



SCOTCH PLAINS

THE TIMES

of

Scotch Plains – Fanwood



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COME SLEIGH RIDING WITH ME...Scotch Plains children took advantage of the slopes of snow to make sledding memories with their friends.

Brooks Crandall for The Times

Scotch Plains Faces 5 Percent Hike In Preliminary Budget

By FRED ROSSI
Specially Written for The Times

Scotch Plains Township Manager Thomas E. Atkins is proposing a \$17.85 million municipal budget that represents a spending increase of nearly 5 percent over last year. Much of the added expenditures, he said, are the result of "mandated, increased expenses that are completely outside of the control" of the local government.

During Tuesday night's meeting of the Township Council, Mr. Atkins called the 2001 budget "very difficult," due to these uncontrollable cost increases.

The governing body, which is planning to hold at least three budget meetings in the next three weeks, is expected to introduce its spending plan on Tuesday, March 13. A public hearing and vote is tentatively set for Wednesday, April 25, although the status, at that time, of several property tax relief bills currently being considered by the State Legislature could delay final consideration of this year's spending plan.

Mr. Atkins provided the council with a list of eight budget categories

that are responsible for his proposed 4.97 percent spending increase — a level that could be altered as council members make final determinations on proposed expenditures this month.

The police department's budget will increase 7.5 percent due to a 3.9 percent salary boost received by the local Policemen's Benevolent Association, as well as the retirement of three police officers who will be paid for unused sick leave and vacation time.

Group health insurance, a marketplace Mr. Atkins called "extremely problematic," will increase 22 percent. With the township due to pay off a 1991 bond issue, there will be a 14.3 percent boost in spending for debt service.

The 22.3 percent increase in payments to the Rahway Valley Sewerage Authority (RVSA), a level Mr. Atkins termed "staggering," is attributable, he said, to RVSA debt management.

More than one-third of the township library's 7 percent spending hike this year is attributable to health insurance costs and the need to hire an additional professional librarian.

Expenses for streets and roads, including salaries for Public Works employees, the spring clean-up, curbside recycling and the downtown task force, will go up nearly 5 percent.

The proposed increase in spending for this year is more than double the 2.04 percent boost in last year's 17,006 million budget versus the 1999 spending plan. With the passage in December of the school bond issue and an increase in Union County taxes, additional taxes on an average assessed home of \$117,000 will total about \$227 for those two components of the local property tax bill.

Mr. Atkins refused to speculate about any potential tax increase to finance local government activities until the township's financial statement is completed later this month. In the meantime, the council will hold budget meetings on Monday, February 12; Thursday, February 22, and on Thursday, March 1. Additional meetings will be scheduled, if needed.

In talking about his budget outline at Tuesday night's conference meet-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12

'Fanwood' Victorian-Style Lamps Set to Make Debut Today in Borough's Downtown Area

By SUZETTE F. STALKER
Specially Written for The Times

The first of 61 Victorian motif lamps were expected to make their debut in Fanwood's downtown today, as progress continued on implementation of a streetscape theme aimed at giving the borough a distinct flavor and economic advantage.

Clayton S. Pierce, Fanwood Downtown Revitalization Coordinator, whose efforts last year led to an agreement with Public Service Electric and Gas (PSE&G) for the lamps, said utility company personnel would begin the installation process near the Millennium Clock at the corner of South and Marine Avenues.

Called "The Fanwood," the 15.3-foot-high, 150-watt metal halide

lamps, featuring a design known as a bishop's crook with scroll, are modeled after ones which illuminated area train depots in the 19th century, including Fanwood's, following Thomas Edison's 1878 invention of the incandescent lamp.

The light fixtures are earmarked for Martine, LaGrande and South Avenues, as well as the rear area of stores along the west side of Martine and the parking lot of the "Carriage House" pocket park being developed on Watson Road opposite the Borough Hall complex.

Fanwood has entered into a lease buy down agreement with PSE&G for the lamps, at a cost of \$2,035 each. The borough will pay the utility \$32 per lamp each month to cover operating expenses -- insurance, bulb

and fixture replacements — that will be incorporated into the annual municipal budget.

The light fixtures themselves, along with new concrete, decorative pavers, electrical conduits and foundations for the lamps, are being funded with a portion of \$400,000 in state and county grant money that was awarded to Fanwood in 1999 for downtown improvements.

The "Fanwood" lamps will provide pedestrian lighting but will not replace traditional street light fixtures.

Municipal officials and others involved with the project believe "The Fanwood," as well as accompanying streetscape efforts, will give the borough a "unifying identity" that will help attract new tax rates to the

borough, as well as strengthen the existing business community.

A Victorian theme was selected for the business district's new look as a way to link the downtown with the borough's 19th century homes and the historic Fanwood train station, according to Mr. Pierce. It is also reflected in the Millennium Clock which stands at the entrance to the train station.

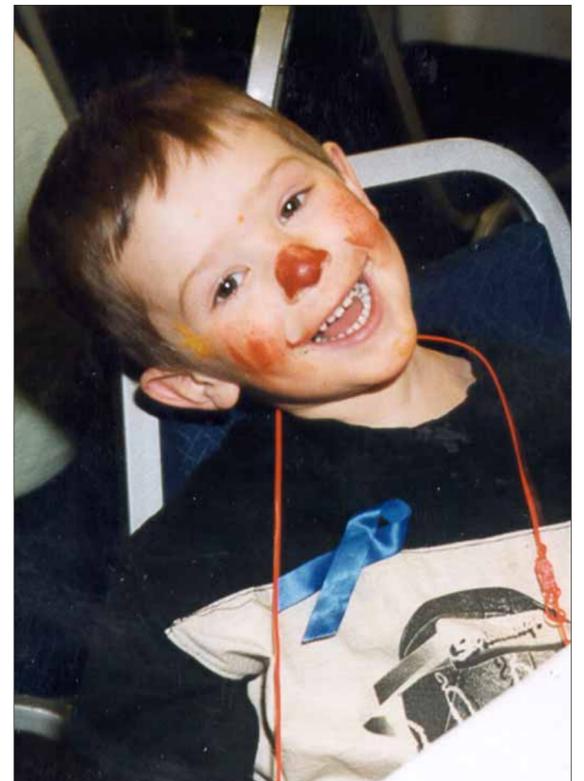
Mr. Pierce said he plans to nominate "The Fanwood" concept to Downtown New Jersey, a non-profit, Somerville-based organization that promotes downtown revitalization efforts, for an Excellence in Downtown Award. The group will present its awards in March.

"The Fanwood" is manufactured by Hadco Architectural Outdoor Lighting of Littlestown, Pa., and will be featured under that name in the company's catalogue for customers worldwide.

Besides the commercial "Fanwood," a residential version of the lamp will be available for \$715, Mr. Pierce revealed. Interested individuals may contact him at claypierce@aol.com for further information.

Mr. Pierce said the residential "Fanwood," a 100-watt incandescent lamp standing some 10 feet high, is being considered for the Borough Hall property to replace deteriorating existing lighting there, as well as for the adjacent Patricia M. Kuran

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12



FUN AT THE CIRCUS...At the Super Sunday 2001 Fundraiser at the Jewish Federation of Central New Jersey in Scotch Plains, special circus activities were offered to children. Pictured, above, Elijah Rockman, 3 1/2, enjoyed some of the circus fun.

Cheri Rogowsky for The Times

Vito Gagliardi Expected to be Named New Commissioner of Education

By SUSAN M. DYCKMAN
Specially Written for The Times

The former Superintendent of Union County Vocational-Technical Schools, Vito Gagliardi, is the likely candidate to succeed David C. Hespe as New Jersey's Commissioner of Education.

Mr. Hespe, who was named Commissioner in April 1999 under former Governor Christine Todd Whitman, will step down March 2. He has

accepted a position as visiting professor in the college of education at Rowan University.

When asked about the status of Mr. Gagliardi's nomination, Anthony D'Elia in the Office of Public Information at the State Department of Education said only that Mr. Gagliardi's name had been mentioned as a replacement for Mr. Hespe.

While acknowledging Mr. Gagliardi's role as a close advisor on

education issues to Acting Governor Donald T. DiFrancesco, Mr. D'Elia emphasized, "To our knowledge, he (Mr. DiFrancesco) has not sent the name to the Senate" for confirmation.

Under New Jersey law, once the Governor has nominated a candidate for a Cabinet position, that name is presented to the Senate for review and approval.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12



A BIG SUCCESS...Members of the Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School Leadership Council display some of the hats they have collected for their "Hats Off to Kids with Cancer" project.

Cheri Rogowsky for The Times

'Hat Drive' for Kids With Cancer Rewarding Success for HS Students

By SUSAN M. DYCKMAN
Specially Written for The Times

It turned out to be a bigger undertaking than they originally anticipated, but seven members of Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School's (SPFHS) Student Leadership Conference (SLC) are hard at work on their "Hats Off to Kids with Cancer" project.

Seniors Mike Stanley and Christin Kurz; junior Jacqueline L'Heureux; Sophomores Ray DiNizo, Monique Lemus and Mats Notoane; and freshman Tracy Salmon teamed up with Scotch Plains resident and Board of Education member Linda Nelson last September for the high school's two and a half-day leadership camp.

Out of that weekend and subsequent meetings, the students decided to implement a service program which Ray's mom had read about last year, collecting hats for children with cancer. Of all the community service ideas they talked about, said Ray, the hat idea was "an original." Though not part of the start-up team, his sister, Jennie, has been very active in the collection campaign.

According to Tracy, the students

particularly liked the idea of helping children. They are planning to give the hats to St. Barnabas and Robert Wood Johnson Medical Centers, which treat approximately 600 children for cancer every year.

In planning how to collect new hats from fellow students at SPFHS, the group decided to use posters and announcements to spread the word. Christin also wrote letters to all 53 homeroom teachers to enlist their support. As an added incentive, the group promised a pizza party to the homeroom that turned in the most hats. Math teacher Nicholas Drakos' junior/senior homeroom was the big winner, collecting approximately 100 hats.

"There was a lot of behind-the-scenes work," explained Mrs. Nelson, who noted that the Fanwood A&P donated 75 bags to aid in the collection effort, which took place January 16 to 31. She also mentioned the group had received a small donation

from Schering-Plough, which students will use to purchase more hats.

By January 31, students had collected about 200 useable hats from their classmates. Many are clearly new, still bearing the tags from the stores where they were purchased. Though there were a fair number of hats that were unacceptable because they had obviously been used, the collectors were generally pleased with the response to their campaign.

Ray would like to continue the program next year. Jennie DiNizo believes SPFHS should add the hat collection to the school's list of annual drives, right up there with food and clothing. The biggest challenge going forward will be to make it clear that donated hats must be new because that is all the hospitals will accept.

Though some of the students would like to personally deliver the hats to their future owners, they brainstormed

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12

INDEX

A&E.....Page 22	Editorial.....Page 4	Religious.....Page 11
Business.....Page 19	Education.....Page 8	Social.....Page 6
Classifieds.....Page 18	Obituary.....Page 10	Sports.....Page 13

Westfield Recreation Department Revamping Pool Signup Process

By DEBORAH MADISON
Specially Written for The Times

WESTFIELD-- After last year's registration procedure for Westfield's Municipal Pool resulted in lines of hundreds of registrants wrapped around the Municipal Building by 8 a.m. on opening day, the Recreation Department has decided to revamp and hopefully, streamline the procedure.

Instead of previous pool members having to apply in person on opening day of registration, as was the case last year, they will now be able to register in person or by mail.

The Recreation Department processed more than 1,800 applications on the first day of registration last year.

Under the revised plan, last year's previous pool members will receive their applications by mail. They will have six weeks, between March 1 and April 15, to register either by mail or in person. If full pool membership capacity is not reached by April 15, then all Westfield residents, including previous members as well as non-previous members can register between April 16 and April 30, or until full capacity is reached.

If full capacity is still not reached by April 30, then non-residents and all the prior groups will have an opportunity to register in May. However, all registration after April 16 must be done in person.

Mr. Burrell explained that because the Recreation Department could not predict whether full capacity would be reached after the first window of opportunity, all registrations after April 16 had to be done in person.

"We generally have a 20 percent turnover in membership each year, so I expect that there will be room for new members, however, we won't definitely know that until after April 15," he said. Pool membership was approximately 88 percent residents and 12 percent non-residents last year, Mr. Burrell said.

This process, he added, should

eliminate the long lines that occurred opening day of registration last year.

The new procedure will need to go before the Town Council as an ordinance change and pass through two readings, before being approved. The first reading of the new ordinance took place at Tuesday night's Town Council meeting.

Pool fees for this year have been revised. The new pool rates are as follows: Resident family: \$210 up from \$200; family with child-care: \$265, up from \$250; husband and wife: \$170, up from \$160, and individual: \$125, up from \$120. These

rates represent a 5 percent increase over last year, Mr. Burrell reported.

The senior citizen and handicapped permit rates, \$60 and \$2, respectively, remained unchanged. Non-resident fees will be as follows: family: \$395, up from \$375; family with child-care, \$520, up from \$495; husband and wife: \$330, up from \$315, and individual: \$235, up from \$225. Those fees were raised approximately 5 percent as well.

Senior citizen non-resident: \$105, and handicapped non-resident, \$2, remained unchanged.



Ingrid McKinley for The Times
RESERVATIONS RECOMMENDED...Last year, streams of people wrapped around the Municipal Building in Westfield to register for membership to the Memorial Pool in town. Pictured, above, clerks at the Recreation Office had their hands full helping registrants.

Hat Drive

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

other ideas in the event such a visit cannot happen. They considered putting labels that say, "From Your Friends at Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School" onto plastic bags containing individual caps.

"I'm particularly proud of how the students have stuck with the program even when it turned out to be significantly more work than we first thought," said Mrs. Nelson.

The Student Leadership Conference includes approximately 100 SPFHS students, as well as Principal David Heisey and community representatives Larry Naldi and Charlie Roll. SPFHS social studies teacher Andrea Karanik serves as faculty advisor to the SLC.

Ian Doebber Inducted Into Honor Society

SCOTCH PLAINS -- Ian Doebber of Scotch Plains has been inducted into the Bucknell University chapter of Tau Beta Pi national engineering honor society.

A junior majoring in mechanical engineering, Ian is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Doebber of Scotch Plains. He is a graduate of Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School.

A dean's list student and member of Alpha Lambda Delta honor society, Ian was one of 20 students selected for an innovative program designed to teach future managers and engineers how to work together in the global economy of the 21st century.

The two-summer program, the Institute for Leadership in Technology and Management, brings management and engineering students together for a summer of intensive course work and field trips during the first year. During the second summer, students serve internships with company managers, engineers and executives.

While at Bucknell University, Ian has been a member of the men's swim team and Lambda Chi Alpha fraternity. He is studying in Australia during the spring semester of his junior year.



Cheri Rogowsky for The Times
SPECIAL GIFT...During the Super Sunday 2001 Fundraiser at the Jewish Federation of Central New Jersey in Scotch Plains, Acting Governor Donald T. DiFrancesco received a special Yarmulke from the UJA Federation. The Yarmulke was inscribed with the name, "Donny D." Funds raised will benefit Kosher Meals on Wheels, camp scholarships, Jewish education, provide stipends for student travel and study in Israel and support other programs and projects.

Calendar, 2001-2002 Budget Top Agenda Items at BOE Meeting

By MELISSA BETKOWSKI
Specially Written for The Times

WESTFIELD -- A discussion over the pros and cons of a Sunday graduation was a major sticking point for the Westfield Board of Education during its regular meeting held Tuesday night.

The board, in discussing the 2001-2002 school calendar was faced with a dilemma over when to schedule graduation.

In 1999, the Westfield High School (WHS) graduation was held on a Sunday for the first time in the school's history. Many people involved in the administration felt that the Sunday graduation, also Father's Day, was a great success.

However, according to WHS Principal Dr. Robert G. Petix, the teachers were told in 1999 that the Sunday graduation was a one-time event, and he did not feel that the faculty would be receptive to having graduation once again on a Sunday.

The 2001-2002 graduation is tentatively set for Sunday, June 23, also Father's Day.

Dr. Petix noted that some faculty members raised objections over the fact that the graduation was held on Father's Day, but also a Sabbath.

Board Member Kimberly Rhodes argued strongly for the graduation to be held on the Sunday, stating that it is much easier for family members to be involved in the ceremony when work schedules do not have to be taken into consideration.

Ms. Rhodes posed a question as to whether or not the graduation could happen without the faculty involvement.

Dr. Petix noted that the presence of staff at the graduation is important to the students, and that it is necessary for the faculty to be in attendance in order to have a successful graduation.

Superintendent of Schools Dr. William J. Foley said that the graduation is not something that can be tinkered with. "You can't run a pilot graduation," he said, in response to Ms. Rhodes' question of whether volunteers could carry out the tasks normally assigned to staff members on the day of graduation.

Discussing the calendar further, Dr. Petix raised some concern over the layout of the calendar, with an

eight-week stretch without a break in April and May. The Spring Vacation is tentatively scheduled for March 25-29, with Passover being the 28th and 29th and Good Friday the 29th.

According to the calendar the way it is, the next day off for students would be on May 27 for Memorial Day.

The board considered the issue raised by Dr. Petix and discussed moving the Spring Vacation to April 1-5.

Dr. Petix told members of the board that he would suggest not closing schools on September 19, the second day of Rosh Hashanah, October 8 (Columbus Day) and February 19 (the second day of the Presidents' Weekend break).

Discussion was also held on the issue of the four-hour sessions for Grades K-5 in October and November for Parent Conferences.

The board voted 6-2 to send the calendar back to the Policies Committee for further consideration.

During the meeting, the board also heard from Business Administrator and Board Secretary Robert A. Berman about the 2001-2002 Budget. Currently, the tentative budget stands at approximately \$56 million.

Mr. Berman discussed the meetings held by the Finance Committee which addressed budgetary concerns. Board President Danielle Walsh said "the budget is a work in progress."

Mr. Berman informed the board about the district's applications for Retroactive Debt Service aid from the State of New Jersey. He said that 15 of the district's 23 applications have been approved, and still others are being appealed.

The tentative tax impact for the 2001-2002 budget is approximately \$51 million, with an increase of nine cents per \$100 of assessed property value.

Mr. Berman said that the board looks forward to adopting the tentative 2001-2002 Budget at its meeting on March 6.

Also addressed at the meeting were the concerns of members of the board over the starting time at the high school.

Currently, first period starts at 7:30 a.m., with the day ending at 2:45 p.m.

According to Dr. Petix, students are not required to take a nine period day, but may opt to go from 7:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. or from 8:17 a.m. to 2:45 p.m. Dr. Petix noted, however, that students may begin later but may not get all of their course choices if they opt for an eight period day. There are certain courses, he said, that must be offered during first period.

He said that the nine period day was begun at the high school in 1972 as a split session to alleviate overcrowding problems in the school at that time. When the population dropped, he said, the option was there to go back to a later start time, but then the students wouldn't have the options that a nine period day offered.

Board Member Eileen Satkin said that the literature keeps reinforcing the fact that students do not do well being in school so early in the morning.

Annamarie Puleio said that the board is charged with the task of "evaluating whether past practice is the best practice."

Ms. Puleio noted that the choices that the board is faced with are not an either-or dichotomy, but that the board has many options to examine.

"We have to take an honest look at the issue or we haven't done a good job," she said.

A question was raised by Board Member Anne Riegel over whether starting a half-hour later would be substantive, or whether other options would need to be evaluated.

Mrs. Walsh noted that the board needs to decide what it is looking to do in terms of this issue before proceeding.

The board will hold a special meeting tonight at 8 p.m. at Roosevelt Intermediate School to discuss the conditions of the district's athletic fields.

Fanwood Lamps

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1
Cultural Arts Center property.

The Downtown Revitalization Coordinator noted that new businesses coming into the borough will be invited to incorporate the Victorian light fixtures into their plans as well.

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SP Council

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ing. Mr. Atkins also fired his annual salvo at the local property tax situation, saying that problems with local taxes "have nothing to do with Republicans or Democrats in Scotch Plains."

"The problem," he said, "rests with the property tax structure at the state level. Until there is substantive change at the state level, there can be no substantial relief for taxpayers on fixed incomes or senior citizens on fixed incomes."

He also pointed out that about 40 percent of education taxes are paid for by the state government in New Jersey, while the nationwide average is about 50 percent.

"This 10 percent difference is considerable," he said, adding that, "the more the state Supreme Court forces all taxpayers to pay for improved schools and education" in the 30 distressed school districts, "the more dollars will be coming from taxpayers in Scotch Plains."

Vito Gagliardi

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

During his February 5 agenda-setting address to the New Jersey legislature, Mr. DiFrancesco made it clear that education is among his priorities for the coming 10 months. The acting governor said he would direct the new commissioner of education to work with legislators to create the foremost new teacher training and retention program in the nation.

Neither Mr. Gagliardi nor the Governor's Office could not be reached for comment on the status of the nomination.

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