

UC Freeholders to Debut \$400 Mil. Budget Tonight

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

ELIZABETH — The Union County freeholders are set to introduce a \$400-million budget tonight, April 27, which represents a \$10.3-million increase in spending over last year. The budget is supported by a \$226.6-million tax levy, which will increase county taxes in 18 of the 21 municipalities in Union County. Taxes in Cranford, New Providence and Winfield will decrease this year.

County officials said the increase in the tax levy was scaled back by \$1.7 million from the initial \$228.3-million tax levy proposed in County Manager George Devanney's \$413-million executive budget unveiled in January.

County taxes in Westfield will be \$22.4 million this year, up \$499,010 over 2005. Scotch Plains' residents will pay \$12.9 million, a \$531,550 hike over last year. Fanwood taxpayers will foot a levy of \$3.6 million, up \$195,097 over 2005. Garwood will pay \$2.1 million, rising \$130,650 over last year.

Summit homeowners will pay the highest county tax per household at \$2,933, up \$83 over last year. Summit is followed by Westfield, with an average tax at \$2,174 or \$55 over 2005. Scotch Plains residents will pay the sixth highest tax at \$1,582, up \$53 over last year. Fanwood residents will pay \$1,344, or \$74 over 2005 levels, with Garwood residents paying \$1,169, or \$62 over last year.

Freeholders said a number of factors contributed to the increased taxes this year, such as insurance and utility costs and homeland security spending. Officials also cited pensions, fixed salaries for unionized employees and increases in the welfare program.

"The heat alone is a million-dollar increase over last year," Freeholder Chairman Alexander Mirabella told *The Westfield Leader* and *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times* after last Thursday's meeting.

He commended the board's budget committee, chaired by Freeholder Angel Estrada, for doing a "fine job" of trimming the executive budget. "We are not looking at layoffs," Freeholder Mirabella said, but noted that "layoffs are not off the table."

The board chairman said the state has approved the county's proposal to offer an employee-incentive retirement program in an effort to trim the county's 3,000-employee payroll.

"We are going to be looking at opportunities (with neighboring counties) this summer" to share services, Freeholder Mirabella said.

He noted that the Union County freeholders were among the first in

the state to support a proposed constitutional convention on property taxes.

"It (property-tax reform) really has to happen at the state level," said Freeholder Mirabella.

In a press release issued by the public information department, Mr. Devanney questioned how property taxes are currently distributed under state statutes.

"What makes a taxpayer in Berkeley Heights better able to pay a tax increase of \$151 as opposed to a taxpayer in New Providence who, under the same system, will only pay a \$4 increase this year? Similarly, what makes an Elizabeth resident better able to afford an \$82 increase while neighboring Roselle Park will see an increase of \$40?" Mr. Devanney questioned.

A public hearing on the county budget will be held at 7 p.m. on Thursday, May 18, in the freeholders meeting room in the county administration building in Elizabeth. The building is located behind the Union County Courthouse off of Rahway Avenue.

In other business, the board considered a resolution to enter into a contract with Access Systems of Manlius, N.Y. to provide consulting services to the clerk of the freeholder board during the vendor selection process for an electronic document management system. The contract, which is not to exceed \$10,000, would be 100-percent paid through a New Jersey Public Archives and Records Infrastructure Support (PARIS) grant. Union County received a \$1,010,639 PARIS grant last year during the first year of the program. The grant request for proposals (rfps) can be viewed on the county homepage at unioncounty.nj.org. Bid proposals will be unsealed by the county on Friday, May 5, at 2 p.m.

The agenda contained a resolution approving contracts to Ron Regner of Summit to operate the pro shop at Ash Brook Golf Course and to McCluney's Golf Pro Shop to operate the pro shop concessions at the Oak Ridge Golf Course in Clark. Mr. Regner will pay the county \$409 per month and \$14,724 for 36 months, while McCluney's will pay \$402 a month for a total of \$14,472.

Mr. Devanney was not present at the meeting, as he was receiving an award from the buildings trades. Deputy County Manager Elizabeth Genievich served in his absence.

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Gina Levy for The Westfield Leader and The Times
LEARNING EXPERIENCE...War Veterans James Wallace, left, and William Phillips pose with Westfield PAL football team players John Dooley, Ryan Rittendale, Geoffrey Scognamig, Josh Poslusny and Brad Erickson during a recent PAL trip to the Lyons Veterans Administration Hospital.

Bridging Young and Old: Youth Meet War Veterans

By GINA LEVINE-LEVY
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

WESTFIELD — Westfield sixth-grader Brendan Dugan spoke of a Vietnam veteran who tried to rescue his two friends during the war.

His fellow student, Justin Ricardo, was fascinated by a serviceman who rode in a tank destroyer.

Were they sharing stories from history class? No.

But it was part of a history lesson they won't soon forget.

The boys were among some 45 members of Westfield's Police Athletic League (PAL) football team who visited with war veterans in Lyons Veterans Administration Hospital last week to hear their stories.

Equipped with pizza, cake and curiosity, the youths filled a recreation room at the Veterans Administration New Jersey Health Care System with high spirits, stories and smiles.

Team coach John Dugan organized the trip so the boys could hear the veterans' stories of "courage and bravery." He said he thought the opportunity would be invaluable. "When I coach these guys, I try to make it more than just a football team," said Mr. Dugan, Brendan's dad.

World War II veteran Michael Peters, 83, told stories of his three years in the service.

"In high school I learned German. Little did I know that four years later (during the war) I'd be using it," he said.

He spoke of living in dugouts and being shot at by massive railroad guns.

But he also shared words of wisdom with the younger generation. "I would tell them to be law-abiding citizens."

The athletes listened closely to Army veteran Jimmy Green, who had dreams of becoming a college football player when he was drafted out

of high school in 11th grade.

Mr. Green spent three years burying fellow soldiers at Arlington National Cemetery before he was able to finish high school and play college football for Morgan State University in Baltimore.

Despite the six decades that divide Mr. Green, 78, from these 12-year-old boys, the message was clear.

"You gotta stick with it," he said.

Former marine Joseph A. Manda, 79, said the visit was a treat since he is a former teacher.

Mr. Manda carries with him the American flag placed on the grave of his wife, Carolyn, who volunteered with American Women's Voluntary Services (AWVS) during World War II.

Former Army combat engineer James Wallace proudly wears a hat that reads "World War II Veteran." He served in the South Pacific from 1944 to 1949 and was shot in the jaw.

But what could potentially be a frightening story to a 12-year-old, turned out to be "the learning experience of a lifetime."

"Behind these scary experiences, there are great stories," said PAL team member Christopher Albanese.

Alex Bond learned, "You shouldn't take good health for granted."

"If you can put your mind to it you can do it," was the lesson team member James O'Rourke walked away with.

Troy Skibitsky realized "how lucky we are to have so many people who would fight in the war for us."

Kurt Kowalski said, "Our country wouldn't be free if we didn't fight in the wars."

But in seven simple but strong words, it was Anthony Amatucci who summed up the tie that brought the team members there to begin with. "I learned that people fought for me."

SP-F Parade to Salute War On Terror Vets

SCOTCH PLAINS — The 2006 Scotch Plains-Fanwood Memorial Day Parade will be held on Monday, May 29. The theme for this year's parade is "Support Our Troops - A Salute To Those Who Serve." The parade will recognize the dedication, commitment and sacrifices of the men and women of the Armed Forces of the United States who have served and continue to serve in the defense of America in the War on Terror.

All Scotch Plains and Fanwood veterans who were in military service from 1990 through to the present will be honored at the parade. This includes those currently serving on active duty. The parade committee invites all township and

borough residents who were or who are still members of the military during this era to participate in the 2006 parade. The invitation is extended to all veterans of this period regardless of duty station. This includes stateside, overseas and combat assignments.

Those veterans who are interested in joining their fellow comrades from the War on Terror should register with the parade committee by contacting Toni Rollis at the Scotch Plains Municipal Building at (908) 322-6700, extension 314. These veterans will march as a group along the parade route to receive the community's "thank you" in recognition of their service to America.

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Sauza Commerativo 750 ml.	\$19.99
Jose Cuervo Reserva de la Familia 750 ml.	\$78.99
Partida Blanco 750 ml.	\$39.99
Cabo Wabo Reposado 750 ml.	\$42.99
Cabo Wabo Blanco 750 ml.	\$34.99

VERMOUTH

Campari 750 ml.	\$19.99
Pimm's Cup 750 ml.	\$13.99
Martini & Rossi Dry Vermouth 750 ml.	\$5.49
Noilly Pratt Dry Vermouth 1 liter	\$6.99

RUM

Bacardi Silver 1.75 liter	\$19.99
Bacardi "O" 750 ml.	\$11.99
Bacardi Limon 750 ml.	\$11.99
Captain Morgan Spiced Rum 1.75 liter	\$24.99
Captain Morgan Parrot Bay 750 ml.	\$16.99
Captain Morgan Parrot Bay Mango 750 ml.	\$16.99
Captain Morgan Parrot Bay Pineapple 750 ml.	\$16.99
Captain Morgan Parrot Bay Passion 750 ml.	\$16.99
Malibu 1.75 liter	\$23.99
Malibu Mango 750 ml.	\$15.99
Malibu Pineapple 750 ml.	\$15.99
Myer's Dark 750 ml.	\$31.99
Gosling's Black Seal 1 liter	\$14.99

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