

## Freeholders Seek More Ways to Add Revenue

By PAUL J. PEYTON

*Specialty Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times*

COUNTY – The county freeholders' fiscal committee continued their budget meetings this past week, as the county looks to trim a \$23 million hike in this year's proposed \$413 million spending plan. The county's tax levy of \$128 million, which accounts for 55 percent of the revenue stream this year, is also up \$12 million over last year.

During budget meetings this past week, County Surrogate Jim LaCorte said he was able to identify \$52,000 in unspent capital funds, which were put back into the budget as surplus. The surrogate's budget for 2006, as published in County Manager George Devanney's executive budget, is \$861,454, up \$11,000 from last year. Mr. LaCorte said his office is mandated to restore records and, thus, he can't cut his capital budget by much. In terms of revenue, he said estate disputes increase revenue to his office. "Income is triggered by conflict," Mr. LaCorte said. He said estate conflicts generated \$70,000 for his office in 2004.

Mr. LaCorte said he expects to continue holding office hours in Union, Rahway, Summit and Cranford, where 150 people were served last year. He will also continue to have educational seminars on the importance of wills, trusts and the estate process.

The board of elections' budget will remain at \$2.5 million. Of that, \$1.3 million is dedicated to salaries and \$1.2 million for "other expenses."

"Our costs are basically all fixed. It's hard to cut on the election board," said Deputy Administrator Dennis Kobitz. He said overtime costs last year were attributed to the presidential election.

The board is responsible for processing voter registrations, training and assigning district poll workers and maintaining a computerized system of all active and inactive voters in the county.

County Tax Administrator Chris Duryee said his operating budget would remain at \$4,000. The board is responsible for supervising municipal tax assessors, equalization of municipal tax assessments and calculating tax rates. He said tax appeals are the main function of the elections board. Mr. Duryee said he expects an increase in appeals this year. He said county residents are provided notices of the appeal process. "It's not a hidden process. It's very much open and in the clear," he said. The five-member board is being expanded to seven.

Members are paid by the state.

Mr. Duryee encouraged towns to keep up with home improvements in their community, which increase tax assessments on properties. In response to a question from Freeholder Dan Sullivan, he said merging tax assessor offices among towns could save some money at the local level.

Union County Superintendent of Schools Carmen Centuolo's \$295,854 budget is up \$16,000 over last year. She told the committee that seven employees are on the county payroll, while five other staffers are state employees. Her office certifies new teachers and monitors school districts.

Freeholder Sullivan said he would like to see the county superintendent's offices placed under state control to save money for counties. Ms. Centuolo said she doesn't think the state wants to take on the salaries of county superintendents of schools.

She is also concerned that she will lose professional staff as a result of the state fiscal crisis.

The freeholders are considering eliminating the county portion of the budget to the Rutgers Cooperative Extension Program (UCRCEP). Department Head Dr. Karen Enslie said if her \$313,653 county budget was eliminated, it would cause her to cut clerical staff. She said this would reduce the amount of classes she could teach. Dr. Enslie is a certified family and consumer family educator and a registered dietician.

Her office includes Master Gardeners, 4-H youth development, nutrition and food safety classes, including the federally funded Food Stamp Nutrition Education Program, which funds seven staff members in the UCRCEP. The office has a total of 18 staff, according to the Rutgers Extension webpage.

County Clerk Joanne Rajoppi's budget is proposed at \$1.9 million. Her office generated \$6.5 million in revenue last year. She noted that revenue from the process of U.S. Passports was down due to competition from U.S. Post Offices, which now have the authority to issue passports. Freeholder Sullivan asked Ms. Rajoppi to consider holding Saturday hours as well as a third weekday night at her Westfield office to increase revenue.

The committee was scheduled to meet last night after press deadline to hear budget requests from the directors of parks, recreation and facilities, human services and administrative services.



**GREAT DECISIONS 2006...**The Great Decisions discussion series will begin again March 3 in Westfield as part of the Westfield Adult School program. Pictured, from left to right, are: Gaile Boothe, past president, Westfield Adult School; Margaret Walker, Westfield Area League of Women Voters, moderator; Dot Teller, Westfield Adult School; Robert Kerwin, Great Decisions 2006 speaker; John McCloskey, Westfield Adult School and Marianne Kerwin, Westfield Area League of Women Voters, moderator.

## Great Decisions Discussions To Be Held In Westfield

WESTFIELD – The Great Decisions discussion series of the Foreign Policy Association will again be held in Westfield, co-sponsored by the Westfield Area League of Women Voters and the Westfield Memorial Library as part of the Westfield Adult School 2006 program.

Developed in 1954 by the Foreign Policy Association, an independent, non-partisan and non-governmental organization, the group will meet this year at the Westfield Memorial Library on Mondays from 7 to 9 p.m.

Topics and speakers will include: March 6 – "Global Health Pandemics," Professor Yanzhong Huang of Seton Hall University; March 13 – "Energy Resources," Robert Kerwin, retired AT&T Bell Labs scientist; March 20 – "UN Reform," Professor Robert VanLeeuwen of Seton Hall University and March 27 – "U.S. and Iran," Professor Louis Cristillo of Columbia University, Middle East Institute.

The remainder of the schedule is as follows: April 3 – "Brazil," Professor Gail Triner-Besosa of Rutgers University; April 10 – "Human Rights/Terrorism," Professor Jeremy Waldron of the Columbia University School of Law; April 17 – "China and India," Professor Rekha Datta of Monmouth University and May 1 "Turkey" with the speaker to be announced.

Early registration is strongly encouraged and will be available at Westfield High School on Monday, February 27, from 7 to 9 p.m., one week prior to the program beginning.

Registration for Great Decisions also may be done at the Westfield

Memorial Library on the dates of the series. For those signing up for the entire series, a free Great Decisions briefing book will be available.

For more information on this and other Westfield Adult School offerings, please consult the spring 2006 catalogue mailed to all households in Westfield and surrounding towns. Catalogues are also available at all local libraries.

To obtain information on all programs, interested persons may visit [www.westfieldnj.com/adultschool](http://www.westfieldnj.com/adultschool), e-mail [adultschool@westfieldnj.com](mailto:adultschool@westfieldnj.com) or call (908) 232-4050. For detailed information on Great Decisions, please call (908) 233-1035.

## Center For Hope Series To Deal With Grief

COUNTY – The Center for Hope Hospice and Palliative Care will offer a five-week lecture series entitled "Journey Through Grief" each Thursday from March 2 to March 30, from 7 to 9 p.m., at Roselle Catholic High School on Raritan Road in Roselle.

This non-denominational program is designed to assist those who have experienced the death of a loved one. Pre-registration is not required and there is no cost to participants.

The series is open to the public and guests are invited to bring family members and friends. Refreshments and fellowship will follow each lecture. For more details or directions, call Donna Dandrilli at the Center For Hope Hospice and Palliative Care at (908) 654-3103.

## Fanwood Library Reveals Closings For Renovations

FANWOOD – The Fanwood Memorial Library has announced that the lower level of the library, including the Children's Department, will be closed to the public through Tuesday, February 28, while the facility undergoes a large-scale renovation project.

In addition, the entire library will be closed on Friday and Saturday, February 24 and 25. Service to the public will resume on or about Wednesday, March 1. The library is located at North Avenue and Tilloston Road.

Utilizing grant funds from a Department of Community Affairs Livable Communities Grant, the plans include renovation of the entire lower level of the building, as well as other key areas.

Highlights of the project will include:

new paint and carpeting; new flooring for the stairwell; additional storage; new work surfaces and shelving; new reference stacks; upgraded floor plans both upstairs and downstairs; new paint and curtains and signage in the Young Adult area, plus new tables, chairs, signage, book stacks and display units, among other enhancements.

With these renovations, the library's heavily used lower level will be able to continue providing varied services to its patrons.

During the closings, Fanwood residents can have all of their library needs met at the Scotch Plains Public Library, located at 1927 Bartle Avenue, through a Cooperative Shared Services arrangement. Anyone with questions may call the Fanwood Memorial Library at (908) 322-6400.

## Changing Your Commute Could Earn Extra Dollars

AREA – The state Department of Transportation has designated TransOptions, the northwest New Jersey Transportation Management Association, the area coordinator for the new Commuter Rewards Pilot Program. The Commuter Rewards Pilot program is an incentive sponsored by the NJ DOT, which pays \$3 a day to commuters who switch to carpooling, vanpooling, walking, cycling or riding transit to get to work.

The program allows a maximum of 100 commuters who change their commute and register with TransOptions to receive the \$3-per-day reward for a 90-day period (60 working days). Commuters in the pilot program can earn up to a maximum of \$180. In the case of carpools, each participant is eligible for the reward. A three-person carpool will in effect receive \$9 per day resulting in \$540 over the full 90-day period.

To be eligible for the Commuter Rewards Program, participants must live in or commute into TransOptions service area of Morris, Sussex, Warren Counties and suburban Essex, Union and Passaic Counties.

Commuters must commute at least half of their distance to work by carpool, vanpool, mass transit, walk or bike. They must log their commute for a 90-day period (60 working days) and have their supervisor sign their tracking log. At the conclusion of the 90-day period, the log is submitted to TransOptions who will issue a Commuter Rewards Check.

John F. Ciaffone, President of TransOptions commented, "This is a fantastic opportunity to try a new method of commuting and to earn a few extra dollars. It gives commuters an incentive to try ridesharing and reduce their fuel expense, commute stress and personal vehicle wear and tear. Commuters who want to participate must contact TransOptions to obtain a registration form."

"When we send out the registration form we will also send the log and additional instructions. This is a simple way to put \$180 in your pocket. NJDOT will evaluate the results of this pilot program and decide if they want to make it a statewide effort. Right now, only TransOptions and Meadowlink, the Bergen County TMA, are piloting the program."

According to a spokesperson, by providing an incentive to get people to modify their commute, the Commuter Rewards Program will help to reduce traffic congestion and air pollution throughout New Jersey. Participation is limited to the first 100 qualified applicants and concludes after 90 days from each participant's start date.

To obtain registration materials, call TransOptions at (973) 267-7600.

## Effective Advocating Subject of Free Class

CRANFORD – The Union County Watchdog Association will sponsor a free class offered by The Citizen's Campaign, which will teach citizens the political skills to be more effective advocates for whatever issues they may have within their own communities. The class will be held on Thursday, March 9, at 7 p.m. at the Cranford Community Center.

Each participant will receive a free copy of "The Citizens' Manual: Paths to Power for Regular Citizens," a resource book of legal rights and political skills for citizen participation in local government.

Seats can be reserved by calling the Union County Watchdog Association at (908) 709-0530. Information also is available at [jointhecampaign.com](http://jointhecampaign.com) for more information.

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