

County to Receive \$2.5 Mil. from State to Settle Dispute Over Reimbursement for Housing Prisoners

By PAUL J. PEYTON
Specially Written for The Leader and The Times

ELIZABETH — Union County and the State of New Jersey have settled litigation regarding what the county had charged was funds owed them for housing state prisoners.

As a result of the settlement, the county will receive \$2,526,084. County Counsel Carol Cohen explained that the county brought the litigation in 1998 against the state for not adhering to the terms of a contract to house state prisoners at the Union County jail in Elizabeth.

Ms. Cohen explained that the state agreed to make up the difference between what the state was paying for prisoners held per contract with the county, \$58.50 per day, and the amount the State of New Jersey agreed to pay for such inmates as of April 1999, \$75.78 per day.

The state agreed to pay the difference in the contract fees retroactive to March 1998, the month Governor Christine Todd Whitman lifted a state of emergency pertaining to overcrowding of state correctional facilities.

Every governor since Brendan Byrne in the 1970s had continued the state order.

Ms. Cohen said the settlement of the suit is based on legal action taken by Gloucester County, which successfully led to an end of the state emergency and a refund to counties for housing state inmates.

Under the emergency declaration, counties were required to house a set number of state prisoners for a maximum of 18 months. Union County signed a contract with the state in 1985, according to the lawsuit, to house 50 state prisoners at the jail. The state prisoner population, however, ballooned to 370 in 1999.

The county, which has said the true cost to house prisoners is \$80 per day per inmate, declined to accept an

offer by the state Department of Corrections for a daily rate of \$62 per prisoner.

Speaking of the new-found revenue for the county from settlement of the litigation, Freeholder Nicholas P. Scutari, Chairman of the board's Policy Committee, commented, "It's a windfall for us for this year. Certainly we could use every penny of that money."

"This is a good thing for the county to recover a good amount of money that is owed to us," added Freeholder Mary Ruotolo.

County Manager Michael J. Lapolla announced last month that the state pulled its prisoners out of the county lockup as of last August resulting in a loss of \$12.5 million in revenue the county anticipated in 2000 and 2001 to house state inmates. As a result, Mr. Lapolla has said he will close the old jail facility on April 1.

The county's anticipated revenue will hike the end of 2000 surplus to \$7 million, still \$2 million short of what county officials had expected.

On another matter, the board approved a resolution to create an advisory committee for the purpose of implementing an open space, recreation and historic preservation trust fund in the county. The committee will include elected officials of both the Democratic and Republican Parties as well as representatives of environmental and labor organizations and the business community.

Freeholder Linda d. Stender will head the committee, which will also include the County Manager or his designee, representatives of the Departments of Economic Development and Parks and Recreation and the Division of Cultural and Heritage.

Voters approved the fund, which will assess property owners in the county 1.5 cents per \$100 of assessed valuation, in November Officials have

said the 20-year fund will net the county \$4.89 million annually.

The trust fund may be used to acquire, develop and maintain lands for recreation and conservation purposes, and for acquiring and preserving historic properties.

The Freeholder board also approved a resolution to enter into a \$125,070 contract with O'Brien and Gere Engineering, Inc. for construction management and inspection services for the rehabilitation of the upper and lower Echo Lake dams.

County Engineer G. Bruce Connor said he anticipates the project will be completed by mid-April.

Parks officials said the contract is separate from the project to dredge

Upper Echo Lake. That project, part of a plan to rehabilitate 11 county-owned lakes, is anticipated for 2002.

The Freeholders also approved a \$12,500 contract with T&M Associates to undertake engineering services associated with the design and construction of nine fairway bunkers at the Ashbrook Golf Course in Scotch Plains.

Bunkers add a slope or difficulty to the course for golfers.

Charles Sigmund, Jr., Director of Parks and Recreation, said he anticipates the construction to begin by early fall. He said the county budgeted \$60,000 in the 2000 capital spending plan for construction of the fairways.



T-SHIRT WINNER...Cub Scouts of Pack No. 98 of Scotch Plains-Fanwood recently held a contest to design a Pack T-shirt, for when a casual alternative to their traditional scout uniform is more appropriate. The winner was Paul Spicer, pictured with his father, John, who used a computer to design his entry. All pack members received the T-shirt at a recent Blue and Gold Banquet, which celebrates the birth of scouting.



News Highlights

WESTFIELD — State Labor Commissioner Mark Boyd, a Westfield resident, will be the guest on "Caucus: New Jersey" this week, with host Steve Adubato.

The program, "Wired for Business," will look at the relationship between jobs and economic development in the state and the rapidly increasing advancements in telecommunications technology.

The program will air on Saturday, February 3, at 12:30 p.m. on Thirteen/WNET New York and at 6:30 a.m. on February 3 and at 10 a.m. on Sunday, February 4, on NJN Public Television.

WASHINGTON D.C. — Consumer Guidance has established a grant fund to help people who are having financial problems because of high energy costs.

This grant program is funded by private donations from corporations and private citizens who receive a tax exemption because of the organization's 501 (c) 3 non-profit status granted through the Internal Revenue Service.

Consumers can apply for the grant by calling (202) 595-1035 or by visiting Consumer Guidance's Web site, www.ConsumerGuidance.org.

ELIZABETH — Union County Clerk Joanne Rajoppi has appointed Special Deputy County Clerks to her office to serve during her term. Ms. Rajoppi was re-elected to a second term of five years in November.

Barbara O'Brien of Linden, who serves as Chief Clerk of the office; Lisa Genova, Supervisor of Elections; Alexis Minnis of Union Township, Assistant Chief Clerk, and David

P. Wright of Winfield, Executive Assistant, were named Special Deputy Clerks during a January 4 ceremony at the Union County Courthouse in Elizabeth.

"These four individuals have a total of 64 combined years of experience in the recording, elections and business sections of the office," Ms. Rajoppi noted.

In case of an absence or disability of the County Clerk, Ms. O'Brien will serve in that capacity.

BERKELEY HEIGHTS — The Volunteer Guild of Rumlens Specialized Hospital of Union County will sponsor a Valentine's Day jewelry sale from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. today, Thursday, February 1, in the Multi-Purpose Room of the facility. The hospital is located at 40 Watchung Way in Berkeley Heights.

The sale will include 14 Karat gold chain necklaces, bracelets and anklets; 14 Karat gold earrings; 14 Karat gold charms and rings; plus sterling silver chains, earrings, charms, anklets and rings, among other items.

UNION — The fifth annual Union County St. Patrick's Day Parade will be held beginning at 1 p.m. on Saturday, March 10, along Morris Avenue in Union Township.

The parade will proceed eastward along Morris Avenue in Union Township from Commerce Avenue to Union Center. The parade viewing stand will be located at the intersection of Morris and Stuyvesant Avenues.

The County Board of Chosen Freeholders has donated \$7,500 to help defray expenses for the parade.

Professor to Discuss Cultural Journey of Jewish Women

WESTFIELD — On Monday, February 12, Dr. Leslie Fishbein, Associate Professor of American Studies and Jewish Studies at Rutgers University will speak to the Westfield Chapter of Hadassah.

In her discussion, entitled "From Shetlet to Ghetto: The Culture of the Lower East Side," she will examine the tensions between loyalty to tradition and the lure of acculturation faced by the first generation of Jewish immigrant women who traveled from Eastern Europe to New York's Lower East Side.

The meeting will take place at 12:30 p.m. at Temple Emanu-El, located at 756 East Broad Street in Westfield. All are welcome to attend. The program has been made

possible by a grant from the New Jersey Council of Humanities, a state partner of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Scotch Plains Baptist Sets 'Worship Live'

SCOTCH PLAINS — The Scotch Plains Baptist Church, located at 333 Park Avenue in Scotch Plains, will present its monthly "Worship Live!" praise celebration on Sunday, February 18, at 6 p.m.

"Worship Live!" features contemporary, Christian praise music, led by a lite-rock band, along with personal sharing. The service is open to the public. For more information, please call (908) 322-5487.

Fundraiser for Organ to Feature Varied Broadway Selections

AREA — Local artists will be among the participants in the first fundraiser for the restoration of the organ at the Crescent Avenue Presbyterian Church in Plainfield. The event will take place on Saturday, February 10, at 8 p.m. at the church.

A local group of thespians called "The Organ Donors" will present

"Broadway and Beyond," a musical review produced by Harriet Jernquist and directed by Elliot Lanes and Drude Roessler.

Songs from *Guys and Dolls*, *The King and I* and *Most Happy Fella* will feature artists from the Westfield Community Players, the Cranford Dramatic Club, as well as others from Scotch Plains and Plainfield.

A live auction and dessert will be included in the program. Reservations are not necessary. There is a suggested donation of \$15.

The church is located at 716 Watchung Avenue. For more information, please call (908) 756-2468.

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