

County St. Pat's Day Parade Set For March 11 in Union

UNION — The 10th Annual Union County St. Patrick's Day Parade will step off on Saturday, March 11, at 1 p.m. sharp on Morris Avenue in the Township of Union, as thousands of marchers and spectators gather to celebrate the patron saint of Ireland.

The 2006 Grand Marshal, Kathleen McGinnis-DiChiara of Summit, will lead the march of bagpipe and high school bands, local police and fire department units, floats and many more organizations through the center of Union.

The Union County St. Patrick's Day Parade has grown from drawing 10,000 spectators during its inaugural run in 1997 to an anticipated turnout of more than 40,000 on-lookers this year, according to a county spokesman. This 2006 parade is dedicated to all the medical professionals of Union County "for their commitment and extraordinary efforts in service to the community," the spokesman said.

In keeping with a parade tradition, officials from Shannon, Ireland will also march for the 10th straight year. As guests of the Union County Emerald Society, Shannon Mayor Tony Mulchay and Shannon Town Clerk Tomas MacCormaic will join in the Union County celebration.

Grand Marshal McGinnis-DiChiara served as president and chief executive officer of the Hillside-based Community FoodBank of New Jersey for 30 years.

"Kathleen displays all the qualities of a selfless and dedicated Irish Catholic who absolutely conveys the true significance of our culture, heritage and honor to the patron saint of Ireland," said Peter Tierney, 2006 Parade General Chairman.

According to Parade Adjutant Paul

Butterly, who also coordinates parade logistics with the Township of Union, the 2006 Union County St. Patrick's Day Parade will feature high school marching bands from the Township of Union and City of Elizabeth, more than 20 bagpipe bands including the Union County Police and Fire Pipes and Drums and the St. Columille United Gaelic Pipe Band, Fourth Degree color guards from the Knights of Columbus, non-profit units, local police and fire departments and floats provided by Union Center National Bank, the Center for Hope Hospice and the Garden State Ceili Club.

A Mass will be celebrated at St. Patrick's Roman Catholic Church in Elizabeth at 9 a.m. to begin the day, followed by a welcoming reception in the church hall.

The family-friendly festivities will kick off at noon at the reviewing stand located at the corner of Morris and Stuyvesant Avenues in Union Center with a welcome from parade officials, traditional Irish music and step-dancing. The one-mile parade will begin at 1 p.m. at Commerce Street and Morris Avenue, proceed east on Morris to Union Center and then south onto Stuyvesant Avenue, ending at Roosevelt Avenue.

The groups represented on the parade committee are based throughout Union, Essex and Middlesex Counties and include the John Cryan Association, Thornsticks, Irish-American Society of the Township of Union, Friendly Sons of St. Patrick, Joseph Nugent Association, Ancient Order of Hibernians in Elizabeth, Union County Emerald Society and the Union County Irish-American Association.

For more information visit unioncountystpatricksdaysparade.com.



CHAT SESSION...The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Board of Education and PTA Council met last Thursday for a roundtable discussion at Park Middle School. Among the topics were state testing and voter turnout for school elections.

Testing, School Elections Discussed by PTA, BOE

By MEGHAN GILL
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

SCOTCH PLAINS — Approximately 40 parents, citizens, school administrators and board of education members met last Thursday night in the Park Middle School Media Center for the annual Parent-Teacher Association Council/BOE roundtable discussion, organized by PTA Council Vice-President Amy Carow.

Superintendent of Schools Dr. Carol Choye distributed voter registration forms and asked every person in the room if they were registered to vote. "If people are not registered to vote, I have the form here," she stated.

BOE President Linda Nelson started the discussion by asking parents if they "feel they get enough information regarding children's test results?"

PTA Council President Karen Kulikowski responded that the district could supply some information, such as a table of tests that would be administered at the beginning of the year, an explanation of what each test measures, how the results are used, if test results are seen by teachers and if students and parents can obtain sample questions.

Mrs. Nelson said the problem with testing is that every district has its own assessment program, but with the implementation of the federal government's No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, districts must look to federal and state testing guidelines. "Ultimately, we have to do what they require, or students will be tested all of the time."

The district was notified on December 20 of the federal and state tests for fifth-, sixth- and seventh-grade students. These tests will be administered in the spring, said Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment Dr. Margaret Hayes.

The state department of education uses the results to set standards for the following year. "The bar is raised every year. As benchmarks increase, all schools will be concerned" with the outcome of the test results, Dr. Hayes said. By 2014, all students in the district must pass state tests under the NCLB Act.

Dr. Choye clarified that the district, under Dr. Hayes' direction, "does not just want students to pass a test, but we want them to learn; we look at the curriculum."

Dr. Hayes directed parents to go to the Department of Education website and find the assessment page, saying the page contains the testing schedule and many tools regarding the tests, sample questions, study guides and parameters of assessment.

Mrs. Kulikowski asked the BOE what measures it would take to relocate elections from schools to other buildings due to safety risks.

Mrs. Nelson responded that "the schools belong to the community. The taxpayers have invested a lot in them. It would send a message to the public that they are not welcome in our schools. We are very proud of our schools. They (voters) see how well behaved our children are, and how crowded, too." She asked parents, "Only 800 parents of 5,300 students voted on budget referendum last year; do you know why parents are not voting?"

Some in attendance said the polling hours are not convenient and there are no absentee ballots provided for the BOE budget referendum and election.

Ms. Carow also suspected that "they (citizens) don't want to say no to the schools, but they don't want higher taxes, so they don't come out to vote."

Also discussed were test preparation services at the high school, Internet safety and the resignation of Terrill School Principal Jeanette Baubles.

RVSA Workers Oppose Privatization Proposal

By KEREN SCHULTZ
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

RAHWAY — Employees of the Rahway Valley Sewerage Authority (RVSA) had the opportunity last Thursday to voice their concerns to RVSA's board of commissioners over the possibility of some of the utility's operations being privatized.

In January, United Water, a subsidiary of Suez Water, presented the RVSA board with a proposal to take over operational control of the RVSA. The sewerage facility currently serves more than 300,000 residents and 3,500 industrial and commercial customers in Westfield, Scotch Plains, Garwood, Mountainside, Springfield, Kenilworth, Roselle Park, Cranford, Clark, Rahway and Woodbridge.

Plant employees expressed apprehension regarding the extent to which RVSA would consider allowing a private company to assume control of its plant — whether it be the entire plant or only the sludge facility.

"(These) unknown variables have a great potential to negatively affect the (Rahway Valley Sewerage) Authority and all the municipalities around it," said Plant Supervisor Robert Valent.

Commissioner Frank Mazzarella, Clark's RVSA representative, first initiated conversation between RVSA's Board of Commissioners and United Water back in November 2005, according to someone familiar with the discussions. Neither Commissioner Mazzarella nor Commissioner Attilio Venturo, the recently appointed vice chairman, attended the meeting.

This is not the first time that the idea of privatization has come up for the RVSA. In February of 1997, it had rejected the idea of privatization, underlining the high quality of its staff and having the second-lowest annual charge per household in the state.

Tom Waters of Woodbridge, an RVSA employee for almost 28 years, addressed the board on behalf of the plant's maintenance department. He attributed the RVSA's low sludge dumping rates to the board's and staff's consistent hard work.

In a letter to the RVSA commissioners, the supervisory staff of RVSA pointed to United Water's claim in its proposal to be able to save the RVSA \$3 million during the first year of privatization.

"To my knowledge, you cut costs by cutting down on (staff)," said Mr. Waters. "I'm not here to play on your sympathy, but I believe this is a large thing for you to consider."

Senior Chief Stuart Michael Rogers stated that the board's decision would not only affect Rahway Valley's municipalities but also the facility's employees and their families.

"My co-workers and I are on the job 24 hours a day, seven days a week. We are dedicated to the authority," Mr. Rogers said.

In a letter to its commissioners, the RVSA staff stated that supervisory employees have on average 15 years of experience operating the plant and most employees have been with the RVSA for a substantial amount of time and have devoted much of their lives to it. In addition, the letter stated that many of the RVSA's 59 employees are near retirement age.

"We are looking at everything, (we are) pursuing all avenues to cut costs — whether it's collecting money from the state or local government. Everybody's job is safe and secure; there's no reason to think otherwise," said Commissioner James Murphy, the newly elected board chairman and Cranford's representative.

The proposal for privatization comes during the utility's \$137 million court-mandated upgrade of its Rahway facility is completed. The RVSA has embarked on an expansion project to eliminate sewer overflows and the upgrades, due to be completed in 2008, will bring the RVSA in compliance with the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection's requirements.

According to RVSA's commissioners, it is still in the preliminary phases of considering United Water's proposal, and the RVSA does not yet have a timeline for when it will arrive at a decision. In addition to its decision regarding privatization, the commissioners announced on Thursday the retirement of Executive Director Richard Tokarski effective Wednesday, March 1.

Union County GOP Seeks Candidates

WESTFIELD — Union County Republican Chairman Phil Morin has announced that the county GOP will hold an open process for those interested in running for Union County freeholder or becoming more involved in the Republican Party in Union County.

"Any Union County resident considering running for office this year or in the future is welcome to meet with our committee," Mr. Morin said. "You do not have to be a registered Republican to get involved and make a difference. If you share the Union County Republican Party's goals of reducing property taxes, campaign finance reform and smaller, smarter government, we want you involved."

For more information, call (908) 789-0200.

Transportation Trust Fund Topic for Raritan Coalition

WESTFIELD — The status of the state's transportation trust fund will be the focus of the Raritan Valley Line Coalition meeting this Monday, February 27, at 8:15 a.m. in the Westfield Town Council Chambers of the Westfield Municipal Building, located at 425 East Broad Street.

Representatives from the New Jersey Alliance for Action will provide an update on their campaign to educate the public and municipal and county officials, "about the need to fix the problems with the current Transportation Trust Fund and then to encourage the governor, state legislators, the state Department of Transportation and NJ Transit to identify

new funding sources to renew it," according to a Raritan Coalition press release dated February 17.

According to the Raritan Coalition, the current trust fund will expire Friday, June 30, after which all of the \$805 million revenue will be required to pay debt service on existing bonds. The \$180 million in annual aid to municipalities and counties "will be eliminated, potentially causing municipalities and counties to raise taxes to pay for needed road, bridge and safety maintenance and improvements" if new revenue for the fund is not found.

For more information, call (908) 231-7000, extension no. 7239.

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