

Garwood Board of Education Candidates Discuss Issues at Lincoln School Forum

By MICHAEL BONACCORSO
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

GARWOOD — The Parent Teacher Association (PTA) hosted a Garwood Board of Education (BOE) Candidates' Night last Wednesday in Lincoln School's cafeteria. Candidates responded to questions asking the board members why they want to be elected as board members, how the school district should prepare for a possible student influx caused by the redevelopment projects, and how to increase parental involvement.

Seeking BOE seats are current board of education member Mary Ann Kjetsaa and newcomers Denise Ridente, Maureen Scepkowski, Ralph Trentacosta and Joseph Miceli.

"When our district faces challenging times after redevelopment. I want to assure my voice is louder than ever to make sure Lincoln School remains top-notch," Mr. Trentacosta responded.

Mr. Trentacosta said he wants to steward a successful district not only for his own children, but all the children in the community.

"Our children are our most prized possessions. We send them to a place where we want them to learn and grow. They spend more time here daily than they do with us," said Ms. Scepkowski, emphasizing the school environment's role in shaping childhood development.

Ms. Ridente said hearing first hand from her children's peers and her children's opinions about Lincoln School had shaped her decision to contribute to the board. She said having her own children in the district allows her to recognize the board's effectiveness or intended effectiveness pertaining to certain poli-

cies they have passed or will pass.

Mr. Miceli said children are his "passion." Mr. Miceli stated that he has worked in education for 37 years as a teacher, principal and assistant superintendent. Mr. Miceli said though he does not have a child in the district he wants to set policy and monitor the school budget.

Ms. Kjetsaa said as an educator for decades she has worked directly with children and wants to continue bettering the school district.

At the last board of education meeting Superintendent of Schools Teresa Quigley, Ed.D., said Lincoln's "community" makes the district special, especially pertaining to parental involvement in extracurricular activities and the need for continued involvement.

On the issue of preparing for a possible student influx from the redevelopment projects in the borough, Mr. Trentacosta said a student population increase will "eventually" happen and the board of education, teachers and school administrators should be prepared.

Ms. Scepkowski said she recalls Superintendent Quigley describing "four possible classrooms" that can be created within Lincoln School. She said the district should begin strategizing on how to plan the additional students.

Welcoming the new residents, including potential volunteers to continue the "small-town" community that exists is another priority, stated Ms. Scepkowski.

Ms. Ridente said she wants to advocate for the district regarding how revenue will be allocated to the district. Ms. Ridente said 95 percent of redevelopment revenue will go to the municipal-

ity and the county.

Mr. Miceli said monitoring the financial impact is important. Annually, the district spends \$14,000 per out-of-district student costs (students who are sent to other schools besides Lincoln School). He said that number could drastically increase.

Candidates were asked, "How do we increase parental involvement?"

Mr. Trentacosta said he noticed the district having a "lack of social media presence," which "hinders" parents staying updated on upcoming activities or volunteer opportunities. Mr. Trentacosta said he would make sure parents remain notified through social media outlets such as public Facebook pages.

Ms. Scepkowski said a "strong school needs strong parental support." Ms. Scepkowski said she believes meetings are hard for many parents to attend because they interfere with dinner hours, family life, and professional life. Ms. Scepkowski stated a PTA subcommittee could address these issues, deriving new ways to keep parents participating.

Ms. Kjetsaa said "food does bring people in" and hosting open events with incentives could bring parents to new opportunities.

Ms. Ridente said parental involvement in extracurricular activities (non-Lincoln related) can be directed via advertisements or word of mouth towards Lincoln extracurricular events.

Mr. Miceli said during his tenure in education he remembers the principal using direct contact with parents to notify them or create intrigue so the parents remain involved in school events.

Probitas Verus Honos



Christina M. Hinke for The Westfield Leader

PIZZA ANYONE?...A Pizza Crow is one of the many scarecrows on display as part of the 11th annual Cranford Downtown Scarecrow Stroll. All are welcome to downtown Cranford to check out over 100 scarecrows lining the streets and vote for a favorite. The scarecrows are created by families, kids, groups, organizations, classes, and businesses, and will be on display through the end of October.



Christina M. Hinke for The Westfield Leader

THE HULK...The Incredible Hulk is one of the many scarecrows on display as part of the 11th annual Cranford Downtown Scarecrow Stroll. All are welcome to downtown Cranford to check out over 100 scarecrows lining the streets and vote for a favorite. The scarecrows are created by families, kids, groups, organizations, classes and businesses, and will be on display through the end of October.