

Mirabella Close to Naming Panel on Ponderosa Farm

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

ELIZABETH — Union County officials announced Thursday night that they are close to announcing the names of Scotch Plains residents and officials to serve on a committee to evaluate the best use for the Ponderosa Farm property, which was purchased by the county in 2003.

Freeholder Chairman Alexander Mirabella said the committee will consist of between six and eight members including himself, Victoria Durbin, director of the Office of Open Space, Recreation and Historic Preservation Trust Fund, and Freeholder Deborah Scanlon, chairwoman of the board's Open Space Committee.

"We said we would put together a committee with the help of (the office of) open space," Freeholder Mirabella told The Westfield Leader and The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times.

"We are getting close to making a decision" and will be sending out notices soon, he added.

A plan to build a Green Meadows Children's Farm on the Cooper Road property was scrapped in February in response to strong objections by township residents at a freeholders meeting.

"We had a lot of people who volunteered to participate," Freeholder Mirabella said. "We will work on a partnership with recreation and the mayor's office."

The Green Meadows farm, which was to have featured 140 animals along with tours, was to have opened this spring. The county is now looking to construct playing fields for baseball and soccer. The county purchased the 23-acre property in 2003 for \$10 million out of the open space trust fund.

In other news, the freeholders approved a new five-year contract with the county's correctional officers' collective bargaining unit. The new contract, County Manager George Devaney said, includes two zero-percent increases in exchange for lifetime benefits for the membership.

Mr. Devaney said the 260-member Policemen's Benevolent Association Local 199 would receive a 4-percent raise in the first year, no increases in the second and third years and 5-percent wage hikes in the final two years of the pact. Both contracts are retroactive to January 1, 2005 and expire December 31, 2009.

"This was one of those rare instances where it was a win-win" for the county and union, Mr. Devaney told The Leader and The Times.

Freeholder Mirabella called the lifetime benefits clause "creative" on the part of the county manager.

"It's a good contract for both sides,"

Freeholder Mirabella said. "It will serve the county and the employees well."

"It (the contract) essentially pays for itself and saves the county money," Mr. Devaney explained, noting the contract provides the county some "budget relief" as county officials are in the midst of the county budget process. He said the county would have sufficient funds to pay for the benefits through the year 2050.

The board also approved a five-year contract with Union County Superior Correction Officers, Local 199A. Similar to Local 199, members will receive a 4-percent raise retroactive to January 1, 2005; 5 percent effective January 1, 2008, and 5 percent effective January 1, 2009.

The board also approved five resolutions appointing attorneys in a lawsuit known as Eduardo C. Tapari vs. Union County for \$5,000 each. County Counsel Robert Barry said, "It is a lawsuit that alleges certain discrimination and actual assault."

Four of the five defendants in the suit are food service staff at Rumlens Specialized Hospital. The fifth is employed in patient services.

During the public portion of the meeting, Bruce Paterson of Garwood commented on an award received by Mr. Devaney's wife, Angela. Referring to an honorary resolution awarded to the Berkeley Heights administrator as Business Administrator of the Year by the Gateway Chamber of Commerce, Mr. Paterson said, "We're talking super woman here."

"She's also a rookie of year," quipped Freeholder Mirabella.

Mr. Paterson added that "something doesn't seem right" with the award.

Kevin Retcho of Linden thanked the board for moving ahead on plans to build a county animal shelter in Springfield. The board has authorized the Union County Improvement Authority to finance the project at the Houdaille Quarry.

Mr. Retcho also recommended that the county look into video conferencing for municipal prisoners to save money on overtime costs in the sheriff's department. "It costs taxpayers millions of dollars in transportation" for prisoners. He said those prisoners who don't make bail in municipal courts are transported to the county jail.

When they are able to make bail, he said, they have to be transported back to the municipality for their bail hearing.

Freeholder Angel Estrada said the county provides video conferencing for some prisoners confined at the county jail to appear before state superior judges at the county courthouse.



7th Congressional District News Economic Expansion, Job Growth Are Rooted In Congress's Tax Relief

Representative Mike Ferguson

In New Jersey, we enjoy one of the highest incomes in the nation. In fact, in the 7th district, which includes portions of Hunterdon, Middlesex, Somerset and Union counties, the median family income is \$90,103.

But that also means we face one of the nation's highest tax burdens, too. And it's not just federal taxes, which have been lowered in recent years. New Jersey's state income tax and highest-in-the-nation property taxes also combine to squeeze families.

As the dreaded IRS tax-filing day approaches (it's April 17 this year because April 15 falls on a weekend), it's clear that when taxes are reduced New Jersey families disproportionately benefit, and when taxes are raised New Jersey families disproportionately suffer.

I recognize the importance that tax relief plays not only in creating economic growth and new jobs but also in allowing you to keep more of what you earn to save, spend or invest.

That's why I've been a strong advocate in Congress for reducing your taxes. In fact, because of the tax relief Congress has enacted, the average New Jersey family is saving more than \$2,000 a year in lower federal taxes.

The Treasury Department recently reported that 811,000 New Jersey families benefit from the doubling of the child tax credit to \$1,000, and more than one million New Jersey families are paying lower taxes because of the elimination of the marriage penalty. More than four million state residents benefit from the reduction in income tax brackets, and 858,000 taxpayers benefit from the lower taxes on capital gains and dividends.

That's real money and real savings for New Jersey families.

Congress also has addressed the alternative minimum tax, or AMT, which is striking more and more middle-income families, especially in high-income states like New Jersey. Last year, Congress approved legislation shielding 17 million taxpayers from being hit with the AMT this year on federal taxes due next April.

The AMT eats away at valuable federal tax deductions and credits, including for state income taxes and property taxes, and particularly strikes New Jersey taxpayers. In fact, half the people paying the AMT in recent years live in just four states — New Jersey, New York, California and Massachusetts.

The AMT was created in 1969 to ensure that a small number of very

wealthy Americans could not use credits and deductions to avoid paying taxes altogether. The AMT is a second tax structure, forcing individuals and families to calculate their taxes twice — once under the regular system and again under the alternative system — then pay the higher amount.

Because it was never originally indexed for inflation, the AMT has increasingly hit middle-income families with incomes of as little as \$75,000.

That's wrong, and I'm working in Congress to permanently protect families from the AMT and also to keep your tax burden low.

We've seen the benefits that tax relief has for economic growth and job creation. Last week, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that 211,000 new jobs were created in February, and more than two million new jobs have been created in just the last year.

The unemployment rate in March was 4.7 percent; that's lower than the average of the 1970s, 1980s and the 1990s. And New Jersey's unemployment rate is even lower.

Homeownership is at a record high. New orders for manufactured durable goods are up. Construction spending is increasing, and consumer confidence is near an all-time high.

I believe the economic expansion and continued job growth is rooted in the tax relief Congress has enacted in recent years, and I will remain a strong advocate for keeping your taxes low.

County to Host History Grant Workshop

COUNTY — A free "how-to" history grant workshop for Union County non-profit groups interested in applying to the county History Grant Program will take place Tuesday, April 18, at 7 p.m., on the lower level of the Plainfield Public Library, 800 Park Avenue.

Non-profit history groups, historic sites, museums, libraries, schools and organizations with collections or programming relating to local history are encouraged to attend the workshop. An overview will be presented of the application process highlighting components including the project statement, narrative, budget and publicity plans.

To be eligible, programs and projects must take place between September 1, 2006 and August 31, 2007.

For more information, contact the Union County Division of Cultural and Heritage Affairs at 633 Pearl Street, Elizabeth or call (908) 558-2550.

Two River and Town Bank Join New Holding Company

WESTFIELD — Two River Community Bank and The Town Bank have announced that the shareholders of each bank have approved an agreement by which the two banks will become independently operated, wholly-owned subsidiaries of Community Partners Bancorp, a newly formed holding company.

Required bank regulatory approvals had been received prior to the shareholder meetings, which were held on March 28 to vote on the transaction. The acquisition of the two banks by Community Partners Bancorp is scheduled to occur on April 1, 2006, at which time each share of Two River Community Bank common stock will be converted into one share of Community Partners common stock, and each share of Town Bank common stock will be converted into 1.25 shares of Community Partners common stock.

Based on December 2005 pro forma combined financials, Community Partners Bancorp would have total assets of over \$459 million, loans of approximately \$354 million and deposits of approximately \$385 million, making it the 22nd largest New Jersey-based bank holding company based on size of assets, bank officials said. Community Partners will have 11 banking offices stretching from

Wall Township in Monmouth County to Westfield in Union County. The new company's common stock will be listed for trading on the NASDAQ Capital Market under the symbol "CPBC."

"This transaction brings together two well-regarded community banks, each serving attractive markets with similar philosophies in banking, now with greater capital resources to grow and prosper," noted Joseph O'Sullivan, chairman of The Town Bank and vice chairman of the new holding company.

Robert W. Downes, Sr., president and chief executive officer of The Town Bank, added, "This combination will enable The Town Bank to continue its emphasis on customer service and dedication to the small business client, through expanded products and services."

Stender Reports

Fundraising Results

SCOTCH PLAINS — In the seventh district Congressional race, Linda Stender filed her Federal Election Commission Report for the first quarter of 2006, showing that she has raised \$371,149 to date. The report also shows that she has \$308,555 cash on hand.

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Muri Greis Lagrein Rose	9.99
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Chateau Trinquedel Rose	11.99
Guigal Cotes Du Rhone Rose	8.99
Vineland Estates Dry Riesling	8.99
S. A. Prum Essence Riesling	7.99
Selbach Zeltinger Schlossberg Spatlese	15.99
Malencini Chianti	11.99
Cantine del Taburno Falanghin	12.99
Ecco Domani Pinot Grigio	7.99
Damilano Barol	25.99
Molnar Pinot Noir	19.49

NAME	PRICE
Ortman Pinot Noir	\$18.99
Pepperwood Pinot Noir	7.99
Mirassou Pinot Noir	7.99
Onix Priorat	10.99
Vega Sindoa Chardonnay	5.99
Cline Syrah	9.79
Stephen Vincent Cabernet Sauvignon	8.99
Rosemount Shiraz	8.99
FAMILY VALUES	
NAME	PRICE
Beringer White Zinfandel 1.5 Liter	\$8.29
Cavit Pinot Grigio 1.5 Liter	11.19
Robert Mondavi Private Selection	
Cabernet, Chardonnay, Merlot 1.5 Liter	16.99
Fish Eye Pinot Grigio & Shiraz 1.5 Liter	11.29

NAME	PRICE
Recanati Shiraz	\$9.79
Recanati Merlot	9.79
Recanati Chardonnay	9.79
Efron's Cave Triple Red	8.99
Noah Cabernet/ Merlot	8.99
Segal's Chardonnay	11.29
Segal's Cabernet/Merlot	14.29
Rashi Barolo	31.49
Noah Gedon Cabernet Sauvignon	12.79
Alfasi Malbec/Syrah	8.29
Barkan Reserve Pinot Noir	16.59
Ella Valley Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon	19.99
Hai Emerald Riesling	7.99
Goose Bay Sauvignon Blanc	12.99
Teal Lake Shiraz	9.59
Baron Herzog Cabernet Sauvignon	10.99
Baron Herzog Chardonnay	9.79
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