



**LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION...**The empty Bombay building was transformed into a living-room scene for the set of a commercial by Washington Square Production company on Monday. The commercial for drug company Allergan featured testimonials from patients and experts in the constructed "home" setting.

## Garwood Resident Takes His Own Life

By MICHAEL J. POLLACK  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

**GARWOOD** — A Garwood man plunged to his death, earlier this month, off the Victory Bridge, leaving behind no note.

Michael Slekitis, 51, jumped off the bridge, which connects Perth Amboy and Sayreville, on the morning of Thursday, July 3.

Sayreville Detective Jeremy Berry told *The Westfield Leader* that Mr. Slekitis had left his white Ford Taurus running on the northbound side.

A motorist witnessed the jump and called police shortly after 6 a.m. that morning. According to Detective Berry, Police reviewed a tape from a nearby Hess Refinery that showed a splash in the Rahway River at roughly 6:08 a.m.

Other than the caller, Detective Berry said no one else was in the "immediate area," and no note was left in the vehicle.

Police, firefighters and rescue-squad officials searched the area by boat, while New Jersey and New York State Police scouted the water by helicopter.

Despite the extensive search, no body was recovered until Saturday, July 5, when fishermen discovered the man near the Morgan Bridge, which connects the Morgan section of Sayreville to Old Bridge.

According to Detective Berry, the body traveled an approximate distance of five miles. The river, he said,

dumps into a bay, and the tides, he suspects, carried him to the Morgan Bridge.

Once the body was recovered, police found a driver's license in the man's wallet. The North Brunswick medical examiner positively identified and confirmed him as Mr. Slekitis.

Detective Berry said an autopsy was conducted to make sure that no "foul play" occurred. The detective could not confirm but "believed" that Mr. Slekitis died on impact. The detective said Mr. Slekitis' injuries are "consistent with the fall," which he estimated at between 90 and 120 feet.

Mr. Slekitis' death is not the first of its kind at Victory Bridge.

"Unfortunately, we do get jumpers," Detective Berry said, adding that about seven deaths a year occur at the bridge.

Mr. Slekitis, a mail handler at the Kilmer Center postal facility in Edison, leaves behind his wife Marcia, parents Raymond and Phyllis and sister Patty.

Darlene Reid, spokesperson for the post office, said, "Our hearts and our prayers go out to Mike's family. He was a valued member of the postal-service family."

Mr. Slekitis was buried Monday at St. Helens Church in Westfield.

Reached on the phone, last Thursday, Mr. Slekitis' widow did not wish to comment — except to say, "Michael was very loved. He was a very caring and likeable person. It's a big loss."

## Westfield Bd. of Adjustment

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down for the garage construction and that the expanded size of the home would be "much too big" for the neighborhood. They also cited concerns about the new garage "blocking the light in their yard."

Mr. Pantano pointed out that the Richardsons have a detached garage on their property directly behind his, which would be a mirror image of his proposed plans, and he said that only one tree would be taken down due to construction, although another could potentially be in the way.

Board member Chris Masciale said that the proposal is "an almost fully conforming plan for expansion" with variations being caused by the awkward spacing of the house and land, and that the house would only be a "little larger."

After Chairman William Heinbokel pointed out that the Pantanos could detach and build their garage without issue, but were only seeking a variance for the specific placement of the structure, the board approved the application.

The board also approved, by a 6-2 vote, a variance request from Simon and Karen Lack of 10 Kimball Circle, to construct a two-story addition that will result in a 26-foot front yard setback, a 24.7-foot variance from the ordinance-required 50.7 feet.

The board, which expressed concern over the addition affecting the views from Golf Edge Drive, said heavy vegetation along the edge of the Lacks' property creates a barrier.



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**CITY OF WATER...** Westfield Leader reporter Christina M. Hinke captures a pair of Venice, Italy's elegant gondolas resting on a canal, July 3. She was invited by the Italian Tourism Board to participate in a journalist trip to learn and write about the city and the Po Delta of the Veneto region.

## Capacity Crowd Attends Meeting on FW Budget

By KATHERINE VOWELL  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

**FANWOOD** — Fanwood's budget concerns and the recent issue of layoff notices were the focus of a special public meeting held by the Fanwood Borough Council July 9 at Forest Road Park Community Center. The room was filled to capacity, and some individuals were forced to stand outside in the rain to hear the public meeting.

Mayor Colleen Mahr opened the meeting by saying, "Never before has the mayor and council been so transparent in wanting to hear from you and also wanting to talk to you."

"This is not about a particular union. This is not about a particular person. This is about you and me, who pay very high taxes in the State of New Jersey, and we are faced with decisions we must make," Mayor Mahr said.

Although Mayor Mahr stated that cuts would be made "across the board," the focus of the public discussion primarily revolved around the potential layoffs of police officers.

"I will not support anything that will jeopardize the safety of Fanwood or the safety of the police officers working on the street," said Councilman and former Police Chief Anthony Parenti.

Resident Jenny Wegner said, "I find it appalling that you want to layoff the cops. If I had it my way there would be 50 cops, so that I could walk outside anytime and feel safe."

Fanwood Police Corporal Ron Greco told the council, "There are only 21 officers in Fanwood, and it has been at that level since 1974. We don't need to rush to a decision."

Westfield Patrol Officer Kevin O'Keefe said that the reduction of police officers would affect the number of motor vehicle stops in the borough, which would have a direct correlation to an increase in crime.

"If you think this town is this safe because of coincidence, you are mistaken," Officer O'Keefe said.

Kevin McGovern, an associate attorney for the borough's Policemen's Benevolent Association (PBA), said, "There is a reason municipalities don't layoff police officers. It does not save money. Your police officers are a source of revenue, and reducing their numbers will not save you money in the long run."

Mayor Mahr responded by stating, "It has been a very contentious few months between the council and the PBA. No one wants to fight with the PBA because no one wins in this situation."

The mayor and the town's chief financial officer, Frederick Tomkins, offered a PowerPoint presentation prior to the open discussion in an effort to help the public better understand the budget.

"Fanwood has been hit with many challenges since the beginning of the year. The first had been with the aid cut to municipalities under [a population of] 10,000, which started us on this slippery slope," Mayor Mahr said. "We need to be proactive. We need to tell you that we are looking to permanently cut costs in the Borough of Fanwood, and we are looking to get by on less."

"The state enacted a new cap law [in

2007] that requires us to only be able to raise the levy by a certain percentage," Mr. Tomkins said. "Part of our problem is because we've lost revenues in 2007, it causes us to be over that cap. We are \$450,000 over that cap number. In order to legally adopt the budget, we have to pare out \$450,000 out of the budget."

As of last Wednesday, the borough had not yet heard whether it would receive extraordinary aid. The borough has since been notified that they will receive \$425,000 in extraordinary aid from the state. (See related story on this page.)

"Our appropriations exceed our revenue, so we either have to increase revenue or decrease appropriations. Our proposed solutions for 2008 are applying for extraordinary aid, cuts in the operating budget and the last item we can look at is reductions in workforce," Mr. Tomkins said.

Mayor Mahr said throughout the meeting, "This is not just a 2008 challenge. This is not a band-aid to get your taxes lower this year. We are looking at making permanent reductions because this problem is not going away."

On a separate note, Monica Felsing, a Fanwood resident, told the public the budget is an issue of leadership, pointing out that state Assemblywoman Linda Stender (LD-21, Fanwood), a former borough mayor, failed to show up to the special meeting.

Former Councilman David Pickering suggested eliminating clean-up fees to help the budget, calling the fees a "luxury" that other towns are operating without. Mr. Pickering said "the clean up fees add over \$45,000, which needs to be eliminated."

Mayor Mahr responded by stating, "We are looking at ways to bounce it [costs] back to the residents, or reduce costs." The mayor also mentioned shared services as a method for cutting costs.

Last Tuesday, the Scotch Plains council supported Fanwood's application for a \$50,000 state feasibility study grant to research sharing police dispatch and other emergency communications with Scotch Plains.

Multiple requests were given by residents to take a closer look at spending within the Scotch Plains-Fanwood Board of Education (BOE), which currently receives 20 percent of its funding from Fanwood.

Mayor Mahr said the council has a limited voice within the BOE, and it has done everything within its power to cut the budget.

Concerns over the merger of libraries between Fanwood and Scotch Plains were discussed, and the mayor put rumors of a new library building to rest after she stated that there are no plans to build a new facility.

The merger between the two towns was suggested. Robert Manduca, a borough resident and Republican candidate for borough council, said, "Urban Democrats in Trenton are making decisions about what to do with Fanwood's money." Resident Daniel Zucker added, "I think it is obvious that the fate of Fanwood is to end up as part of Scotch Plains."



**MONEY TALKS...**The special Fanwood budget meeting attendance on July 9 overflowed the room capacity. Some stood outside in the rain to hear the discussions on the borough's budget crisis and potential layoffs.

## Fanwood Mayor Colleen Mahr's Letter to Borough Residents

On behalf of the governing body of the Borough of Fanwood, I wish to express my sincerest gratitude to the more than 200 residents that attended the special meeting on the 2008 municipal budget held last week at Forest Road Park. The mayor and council reached out to the citizens to share their difficulties of producing a budget, hear the opinions of the general public and to open the lines of two-way communication.

Residents who could not be present at the special meeting sent letters, e-mails and placed phone calls to express their points of view on the budget and taxes. Their concerns were taken into account and did not fall on deaf ears.

The 2008 municipal budget has been the most challenging in the recent history of Fanwood. Many factors have contributed to the demanding nature of this budget, ranging from the sky rocketing utility costs, contractual obligations with unions, decreases in state aid to municipalities, unfunded mandates, a 4 percent cap on the tax levy, a sluggish economy, tax appeals and increased pension contributions.

Your mayor and borough council have heard loud and clear the pleas of the taxpayers. We know you expect this governing body to be leaders, take a stand and make the tough decisions in reducing the 2008 municipal budget. The council has diligently worked since January on the budget. I commend them for graciously giving of their time and effort to formulate a fiscally conservative budget that seeks to provide the citizens with services and superior public safety. Over the last few weeks, the focus has shifted to a reduction of work force and operating expenses. Please

understand that this is not an easy conversation but a necessary dialogue. Actions to reduce the enormous tax burden on residents must and will be taken.

The borough is extremely fortunate to receive \$425,000 in extraordinary-aid funds from the State of New Jersey that will go directly to reducing the tax levy. On behalf of all the Fanwoodians, I would like to personally convey deep appreciation to Senator [Nicholas] Scutari, Assemblywoman [Jerry] Green and Assemblywoman [Linda] Stender for their assistance in securing extraordinary aid for the borough and acting as advocates of Fanwood's right to receive its fair share of aid.

Fanwood is not unique; like so many small communities across New Jersey, it is in a budget crisis and examining all areas to reduce the tax burden on homeowners and businesses.

The governing body expects to make final adoption of the 2008 municipal budget in August. Residents should understand that I clearly comprehend the directive from the residents to make reductions and cut the municipal budget. Knowing that the borough can control only 20 percent of the tax bill, please see that I will make the difficult decisions on the portion I have power over.

As Mayor of Fanwood, I am extremely thankful that so many residents came to the special meeting. It is rare to see, first hand, democracy at work. The Borough of Fanwood is a wonderful close-knit community that came together to discuss a problem. Please know that a solution is in sight. Thank you again.

Colleen Mahr  
Mayor of Fanwood



**NO LAYOFFS PLEASE...**Phil Ugoni, representing Policemen's Benevolent Association (PBA) Local 123, foreground, addresses the Fanwood Council on Monday night, urging the council to consider the needs of the borough's employees when making the remaining budget cuts. Pictured, from left to right, are: Councilman Anthony Parenti, Councilwoman Joan Wheeler and Mayor Colleen Mahr. Mayor Mahr addresses borough residents in a letter below.

## POLICE BLOTTER

**Westfield**  
Monday, July 7, Joyce Maxwell, 37, of Jersey City was arrested during a motor vehicle stop at a Prospect Street lot for contempt of court involving traffic warrants from three municipalities.

The warrants included two from Jersey City, with total bail of \$1,000; two from Kenilworth, with bail of \$325, and one from Cranford, with bail of \$80. Maxwell posted bail on all of the warrants and was released.

Tuesday, July 8, police arrested Roy Williams, 33, of Scotch Plains on an outstanding Newark traffic warrant with bail of \$165, after conducting a motor vehicle stop in the area of West Broad Street and Rahway Avenue. Williams was released after posting bail.

Thursday, July 10, Jesse Jenkins, 24, of Linden was arrested on an outstanding Roselle traffic warrant with bail of \$300 after a motor vehicle stop on South Avenue near Windsor Avenue. Jenkins was released after posting bail.

Saturday, July 12, a resident of Canterbury Lane reported the theft of a keeapsake granite golf course marker from his backyard. The marker had been located there for four months.

**Scotch Plains**  
Thursday, July 10, a resident of Essex Road reported that someone damaged his vehicle while it was parked in the driveway. According to police, the damage was valued at approximately \$300.

Friday, July 11, a resident of Shackamaxon Drive reported that someone damaged his vehicle while it was parked in front of his house. According to police, the damage was valued at approximately \$80.

Friday, July 11, Damarias Acevedo, 19, of Plainfield was arrested for an outstanding warrant after a motor vehicle stop. According to police, she was processed and released.

Friday, July 11, Melissa Ellis, 25, of Irvington was arrested for an outstanding warrant after a motor vehicle stop. According to police, she was processed and released.

Friday, July 11, Suburah Goldston, 20, of Scotch Plains was arrested on an outstanding warrant after a motor vehicle stop. According to police, she was processed and released.

Saturday, July 12, Alberto Paez, 35, of Plainfield was arrested on an outstanding warrant after a motor vehicle stop. According to police, he was processed and released.

Saturday, July 12, a resident of Rivervale Court reported that someone calls his house several times a day and then hangs up.

**Fanwood**  
Wednesday, July 9, Paige J. Horn, 40, of Plainfield was arrested and charged with shoplifting from a South Avenue store. According to police, she was processed and released with a summons.

Wednesday, July 9, Anthony G. Head, 37, of Plainfield was arrested and charged with shoplifting from a South Avenue store. According to police, he was also charged with outstanding warrants out of Hillside, South Orange, Union, Irvington, South Plainfield and Fanwood. He was processed and turned over to the Union County jail, authorities said.

Friday, July 11, Hector L. Montes, 39, of Westfield was arrested on an outstanding Patterson warrant after a motor vehicle stop on Terrill Road. According to police, he was processed and released.

Friday, July 11, Tangenay Sessoms, 20, of Elizabeth was arrested on an outstanding warrant out of Newark after a motor vehicle stop on South Avenue.

Friday, July 11, two 15-year olds, and one 16-year old Scotch Plains juveniles were arrested and charged with the May 22 strong-arm robbery of a Fanwood juvenile. According to police, they were processed and released pending a court date at the family court in Elizabeth.

Saturday, July 12, James H. Gordon, 39, of Plainfield was arrested on outstanding warrants out of Fanwood, Watchung, Irvington, Hillside, Maplewood and Scotch Plains after a motor vehicle stop on LaGrande Avenue. According to police, he was processed and turned over to the Union County jail.

Saturday, July 12, Keith B. Anderson, 40, of Plainfield was arrested and charged with robbery, terroristic threats, theft by unlawful taking after attempting to shoplift from a South Avenue store. According to police, as he was being detained by employees, he punched an employee in the head and picked up a knife. He is

being held on \$60,000 bail at the Union County jail.

Sometime between Sunday, July 13, at 7 p.m. and Monday, July 14, at 8:50 p.m. a resident in the 100 block of Beech Avenue reported that someone entered his unlocked vehicle while it was parked in the driveway and removed approximately 20 CDs.

Monday, July 14, Maximilia N. DelNegro, 19, of Scotch Plains was arrested for an outstanding warrant out of Scotch Plains after a motor vehicle stop on Second Street. According to police, he was processed and released.

Tuesday, July 15, Jamee E. McCoy, 31, of Plainfield was arrested on an outstanding warrant out of Watchung after a field investigation. According to police, he was processed and released to the Watchung Police Department.

Tuesday, July 8, a secretary of a Springfield Avenue business reported that someone removed three checks totaling \$125 and a wallet that was in a purse on a counter. According to police, the suspect attempted to use two credit cards that were in the wallet but were declined at the point of sale.

Tuesday, July 8, Devon J. Samaroo, 25, a homeless individual was arrested and charged with defiant trespassing, theft of movable property, lewdness, criminal mischief and disorderly conduct after he was found bathing in a public restroom. According to police, he is being held on \$4,500 bail.

Friday, July 11, Martin Santiago 3rd, 29, of Linden was arrested and charged with driving with a suspended license after being stopped for a cracked windshield. According to police, a court date is set for Thursday, July 24.

Friday, July 11, Dimone S. Floyd, 33, of Jersey City was picked up at the Hudson County jail on outstanding warrants out of Mountinside in the amount of \$581, Woodbridge in the amount of \$350 and Princeton for \$250.

## Man Charged With Luring 13-Year-Old Girl

Thursday, July 10, police arrested Derek McDonough, 28, of Plainsboro at his home on charges that he enticed a 13-year-old Westfield girl into a sexual relationship after meeting her on a social-networking site on the Internet.

Captain Clifford Auchter of the Westfield Police Department confirmed to *The Westfield Leader* yesterday that McDonough had been charged with sexual assault, luring and enticing a child, endangering the welfare of a child and criminal sexual contact.

The teenager told authorities that McDonough had contacted her on her MySpace account approximately six months ago and that within the last month, the two had engaged in sexual activity at various locations.

Captain Auchter said the Westfield Police Department's detective bureau is conducting the investigation into the matter. McDonough was being held on \$150,000 bail at the Union County jail.

## Garwood Bd. of Ed.

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tion about reimbursement for sick time and for the borough's payment of costs associated with a state-mandated mentoring program for Ms. Quigley.

The board explained that the contract places a cap on Ms. Quigley's reimbursable unused sick time for her prior employment with the district and for her tenure as superintendent. Ms. Quigley also explained that the mentoring program is part of a requirement for any person seeking state certification.

Mr. Paterson also questioned Supervisor of Buildings and Grounds Thomas Spera regarding the borough's Long Range Finance Plan, which lists various buildings and grounds projects, which the district intends to complete. Mr. Spera explained that LRFP is a five-year plan.

"This is a minimum of a five-year plan that you have to put together for the county and the state," Mr. Spera said.

Mr. Paterson said the fact the LRFP is a five-year plan "does mitigate a lot of [his] concerns."

Mr. Conlin also asked the board for clarification regarding the role of Summit Management Solutions LLC. The board explained that Ernie Turner from the company was retained as a consultant at the recommendation of the county in March.