

Kean University Receives Accreditation for 10 Years

By MICHAEL J. POLLACK
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

UNION – The Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) has announced that Kean University has complied with its standards regarding “excellence in higher education” and is no longer under probation.

The university had faced the prospect of losing accreditation, which would have made students ineligible for federal financial aid and the school unable to receive federal grants. Now, the university’s accreditation has been reaffirmed for the next 10 years.

“This is welcome and wonderful news for our students, their parents and guardians, alumni, benefactors, faculty and staff,” Kean University President Dawood Farahi said. “This has been a long and thorough process. Kean University has emerged from it as a stronger institution, more determined than ever to deliver a world-class education to our students.”

Kean Board of Trustees Chairwoman Ada Morell said, “Everyone who cares about Kean and our students rolled up their sleeves and got to work to ensure this university provides the quality education and opportunity it promises.”

MSCHE requires all of its accredited institutions to comply with 14 standards. In June 2011, MSCHE warned Kean that its accreditation was in “jeopardy” because of “insufficient evidence” that the institution was in compliance with Standards 7 (Institutional Assessment) and 14 (Assessment of Student Learning).

A written monitoring report was required by March 1, 2012 to address the issues the MSCHE cited. Thereafter, MSCHE dispatched a team of peer evaluators to the Union Township campus to verify the contents of the report. In late June, MSCHE placed Kean on probation, “a more serious status than Warning.” Richard Pokrass, director of communications and public relations at MSCHE, had told the *Westfield Leader/Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times* earlier this year.

The team of evaluators found that the school was now out of compliance with two additional standards, 6 (Integrity) and 12 (General Education). The visiting team’s report, compiled after a visit on September 13 and 14, makes observations and recommendations for each standard in question.

In the report’s conclusion, it states, “The visiting team encountered, in the course of our visit, an acknowledgment from all constituencies that the Middle States reporting process has had some salutary, albeit painful, effects for the institution. The team appreciates the sentiment and finds it to be an important foundation for the work already achieved and for the results yet to be realized.”

In the report, which can be read online, the visiting team calls Kean University “an institution in the midst of dynamic transformation.” The team said it observed that “specific changes resulting from broad institutional transformation have posed conflict and struggles for Kean that are not easy to resolve and will require continuing earnest collaboration across and among all constituencies.”

“The team probed the board’s understanding of its responsibility for establishing a clear tone of the highest commitment to institutional integrity. The team was satisfied the board understands its responsibility and is able to demonstrate such commitment. In the same way, through interviews and an examination of the evidence, the team probed the understanding and ability of the institution’s executive leadership—president, chief academic officer, executive vice-president for operations, faculty senate executive officers—to establish a clear tone for the highest commitment to institutional integrity. The team was satisfied that the executive leadership has demonstrated such commitment.”

The commission had also asked Kean to show evidence “that factual information about the institution, including MSCHE team reports and commission actions, are accurately reported and are made available to the institution’s community...The team found that Kean was responsive to this request. The institution’s website now includes comprehensive and accurate information on accreditation and assessment.”

In its letter to President Farahi, dated November 15, MSCHE requested a monitoring report, due by March 1, 2014, to demonstrate how the university continues to progress in areas related to academic and institutional assessment. MSCHE representatives will visit the university following the submission of the monitoring report.

James Castiglione, president of the Kean Federation of Teachers, said the decision to lift probation is “good news for Kean University students, faculty and staff in the short run.”

However, he said, “In the eyes of many in the university community, issues of integrity, governance and institutional leadership have not been satisfactorily addressed. The Faculty Senate’s 83-percent vote of ‘no confidence’ in the leadership of President Farahi in August illustrates this.”

He also said that passing Standard 6 (Integrity), “after it was proven that [Farahi’s] résumés contained numerous false academic credentials, is a political achievement. Faculty, professional staff and librarians will work to ensure that academics are not further compromised.”

Lawmakers to Tour Ocean County Today

TRENTON – Bipartisan Assembly leadership has announced that New Jersey General Assembly members will tour parts of Ocean County today, November 29, that have been devastated by Superstorm Sandy.

The tour will depart the Statehouse around 10 a.m. and return at 4 p.m. Members will travel via buses led by the New Jersey State Police with anticipated stops at Seaside Heights, the Casino Pier and boardwalk, Ortley Beach, Normandy Beach, Brick and Mantoloking. Members also hope to meet with local elected officials. Those wishing to join the tour are asked to RSVP to the Assembly Majority Office at thester@njleg.org or jscirtino@njleg.org.

Cleaning Up Storm Debris Top Priority for Admin.

TRENTON – The Christie Administration is making the safe removal of debris from Hurricane Sandy a top priority by working with communities to remove these materials to landfills, incinerators and recycling facilities as quickly as possible so that residents can begin to rebuild, Department of Environmental Protection Commissioner Bob Martin said.

“The scope of the devastation the storm inflicted on New Jersey is unprecedented,” Commissioner Martin said. “Our number one goal is to safely remove debris from the streets of our storm-ravaged cities and towns. We are working diligently, in cooperation with cities, towns and counties, plus haulers and disposal facilities to make sure we haul away debris as quickly and efficiently as possible.”

The storm has left millions of cubic yards of materials that need to be hauled away. So far, the DEP has approved 100 temporary debris management areas to help ensure a steady flow of debris from communities that were impacted by Hurricane Sandy. These temporary debris management areas have been established in a variety of locations, including parking lots, municipal public works yards, former landfills, and empty fields. Local staging areas allow municipalities to get debris off the streets quickly, reducing health and safety concerns and improving access to these communities, the DEP said.

They are located from Bergen County to Atlantic County although the majority are in Monmouth and Ocean counties.

“I commend the tremendous efforts by officials in our municipalities who, in the face of staggering challenges brought on by the storm, immediately recognized the importance of clearing debris from communities as one of the first steps toward helping their residents and businesses recover from Sandy,” Commissioner Martin said.

Even before the storm hit, the DEP set in motion the framework for a system of temporary debris management areas for the staging and source separation of materials for proper disposal and recycling. The DEP is also working with the state’s treasury department to ensure there are sufficient numbers of contractors available to work with local governments to haul away debris and has issued hundreds of temporary vehicle registrations to vehicles to increase waste-hauling capacity. In addition, the state has hired contractors to monitor the waste flow and ensure that it is managed properly.

Among the steps taken by the DEP to manage storm debris include: expediting the review of applications for local debris staging areas; engaging with municipalities and counties, as well as representatives of New Jersey’s solid waste and recycling industries, to evaluate ongoing and anticipated solid waste and recycling demands to ensure there is sufficient capacity in the system to handle storm debris; authorizing state, county and municipal entities and permitted solid waste facilities in the state to obtain

temporary DEP registrations for commercial vehicles and equipment to be used in hauling storm waste; issuing a statewide enforcement alert noting that illegal dumping will be subject to mandatory fines and possible vehicle forfeiture. Illegal dumping may be reported to local police or the DEP’s emergency hotline at 877-WARNDEP (877-927-6337). For questions during business hours, call the DEP at (609) 292-6305.

The DEP is also working to ensure resumption of normal trash and recycling collection services to communities throughout the state. Residents should contact local public works or municipal recycling coordinators or visit their websites for details.

In addition, the DEP has assigned staff to work with storm-affected municipalities one-on-one, serving as liaisons to help them work through any concerns, advise them on the availability of resources, and ensure the cleanup proceeds smoothly. These experts are helping to prioritize which towns need the most assistance in moving debris. They are also helping municipalities work through the FEMA reimbursement process.

DEP inspectors and local authorities are closely monitoring storm debris removal to ensure protection of the environment and public health. A list of solid waste facilities and operating hours as well as various DEP actions and guidance documents related to debris management may be found at www.nj.gov/dep/special/hurricane-sandy/debris.htm.

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CF Homeowners Reassured On Hist. District Designation

By FRED T. ROSSI
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

CRANFORD – The township committee on Tuesday tried to reassure owners of potentially historic houses that their property rights would not be affected if their homes and neighborhoods were designated in the future as historic districts.

At its meeting this week, the committee enacted an ordinance spelling out the procedures under which a neighborhood can be designated as a historic district by the local historic preservation advisory board. Also offered was an amendment, to be voted on next month, giving homeowners in any potential historic district the right to object to the designation during a hearing before the historic preservation board, which would then advise the township committee of the objections.

Several owners of homes that could be designated as historic spoke at Tuesday’s meeting, with the main thrust of concern being that they would not be able to maintain their homes as they see fit. Mark Buckman, the owner of an 1870s-era home, said, “I should be able to do and modify my house as I see fit.”

Maureen McDougal, a member of the advisory board, tried to reassure homeowners, saying there will be “no onus on property owners [within a historic district] to seek any kind of special permission or limit what they’re allowed to do.” Another board member said owners would be “free to maintain their property to suit their needs.”

The reasoning behind the historic district designation is two-fold, according to several who spoke on Tuesday: such a designation makes it easier to apply for and receive state grants in this area and the designation can lead to an increase in property values, according to Commissioner Edward O’Malley, of 2 to 3 percent. Ms. McDougal said it was important for Cranford to “recognize its role as a steward of the cultural properties that we have,” adding that these properties “lend value to the character of the town.”

Mayor David Robinson acknowl-

edged the concerns of homeowners, noting that his own home could ultimately be designated as historic. “If it comes down to what color I can paint my house or putting on an addition,” he said to residents at the meeting, “I’ll be sitting with you raising holy hell because it’s not appropriate.”

In other business, multiple ordinances were introduced, including one calling for a voter referendum on whether a commission should be established to study Cranford’s charter with an eye on possibly changing the form of township government.

Commissioner Lisa Aduvato emphasized that such a commission would be established “just to study” the possibility, “not to change” the form of government. She said, with Mayor Robinson echoing her, that under the present form of government, turnover of committee members is quick and elections are held too often, leading to “no accountability” and “issues getting recycled” from year to year.

Commissioner Kevin Campbell voted against the ordinance, saying he had not heard any complaints from residents about the form of government and that the committee has bigger issues to deal with at the current time.

A \$580,000 bond ordinance was introduced to help finance various repairs to municipal properties and facilities that were damaged by Hurricane Sandy last month. Deputy Mayor Andis Kalnins said the bond will cover part of the emergency \$775,000 appropriation approved earlier this month, and noted that insurance and funding from the federal government should eventually cover most of Cranford’s expenses in this regard.

An ordinance raising the fee for use of the conservation center also was introduced on Tuesday. If approved next month, the fee will increase to \$75 from \$65, which Mr. Kalnins said was needed to cover the cost of operating the center.

At the start of the meeting, members of Junior Girl Scout Troop No. 40903 led the salute to the flag.

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