

Tobacco Settlement Funds Need to Go to Education, Freeholder Mirabella Says

SOUTH ORANGE — Union County Freeholder Alexander Mirabella today pledged his support to make sure New Jersey utilizes tobacco settlement funding to "break the cycle" of tobacco use.

"I am pleased that the State Legislature is considering three bills that will take a portion of the \$246 billion settlement for education. I will make sure that any funds received in Union County will go to reducing youth smoking by educating young people to the dangers of tobacco use," Freeholder Mirabella said.

Freeholder Mirabella made his remarks at the National Council on Drug Dependence of Union County Annual Breakfast held at Seton Hall University in South Orange.

"The figures are staggering. Every day 3,000 children become addicted to nicotine, 1,000 of which will die from a related illness. On a daily basis, there are 500,000 deaths related to tobacco use," he said. "We must act now. It is important that the state and Union County not relax. There are too many agencies vying for these funds."

A report issued by the Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids and the American Heart Association states that few states will devote tobacco settlement funds to reducing youth smoking. President Clinton issued a statement saying he will strongly oppose any legislation waiving the Federal government's claim to tobacco settlement funds without a commitment from the states to fund youth tobacco prevention efforts.

"In the absence of such a commitment, states won't have to spend a single penny of the \$246 billion tobacco settlement to reduce youth smoking," the President was recently quoted as saying.

Freeholder Mirabella said, "we must send a clear message to Washington that New Jersey will use tobacco settlement funds to reduce youth smoking and pay for tobacco related illness medical expenses for those who can't afford to pay."

"We must make sure we are able to fund education so our young people

know the ugliness of tobacco use before they light that first cigarette. We can make a difference so that future generations are not plagued by the illnesses associated with tobacco use," Freeholder Mirabella said.

Figures from the National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion show that cigarette smoking is the single most preventable cause of premature death in this country and that one in five deaths is smoking related, the Freeholder noted.

The tobacco settlement is pending legislation that requires tobacco companies to pay for education and health care for tobacco related illness.

"The tobacco settlement is not purely a money issue. It is a brief moment in time for us to reverse the amount of people who become addicted to tobacco products. We must support our legislators in their efforts to bring this funding to New Jersey," said Freeholder Chairman Nicholas Scutari.

There are three non-partisan bills before the Legislature regarding the tobacco settlement funds. Assembly Concurrent Resolution No. 148, sponsored by Assembly members Loretta Weinberg and Joan Quigley, and State Concurrent Resolution No. 95, sponsored by Senators Shirley Turner and Byron Baer, amends the State Constitution to dedicate use of tobacco funds for health care and smoking prevention programs.

Senate Bill No. 769, sponsored by Senator Jack Sinagra, requires use of tobacco settlement monies for certain health-related purposes.

Figures from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention show that 43 percent of the nation's high school students use tobacco and that smoking has increased from 27.6 percent to 36.4 percent since 1991. Five million adolescents will die because of their addiction to tobacco products in the next 40 years.

"It's time we all take responsibility for teaching our children how bad smoking is for them. New Jersey must use tobacco settlement funds to keep our children smoke-free," Freeholder Mirabella said.



HAPPY RETIREMENT... Dr. Thomas H. Brown, President of Union County College, left, congratulates Professor Richard Bonner of Scotch Plains on his retirement after 11 years of service to the college. Dr. Brown is pictured presenting the new retiree with a commendation issued by the Union County College Boards of Trustees and Governors.

Eleven Retirees are Honored For Years of Service to UCC

SCOTCH PLAINS — Eleven Union County College (UCC) faculty and staff members who retired during the 1998-1999 academic year were honored by the college administration during a reception held on May 13 at UCC's Cranford campus.

Dr. Thomas H. Brown, UCC President, presented each retiree with a gift and honored them with individual remarks.

This year's retirees and the years they began their careers at UCC are as follows: Carol Drozic of Scotch Plains, administrative assistant (1980); Richard Bonner of Scotch Plains, Professor of Physics/Engineering (1988), and Richard Lucas of Waretown, counselor generalist (1982).

Alberta Matyas of Cranford, executive secretary of the Vice President for Institutional Development and Advancement, and assistant secretary of the Board of Governors (1974); Frederick Perry of Virginia Beach, Virginia, Director of Student Activities (1972), and Loretta Syko of Rahway, secretary of the Business Department (1988).

Charles Varela of Urbana, Illinois, Senior Professor of Psychology/Sociology (1960); Laura Engel of Cranford, full-time clerical position in the library (1978); Richard McKeely of East Boulevard, Professor of Biology (1968); Robert Wallerstein of Perth Amboy, Associate Professor of Mathematics (1974), and James Newman of Piscataway, Professor of Physics/Engineering (1978).

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Volunteer Drivers Sought By Mobile Meals Program

WESTFIELD — Mobile Meals, a non-profit organization serving the nutritional needs of disabled residents of Westfield, Mountainside, Scotch Plains, Fanwood, Garwood, Cranford, and Clark, is seeking volunteer drivers.

Crews of volunteer food packers and deliverers prepare and distribute wholesome, low-cost dinners each morning, Monday through Friday. Recipients pay a nominal fee and

may, for a slight extra charge, receive an equally nutritious cold supper at the same time.

"Many residents of our local communities are not aware of our ability to assist those who are unable to prepare their own meals," said Nancy Otchy, President of Mobile Meals.

For more information, volunteers may call Mobile Meals at (908) 233-6146.

New State Statute Upgrades Penalties for Identity Theft

ELIZABETH — A new statute that contains upgraded penalties for "wrongful impersonation" and "theft of identity" is now on the books in New Jersey, thanks to a joint effort from law enforcement and legislators in Union County.

Union County Prosecutor Thomas V. Manahan announced June 7 that his office has developed streamlined and standardized procedures to help police cope with the growing problem of identity theft.

In providing every police chief with copies of the new law that went into effect on May 21, the prosecutor credited a quick response by Assemblymen Neil Cohen (D-20th District) and Alan Augustine (R-22nd District) to his call for legislative action to deal with criminals who steal personal identifying information from unsuspecting victims in order to benefit themselves.

The law now makes it a crime to make purchases using another's name, address, telephone number, Social Security number, place of employment, employee identification number, demand deposit account number, savings account number, credit card number or mother's maiden name.

Mr. Manahan said the penalties under the statute can run as high as a 10-year state prison term, depending on the amount of the theft, but a thief is subject to arrest for a disorderly persons offense for just the act of stealing credit or identifying information for illegal use.

"When we conducted our training seminar in the fall, many law en-

forcement officers were shocked to learn how easy it is for a person to be victimized," said Mr. Manahan, who himself was a victim of such a theft years ago.

Now a required portion of training for all new police officers, the identity theft issue was brought into the lawmaking arena by Assemblymen Cohen, Augustine and Richard H. Bagger (R-22nd District) with the support of the New Jersey Bankers Association and the Union County Police Chiefs Association.

"We've had a number of victims reach out for us and we have now a complete compilation of contacts and referral sources to help them," said Lieutenant Patricia M. Leonard, Commander of the Special Prosecutions Unit.

"This way we can develop information on the thieves and the victim can restore their credit and follow the proper reporting procedures they fall prey to such criminals," she added.

All of the chiefs have been supplied with copies of special pamphlets developed by the Prosecutor's Office for business interests and consumers, she said, adding that additional information about identity theft can be obtained by calling (908) 527-4623.

Mr. Manahan said if there is enough interest, then he will ask his staff members, postal authorities and municipal detectives, who are experienced in dealing with the ways thieves steal money and credit using electronic transfers and other uses, to set up another in-service training session at the John H. Stamler Police Academy in Scotch Plains.

Suicide Suspected In Death of Woman Found in Township

By KIM KINTER
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

SCOTCH PLAINS — A 41-year-old Union woman was found dead Monday in her car of an apparent self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head, Scotch Plains police said.

Scotch Plains police are wrapping up their investigation after receiving information from the Union County medical examiner's office that the woman's wounds were consistent with that of a suicide, sources said.

The woman, whose name was not being released at press time by police or the Union County Prosecutor's office, was found in the parking lot of the Bell Atlantic office on Cellar Avenue, said Captain Joseph M. Protasiewicz of the Scotch Plains Police Department.

She had been in training with Bell Atlantic to be a business service consultant since December, and was to have graduated on Tuesday, according to a company spokesman.

Captain Protasiewicz said police received an emergency call at 10:10

a.m. on Monday from an employee at the Bell Atlantic office, reporting an unconscious female in a car in the company lot.

Police found the victim slumped in the driver's seat with a gunshot wound to the head, Captain Protasiewicz said. The victim was pronounced dead at the scene by paramedics from Muhlenberg Regional Medical Center in Plainfield.

A small caliber handgun was recovered at the scene, he said.

Soraya Rodriguez, a spokeswoman for Bell Atlantic in New Jersey, said the woman's colleagues were hit particularly hard by her death.

"It's been hard on (the) employees," she said, adding that Bell Atlantic made grief counselors available to employees in the Scotch Plains office the day of the incident. The company also told employees that they could leave early that day should they feel the need.

Ms. Rodriguez added that colleagues spoke highly of the woman, and had no indication that she may have been distraught over anything.

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