF JOHN PARIZEAU
GATOR-AID (August 23)...An estimated three-to-five foot juvenile alligator emerges from Gregory's Pond in Westfield. Bill Jordan, a resident of Mountainside and a realtor at Taylor and Love, received this picture from a neighbor and submitted it to The Westfield Leader and The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times. LATER, GATOR (August 30)...The New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife on August 25 caught the two-and-a-half foot alligator living in Gregory's Pond. The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection has custody of the animal and will look to find a home for it out of state. The Leader/Times had broken the story on the alligator's whereabouts a week earlier.