

County Freeholder Incumbents, Challengers Face Off In Varied, Spirited Candidates Forum

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

CRANFORD — Viewers of last week's televised Union County Freeholder candidates forum in Cranford were given a spirited evening of widely contrasting views of the board's past five years under Democratic majority. While Democrats claimed Republicans were "out of touch" with county residents and not responsive to a slowing economy in the early to mid 1990s, Republicans said Democrats were voting 9-0 "behind closed doors" and were approving controversial projects where some questionable political relationships are evident.

Incumbent Democrats on the Freeholder Board, Daniel P. Sullivan of Elizabeth, Mary P. Ruotolo of Westfield and Board Vice Chairman Lewis Mingo, Jr. of Plainfield, defended their record against Republicans J. Ricky Badillo of Roselle Park, Andrew MacDonald of Fanwood and R. Jeffrey Schundler of Westfield.

The forum, sponsored by the Union County Leagues of Women Voters, featured a number of political shots from both sides.

Republicans were on the attack much of the evening, criticizing the Democrats for everything from supporting the building of a marine transfer station in Linden to accept New York City's trash, to approval of a medical waste facility in Rahway, to receiving new Crown Victorias for personal use.

Democrats said they took over a county from Republicans in 1997 that was in the midst of an economic downturn, resulting in the loss of 5,000 to 6,000 jobs, and challenged their opponents to propose new programs for the county.

"Under Republican leadership, Union County government was stagnant and a dramatic sense of hopelessness had set in. Union County's economy lagged behind in virtually every economic indication. From 1992 to 1995, nearly 6,600 jobs were lost," Freeholder Sullivan stated.

He said under the Democrats, who took control of the board in 1997 after five years of GOP leadership, "we've led Union County in one of the most prosperous economic periods in our history."

Mr. Schundler, the brother of gubernatorial candidate Bret Schundler, said the board needs to have "good government" through "checks and balances."

"Right now, you have 9-0 (votes) behind closed doors," he said.

Freeholder Sullivan, who joined the board in 1995, responded, "There are checks and balances in Union County. They happen in November. They're called elections."

"The voters make their decision based on who we are and what we do," he added.

One of the more heated exchanges occurred when candidates were asked their voting records on taxes. Mr. Sullivan noted that six out of the seven budgets he has voted on contained either a flat tax or a tax decrease. Mr. Mingo and Mrs. Ruotolo, who both joined the board in 1998, voted for a flat tax or tax decreases in three of the past four years on the board.

When Mr. MacDonald, a school teacher in Elizabeth and former Fanwood councilman, and Mr. Badillo, a corrections officer, failed to specifically answer the question, Mr. Sullivan was quick to respond.

He characterized Mr. MacDonald and Mr. Badillo as "Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers" for dancing around the question. Mr. Sullivan said Mr. Badillo and Mr. MacDonald raised taxes four and nine times, respectively, in their elective careers.

Mr. MacDonald shot back, respond-

ing that when he served in the 1970s and 1990s under Democratic majorities, during the gubernatorial administrations of Brendan Byrne and Jim Florio, the Democrats continued to force mandated programs on municipalities. This forced towns to raise local property taxes to pay for these programs.

Mr. Badillo said he has a reputation for cutting wasteful spending, adding that municipal taxes in his town have risen, on average, \$100 or less per household.

The hottest topic of the evening was the proposed \$50 million marine trash transfer station in the Tremley Point section of Linden and the subsequent "trash train" that would process 10,000 tons of New York's household trash per day. The trash would be shipped by rail south to landfills in Georgia and South Carolina.

The facility, proposed by Browning Ferris Industries, has been held up by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) over an ongoing investigation by the Attorney

General's office into what, if any possible involvement, Linden Mayor John T. Gregorio and his family may have had in having the facility built in the city.

The Mayor's son-in-law is said to be included in a partnership that owns the land earmarked for the facility and would reap significant revenue once it is up and running.

"Union County is quickly becoming the next trash dump of the United States," asserted Mr. Badillo, adding that the board approved a medical waste facility in Linden a few years ago.

Mr. Sullivan emphasized the county does not derive any profit from approving these types of facilities. Mrs. Ruotolo noted the medical waste is treated on site and disposed of. She said medical waste is not burned.

On the marine trash transfer facility, Freeholder Mingo accused Republicans of "mixing apples and oranges," explaining that the board has no jurisdiction in the Linden investigation.

Scotch Plains Recreation Events

Free Senior Bowling Party, Friday, October 19, 9:30 a.m. at Linden Lanes.

Anyone interested in this event must register at the Scotch Plains Recreation Department, located in Room 113 of the Scotch Plains Municipal Building, 430 Park Avenue. The party will include bowling, use of equipment, instructional assistance, coffee and donuts. All are invited, beginners as well as experienced bowlers. Bowlers must provide their own transportation. Please call the Recreation Office with any questions (908) 322-6700, extension no. 222.

Family Chemical Wizardry Workshop, 2 to 4 p.m., Sunday, December 9, Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School Cafeteria.

The workshop will feature hands-on activities and dynamic chemistry demonstrations for children in grades 1 through 6. Parents can participate in this program, which will feature making a glob from glue, copper coat nickels with electricity or collapsing a can with just air.

The cost is \$15 for residents and \$20 for non-residents. Registration is taking place in the Recreation Office through Friday, November 9.

Coaches Certification Program, Wednesday, November 7, 7 p.m., Multi-Purpose Room, Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School.

This Coaches Safety Training Program will be conducted with the cooperation of the Rutgers Youth Sports Council. The three-hour session meets the requirements to indemnify coaches for liability under Little League laws. Pre-registration is required.

Residents may call the Scotch Plains Recreation Department to register. There is a \$25.50 fee for non-residents which must be paid at the session.

Musical Instrument Workshop, Monday, October 29, to Monday, December 17.

Registration will take place Wednesday, October 17, to Wednesday, October 24, at the Recreation Office in the Municipal Building. All classes take place at the New Jersey Workshop for the Arts, 150-

152 East Broad Street, Westfield.

Classes are as follows:

Mondays at 3:30 p.m., beginner strings (for children in grades 3 through 6). This class includes violin, viola, cello and string bass. The cost is \$50 per child.

Beginner group piano (pre-school, 4 years to kindergarten age). The class is available at 10:30 a.m. or 1:30 p.m. at a cost of \$50 per child.

Tuesdays: beginning orchestra (one year experience required). The class, which cost \$64 per person, will be given from 6 to 6:45 p.m.

Junior Orchestra (first position on all four strings). The class will be held 6:45 to 7:30 p.m. at a cost of \$64 per person.

An additional cost will be charged for materials, which will be paid directly to the Workshop at the first session. Rental information will be available at the first session.

An adult must accompany pre-k and kindergarten children.

Radio City Tickets Are Now On Sale

The Scotch Plains Recreation Commission is sponsoring a trip to Radio City Music Hall on Tuesday, December 11. The bus will depart from the Green Forest Park parking lot at 3 p.m. for the 5 p.m. performance.

The bus will return to Scotch Plains immediately following the show. Residents can register from Monday, October 15 to Friday, November 9. Non-residents can register from Monday, October 29 to Friday, November 9. The cost is \$55 per ticket for residents and \$60 for non-residents.

Tickets will be sold on a first-come, first-served basis.

Vanity Fair Outlet Shopping Trip, Reading, Pa., Wednesday, November 7.

The bus will leave from Green Forest Park at 8:30 a.m. and return around 6:30 p.m. The cost is \$17 for residents and \$22 for non-residents \$22.

This fee includes transportation, a shopping bag and various food coupons. Those interested can register at the Scotch Plains Recreation Department in the Municipal Building, Room 113.

Westfield Recreation Events

Upcoming Events, Trips

Haunted House, Wednesday, October 31, 5 to 9 p.m. The cost of the haunted house is \$1 with children under 5 admitted for free.

Renault Winery Tour & Smithville Trip, Friday, October 26. The bus for this trip will leave at 9:15 a.m. The cost, including lunch, is \$52 per person.

Ellis Island Trip, Sunday, November 11. The cost is \$58 per person.

School House Rock, The Forum Theatre Company, Metuchen, Saturday, November 3.

The bus for this trip will depart at 10 a.m. The fee is \$22 per person.

Winnie The Pooh Christmas, The Forum Theatre Company, Metuchen.

The bus will depart for the theater at 9 a.m. and the cost is \$25 per person.

New Jersey Devils Tickets. Discount tickets are available for the Friday, November 9, game versus the Toronto Maple Leafs. Game time is 7:35 p.m. and the cost is \$40.

Fall Children Programs: Bowling, Mondays, 3:45 p.m., Linden Lanes.

The cost is \$6 per week and the program is open to youngsters ages 6 to 14.

Bumper Bowling, Wednesdays, Linden Lanes

This program, for pre-kindergarten and kindergarten-aged children, includes two times to bowl: 9:30 a.m. or 12:30 p.m. The cost is \$6 per week.

Adult Program in conjunction with the Westfield Y:

Lunch & Learn — Fashion Show with Chico's, and a make up demonstration by Douglas Cosmetics of Westfield, Wednesday, November 14, 12:15 p.m.

This event, to be held in the Community Room of the Westfield Municipal Building on 425 East Broad Street, is free. Attendees are asked to bring a bagged lunch. The program is open to adults only.

Adult Senior Social Friday, October 19.

Westfield seniors are invited to take part in this free bowling party. The party will be held at Linden Lanes tomorrow, Friday, October 19, at 9:30 a.m. The party includes all equipment, instruction, and coffee and donuts. All seniors are invited, beginners as well as experienced bowlers. Seniors can register in person or call the Recreation Department at (908) 789-4080.

Teen Programs: Teen Center, Friday nights, at 8 p.m. to midnight. Teen Center features music, movies, pool tables, video games, ping-pong, foosball, air hockey, a big screen TV, refreshments, lounge area and special events.

Night Place is offered monthly on Friday nights to all intermediate school youths from 7:30 to 9:30 p.m. Activities include disc jockey, food, games, movies and dancing.

The cost is \$2 in advance and \$3 at the door. Upcoming dates include: October 19, November 16, January 25, February 15, March 22, and May 17.

New Programs to Start Monday, November 5.

Ballet Stretch & Tone, a beginner class based on various dance exercises at the barre and floor. No experience is necessary. Instructor Terri Karch has studied dance for most of her life. She offers a non-intimidating environment for her students. The class is done at each class member's pace. Classes will be offered Mondays and Wednesdays from 11:30 a.m. to 12:15 p.m. from November 5 to December 5. The fee is \$45 per person.

Ballet for Kids is a beginning Ballet class for kids aged 7 to 10 years. The focus is on placement at the barre and having fun. The class will be offered Mondays from 3:30 to 4:15 p.m., from November 5 through December 3. The cost is \$35 per child.

For questions on any Westfield Recreation Commission programs, please call, (908) 789-4080.



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