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SIXTY CENTS

Scotch Plains Mourns Death Of Police Chief Mark Zyla

By FRED T. ROSSI
Specially Written for The Times of Scotch Plains-Fanwood

SCOTCH PLAINS — Flags in Scotch Plains flew at half mast this week and mourning bunting was draped at the front of the municipal building in memory of Police Chief Mark Zyla, who died early last Friday morning, a year-and-a-half after taking over the department's top position.

Chief Zyla, 46 years old, collapsed at the Sun Tavern in Fanwood shortly after midnight on October 14 and died a short time later at Muhlenberg Regional Medical Center in Plainfield. Crowds of mourners gathered on Sunday evening and Monday for Chief Zyla's wake in Scotch Plains prior to a Tuesday-morning funeral.

Several streets were closed off on Tuesday morning for Chief Zyla's funeral procession from the Rossi Funeral Home to St. Bartholomew the Apostle Roman Catholic Church in Scotch Plains, where a standing-room-only crowd of family, friends, residents and police officers from around the state gathered for a mass featuring a stirring bagpipe rendition of "Amazing Grace." Burial took place at Fairview Cemetery in



Chief Mark Zyla

Westfield.

In honor of Chief Zyla, who joined the police department in 1983, an unoccupied township patrol car was parked in front of the funeral home throughout last weekend and for the duration of the late chief's wake and funeral services. Township police officers wore black bands over their badges.

Saying that the township family was "devastated" by the Chief's death, Township Manager Thomas Atkins told *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times* that Mr. Zyla was "a highly dedicated law-enforcement professional" who was "a very stabilizing force in the police department," even in the years before he assumed the top leadership spot. Mr. Atkins said members of the department viewed Chief Zyla as someone who was "fair, impartial, who always worked hard and gave them (department officers) a fair shake."

"He loved the kids," Mr. Atkins added, referring to Mr. Zyla's years of coaching various Police Athletic League football and baseball teams. "And he really loved Scotch Plains."

Mayor Martin Marks called Chief

Zyla's death "particularly devastating for me in that Mark and I had become good friends. He and I played together on the same summer softball team and shared the same competitiveness on the field," he told *The Times*. "Being able to crack a joke, many times at our own expense, was also something we were able to share."

The mayor said that, "above all, Mark was a dedicated husband and father who showed great pride and affection when speaking of his family. There is no doubt he deserved and received the respect and admiration of the township's municipal team and most certainly of the officers under his command."

Mr. Zyla became chief of police in May 2004, succeeding Marshall Nelson, after a 21-year career with the department. Chief Zyla was promoted to sergeant in 1995 and in 2001 was elevated to lieutenant. Between 2001 and 2004, he served for 13 months as commander of the uniformed division and for a year as education, training and internal affairs officer. Prior to joining Scotch Plains in 1983, he had served a year with the Union County Police Department.

When announcing his promotion to chief last year, Mr. Atkins cited Chief Zyla's administrative and supervisory experience as well as his performance during written and oral examinations that were part of a lengthy selection process. "His record speaks for itself," Mr. Atkins said of Mr. Zyla at the time. "He is the best equipped to lead us into the future."

During his formal swearing-in as police chief on May 1, 2004, before a standing-room-only crowd of family, friends and law enforcement colleagues from throughout Union County, Mr. Zyla called it "one of the proudest days of my career," and emotionally acknowledged the presence that evening of his mother, who was widowed when Mr. Zyla

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STIRRING TRIBUTE...Hundreds of police officers from across the state gathered Tuesday morning to mourn the loss of Scotch Plains Police Chief Mark Zyla, who died suddenly last Thursday night. Photos of the moving procession in Scotch Plains can be viewed at www.goleader.com/photos.

Council Candidates Debate Taxes, One-Party Gov., Redevelopment

By MEREDITH MANNINO
Specially Written for The Times of Scotch Plains-Fanwood

FANWOOD — A debate between the Republican council candidates, Michael D'Antuono and Maureen Mawby, and the Democratic nominees, Bruce Walsh and Joan Wheeler, offered Fanwoodians the opportunity to better understand the candidates' views.

The League of Women Voters and *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times* sponsored Tuesday night's forum. The debate was moderated by *Times* reporter Fred Rossi. Merry Wisler represented the League of Women Voters.

Residents can cast their votes on Tuesday, November 8. The debate was telecast live on Channel 35, and will be rerun regularly until Election Day. Residents should check

the Channel 35 bulletin for schedule information.

Questions were prepared by the newspaper and the League of Women Voters based on input from the two political parties and the public.

On the issue of taxes, Ms. Mawby said that if elected she would encourage more private development, and expressed her sentiment that taxes had not decreased during Mayor Colleen Mahr's time in office.

In response, Mr. Walsh expressed his disappointment that the tax issue had turned into a partisan issue between the two parties.

"Last year's budget was voted (or approved) unanimously," he said.

"It's (property taxes) really a state problem," he added, "and until Trenton changes we can't change. We need to look at every line item on the

budget and see where we can save."

Mr. D'Antuono also blamed the County of Union for the tax increase, and in answer to a question about senior citizens and taxes, he noted that Fanwood seniors are upset at tax increases.

"They (seniors) can't afford to pay these taxes and they're selling their houses," he said.

He said nepotism, such as the hiring of Acting Governor Codey's brother at a higher salary than he was paid at the state thereby hiking his state pension, have caused a jump in county taxes and have impacted Fanwood taxpayers.

Mr. D'Antuono and Ms. Mawby said they favor a study to evaluate either streamlining or consolidating municipal operations by working with

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Scotch Plains Budget Already Facing \$800,000 Increases

By FRED T. ROSSI
Specially Written for The Times of Scotch Plains-Fanwood

SCOTCH PLAINS — With 2006 municipal budget in the initial stages of taking shape, Township Manager Thomas Atkins expects the township to be faced, at the outset, with about \$800,000 in mandated cost increases in four areas, a sum that represents almost five percent of last year's \$20.5 million municipal budget.

Mr. Atkins told *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times* that increased health insurance premiums, bigger state pension contributions, steeper fees for the Rahway Valley Sewage Authority and higher debt service levies are responsible for the initial cost increases as next year's budget begins to be assembled.

Mr. Atkins met with department

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It's Clean Living in SP for Cooper Road Resident

By JILL S. CRANDALL
Specially Written for The Times of Scotch Plains-Fanwood

SCOTCH PLAINS — If you are driving on Cooper Road on a Saturday morning you might pass Christopher Palmer. After moving to Scotch Plains with his family in 1998, Mr. Palmer began a weekly ritual. He walks along the stretch of Cooper Road from Martine Avenue to Terrill Road picking up litter.

When Mr. Palmer first moved to Cooper Road, he was taken by the natural beauty of the majestic street. However, he was dismayed by the amount of trash strewn around the immediate area. He quickly transformed these feelings into action and became a one-man clean-up crew.

Listening to National Public Radio on his headphones, Mr. Palmer starts his walk with gloves and a small trash barrel. He uses a metal reach extender so he does not have to touch the trash with his hands or crouch down to pick it up.

Most of what he finds are fast-food containers, bottles, empty cigarette packs and lighters. Soiled diapers, cell phones, CDs, and torn lottery

tickets also turn up in smaller amounts. Any items of value such as cell phones are turned in to the Scotch Plains Police Department.

Cars will sometimes stop and ask Mr. Palmer if he works for the town. "No, I live on Cooper Road and like to maintain it," he replies. He also obliges people who stop to ask for directions.

For Mr. Palmer, his weekly clean up provides one small way he can improve our community. "If this article encourages others to maintain a small area or street near their home, then the benefit can be multiplied and shared."

Mr. Palmer is a sales manager for a high tech firm based in Seattle with a busy work and travel schedule. He and his wife Connie have two daughters in the Scotch Plains-Fanwood school system. As a closing thought Mr. Palmer says, "Of course, no one person can clean up the whole town. I try to keep perspective by recalling this aphorism: 'It is better to light one candle than to curse the darkness.'"

He has proven that one person can make a difference.



MAKING A DIFFERENCE...Christopher Palmer of Scotch Plains, during his weekly Saturday morning ritual, picks up trash along the stretch of Cooper Road from Martine Avenue to Terrill Road.

Staggard Place Rezoning Report Sent to Council

By DEBORAH MADISON
Specially Written for The Times of Scotch Plains-Fanwood

FANWOOD — The Fanwood planning and zoning board of adjustments is sending a preliminary report, completed by the consulting firm T&M Associates, to the borough council, recommending the rezoning of two Staggard Place properties from light industrial to a residential zoning designation.

The fact-finding report was commissioned by the board after several residents requested a zoning change earlier this year. A summary of the report was presented by Stan Slachetka, a professional planner with T&M, at a special meeting of the board, held on October 17 prior to the monthly agenda meeting.

The two adjacent lots, which front onto Staggard Place, are sandwiched in between commercial lots that front onto South Avenue and residential lots of single-family homes that front onto LaGrande Avenue.

The residents requested a zoning change after learning that the owners of the two lots entered into a contract purchase agreement with a developer. The developer submitted concept plans to the board, proposing the construction of 19 townhouses.

Neighboring residents told *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times* that they are opposed to such a large development because it would greatly devalue their homes and create traffic and water-runoff problems in their neighborhood.

Mr. Slachetka told the board that T&M concluded that a residential zoning designation would be more appropriate for these properties than the LI designation. He said that four to five single-family homes on a cul-de-sac would be more in character

with the surrounding neighborhood and more in keeping with the density recommendations of the master plan than 19 townhouses or a large, commercial building.

"The proposal of 19 townhouses on this 1.1 acre property would be a greater density than anywhere else in the Borough," Mr. Slachetka stated. The townhouse proposal would also generate 14 to 15 vehicle trips in the morning rush hour on Staggard Place.

The owners of the lots, Alesia Tarbell and Carl Ciottoni, testified before the board that they purchased these properties as investments, believing that they could eventually sell the lots as light industrial.

Mr. Ciottoni told the board that he felt his rights as a property owner would be violated if the borough decided to rezone his property.

"Putting forth a proposal to change the zoning will negatively impact my investment," he said.

After hearing the report, several board members added their recommendations to send to council, agreeing with the report's findings. Several board members also advised the council to judiciously consider the rights of the property owners when making their decision.

If the borough council agrees with the reports findings, they will most likely ask the planning board to conduct a formal study and to commission a final report from T&M. The planning board would then hold public hearings on the rezoning proposal, vote on the recommendations and send it back to council for a final vote.

Gary Goodman, an attorney representing the owners of the lots, briefly questioned Mr. Slachetka regarding the report's findings. He asked Mr. Slachetka why the borough's 1998 master plan and the re-examination of the 2001 master plan neglected to mention a more appropriate zoning for these two lots.

Mr. Slachetka responded that although these two properties were not specifically mentioned, the master plan did state that all of the properties along the South Avenue commercial/business corridor should be considered for more appropriate zoning.



PROVIDING VIEWS...The four Fanwood candidates for the two borough council seats express their views to the public on TV35 Tuesday night. The election is November 8.

Fanwood Board Streamlines Borough Meeting Procedures

By DEBORAH MADISON
Specially Written for The Times of Scotch Plains-Fanwood

FANWOOD — The chairman of Fanwood's Planning and Zoning Board of Adjustments, Gregory Cummings, shared with the board several procedural changes the board would be implementing, at their monthly agenda meeting on October 17.

In order to streamline hearings and improve the overall time-frame of meetings, Mr. Cummings made the following recommendations:

Board members will ask questions only after applicants and witnesses have completed their testimony.

Board members will listen to the testimony of experts and consultants before asking questions.

There will be no comments until the appropriate time, after all of the testimony has been presented.

All questions from board members will be directed through the chairman. The first three of these will now apply to board members as they have also applied to members of the public, he stated.

The board also approved changing

the timeline for the submission of applications to require applicants to submit completed applications at least 20 days prior to being placed on the agenda. The current requirement was 10 days. By moving the requirement up to 20 days, the board would then have time to submit the applications to their experts and to receive expert reports at least 10 days prior to first hearings.

Additionally, the board will in the future, inform all applicants that an increase in impervious coverage may trigger a storm-water-management requirement with their proposals.

The board reviewed several applications that will be held at their next regular meeting. Those applications include the continuation of a minor subdivision at 54 Stewart Place, and bulk variances at 130 Tillotson Road, 225 Forest Road and 38 Helen Street.

The next regular meeting of the board will be held on Wednesday, October 26, and the next agenda meeting will be held on Monday, November 21. All planning board meetings are held in Borough Council Chambers at 7:30 p.m.

Erratum

A story that appeared on the front page of last week's *Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times* should have stated that Cheryl Kriney was the person who addressed the Scotch Plains-Fanwood Board of Education, and that it is the second grade that has sections of 24/25 at Brunner Elementary School. We regret the errors.

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