

County Clerk Declares Absentee Ballot a Success

ELIZABETH — New Jersey's new approach to absentee ballot applications is a resounding success in its first year of use, according to Union

Broom Bowl Set Nov. 26 At Warinanco Skating

ROSELLE — The Warinanco Ice Skating Center is holding the "Thanksgiving Broom Bowl Challenge" on Saturday, November 26 beginning at 3:30 p.m. The family event, open to the public, is a combination of broomball and bowling.

Children four through 17 years of age who are competing in the challenge will be divided into three age groups. A gift certificate to the Ice Chalet pro shop will be awarded to the first-place winner in each age group.

The Warinanco Ice Skating Center is located off Thompson Avenue in Warinanco Park, located near the border of Roselle and Elizabeth. All regular admission and skate rental fees apply to this event.

For more information, call the Skating Center at (908) 298-7850 or the Union County Department of Parks and Recreation at (908) 527-4900.

County Clerk Joanne Rajoppi. "In the weeks before the November 8 general election, my office quickly and efficiently processed 6,469 applications for absentee ballots, as compared to 4,607 applications in 2001," Rajoppi reported. "This is a 40 percent increase since the last gubernatorial election," she said.

For the first time, absentee ballots were available to all New Jersey voters without stating a reason for their need, such as a physical disability or illness or a scheduled business-related trip.

The county clerk is responsible for accepting and processing a voter's absentee ballot application and delivering a sample ballot to the voter. She also is responsible for designing and printing the machine, provisional and emergency ballots.

For the November 8 election, clerks received applications from civilian and military voters. The clerk said her office was able to quickly approve the applications and mail out ballots in a timely fashion, whether the ballots needed to be delivered across the street or to the far corners of the Earth.



IMPAIRED...Union Catholic High School teacher and track coach Mike McCabe, assisted by Fanwood P.D. Sgt. Thomas Jedic, tries on a pair of the Fatal Vision goggles, which simulate different levels of impairment due to alcohol consumption. Seniors Pam Heaney, Kim Hannam, Obi Nwizugbo, Tarrell Calloway and Even Challist observe.

Drunk-Driver Awareness Held for Local HS Students

FANWOOD — The Fanwood Community Policing Alliance, in conjunction with the Fanwood Police Department and the Scotch Plains-Fanwood Municipal Alliance Committee, hosted a drunk-driver awareness event for students at Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School (SPFHS) and seniors of Union Catholic High School on October 21 in the parking lot of Saint Bartholomew's Church in Scotch Plains.

Students from SPFHS Health and Physical Education class, along with a group of seniors from Union Catholic High School, were invited to learn "hands on" the effects of alcohol on their ability to drive and perform basic functions. This was done with the Safety Buggy, a modified Volkswagen Beetle that a trained operator controls while a student is driving along with student passengers in the back seats.

The car is driven through a short obstacle course and then made to appear drunk with a loss of steering, brakes, etc.

The Safety Buggy comes from the

Pennsylvania Driving Under the Influence Association and tours the region all year long.

In addition, Fatal Vision Goggles, which simulate vision impairment at different levels of alcohol consumption, were available for the students.

"The Safety Buggy is a learning experience that is very worthwhile for the students because they can feel the loss of control and delay in their reaction time in a safe structured environment. Often young adults believe that are invincible and this program proves to them they are not, by breaking through their denial, it gives them a reality check," said Liz Knodel-Gordon, the Substance Awareness Coordinator for the SPF School District.

Danielle Zoller, a Union Catholic High School Senior said, "I really understand what effect alcohol has on the brain after trying to walk with those goggles on; it was funny, but also scary to imagine someone trying to drive with those on."

"Driving in a car that simulated what one drink would do to a person reinforced my decision never to get in a car with someone who drinks," added Pam Heaney, a Union Catholic senior.

Tarrell Calloway, another Union Catholic senior, commented, "I'm pretty coordinated; I play varsity basketball and have to make quick decisions throughout the game. Trying to catch a ball with the goggles on really made me think about the effects that alcohol has on the body."

For more details, visit www.FanwoodCPA.org.

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UCF OK's HEART Grants; Applies for Archive Funds

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

ELIZABETH — Board members and county department heads gave accolades to Union County Freeholders Rick Proctor, Angel Estrada and Nancy Ward Thursday night.

The three freeholders won their seats to ensure their hold on all nine-board seats next year. Democrats have won every county government election since 1995 and have held the majority since 1997.

Top vote-getter Freeholder Nancy Ward thanked "the people of Union County for electing me to another three years." Ms. Ward was named to the board during the fall of 2004 to fill a vacancy when John Wohlrab resigned after being arrested and charged with domestic abuse.

Freeholder Estrada, who won a third term, said the victory "really gave me a chance to see the diversity in this county" at train stations and other places he stopped on the campaign trail.

Veteran Freeholder Dan Sullivan said that regardless of headlines of domination by Democrats on the board, "I think in the final analysis, it always comes down to what the voters think and what they want."

Freeholder Chester Holmes said, "I think they (voters) made some very wise choices" in returning three incumbent freeholders."

The board approved \$41,755 of HEART (History, Education, and the Arts Reaching Thousands) grants to 34 organizations.

Receiving grants are: the Westfield Symphony Orchestra, \$2,000; the Chinese American Music, Westfield, \$1,000; Shubanjali School of Performing Arts, Scotch Plains, \$1,500; the Union County Educational Services Commission, Westfield and Garden State Cultural Association, Scotch Plains, \$1,000.

During the public portion of the meeting, Plainfield residents asked the freeholders to look into changes to the absentee ballots, noting that Hispanic voters might have discarded some 300 ballots because they did not fully understand them.

Nancy Piwowar told the board the forms did not contain a line to write their names.

"These voters have the same rights as anyone else under the Voting Rights Act of 1965," said Ms. Powowar.

She later told *The Leader and The Times* that the bulk of the 1,700 plus write-in votes are believed to have been for Plainfield Mayor Al McWilliams, who lost his reelection bid as a write-in candidate on November 8 to board of education member Sharon Robinson-Briggs. She said many voters apparently threw away the absentee ballots "because they didn't make sense."

Carol Bicket, also of Plainfield, said the "New Democrats," a group created by Mr. McWilliams, "are not going away."

On another matter, Bruce Paterson of Garwood criticized a column written by Freeholder Proctor and published in *Union County Directions*, a publication of the Union County Alliance.

Mr. Paterson said he felt criticism of President George W. Bush over the handling of Hurricane Katrina relief efforts by FEMA was a "partisan shot" in what is supposed to be a "non-partisan" publication.

Freeholder Proctor said, "Everyone knows there was a policy failure" over Katrina relief efforts.

The board approved a resolution to support cable TV competition for state residents. The resolution urges the legislature "to make it easier for companies to compete for business."

According to Exec. Dir. of N.J. Consumers for Cable Choice, Rachel Holland, cable rates have jumped 35 percent over the past five years.

The board also approved an \$115,500 contract with the PMK Group of Cranford for construction observation and administration for the reconstruction of Meisel Park in Springfield.

The \$2.6 million project is underway, which includes baseball and softball fields, a six-lane all-weather track and a combination football/soccer field and fitness trail.

Also approved was a resolution to apply for \$1.2 million PARIS grant million to improve the county's archiving and records management operation. The grant is available through the New Jersey Department of State, Division of Archives Records Management Public Archives and Records Infrastructure Support.

The county will also apply for \$2 million in funds through the department to offer shared services to the 21 municipalities in the county totaling \$2 million for records management.

The board, recognizing law enforcement officers who volunteered for Hurricane Katrina relief efforts, approved resolutions that included Westfield Patrolman Robert Bartkus, Mountainside Patrolman Donald Amberg, Scotch Plains Patrolmen Art Bruschetti and Thomas Sarnecki.

Christmas Tree

Lighting Set Dec. 4

WESTFIELD — The Westfield Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony will be held Sunday, December 4 from 5 to 6:30 p.m. at the North Avenue Train Station parking lot.

For more information, please contact the Westfield Area Chamber of Commerce: (908) 233-3021 or Info@WestfieldChamber.com.

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