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SIXTY CENTS

Rescue Squads Face Longer Trips When Muhlenberg Hospital Closes

By KATHERINE VOWELL
Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

PLAINFIELD — As Muhlenberg Regional Medical Center in Plainfield makes its final preparations for closing, local volunteer rescue squads are being warned of the various changes about to take place.

Current plans will leave Muhlenberg open to non-critical patients who can receive out-patient care, meaning volunteers will have to decide which patients require in-patient care.

“That is a huge window,” said Shawn Lawson, captain of the Plainfield Rescue Squad. “We will have to use our own judgment, because we can’t bring anyone [to Muhlenberg] who has to be admitted.”

For Plainfield, the current five- to seven-minute trip to Muhlenberg hospital will now range from 20 to 40 minutes each way, depending on the hospital of choice, thereby tripling the amount of time it takes to get to Muhlenberg.

Roughly 85 percent of Plainfield’s calls are taken to Muhlenberg, the remainder go to Overlook Hospital in Summit, JFK in Edison, Robert Wood Johnson in New Brunswick and Somerset Medical Center in

Somerville.

“It is going to be very challenging for us and the city,” Mr. Lawson said. “We average 7,000 calls a year, and the longer our transports take to other hospitals is going to affect the patients traumatically. Going out of town combined with the level of calls does not work for us or the patients.”

Other rescue squads are facing similar situations with the added commute to alternate hospitals.

“Overlook Hospital is twice as far, twice as long, and twice as much fuel,” said John Oatis, president of the Fanwood Rescue Squad, who estimates about 50 percent of Fanwood’s calls are taken to Muhlenberg.

With gas prices shooting up this summer, the added fuel cost is an additional burden that these volunteer organizations will be facing once Muhlenberg is closed.

“Muhlenberg has been always, not necessarily better equipped, but better experienced for all emergencies,” Mr. Oatis said. “They are the best hospital around as far as emergency rooms, they’ve seen just about everything. They know how to treat people and get them moved around in an orderly fashion.”

Muhlenberg is not the only hospital suffering from financial difficul-

ties. “It is the entire hospital system in general that is suffering,” said Mr. Oatis. “We have seen a string of hospitals closing, and it is just going to continue until someone comes up with an answer.”

Mr. Oatis, who is also a member of the New Jersey State First Aid Council, 2nd District, said that at a meeting last month, two senior officers from Muhlenberg hospital quoted that the hospital was losing \$1.5 million every month, and between \$15 to \$18 million annually.

“When you hear numbers like that you realize why they can’t go much further,” Mr. Oatis said. “It all comes down to the money, and it is a business decision on their [Muhlenberg Hospital’s] part.”

According to Mr. Oatis, the hospital will keep open the programs that are turning a profit, including the School of Nursing. The hospital will also run a satellite emergency room used for basic life support, nothing serious that would require a patient to stay in the hospital.

“They are still going to keep the paramedic unit that work the advanced life support open,” Mr. Oatis said. “The unit will be kept on for a while, because they have the ability to stabilize patients, communicate within emergency rooms and provide medications.”

With local rescue squads spending more time on the road, the volunteer rescue squads will be relying on mu-

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DAVID B. CORBIN FOR THE SCOTCH PLAINS-FANWOOD TIMES
PAINFUL CLOSING...Founded in 1876, Muhlenberg Regional Medical Center is closing due to financial losses. The hospital in Plainfield, as viewed from Hub Stine Field, serves many local towns such as Fanwood, Scotch Plains and Westfield. See story at left.

Scotch Plains to Establish Special Improvement District Next Month

By FRED T. ROSSI

Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

SCOTCH PLAINS — The township council will introduce an ordinance, next month, to establish a Special Improvement District (SID) in the downtown business district and along Route 22.

During a 100-minute meeting on Tuesday with about 45 business and property owners, Deputy Mayor Nancy Malool said the ordinance would include a provision calling for a first-year assessment of \$400 on each property within the SID boundaries. This, she said, was in response to concerns raised by downtown property owners about the exact level of assessments being considered to finance the initial year of the SID’s operations.

The original proposal was a six-tiered flat rate formula depending on a property’s assessed value, with the assessments ranging from \$250 to \$2,000 per year.

Ms. Malool said she formulated the \$400 flat rate proposal after meeting last week with East Second Street property owner Sal Lamastra, who presented her with a petition signed by 121 individuals opposed to the SID.

Ms. Malool said, this week, she wasn’t surprised by the petition but questioned its value because of her concern that signers were not provided with accurate information about the details of the SID. She said she spoke to multiple people who told her they had been told their annual as-

essment would be \$2,000 when, in fact, most property owners would be paying \$250 to \$500 under the original formula.

As Mrs. Malool and Matthew Jessup, an attorney and consultant for SID, spoke in greater detail about the fee structure and what they saw as the benefits of establishing a SID, much of the vocal opposition appeared to dim among the attendees. Mr. Lamastra said, “at least we can take a chance” with the \$400 assessment, although he continued to express concerns about a SID entity “dictating” to the business community.

Ms. Malool and Mr. Jessup both reminded attendees that the SID board of directors would be composed of local business and property owners.

Ms. Malool said the \$400-per-property assessment would result in an initial operating budget of about \$65,000, which she said would be enough to hire a manager, likely on a part-time basis initially, to start promoting local businesses and securing grants and other outside funding.

A board of directors of 11 to 13 members will be appointed by the township council and include representatives from all areas within the

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SP Plans Resurfacing Program for Summer

By FRED T. ROSSI

Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

SCOTCH PLAINS — The township is preparing to embark on what Township Manager Thomas Atkins called Tuesday night “an ambitious, aggressive program” of road resurfacing on 22 streets this summer.

At the township council’s conference meeting, Mr. Atkins said he was confident the roadwork could be mostly completed in the 10 weeks between the end of the school year in late June and the beginning of the next school year in early September.

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FRED T. ROSSI FOR THE SCOTCH PLAINS-FANWOOD TIMES
TO THE RESCUE...At last week’s township council meeting, Mayor Martin Marks, left, presented a proclamation to Harold Hill, honoring him for his 50 years of service to the Scotch Plains Rescue Squad.

Updated Redevelopment Plan Presented to Planning Bd.

By DEBORAH MADISON

Specially for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

FANWOOD — The Fanwood planning board heard a presentation of the most recent, proposed revisions to the Downtown Fanwood Redevelopment Plan. Mayor Colleen Mahr and the borough council act as the borough’s redevelopment agency and requested the update.

Stan Slachetka, a planner with T & M Associates that was hired by the borough, said to the board that the proposed changes were made to “fine-tune” small aspects of the overall plan and did not fundamentally alter the original plan in any substantial way.

The downtown redevelopment area – bordered by Martine Avenue to the north and Second Street to the south, and flanked by South Avenue and LaGrande Avenue to the east and west – is currently being redeveloped by a public and private partnership between the borough’s redevelopment agency and private developers. Certain parcels of the project are in various stages of completion, while other lands have not been purchased yet.

Some of the overall goals to be achieved by the redevelopment plan include improved pedestrian circulation and safety, enhanced linkage of the residential areas to the Fanwood Train Station and retail areas, and additional incentives to promote retail develop-

ment, Mr. Slachetka said. “The goal is to balance the community vision with the practical realities of the market place,” he said.

He said there would still be opportunities in the future to modify other design details as developers come before the board for site-plan approvals. However, Mr. Slachetka said some of the design features included in his presentation are considered to be essential and “locked-in” in order for these overall objectives to be achieved.

One of features of the plan includes a pedestrian walkway, traversing the entire length of the municipal parking lot from LaGrande Avenue to South Avenue, located behind retail stores and residential units. Another aspect of the plan, Mr. Slachetka told the board, is the inclusion of drive-through lanes in the parking lot for Sovereign Bank, located on South Avenue.

Mr. Slachetka said the bank considered drive-through lanes to be an essential aspect of its success. Board members discussed their concerns regarding pedestrian safety in the parking lot and ways to alter traffic patterns, as well as speed and site lines.

The board discussed eliminating multiple ingress and egresses in order to improve pedestrian safety.

Another debated aspect of the plan was whether or not to allow profes-

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Essex Jury Awards \$5.5 Mil. to Family of Student Killed in WF

SP Attorney Levine Serves as Family’s Attorney

By FRED T. ROSSI

Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

WESTFIELD — The State Superior Court jury in Essex County, last Thursday, ordered the City of Newark to pay \$4.1 million to the family of Sohayla Massachi, a Seton Hall University student who was murdered in Westfield in 2000, and demanded Seton Hall University and Argenbright Security company to pay out the remaining \$1.4 million, or 25 percent, in the Estate of Sohayla Massachi v. City of Newark Police Department case.

The decision arose because of mistakes made by a Newark 911 operator and police dispatcher during the May 2000 incident.

At the time of the incident, Ms. Massachi, a 1994 graduate of Westfield High School, was abducted by her former boyfriend, Christopher Honrath, from a street near the Seton Hall campus on the afternoon of May 10, 2000. He then drove Ms. Massachi, 23, to his

apartment on Central Avenue, where he shot Ms. Massachi and himself.

During the kidnapping, two high school students saw Honrath pull a screaming Ms. Massachi into his car, parked on South Orange Avenue in front of the university in South Orange.

One of the students ran to the security booth at the university’s main gate and reported what she had seen to an Argenbright Security employee, who told her that the incident “was not on campus, and there is nothing they could do for her.”

The two students then called the South Orange Police Department from one of their homes and reported the abduction, along with a description of the two people involved, as well as a description of the car and its license plate number.

Minutes later, two off-duty Essex County Sheriff’s Officers who witnessed the abduction called 911, which

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Communities to Celebrate Memorial Day on Monday

By LAURA MORTKOWITZ

Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

SCOTCH PLAINS — Area communities will hold various Memorial Day observances on Monday, May 26, to honor those military men and women who gave or risked their lives protecting the United States.

The communities of Scotch Plains and Fanwood will begin their Memorial Day observances at 8 a.m. at American Legion Post, 209 Park Avenue and Sunset Place in Scotch Plains. Wreaths will be laid at the Fanwood Memorial Library located at North Avenue and Tillotson Road at 9 a.m., and presented at the Veterans Monument at Park Avenue and Front Street in Scotch Plains at 10 a.m.

The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Memorial Day Parade, themed “The 55th Anniversary of the Korean War Armistice,” will begin at 10:45 a.m. from the Scotch Plains Municipal Building, located at 430 Park Avenue. It will proceed down Park Avenue and Martine Avenue before ending at LaGrande Park in Fanwood.

Donald Wussler will serve as the parade’s grand marshal. Mr. Wussler is a Korean War veteran from the United States Army 7th Infantry Division and the recipient of a Purple Heart.

Opening ceremonies in Westfield will begin at 9 a.m. at the Monument to Veterans of World War I at the North Avenue and East Broad Street Plaza. All Westfield and Mountaintownside organizations are invited to participate. The grand marshal is Lieutenant Colonel Michael Hrycak, who

has lived in Cranford since 1960.

Lt. Col. Hrycak has served in the United States Army since graduating from Rutgers University, having been commissioned as a second lieutenant through the Reserve Officers’ Training Corps (ROTC) in 1981. He was promoted to major in 1996, and to lieutenant colonel in 2003, and has served in the Iraqi Theater of Operation.

The opening ceremonies will feature multiple guest speakers, such as Peter Hogaboom, this year’s Master of Ceremonies; Al Riker, American Legion chaplain, and Westfield Mayor Andrew Skibitsky. Kerry Stubbs will sing “God Bless America” a cappella, and Theodore Schlosberg of the New Jersey Workshop for the Arts will perform taps.

There also will be cannon volleys by Lambs Artillery and special bell tolls by Jack Panosh, bell master and curator for the Westfield Town Clock.

After opening ceremonies, the parade will proceed north on East Broad Street to Fairview Cemetery, where closing ceremonies will take place. The Daughters of the American Revolution and the Sons of the American Revolution will hold their annual memorial service at the Revolutionary War cemetery.

At noon, Garwood will offer a solemn celebration at noon, held at the Garwood Knights of Columbus Hall at 43 South Avenue. There will be a guest speaker and refreshments for those in attendance. All are welcome, with a special invitation extended to children and young adults.

Fanwood Redevelopment Concept Plan Map



FRED T. ROSSI FOR THE SCOTCH PLAINS-FANWOOD TIMES
HOLE IN ONE...Scotch Plains Parks and Recreation Director Raj Poerio (center) accepts an award, at last week’s Scotch Plains township council meeting, from Bruce Kaufmann and Dee MacKay of the New Jersey Recreation and Park Association for excellence in design for the township’s mini-golf facility at Scotch Hills Country Club. Mr. Kaufmann and Ms. MacKay serve as Westfield’s recreation director and assistant recreation director, respectively.

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