

Libel Suit Against County Watchers Thrown Out

COUNTY — A libel lawsuit filed by Sebastian D'Elia, public information officer for the Union County freeholders, against Tina Renna of Cranford and Patricia Quattrocchi of Garwood, two vocal critics of county government, was thrown out of court last week after oral arguments before Superior Court Judge Marianne Espinosa in Elizabeth.

Mr. D'Elia's lawyers argued that statements made by Ms. Renna in an Internet blog, "The County Watchers," involving her opinions as to the oppressive nature of county Democratic politics and government operations were defamatory as a matter of law, while Ms. Renna and Ms. Quattrocchi's attorney, Philip Morin of Cranford, argued that the statements were not libelous and that, regardless of whether the statements were defamatory, Mr. D'Elia could not prove that he was damaged. Mr. Morin serves as chairman of the Union County Republican Committee.

The judge denied Mr. D'Elia's motion and granted Ms. Renna and Ms. Quattrocchi's motion, finding that Mr. D'Elia had not provided sufficient proof that he suffered any damages.

"This was not a hard case for the court to decide, given the questionable allegations of libel and the complete lack of proof of any damages," Mr. Morin said. "The decision further demonstrates that Internet bloggers can challenge the actions of government officials and receive the same protections afforded to the traditional media."

"This is a great victory for the First Amendment and the citizens of Union County," Mrs. Renna said. "Pat and I will continue to shine a light on the inner-workings of county government and make sure it is exposed for what it is."

Mrs. Renna is the president of the Union County Watchdog Association, a non-profit corporation that states it is dedicated to "working on behalf of the residents and taxpayers of Union County, monitoring the activity of county government and advocating change to eliminate waste, corruption and incompetence."

"Unfortunately, we will never know what kind of chilling affect that this case had on other individuals who might have stepped forward to criticize county government, but were afraid of being sued," Mrs. Quattrocchi said. "At least now, people will know that they can speak out and that the First Amendment is on their side."

Mrs. Quattrocchi is a founding member of the Watchdog Association, a former three-time GOP freeholder candidate, a frequent contributor to the "The County Watchers"

blog, countywatchers.com, and writes a weekly column for the political website, politickernj.com.

In response, Mr. D'Elia said while the judge's decision "allows political partisans such as Renna and her ilk to recklessly portray others, I do accept it."

"The judge also found Ms. Renna's entry to be 'unflattering,' 'mean spirited,' and 'poorly written,' which I do agree with," he continued.

"While I took this case up on my behalf, I also did so to give hope to others whose reputations have been swiftboated, and impugned by malicious political partisans such as Ms. Renna, who not so coincidentally was represented by the Union County Republican Chairman Phil Morin. She should rename her blog 'Union County Democrat Organization Watcher,' as so little of it pertains to actual county government issues.

"Sadly, the old-fashioned ways of civil discourse and accountability are going the way of printed newspapers and record players. Nevertheless, I do not regret pursuing a legal action. When confronted with an individual whose motives are purely malicious and vindictive, there can never be compromise," Mr. D'Elia stated.

"Make no mistake, Ms. Renna will try to spin this as an abridgment on her speech — but this charge was dismissed in court. She has continued to write and say whatever she wants prior to and after the lawsuit. I was not the one who wrote an entry personally attacking myself and my family — she did that to me. She prefers to take this low road and make vicious personal attacks, rather than sticking to issues and facts," Mr. D'Elia said.

Aschenbach, Dugan Win in Cranford

CRANFORD — On Friday, the township clerk completed counting 109 provisional ballots cast on November 4. The results show Daniel Aschenbach (D) and Mark Dugan (R) as the winners in the election for the two Cranford Township Committee seats that were up for grabs.

The final tally reported for the votes is Mr. Aschenbach with 5,909 votes, Mr. Dugan with 5,822, Christopher Drew (R) with 5,721 votes and Kevin Illing (D) with 5,748 votes.

Republicans currently have a 5-0 control of the township committee. The election results in a 4-1 majority next year for the Republicans.

Provisional ballots are paper ballots cast because the names of voters did not appear in the register of eligible voters or faced a challenge at the polls.



Raynor Denitzo for The Westfield Leader and The Times
GARWOOD VICTORS...Victorious Democrat candidates Louis Petruzzelli and Jonathan Linken celebrate during a gathering at the Westwood on Tuesday night, November 4. Mr. Petruzzelli and Mr. Linken defeated Republicans Timothy Hak and Patricia Quattrocchi for the two seats on the Garwood Council.

U.S Customs Has Record Counterfeit Seizures in Area

NEWARK — U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officials announced last week an increase in seizures of counterfeit goods. In fiscal year 2008, which spanned from October 2007 through September 2008, the New York/Newark area seized more than 400 shipments of counterfeit and pirated goods with a domestic value of almost \$100 million that arrived in cargo containers at the seaport. This is an increase of 53 percent by value, and almost a 9 percent increase in seizures, over fiscal year 2007.

CBP in New York/Newark was responsible for over 700 IPR seizures, which encompassed sea cargo, air shipments and express consignments. Counterfeit textiles, apparel and footwear accounted for 78 percent of these seizures. The combined retail price of the seized merchandise exceeds \$1 billion.

CBP Director of Field Operations for New York, Robert Perez, said, "CBP continues to combat the illegal import of counterfeit goods, which pose significant health and safety dangers and threaten American businesses."

The Port of New York and New Jersey is the largest seaport on the East Coast where CBP processes approximately a million containers a year, which equates to more than 20 percent of all international sea containers arriving into the U.S.

Some accomplishments at the seaport for FY 2008 include:

CBP officers at local seaports seized nearly a half a ton of cocaine, over 60 pounds of methamphetamine, over 4,200 pounds of marijuana, and almost 14 pounds of heroin in containerized cargo with a street value of over \$36 million.

In a special operation with DEA conducted this past year, CBP seized more than nine million tablets of ephedrine and more than 76,000 pounds of precursor chemicals that can be used to produce methamphetamine.

At the beginning of the fiscal year, CBP officers discovered over 2,500 pounds of marijuana concealed in clay vases arriving from Mexico.

In June, CBP officers made a seizure of more than 500 pounds of cocaine concealed in a consolidated shipment of jewelry, mirrors, ceramics and other household items arriving from Peru.

In addition, almost 175 pounds of cocaine was seized in a containerized shipment of wearing apparel arriving from Panama.

Over the last fiscal year, CBP personnel executed the seizure of 380 shipments of commercial merchandise that violate trade laws with a domestic value over \$106.6 million. This represents a 13 percent increase in the number of seizures and a 43 percent increase in value over FY07. Most of these shipments included wearing apparel, handbags, sneakers, perfume, sunglasses and toys that violate the Intellectual Property Rights of famous well-known name brand companies.

CBP recovered 133 stolen vehicles that were being smuggled out of the U.S. to foreign ports in Fiscal Year (FY) 2008.

CBP partnered with ICE, FBI and state and local law enforcement agencies in Pennsylvania, New York and New Jersey on a criminal case titled "African Jack," in which 51 stolen vehicles valued at over \$1.3 million were recovered as part of an organized smuggling ring exporting vehicles to Sierra Leone.

During FY 2008, CBP Agriculture Specialists intercepted 19 first-time pests at the Port of Newark.

This past summer, CBP partnered with the U.S. Coast Guard and local law enforcement to focus on small boating enforcement efforts in the New York harbor and identified 25 incidents in which pleasure boaters failed to properly report their arrival coastwise in accordance with their cruising license.

"CBP remains focused on fostering strong partnerships with all levels of law enforcement and with our trade industry partners to ensure we collectively contribute to our nation's security while facilitating the free flow of legitimate trade and travel. Our mission is to remain vigilant and we will do just that," Mr. Perez said.

Westfield American Legion Holiday Gifts for Troops

WESTFIELD — Holiday "We Care" Packages will be sent to local troops in Iraq and Afghanistan at the end of November by the "Support Our Troops" Committee of the Martin Wallberg American Legion Post 3 in Westfield. Donations of goods and money are needed.

Most items can be shipped except chocolate and aerosols. Favored items are granola bars, hard candy, cookies, chips of all sorts, gum, beef jerky, ground

coffee, pretzels, powdered Gatorade and iced tea, sugar packets and creamers. Donations can be mailed to American Legion Post 3, 1003 North Avenue, Westfield, N.J. 07090.

Checks should be made payable to "American Legion/Support Our Troops." Items should be dropped off at the Post bar after 2 p.m. or at RE/MAX on the corner of North Central in Westfield.

For more information, call Pete Hogaboom at (908) 247-7630.

Legislature to Recognize Local Arts Organizations

TRENTON — The New Jersey State Legislature will recognize the contributions of artists and art groups to the community on Monday, November 17. The groups being recognized include the Jersey Central Art Studios, The Summit Outdoor Arts Project and the Mayor's Partnership for Summit Arts.

The Jersey Central Art Studios is an arts-focused non-profit organization led by founder and visionary, Deb Leber of Cranford, New Jersey. Its members include active artists and citizens dedicated to raising awareness of the visual arts and the artistic process through education, events, and economic development.

The Summit Outdoor Arts Projects was founded by Michael Tcheyan, Dr. Harry Wilson and Paul Sears, Summit High School principal. The purpose of the project is to place contemporary modern sculpture on the grounds of the Summit High School so that students and teachers can experience it as a part of a normal day and so that teachers can use actual works of art to educate and inform students about issues and challenges surrounding art, design and freedom of expression.

Mr. Tcheyan is also a member of the Mayor's Partnership for Summit Arts, a group that places works of art in public

areas in hopes that it will add an interesting, unique experience to the daily routine of Summit's citizens and visitors. The Partnership was originally founded by Mayor Walter Long and it has since been reappointed by Mayor Jordan Glatt of Summit.

For more information, call Scott Mersereau in Brammick's legislative office at (908) 232-2073.

County Residents Nominated by Gov.

TRENTON — Governor Jon Corzine has announced appointments of several Union County residents.

Dr. Emil Cappetta of Summit has been nominated for reappointment to the New Jersey Board of Dentistry. Also nominated for reappointment to the board was Dr. Maxine Feinberg of Westfield. Dr. Feinberg is a dentist in Cranford.

Mary Hall Gregg of Westfield was nominated for appointment to the New Jersey Health Information Technology Commission. She has served as chief information officer and vice president for information technology since 2000 at Quest Diagnostics.

COMMUNITY FOOD DRIVE AT THE MATTRESS FACTORY

For the Month of November the Mattress Factory would like you to join them in helping N.J. families in need.

By Bringing in Non Perishable food items customers can receive a 5% - 10% discount off their purchase of any premium mattress set.

The food drive is for the Community Food Bank of New Jersey, the organization is celebrating 25 years of fighting hunger and poverty in New Jersey.

"We grew up here and our

business as been part of the community for over 20 years, it is important to us to give back personally and professionally.

We hope you will stop in and drop off non perishable food items." Ron Shovlin, owner of the Mattress Factory.

The Mattress Factory stores are located at 35 South Ave, Fanwood & 319 Route 10 east, E. Hanover. For more information please call 1-877-matt-fac.

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"We would like you to join us in helping N.J. families in need"

Ron Shovlin
Rick Shovlin

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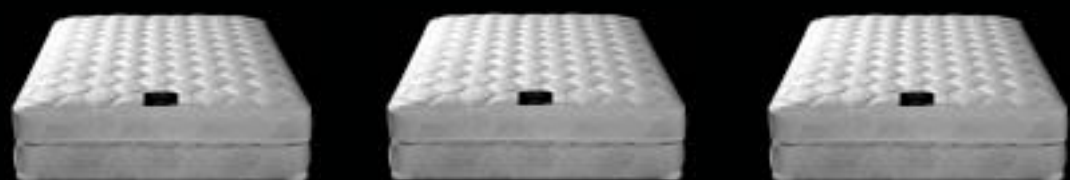


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