

BOE Honors Teachers, Staff Recognized With State Awards

By **KIMBERLY A. BROADWELL**
Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

SCOTCH PLAINS – In front of a packed audience, members of the Scotch Plains-Fanwood Board of Education (BOE) last Thursday honored many teachers and other education service professionals for earning Governor's Educator of the Year awards. Resolutions were read from all board members and administrators for the honorees from each school.

A total of 14 awards were given to teachers, aides and even the Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School nurse, Lisa McNally, for their excellence in service to the district. In addition,

three district employees were given special recognition as New Jersey Exemplary Elementary Educators.

Colleen Haubert, principal of Evergreen Elementary School, was honored, as well as third-grade McGinn Elementary School teacher Allison McGee and fifth-grade Terrill Middle School teacher Joseph Roskin.

Superintendent of Schools Margaret W. Hayes, Ed.D., stated that she was happy to have so many talented and dedicated teachers and educational professionals within the district. All board members echoed her sentiments.

In other business, the board introduced the upcoming calendar for the

2019-2020 school year, which includes 182 days of school for students and 186 days for teachers. The calendar, which is still in draft form, is claiming Thursday, September 5, 2019, as its opening day and Tuesday, June 23, 2020, as its closing.

In addition, four emergency days are built into the calendar. It was explained that if no emergency days are needed, schools will be closed Friday, May 22, and Tuesday, May 26, 2020, as Memorial Day is on Monday, May 25, in 2020. In addition, if one emergency day is needed, schools will be closed on May 22 but will be open on May 26 that year.

Also, if more than four days are needed prior to Presidents' Weekend in 2020, give-back days will come from Friday through Monday, February 14 and 17, which are the two days off for Presidents' Day weekend.

The other give-back days would come from spring break starting with Monday, April 6, and moving forward to how many days are needed. Spring break is scheduled for April 6 to 10, 2020.

Winter break is scheduled for December 23 to 31, 2019, and Thanksgiving break would fall on November 28 and 29. In addition, schools are scheduled to close on Tuesday, November 5, for Election Day and November 7 and 8 for the New Jersey Education Association convention. Schools also are slated to close on September 30 and October 1 for Rosh Hashanah and October 9 for Yom Kippur. Students will have October 14 off for Columbus Day, while staff will use this day for professional development.

The next board of education meeting will be held this evening, Thursday, January 31, at 7:30 p.m., in the administration building at Cedar Street and Evergreen Avenue in Scotch Plains, where the board will vote to approve next year's calendar.



Kimberly A. Broadwell for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times
TOP TEACHERS...The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Board of Education honored many teachers and other education service professionals at last Thursday's meeting for earning Governor's Educator of the Year awards. Pictured, from left to right, are: award recipient Joseph Roskin, a fifth-grade teacher at Terrill Middle School; Allison McGee, a third-grade teacher at McGinn Elementary School; Colleen Haubert, principal at Evergreen Elementary School; Superintendent of Schools Margaret Hayes, Ed.D., and Joan Mast, Ed.D., assistant superintendent.



Courtesy of Greater Westfield Area Chamber of Commerce
TRENTON UPDATE...The Greater Westfield Area Chamber of Commerce (GWACC) hosted its annual Legislative Panel last Wednesday to discuss the New Jersey Economic and Fiscal Policy Workgroup's "Path to Progress" report. Pictured, from left to right, are: Assembly Majority Leader Louis Greenwald (D-6th, Voorhees), Assembly Minority Leader Jon Bramnick (R-21st, Westfield), Senate Minority Leader Tom Kean, Jr. (R-21st, Westfield) and Senator Joe Cryan (D-20th, Union).

Neighbors Ask For Help From Freeholders To Stop Cell Tower

By **PAUL J. PEYTON**
Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

CRANFORD — A group of Cranford residents again pleaded with the Union County Freeholder Board last Thursday to do what it can to stop construction of a 140-foot cell tower on the Cranford campus of Union County College (UCC).

Ray Licata said the cell tower would be 230 feet from the nearest residences on Princeton Road. He cited studies by the National Toxicology Program (NTP) for the U.S. Department of Health and Human

Services National Toxicology Program (NTP) and the Ramazzini Institute in Italy which show that cell-tower radiation "has health effects."

Mr. Licata said Verizon's contract with UCC, approved by the college board in October, includes a distributed antenna system or DAS. He said DAS includes an antenna on the roof and antennas inside a building to provide cell reception.

"There are also plans for them to build a new parking garage so they could put more antennas on top of that or any other buildings," he said.

Mr. Licata said the college plans to expand cell-phone coverage from the campus on Springfield Avenue all the way to the Cranford train station on North Avenue.

"This is an educational institution. Why are they concerned about cell coverage to residents of Cranford all the way down to the train station?" Mr. Licata asked. "The answer is money," he said, noting UCC will get \$34,000 a year for the next 25 years, and that Verizon would profit by selling the tower in the years ahead.

The college has said the cell tower is sought to ensure all employees and students have cell coverage for emergency messages in the event of a campus-wide emergency such as an active shooter. Currently, there are areas where there is no cell-

phone coverage, UCC staff has said. Freeholder Angel Estrada asked Mr. Licata to provide copies of the reports he cited, noting that none of the information he has read "are binding that there is any danger or impact to people in general."

Chemeda Mindy Kipness of Colby Lane in Cranford, a resident since 2004, noted that the cell tower would be built on land that is "already" elevated 20 feet, surrounded by 70-foot-high trees adjacent to Princeton Road, between Colby Lane and UCC's parking lot.

She said most cell towers are located in commercial areas, "not near these kinds of residential areas."

"This is going to impact the entire north side of Cranford and Westfield," she said. "The cell tower will be less than 1,000 feet from close to 300 homes in just Cranford; even more if you include Westfield."

She said Washington Elementary School in Westfield and Brookside Elementary School in Cranford are in close proximity to where the tower would be located at UCC. Ms. Kipness also said it is estimated nearby home values would drop 20 percent if the tower is constructed.

Ms. Kipness asked the board to help "find other ways that this cell tower proposal can be remediated."

Michael Normann of Colby Lane

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8

Fanwood Planning Board OKs Fencing for Goddard

By **KIMBERLY A. BROADWELL**
Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

FANWOOD – A brief discussion regarding variance relief for new fencing at the Goddard School in Fanwood was held last Wednesday evening during the planning board's monthly meeting. The school is located at 324 South Avenue.

Goddard School owner Tracy Brace asked for and was granted permission to make some of the fencing surrounding her school six feet high instead of the allowed four feet high for "security reasons."

Ms. Brace testified that because of the current social climate of heightened security at schools, she felt it necessary to install a six-foot-high fence in front of the play area of her facility to ensure the safety of the preschool children who play outside in that area.

Some members of the planning board were concerned that if the Goddard School was to vacate the property in the future, new business owners who might not want the higher fencing would be deterred from investing in the property. As a condition

of granting variance relief of the extra two feet of fencing, Ms. Brace agreed to remove the six-foot fence and return the four-foot fence if she decides to vacate the premises.

All members voted in favor of the six-foot fencing except John Steigerwald.

In other business, the redevelopment case involving the old Young's Paint property at 1 South Avenue was postponed to an undisclosed future meeting. It was noted that it would take some time for Empire Builders, which is asking to redevelop the property, to re-design their project.

Lengthy testimony was heard last month regarding the property. Empire Builders is proposing to build a 36-unit building with a storefront on the first floor.

The proposed project needs relief from three variances in order to move forward. These variances include the front-yard setback, lot coverage and parking spaces. Also, a waiver for fencing is required.

At the December meeting, board members had concerns with the proposed

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8



Paul Lachenauer for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times
RISING UP...Scotch Plains Mayor Al Smith, left, and Councilman Ted Spera helped out with Rise Against Hunger food packages during the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service activities at the Fanwood-Scotch Plains YMCA on January 21.

GWACC Hears 'Harsh Reality' On Pension Costs

By **MICHAEL BONACCORSO**
Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

WESTFIELD – The Greater Westfield Area Chamber of Commerce (GWACC) hosted its annual "legislative panel" last Wednesday to discuss the New Jersey Economic and Fiscal Policy Workgroup's "Path to Progress" (PTP) report. The bipartisan work group included both Democratic and Republican state legislators, academics, public policy researchers and private industry professionals.

GWACC invited for the lunch panel the work group's co-chair and Democratic Assembly Majority Leader Louis Greenwald, Assembly Minority Leader Jon Bramnick (R-21st, Westfield), Senate Minority Leader Tom Kean, Jr. (R-21st, Westfield) and Senator Joseph Cryan (D-20th, Union) to discuss the report's assessment of long-term budget challenges facing state and municipal officials.

The New Jersey Legislature created the Economic and Fiscal Policy Workgroup, "charged with a broad mission – to address soaring pension and benefit costs, hold down property taxes, make state and local government and school districts more efficient, assess the equity and efficiency of our state and local tax structure, leverage the value of state assets, and mitigate the negative impact of the federal tax law that targeted high-cost states," according to the "Path to Progress" report's introduction.

"New Jersey faces a harsh reality. We have an unsustainable legacy of pension and benefit costs equating to almost \$17,000 per resident," the panel's moderator, Stephanie Branna, said in opening comments to the lunch's attendees at Echo Lake Country Club in Westfield.

The report states that the "failure

by legislators of both parties to make necessary pension payments (throughout the years) if not resolved" would hinder New Jersey's ability to "fully fund public schools, expand preschool and make New Jersey affordable for families, senior citizens, and businesses."

Ms. Branna said when quantified the "unfunded pension and benefit costs" would equate to nine million New Jersey residents "opening their wallets and donating \$17,000 to alleviate this burden."

"It comes to no surprise that without action, New Jersey will become an unaffordable place to live and do business," Ms. Branna said.

In January 2018, the work group was formed to draft recommendations aggregated into five categories including "pension and benefit reform, education reform at the administrative level, county and municipal government reform and shared services, state and local government tax structure, and the leveraging (state) assets to stabilize the pension system," according to the PTP report.

As cited by Pew Charitable Trusts, New Jersey ranks amongst the most underfunded employee pension systems in the country. New Jersey's unfunded pension and retiree health benefit liabilities total \$151.5 billion, or four times the state annual budget, according to the PTP report.

"Without changes to the pension and benefit structure, the cost of pensions and benefits will rise \$4.1 billion over the next four years, eating up 26 percent of the state budget," the report states.

Ms. Branna stated that the report recommends that state employee health care coverage be shifted from "platinum-level to gold-level" coverage. In conjunction, "new retirees"

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8



Paul Lachenauer for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times
THANK YOU FOR YOUR SERVICE...Former Tuskegee Airman Malcolm E. Nettingham, right, received the Day of Service Award from Leland McGee and Marie Leppert at the Scotch Plains-Fanwood Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service opening program at Fanwood-Scotch Plains YMCA on January 21.

PAGE INDEX

Regional	2-3	Education	16-17
Editorial	4-5	Sports	9-14
Police	14	Real Estate	9-13
Community ...	6-7, 15	Classifieds	15
Obituary	6	A&E	17-18



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