



SCOTCH PLAINS

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# THE TIMES



of

## Scotch Plains – Fanwood

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SPECIAL GUEST...Acting Governor Donald T. DiFrancesco made a special appearance at Brookside Park on May 20 for the Jim Airey ALS Awareness Tournament. Pictured, above, Mr. DiFrancesco meets with baseball fans.

### Fanwood Downtown Block Eyed as Redevelopment Area

By SUZETTE F. STALKER  
Specially Written for The Times

Hoping it will spur economic revitalization, the Fanwood Planning Board voted 8 to 1 last week in favor of recommending that the governing body designate a full block of downtown land, which includes the Dean Oil site, as an area in need of redevelopment.

The block, bordered by South, Martine and LaGrande Avenues and Second Street, was the subject of a study done earlier this year by Abeles Phillips Preiss and Shapiro, a planning and real estate consultant firm based in New York City and New Brunswick.

During a special Planning Board meeting on May 16, planner Richard Preiss presented a report on his firm's findings to the board and some 20 audience members, among them property owners and tenants on the

block who had been sent letters notifying them about the meeting.

Prepared on behalf of Mayor Louis C. Jung and the Borough Council, the study focused on the entire 6.5-acre block, made up of 24 individual tax lots, to determine whether it met requirements for designation as an area in need of redevelopment under New Jersey's Local Redevelopment and Housing Law, which was passed

in 1992.

The comprehensive study involved surveys of land use, property conditions and occupancy-vacancy elements; reviews of the current Master Plan, Land Use Ordinance and municipal records related to the properties, and discussions with borough officials, according to Mr. Preiss.

The firm also analyzed soil and  
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### Full-Day Vo-Tech Program Concerns Local School Districts

By SUSAN M. DYCKMAN  
Specially Written for The Times

The state's increased requirements for high school graduation make it difficult for a "shared time" vocational-technical program like that offered at the Union County Vocational-Technical Schools (UCVTS) in Scotch Plains to work the way it used to, according to Superintendent Thomas J. Bistocchi.

"There's not enough time in a child's day to fulfill the requirements," he said.

The school has proposed a \$12 million expansion that would allow the school to offer a full-time academic and vocational program. The proposal calls for construction of a new 80,000-square-foot building for classrooms, science and computer labs, fitness center and auditorium.

In a shared time program, a student receives academic instruction at his local high school, then travels to UCVTS for vocational training. While students spend three periods on the UCVTS campus, Mr. Bistocchi said they spend the equivalent of one period or more traveling between schools.

Of New Jersey's 21 county vocational-technical schools, approximately 12 are full-time programs.

The UCVTS superintendent main-



Union County Vocational-Technical Schools

tains a shift to a full-time program, that offers both academic and vocational courses at one location, is necessary for the program to remain a viable option for students seeking vocational opportunities.

"It's the only way to get the kids to come," said Mr. Bistocchi.

Like Scotch Plains-Fanwood, Westfield High School (WHS) currently enrolls approximately 20 students in the UCVTS program, though that number varies from year to year.

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### Slower Economy Impacts Some Area Stores; Talbot's, Target Report Increase In Sales Volume

By FRED ROSSI  
Specially Written for The Times

A year ago, it almost seemed that the good times would last forever. The national economy was barreling ahead into the 10th year of its expansion — one that had seen unemployment drop to its lowest level in decades; one that had turned a triple-digit federal budget deficit into a triple-digit surplus; one that had provided stock market investors with trillions of dollars in capital gains, and one that had given consumers reason to believe that everything was somehow affordable and nothing was unattainable.

What a difference a year makes. The economy slammed on its brakes

late last year as stocks skidded into a bear market and whispers about a recession grew louder. Joblessness has risen as layoffs have mounted. Stock losses have forced many to pare back their spending. Consumers are more nervous than they were six or seven months ago. Locally, the picture is a mixed one, as discovered this week during a quick check with area businesses and business leaders.

With no businesses in town closing their doors recently, Debbie Schmidt, Executive Director of the Westfield Area Chamber of Commerce, said it's "a good sign that things are going fine."

Typically, she told *The Times of Scotch Plains-Fanwood*, after the

winter holidays, those businesses that had struggled just to make it through the December shopping season then close their doors.

But that wasn't the case this year in Westfield. In fact, she said, "people are looking to open in Westfield."

Pointing to the recent revival in the stock market, Ms. Schmidt expressed her hope that the worst of the economy's decline is over. She also noted that Talbot's, the national clothing retailer with a store in Westfield, just announced its sales were up 10 percent for the last fiscal year. In addition, Target, although not located in Westfield, was cited by Ms. Schmidt as also having reported healthy sales figures.

"So I think that the retail sector is doing well," she said.

She added that Trader Joe's, the specialty grocer on Elm Street, is serving some 7,000 customers a week and "doing very well," according to a recent conversation she had with the store's manager. And banks in Westfield are also healthy. While there is consolidation occurring in

the industry, "we're not seeing closures due to a lack of activity."

Ray Pardon, President of the Scotch Plains Business and Professional Association, says that, overall, "general walk-around trade and business activity in town seems to be down."

He told *The Times* his feeling is that the current economic slowdown may be "more of a psychological recession than a financial one." Seeing big losses in the stock market, reading about layoffs and paying more for gasoline "sets up a negative psychological outlook in people's minds," he said.

A bright side to a slower economy for local merchants, Mr. Pardon said, is that "people tend to stay home and not take longer vacations," thus making it more likely that they'll spend their money closer to home.

Mr. Pardon added that business at his own store, Nuts 'n' Plenty on Park Avenue, has "definitely slowed down. I see it in my numbers." Another indicator to him of less-rosy times is the increase in the number of cus-

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### Local Consumers Forced to Dig Deeper At Gasoline Pumps

By FRED ROSSI  
Specially Written for The Times

Although the staggering 30 to 40 cent rise in gasoline prices of the past two months appears to have ended, or at least stabilized, the fact remains that, as the summer holiday season begins this weekend, gas prices are, for the most part, the highest they've ever been. A year ago, prices at the pump shot up to about \$1.50 for a gallon of regular gasoline.

However, prices remained steady throughout much of last fall and began to decline during the winter, with prices at some gas stations dropping to as low as \$1.29 per gallon.

Two months ago, however, price increases started to become an almost daily occurrence as the nation's energy woes began to affect consumers across the country. Gas prices in our area are now well above \$1.50 for a gallon of regular, and some stations are charging nearly \$2 for a gallon of premium.

Some are blaming the Bush Administration for its admitted lack of options to stabilize gas prices. Others blame the dearth of new oil refineries in the United States, while some point the finger at everyone's favorite scapegoats — OPEC (Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries) and the oil companies — for the rapid rise in gas prices this spring. Whoever is at fault, the fact is that consumers have to dig much deeper in their wallets in order to fill up their gas tanks.

Susan Konray of Westfield told *The Times of Scotch Plains-Fanwood* that the Bush Administration "is probably orchestrating a gas crisis in order to push through policies to lower emission and pollution standards and allow the industry to burn dirtier fuel oil and coal. The people will pay and big business will reap huge benefits."

Dale Cassidy from New York said that, despite the spike in gas prices,



File photo of The Times

**PAYING THE PRICE AT THE PUMP...Customers must dig deeper in their pockets to pay for gas, as prices are, for the most part, the highest they have ever been.**

she is "still doing normal stuff."

She said that partly because her husband's car takes premium gas, she is "writing down places where I see cheap gas."

Gina Bonneau, visiting the area from the shore area, explained that the increase in gas prices has been a sort of blessing in disguise.

"I had been thinking about how to increase my physical activity in my busy schedule," she added.

She said the higher gas prices made her realize "that I didn't have to drive to the boardwalk or a park to accomplish my walking routine. I can walk to do errands such as going to the post office or local stores in a healthy way, while saving on gasoline."

Suzanne Dominguez of Milltown said she "considers the rise in gas prices to be a major drain on my pocketbook." She said that "instead of spending around \$20 a week, now the expense looks more like \$25 or \$30. Over a year's time, that'll add that, INDEP

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### Parade Grand Marshal Michael Rossi Recalls, First Hand, Pearl Harbor

By FRED ROSSI  
Specially Written for The Times

The sound of some unexplained nearby explosions wasn't going to keep Staff Sergeant Michael Rossi from his Sunday morning routine. Stationed at Schofield Barracks in Hawaii, Mr. Rossi, a few months from his 24th birthday, liked to eat breakfast by himself on Sundays.

Born and raised in the Bronx, he had joined the Army in July 1940 and was stationed in what was then the territory of Hawaii with the 25th Infantry Division of the 89th Battalion.

Next Monday, Mr. Rossi, a former Chief of Police in Scotch Plains and the father of Councilman Frank S. Rossi, will serve as Grand Marshal of the Memorial Day Parade in Scotch Plains and Fanwood.

The theme of this year's celebration is the upcoming 60th anniversary of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, which ushered the United States into World War II.

Earlier this week, Mr. Rossi, after some cajoling and, with some reluctance, spoke with *The Times of Scotch Plains-Fanwood* about his experiences on that "date which will live in infamy."

In his dormitory on that early Sunday morning of December 7, 1941, Mr. Rossi, in Hawaii for 14 months, was preparing to go out for breakfast when he heard what he said was "a tremendous blast" at nearby Wheeler Field, home to a fleet of military planes — a blast that caused the concrete barracks building to vibrate.

A fellow soldier, still in his teens, according to Mr. Rossi's estimate,



Michael Rossi

was so unnerved by the unexpected explosions that Mr. Rossi spent some time trying to calm him.

"I told him there'd been earthquakes in the area," he recalled telling the green soldier in an attempt to pacify him, "and that possibly this was just an earthquake." He also broached the possibility that some practice bombings had gone slightly awry.

Mr. Rossi noted that the older soldiers outside his building did not seem to be concerned.

"Nothing was going to keep me from going to breakfast," Mr. Rossi said, so he got dressed and headed outside. As he stepped into the early morning Hawaiian sun around 8 a.m., he saw a fighter plane, decorated with a red rising sun insignia, coming in towards the barracks building.

Mr. Rossi said the anecdotes about Japanese pilots smiling at the Americans during the bombing attacks were true, because he saw it himself. "They were smiling in satisfaction at the shock on our faces."

He then watched as a lieutenant

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Courtesy of Michael Rossi

**SERVING WITH PRIDE...Staff Sergeant Michael Rossi, far left, poses with fellow soldiers in Auckland, New Zealand. The snapshot, which was taken in October of 1943, also includes soldiers from New York, Texas, Michigan, Chicago, Iowa and New Jersey.**

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CYAN YELLOW MAGENTA BLACK

## Parade Grand Marshal Rossi Recalls Pearl Harbor Attack

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pulled out his .45 pistol and fired, in "an act of defiance," at the Japanese plane. "The first rule of thumb for a soldier under attack is to arm himself," Mr. Rossi said.

So he went back into the barracks, broke down the padlocked door to the supply room, and armed himself, joined by his fellow soldiers, some of whom didn't properly equip themselves.

The group then stayed inside the building and waited for the attacks to end, which they did two hours later, after a second wave of Japanese attacks. Afterwards, Mr. Rossi and his unit shipped out to positions that had been determined as a result of pre-attack planning and maneuvers designed to react to just such an attack.

On their way to their position, Mr. Rossi and fellow members of his unit saw the destruction wrought on the Pacific fleet by the Japanese.

"We passed Wheeler Field. That was devastation. There were lines of planes with holes that made them as porous as you can imagine," Mr. Rossi recalled. He also saw hangars at the base destroyed.

"We passed Pearl Harbor, and I could see one ship upended in the water," protruding at a ninety degree angle, the veteran said.

Mr. Rossi's unit, which included James Jones, who later wrote "From Here to Eternity," took up their position in a jungle area. "There were mosquitoes, there were injuries, there were infections," Mr. Rossi said. "The boys without equipment were in bad shape."

In March 1933, a teen-aged Mr. Rossi had attended the inauguration of President Franklin D. Roosevelt. He said hearing the President's words on the radio in Hawaii in the wake of the Japanese attack nearly nine years later had gratified him.

"I was just a bit player in a real tragic drama," he said. More than 2,400 were killed and close to 1,200 injured in the attack on Pearl Harbor.

Afterwards, Mr. Rossi served in the Pacific Theater, including Guadalcanal and Luzon. His actions in Luzon earned him a Silver Star commendation. Mr. Rossi was discharged from the service in July 1945, a month before the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and two months before the Japanese formally surrendered.

It would be several decades before he would return to the scene of the Sunday morning breakfast that never was. His division had formed an alumni association of sorts and, in 1974, to commemorate the 25th anniversary of its formation, Mr. Rossi and the group traveled to Hawaii.

He initially told *The Times* he was reluctant to talk much about his experiences of nearly 60 years ago. But what his interviewer expected would be a brief chat turned into more than 90 enjoyable minutes of recollections, anecdotes humorous, sad and interesting, observations — some of them off the record — and the sharing of various photographs and official communications relating to Mr. Rossi's war-time experiences.

It was ironic that, as the conversation with Mr. Rossi was ending, a television in another room of his Scotch Plains home was tuned to the news that construction of a controversial World War II Memorial in Washington, D.C. had been approved.

When asked his opinion of the memorial, Mr. Rossi pulled from his wallet a card showing him to be a charter member of the association that had led the fight to build the memorial.

Mr. Rossi was never asked whether he and his fellow soldiers from that war deserve the moniker of "the greatest generation," but after spending some time with him, it's hard to argue with that description, given the overwhelming odds they faced at the outset and the grit and determination they displayed in winning what author Studs Terkel called "the good war."

## Vo-Tech Expansion

**CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1**  
Superintendent of Schools in Westfield, Dr. William J. Foley, said that while a full-time program might be a viable option, he favors a shared-time approach. "They're a little young to get too specialized," he said.

The time factor "is not a compelling argument for us," said Dr. Foley, who noted it takes only 10 minutes for Westfield students to get to the UCVTS campus by bus. He did say, however, if time is a problem, the school day might need to be extended.

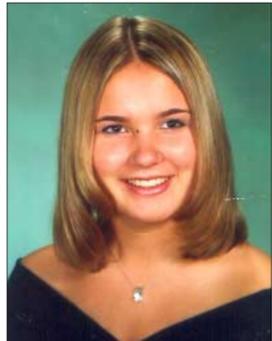
Mr. Bistocchi cited a 1992 study conducted under former UCVTS superintendent and present State Education Commissioner Vito Gagliardi, which suggested the school turn to a full-time delivery system. He also commented on the reimbursement opportunities presented by the School Facilities Construction and Financing Act, saying it was an "opportunity" to expand the program.

UCVTS currently enrolls 600 to 700 students on a shared time basis. With a shift to full time, enrollment would drop closer to 500 students.

Superintendent Bistocchi does not anticipate a "dramatic impact" on local districts though, tuition would certainly increase for a full-time program.

It costs Scotch Plains-Fanwood \$2,500 per student for the existing shared time program. In discussing the issue, some board members have expressed concern about the impact of increased costs to the district for a full-day vo-tech program.

"It's all about making sure the opportunities are there," said Mr. Bistocchi, who predicted a "devastating" impact on the county economy if the UCVTS program ceased to exist.



**READY FOR COLLEGE...** Scotch Plains resident Nina Sado, the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Janusz Sado of Scotch Plains, will attend Fairleigh Dickinson University's Teaneck-Hackensack Campus this fall. She plans to major in pre-dentistry. Nina will be a 2001 graduate of Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School.



**READY TO PLAY...** The Second Garden State Open Table Tennis Tournament was held in the Westfield National Guard Armory last Saturday and Sunday. Sponsored by "Lily Yip Sports, Inc.," participants included 10 players from the North Jersey Developmental Center. The event helped prepare for the Special Olympic Summer Games to be held from Friday to Sunday, June 1 to 3. See story on Page 5.

## Fanwood Planning Bd. Supports Having Block Designated as Redevelopment Area

**CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1**  
groundwater contamination progress reports regarding the long-vacant Dean Oil site, which spans four lots at the southwestern corner of the block, at LaGrande Avenue and Second Street.

Situated at the key intersection of South and Martine Avenues and directly opposite the Fanwood train station, the block is considered pivotal to the economic vitality of the borough's downtown. Its diverse commercial uses include retail, office, warehouse and light industry.

During the course of the study, Mr. Preiss said his firm looked at individual lots on the block in terms of seven statutory criteria for establishment of a redevelopment area, as set forth under the Local Redevelopment and Housing Law.

Criteria categories include buildings which are not conducive to proper living or working conditions, those which have fallen into disrepair or are no longer used; land which has remained unimproved for a decade and, for various reasons, has no likely prospects for development through private capital, and property which reflects an increasing or total lack of proper utilization.

Mr. Preiss stated that while he found some properties to be "in fairly good condition," particularly retail stores along Martine Avenue, others on the block exhibited some physical deterioration. He also noted the existence of several lots which he said were "underutilized" or vacant.

Of the 24 lots evaluated by his firm, "all but seven meet at least one of the statutory criteria" for designation as a redevelopment area, Mr. Preiss observed. In his firm's report, it was recommended that "all the properties within the study area should therefore be included within the redevelopment area."

The report additionally determined that "the exclusion of only a few parcels could potentially restrict future redevelopment activities. Moreover, these properties can be readily incorporated into a redevelopment plan as a whole."

Mr. Preiss characterized shops lining Martine Avenue, defined as the "core retail area" of the downtown, as having "consistent retail frontage and a pedestrian-friendly environment."

He said that while South Avenue also features some small retail businesses, they are negatively impacted by gaps in retail frontage along that end of the block, plus underutilized adjacent lots.

In addition, the planner said, the parking area which occupies most of the central area of that block is "not integrated with the lots to which it is adjacent and which it serves."

He observed that there were, on average, only two property sales every five years on the block during the 1990s, which he termed as very slow turnover for property in such a prime location.

The report indicated several factors were responsible for this trend, including age of the buildings — the last of which were built in the 1970s — and maintenance issues. It also mentioned the rela-

tively small size of the properties, as well as and soil and groundwater contamination concerns, particularly involving the Dean Oil site.

Mr. Preiss said designating the block as a redevelopment area would allow elected officials to take a more "proactive" approach in addressing development problems there "on a comprehensive basis."

He also said such status would serve as a "very useful tool for a public-private partnership," through which Fanwood's municipal government could create a plan for improving the area that conforms to its goals and the borough's Master Plan. The redevelopment plan could then be implemented by the private sector.

According to Mr. Preiss' report, a redevelopment plan would encourage private redevelopment and/or rehabilitation efforts by existing property owners wherever possible, as well as promoting "infill retail development" and second-story additions for offices and affordable apartments.

The report also anticipated such a plan would call for "adequate off-street parking, with improved traffic circulation and loading facilities," as well as "good pedestrian linkages" and coordination of future development activity "with improvements to the train station parking lot and other public and private improvements to the downtown," among other objectives.

While the plan would also give the borough, as stated in the report, "the power of eminent domain to acquire property and/or easements should redevelopment efforts on the part of existing property owners and businesses prove ineffective," Mr. Preiss emphasized that not all properties within the block would be earmarked for redevelopment, nor would property arbitrarily be taken out of an owner's hands.

Helen Ling, the owner of Enchantments and Enchantments Too on South Avenue, refuted Mr. Preiss' conclusion that retailers along that section of the block were not doing as well as they could be. Questioned by the proprietor, Mr. Preiss conceded that he had not spoken with her personally about her business.

"This is a viable retail district," Mrs. Ling said, adding that customers have told her they prefer shopping there rather than on Route 22 or at malls.

Mrs. Ling, who has been in business there for 11 years, expressed concern that officials had already decided to designate the block as a redevelopment area.

She also wondered whether officials would give any weight to a report recently presented to the governing body by the borough's Long Range Planning Committee.

Mrs. Ling said the report represented "thousands of hours of volunteers' work" over the past two years in preparation of strategic goals and objectives for the community over the next decade.

Board Chairman Gregory Cummings responded that the purpose of the meeting was to allow property and business owners to have input regarding whether the block should be designated as a redevelopment area. He also agreed that the

Long Range Planning Committee's report was important to the overall decision process.

During a discussion of how redevelopment area status could affect successful revitalization of the Dean Oil site, Mr. Preiss said that borough officials could stipulate that a developer agree to implement cleanup efforts at the property as a condition of being designated to develop the site.

Although the Planning Board voiced unanimous support for efforts to revitalize the block, several — including Andrew MacDonald, who ultimately voted against the idea — voiced reservations over the potential fiscal impact on the borough of implementing a redevelopment plan.

However, Mayor Jung said there are financial avenues, such as grant money, to help put a redevelopment plan into motion. He stated that "it's time to do something" about improving that section of the downtown.

With the Planning Board having endorsed designation of the block as a redevelopment area, the next step is for the governing body to hold a hearing to determine if it should accept the Planning Board's recommendation.

If it is approved, a planner would likely be retained to create a redevelopment plan for the block, it was noted during last week's meeting.

## Economy

**CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1**  
tomers paying for their orders with credit cards rather than cash.

One area where conflicting stories were heard was the local travel industry.

Claudia Santo, with Sojour Travel on Elm Street, said she had "absolutely" seen a slowdown in bookings in all areas of travel. She first noticed a downturn early this year.

But Jean Ann Honig, with SeaBound Cruises/World Cruises Ltd. on Front Street in Scotch Plains, stated she has seen a 20 percent increase in bookings so far this year.

"The first quarter was better than usual for cruising," she told *The Times*, attributing the rise to the fact that cruises typically have a fixed price with nearly everything included in that price. "The cruise lines tell us that their sales are flat," she said, but her business has bucked that trend.

## SCOTCH PLAINS POLICE BLOTTER

### MONDAY, MAY 14

•Two Scotch Plains boys, ages 13 and 14, were reportedly taken into custody for shooting paint ball guns at street signs on the south side of town. Both boys were released to their parents.

•A Plainfield Avenue resident reported that someone had endorsed six checks totaling approximately \$3,000 using his name and bank account number. The checks were from accounts at banks in Newark and Irvington. The incident occurred during the end of April.

•Craig K. Gallagher, 22, of New Providence, Craig Grimsley, 18, and Ty K. Krashoff, 37, of Eatontown; and Michael J. Debuhr, 23, of Mountaintop, were arrested for possession of suspected heroin pursuant to an investigation of criminal mischief at a Route 22 fast food restaurant at approximately 10 p.m.

Gallagher had additional charges of criminal mischief, possession of a hypodermic needle and possession of a knife.

During the investigation police reported that a 17-year-old New Providence boy was taken to Muhlenberg Hospital by ambulance for observation after ingesting an unknown substance. The boy was released from the hospital to his parents.

Juvenile charges are pending. Gallagher was released on \$7,000 bail, set by Scotch Plains Municipal Judge Brian Levine. The other adults were released on summons.

**TUESDAY, MAY 15**  
•A Westfield Road resident reported that someone had opened a credit card account using his personal information causing a debt of approximately \$11,000.

**WEDNESDAY, MAY 16**  
•Arthur Jude Muglia, 39, of North Plainfield was arrested and charged with

## Memorial Day Plans in SP-F

**CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1**  
The line of march is as follows: the Scotch Plains and Fanwood police departments, who will lead the parade followed by American Legion Post No. 209, the Legion Post No. 209 Ladies Auxiliary, the Sons of the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars Post No. 10122, St. Columcille Pipe Band, Grand Marshal Rossi, Pearl Harbor Survivors Association and the Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School Marching Band.

Acting Governor Donald T. DiFrancesco, State Assemblymen Richard H. Bagger and Thomas H. Kean, Jr., the Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders, Scotch Plains Mayor Martin L. Marks and the Township Council, Fanwood Mayor Louis C. Jung and the Borough Council, Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School Air Force Junior Reserve Officers Training Corps Color Guard and Cadets and the David Aaron Dixieland Band.

Scotch Plains Fire Department, Scotch Plains Lions Club, Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School Percussion Ensemble, UNICO, Italian-American Club, Fanwood Youth Organization Baseball, Fanwood-Scotch Plains YMCA Indian Guides, George Krauss Memorial Band, Scotch Plains Democratic Club, Martial Arts America, Willow Grove Presbyterian Church, Scotch Plains-Fanwood Girl Scouts, Fanwood Fire Department, Fanwood Lions Club, Harmony Dancers, Scotch Plains-Fanwood Youth Baseball Association, Scotch Plains Baptist Church, Moore-Ryan School of Irish Dance, Scotch Plains Rescue Squad, Plainfield High School Band, Scotch Plains-Fanwood Soccer Association, Karate in Motion, Club Scout Pack No. 98, Moderne Academie of Fine Arts, Fanwood Rescue Squad, Westfield Fire and Drum Corps, antique cars and the Westfield Community Band.

## Gas Prices

**CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1**  
up to more than I'd like to spend."

She added that the increased cost of gas "won't break me, but it does affect the way I think about going out for a nice drive in the country or my cross-country summer plans."

Cleis Murillo of Bound Brook drives a van she said she uses to shuttle around her mother, her sister and their kids. She said she had never worried about the wear-and-tear and the cost of gas.

"Now," she joked, "I practically charge (my family) at the door before they get in! It's a major financial undertaking to fill my tank now."

Local gas retailers say the price hikes are out of their hands as they are forced to pass on the higher prices they pay to their suppliers.

## Cameron Rogers Wins Second Place In Essay Contest

**SCOTCH PLAINS** — Cameron Rogers of Scotch Plains, a fifth grader at Wardlaw-Hartridge School in Edison, is the second place winner in an environmental essay contest for youngsters in grades five to eight invited to write a 250-word essay on "Why it is important to protect and conserve wildlife habitats such as the Arctic Wildlife Refuge."

Cameron won second prize for his essay, "Why, Because We Care." He will receive a \$500 U.S. Savings Bond.

He will be presented with his award and bond by U.S. Senator Jon Corzine on Sunday, May 20, from 2 to 4 p.m. at the Doubletree Hotel in Somerset.

## SCOTCH PLAINS POLICE BLOTTER

burglarizing a Park Avenue dry cleaners during a surveillance by Lieutenant Gerry Cline and Detective Joseph Mack of the North Plainfield Police Department.

Muglia had reportedly smashed the front window of the business and entered the store prior to being apprehended by the officers. Muglia had been a suspect in an ongoing investigation by that department. The incident occurred at approximately 12:45 p.m.

He was transferred to the Union County Jail in lieu of \$10,000 bail set by Judge Levine.

•Rafael Fries and Isaac Maldonado, both 18 and from Elizabeth, were arrested for simple assault upon a student at the Union County Vocational Schools on Raritan Road. The victim received minor cuts and bruises and was not transported to a hospital. Police said both suspects were former students at the School. They were released on summons.

•A Ravenswood Lane resident reported damage to the liner of their swimming pool. Police said it appeared that someone had caused three large tears by an unknown object. The exact time of the incident could not be determined.

•A Glenside Avenue resident reported that several pieces of jewelry were taken from a master bedroom. Police said there were no signs of forced entry. The incident occurred over the weekend.

**SATURDAY, MAY 19**  
•The theft of a bicycle was reported from in front of a Westfield Avenue business.

**SUNDAY, MAY 20**  
•Police received a report of damage to a door at a business in the 1600 block of East Second Street sometime over the weekend. It did not appear to be an attempt to gain entry.

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