



JUMPING FOR JOY...A playful mood overtook pre-prom formality for these elegantly dressed Westfield High School seniors. From left to right are Mary McKeivitt, Chloe Rothenberg, Grace MacKenzie and Darla Stabler.

Area Residents Cycle for Cancer

By CHRISTINA M. HINKE
Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

WESTFIELD — Two teams out of Westfield will join some 5,000 other cyclists in Massachusetts on August 7 and 8 for the massive two-day bike-a-thon, the Pan-Massachusetts Challenge (PMC), which raises money for cancer research and treatment at the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute.

For 12 years, Ed Gallagher, 52, of Belvidere Avenue has ridden in the two-day cycling event and raised about \$400,000 to benefit cancer research and treatment at Dana-Farber. He and his team, ConvergEx, are made up of friends from outside the region and Westfield-area residents, Ed Carr of Mountaintopside, Anthony Cook of Lenox Avenue and Mark Otto, a Westfield native who now resides in Red Bank, who ride regularly in a cycling club run out of Jay's Cycle Shop on North Avenue, where, for the last three years, they have held a charity auction to raise money for Dana-Farber.

One hundred percent of the money raised by riders during the PMC is given to the Jimmy Fund, which provides the main source of funding to Dana-Farber, whose discoveries reach worldwide. All of the services offered during the event are fully donated and staffed by some 3,000 volunteers, with Mr. Gallagher's two daughters among them.

Helping the institute fund its research and treatment that has helped save lives for over 50 years hits close to home for Mr. Gallagher, whose sister Eileen was diagnosed with breast cancer in 1999, and five years ago, at the age of 52, Eileen succumbed to the disease. "She was in remission for a while, and it came back and spread to her liver and lymph nodes," he said. "She lived in Brooklyn. She left two boys, who are college age now, and a husband."

"She was a big supporter of the Jimmy Fund," Mr. Gallagher said of his sister. "She always felt they had the best research." "My mom had to go through a radical mastectomy. Today, many women don't have to go through that with new treatment," said 37-year-old Mr. Carr. Today, his mom has fully recovered from the breast cancer she was diagnosed with in 1992.

His teammate, Mr. Cook, 46, has suffered the loss of his father, friends and in-laws to cancer, so when he decided last year to ride in PMC, he said, "My opportunity to do something about it is very minor — to sit on a bicycle for two days and 200 miles." A 1981 alum of Westfield High School and president of the Westfield Foundation, Mr. Cook has raised about \$8,000 for the cause.

"My father succumbed to lung cancer at 59. He hadn't smoked in nine years. The doctors said smoking wasn't the cause of cancer, but I believe it was," he said. "I feel like cycling saved my life. I was

overweight and smoking. After 9/11, I was told by a psychologist to do something to burn off the adrenaline. I took up cycling and weight lifting. I hadn't exercised in 20 years. I developed a much healthier attitude and lifestyle," Mr. Cook said.

John Coyle, 37, and Nicole Coyle, 36, and their friend, Greg Janacek, make up part of the team, Matthew's Ducks, that will ride in the bike event on behalf of Matthew Bove, the son of Mr. Coyle's high school friend. At only 18 months old, Matthew was diagnosed with a rare form of liver cancer and was treated at Dana-Farber, where 70 percent of his liver was removed.

"It's somewhat of a miracle. They thought it had spread to the brain. They did an MRI, and it was completely gone," Mrs. Coyle said.

This is the first year Mrs. Coyle and Mr. Janacek will participate in the ride, with Mrs. Coyle riding a 47-mile loop on Sunday and Mr. Janacek gearing up for the two-day Wellsley to Bourne 84-mile route and then the Wellsley to Wellsley route with Mr. Coyle.

Last year, Mrs. Coyle and her daughter and sister went to support her husband and the team on the sidelines. "You see the kids and their families, and it is really moving. It's not a race, it's a ride," she said. "For 200 miles, you are cheered along the route — cow bells, cheerleaders doing flips, bands playing..." said Mr. Gallagher. "Every 100 yards, there is someone and once you're in the city, it is 15 to 20-people deep. They are cheering and whooping it up. When you arrive in Provincetown at the finish line with people cheering, you can't help but cry. ...It's a tremendous feel-good weekend that you can't put into words."

For Matthew's parents, that encouragement has helped them get through the difficulties they have faced since their son's diagnosis as an infant. "The amount of support they get is tremendous. They feel they couldn't have done this without all of the support," Mrs. Coyle said.

"It's a great cause," said Mr. Janacek, whose grandmother was diagnosed with lung cancer about 15 years ago.

"It's a great way to stay active and a great way to donate to a good organization," he said. He said his goal is to "finish with a decent time."

"I remember last year riding and seeing a woman standing at the top of a hill gasping for breath. She said, 'I'm going to make it!'" said Mr. Gallagher. "For many people, it's a heroic effort." And that sentiment of heroism extends to not only the riders but also those battling the disease and those who survived.

To donate to the cause, go to Matthew's Ducks page: www.pmc.org/egifs/NC0074 or drop off a check to Jay's Cycle Shop made out to Jimmy Fund, with Mr. Gallagher and Mr. Cook's name on it or go to pmc.org and search for ConvergEx or TC0135.



REST STOP...The Fortunato family of Scotch Plains brought along some good summer reading on their tour of the Blue Ridge Mountains in Virginia and North Carolina last month.

Property Tax Cap Opinions

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

lion. He said salaries and wages are the town's biggest expense. In that regard, he favors changing the state's binding arbitration law to make arbitrators "live within a two-and-a-half-percent cap" and requiring arbitrators to "take into effect what it (contract settlement) does for local property taxes."

"Salaries and wages are our biggest expenses, [but] with binding arbitration, it's very hard to control that," Mayor Skibitsky said. "With binding arbitration, the arbitrator just goes in and looks at the arguments...and sees what is happening in surrounding towns and other towns in the county and then tells you what you are going to pay."

When asked if a hard 2.5-percent cap could result in municipal-worker layoffs, Mayor Skibitsky said, "We hope not. ...We are hoping the economy turns around and our revenues start picking up."

The mayor said Westfield's municipal salaries and wages are down \$300,000 since 2007 "because we've been doing the things (such as eliminating some positions) that I think have to be done [in] other municipalities and other levels of government throughout the state — which I don't think is being done."

He pointed to the amount of income taxes that Westfield residents pay into Trenton's coffers. "I think it's easy for government entities to spend other people's money. [Look at] how much money goes out of Westfield into Trenton [before] it gets dispersed around the state — virtually none of it coming back to Westfield," Mayor Skibitsky said. "I think those municipalities need a cap, and I think it's going to help us in the long run."

"If you're a municipality, and you're spending a lot of money that comes in from the state, where is the control there to make sure you are spending it efficiently?" Mayor Skibitsky questioned. "Do local residents really care if you are spending other towns' money? I don't think so."

He said New Jersey's income tax was established in the 1970s for property tax relief. "We get almost none of it back now," Mayor Skibitsky stated (in noting the state-aid reduction this year).

Mountaintopside Mayor Paul Mirabelli said, "In theory I support it (2.5-percent cap)."

"First of all, Mountaintopside doesn't need [a 2.5-percent cap]. We have the lowest taxes in the county. To force a two-and-a-half-percent cap on Mountaintopside — former mayor (Viglianti) did that before anyone talked about two-and-a-half-percent," Mayor Mirabelli said. He said his concern, however, is in areas such

as pensions, utilities and health care costs, which are out of direct control of the borough and could "eat away at the rest of the budget if we have a hard cap."

He also opposes part of the proposal that would require towns that need to exceed the cap to put a referendum on the election ballot — which, if Mountaintopside needed to take such an action, he said, would cost the borough \$10,000, "and it delays the adoption of the budget because it takes 60 days to get a referendum out."

Fanwood Mayor Colleen Mahr, former president of New Jersey Conference of Mayors, said she was not taking a position on the 2 percent cap until she sees the details. She said the cap should be done "statutorily" by legislation rather than constitutionally. She also said the state needs to stop "balancing the pensions on the backs of municipalities" and instead either fund the system or reduce this benefit to lower the costs for towns.

"The number of a cap (2 or 2.5 percent) is arbitrary because towns have [already] been dealing with caps for decades, and it has been working out," she said, noting that the 4 percent has been in place since 2007. "It is nothing new for mayors."

She said the Fanwood Borough Council only has control over 20 percent of the average \$10,000 property tax bill in her town, or \$2,000, which is spent on a "lot of valuable services" such as the police and public works.

Mayor Mahr said while she supports the exceptions to the 2-percent-cap proposal, she urges the legislature to get to work on approving the "tool kit."

She said the kit needs to include arbitration reform, and it needs to get to mayors this summer, as towns are already well into the budget process by the time the fall arrives — the time when Senator Sweeney said he expected these reforms to be approved.

"They (legislature) should deal with the tool kit now. We need something more than a promise [to discuss the issue]," she said. "Nothing works without the tool kit."

Fanwood

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Kids Recreation Grant. A large percent of the money granted, which as of now stands at a total of \$171,000, is covered by donations from local organizations. Mr. Budiansky outlined plans that include a pavilion, a new basketball court and tennis court repairs at LaGrande Park.

The council suggested that, if granted, LIUNA employees with the necessary qualifications could perhaps engage in the LaGrande renovations.

Owner of Sports Place in Fanwood Closes Business

FANWOOD — In a letter forwarded by the Fanwood Business and Professional Association, Sports Place on South Avenue announced it is closing for business.

"As of July 2010, Sports Place, as you know it, will be closing its doors. Thank you for all of your support over the past three years. It has been a very rewarding and challenging experience, and I am proud of the programs and events that we have implemented.

I am happy to announce that Scott Matthews of Intensive Therapeutics, Inc. will be taking over the location as of September 1, 2010. Scott has been a big part of the special-needs sports programs that we ran in conjunction

with the [Borough] of Fanwood. I will continue to work with Scott on projects and will continue to collaborate on programs and events. The facility will remain. We will still be available for groups and camps, as well as therapy services. Beginning in September, Music Together will also be offering classes. If you have any questions about Intensive Therapeutics and their programs, feel free to call Scott at: (973) 771-1582.

Once again, thank you! We look forward to the exciting changes and hope that you will continue to be a part of all of the great programs coming this fall!"

Maria Wester
Owner

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SP Council Okays Budget

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

percent), as well as mandated contributions to the state's police and fire pension funds (11.1 percent) and public employees pension fund (14.8 percent).

Deputy Mayor Dominick Bratti said the \$91.80 municipal property-tax increase "is \$91.80 too much," but said that under the circumstances, the 2010 spending plan was "the most fiscally responsible" budget the council could have crafted.

Councilwoman Mary DePaola agreed, calling it a "responsible budget" and the "best that we can do."

As he did in 2007, 2008 and 2009, Councilman Glover voted against the budget, repeating his annual exhortation that "we can do better."

He criticized this and previous councils for not giving consideration to his past suggestions for reducing the township's telephone costs by what he claimed would have been \$25,000 per year.

He also said the year-long shared services study with Fanwood, which was completed earlier this year, had not been acted upon in an effort to identify possible savings. Mr.

Glover said he could "guarantee" that if the public were asked to vote on this year's budget, they would reject it.

Mayor Nancy Malool said the council had "made really hard decisions last year" that resulted in this year's budget not including large tax hikes, layoffs or service cutbacks.

She lauded the efforts of Township Manager Chris Marion, who, she said, had required all municipal departments to reduce their spending this year. Looking ahead to 2011, she said the likely 2-percent property-tax cap to be mandated by the state is "going to be very hard to meet." She warned of the possibility of "severe cutbacks" next year, but said this year's budget "is the best we can do."

The mayor, responding to Mr. Glover's criticisms about the shared services study, said that even if all the study's recommendations were implemented, the savings to the average household would be about \$100 per year. "It's not the slam dunk" or "the answer that everyone's looking for," she said.

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