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SIXTY CENTS

6 Candidates Vie for 3 SP Seats On BOE; Russo Seeks 1-Yr. Term

By GINA LEVINE-LEVY
Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

SCOTCH PLAINS — Three incumbents representing Scotch Plains on the Scotch Plains-Fanwood Board of Education and three other township residents are vying for three seats on the board of education.

In addition, nine-year incumbent Thomas Russo is running unopposed for a one-year term left open when former board member Lance Porter stepped down last year.

All four seats up this year are from Scotch Plains. There are no Fanwood

seats up this year.

Incumbents Linda Nelson, board president, Norman "Trip" Whitehouse and Betty Anne Woerner all filed petitions to seek three-year terms. Julius Shapiro, David Gorbunoff and George Gowen are challenging them. As of Tuesday afternoon, there was one more application still being reviewed by the business office.

Mr. Russo, a graduate of the SP-F school system, said he is running for the one-year term to take care of some unfinished business, such as

contract negotiations with the Scotch Plains-Fanwood Education Association.

"It's very important that we agree to a contract that's fair to both our staff and to the community, he said.

Mr. Russo added that he also wants to aid in the search for the new Terrill Middle School principal. "It's important that we maintain the strongest administrative staff that we possibly can."

Mr. Russo has two sons; one is a graduate of Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School (SPFHS) and the other is a junior.

If re-elected, it will be his 10th year — "a nice round number," he said.

Mrs. Woerner, who is finishing her first term, said her financial background is an asset to the board.

A chief financial officer for a children's non-profit organization, Mrs. Woerner said finances are an important issue facing the board: "(The) property tax is way too high and yet our school board and many others are not getting funds from the state to meet mandates. It's the 'perfect storm.'"

She stressed that there is a big "financial challenge" ahead for the board.

A working mother, Mrs. Woerner

though he said "we need to do something for our seniors."

In other business, the mayor commented on the decision two weeks ago by the Union County Freeholders to withdraw its plans to lease the 23-acre Sevell property on Cooper Road to a private company so that it could be turned into an education farm. Several hundred residents attended a planning board meeting three days earlier to raise objections. The following evening, in the wake of the

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S. Plains Council Debates Senior, Community Centers

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

SCOTCH PLAINS — Two months after including it among his initiatives for the new year, Mayor Martin Marks on Tuesday said that, at present, "there is not a consensus" among members of the township council "to move forward" with construction of a community center, although he said a senior meeting facility was something that needs to be pursued.

At the council's regular meeting, the mayor said both projects were being approached "very cautiously," given the costs and location issues involved. In his January 3 address laying out his 2006 agenda, Mayor Marks favored both a new senior and a community center, although the details of where it would be located and what such a building would entail have not yet been made public.

The mayor told *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times* in January that a new facility could be based at Brookside Park, although he did not rule out the possibility of it being situated at the library in conjunction with a facility expansion there.

Recreation Director Ray Poerio told *The Times* several weeks ago that he and the township recreation commission "certainly understand the dollars involved with such a project and will work very closely with the council to determine what the needs are for the overall community." He had expressed his hope that final decisions could be made this year, so that construction could start later this year or in 2007.

It's unclear where any new community center now stands, given the mayor's comments on Tuesday. As for a new senior-citizens center, the mayor said it still not known where it would be located. "We will take this slowly and cautiously," he said, al-

Gatorade Contents Burn Park Student, Police Investigate

By MICHAEL J POLLACK
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

SCOTCH PLAINS — Last Wednesday, a sixth grade student at Scotch Plains' Park Middle School suffered burns to the insides of her mouth caused by tasting a chemical substance in her drink. Though she bought a sports beverage, according to Detective Sergeant Brian Donnelly, she "recognized the foreign substance and spit out." Eventually, she went to Muhlenberg Regional Medical Center, where she was treated for burns and irritation to the mouth. Within two hours, she returned to school.

"We are investigating how the substance got in the bottle," Sergeant Donnelly. "We've sent the substance to the state police lab to see what it is. We are treating it as criminal."

Saying he is dealing with the manufacturer and the food service provider, the student, who bought the drink in the noisy cafeteria, said she didn't "know definitively" if the bottle was completely sealed.

Sergeant Donnelly said the smell was "was consistent with a cleaning agent. It had a cleaning type smell.

The color in the bottle was not the same as what was advertised."

Park employs Pomptonian Food Services to manage operations for the cafeteria, hire staff and purchase food. Cathy Penna of Pomptonian assured the public that procedures were implemented to work with the school administration and local police to "ensure the safety of the students. Precautions are in place."

Because the investigation is ongoing, she didn't want to disclose what measures are being taken specifically. She did confirm that the substance was discovered in a Gatorade bottle and that the company has contacted PepsiCola directly regarding safety measures.

Heather Mitchell, spokesperson for The Gatorade Company, released a statement in response to the incident.

"Our concern when we first heard of this situation was the safety of the student and we were pleased to hear that she was back in school the same day," Ms. Mitchell's statement read. "The police believe that the product was somehow compromised after it left our control; based on the integrity and quality standards of our production processes, we are confident that this is an isolated incident. State and local law enforcement authorities continue to investigate this situation and The Gatorade Company continues to work closely with police on this matter."

Scotch Plains-Fanwood Public Schools Business Administrator Anthony Del Sordi said on Thursday that the school checked all supplies to "make sure no bottles were opened. We continue to alert people about open containers and bags. On the day (of the incident), we did remove some of the drinks."

He said until the school and town have a clear indication of who is responsible for placing the cleaning agent in the drink, "we won't be able to make any judgment. We did notify parents to speak to their children about being careful when purchasing products. We feel we did everything to make the students safe."

Former Residents Establish MS Benefit Foundation

MOUNTAINSIDE — Former Mountainside residents Blanche and George Watts have established a foundation to benefit the borough. Announced to the public at the borough's annual reorganization meeting, the concept behind the foundation is to aid organizations delivering services to Mountainside residents, whether based in Mountainside or not. Patterned after a community foundation, the organization will not only solicit grant requests but also entertain funding initiatives to meet community needs. To be funded with approximately \$3.5 million, the foundation anticipates making grants each year in excess of \$140,000.

Benefactors Mr. and Mrs. Watts



VISIONARIES...Fanwood residents participate in a Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) "visioning session" at Children's Specialized Hospital in order to brainstorm ideas regarding the development of the South Avenue corridor.

Fanwood Residents Provide Input On TDR Program, Redevelopment

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

FANWOOD — Fanwood residents experienced what it might be like to be a city planner, participating in the most recent Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) "visioning session," on Saturday, February 25 at Children's Specialized Hospital.

Organized by the Department of Smart Growth, a division of the Department of Community Affairs, in conjunction with the borough council, the TDR workshop allowed residents and business owners to brainstorm ideas regarding the development of the South Avenue corridor while learning about the proposed plans to implement the TDR program.

The proposed revitalization area runs along South Avenue to the south of the Fanwood Train Station and Downtown north of Martine Avenue, between South and LaGrande Avenue. This corridor is currently a mixture of zones, including light industrial (LI), general commercial (GC) and residential (R). Many of the buildings in this area are old and dilapidated or in need of redevelopment.

After a short presentation, the audience broke up into small groups to discuss their visions for the revitalization and redevelopment of this area. The types of businesses some of the residents chose as being desirable were a drug store, an upscale bar and possibly larger tax-ratables. Most of the residents agreed that the existing A & P was in need of redevelopment due to the property's age and lack of maintenance.

The types of businesses that many of the residents considered undesirable were garden apartments, fast-food chains, nail salons, gas stations, dry cleaners and Chinese restaurants. The need to provide borough residents with a wider variety of services was considered desirable, as was an attempt to limit those businesses and services that seemed redundant.

Participants made lists of desirable and undesirable types of buildings they would like to see along South Avenue and in the area north of Martine Avenue, as well. Limiting

height, size and density of buildings, maintaining Fanwood's Victorian style, pedestrian friendly sidewalks, ample parking and well-maintained properties were among some of the desirable features enumerated. Limiting the density to curtail school taxes

was completely voluntary.

Consultants from the Department of Smart Growth, who gave the presentation, were paid for through a \$120,000 grant from the department. This was the fourth public presentation hosted by the Smart Growth consultants and the borough.

Handouts and maps of the borough explaining the TDR program were also on display at the session. According to the published information distributed at the meeting, TDR is the transfer of development potential from one piece of property to another. A TDR program permits developers, in a receiving zone, to purchase TDR credits from property owners in a sending zone. Property owners in the sending zone agree to place certain development restrictions (easements) on their properties in order to preserve the property's historical integrity.

The property owners in the receiving zone are afforded certain development incentives for purchasing the credits. The borough and the Smart Growth representatives are still working out the precise incentives for each party to participate in the program.

The TDR program can also provide funds for homeowners to maintain the

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Sending district boundary of Fanwood as per the Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) program

was a chief concern of many of the residents.

Undesirable features discussed were bump outs and flat roofs. Several residents also agreed that they did not want the borough invoking eminent domain on existing businesses. Mayor Mahr assured the residents that the TDR program did not include any plans to invoke eminent domain and emphasized that the TDR program

Communications Tower Expected to be Built in Spring

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

SCOTCH PLAINS — Union County officials on Monday outlined their plans for the construction of a cellular telephone tower at the county's maintenance yard on South Avenue.

In a brief presentation before the planning board, Deputy County Counsel Joseph Ascione said the 150-foot tower would hold communications antennas for the county's own use. The tower's cost will be paid via the leasing of additional tower space to Omnipoint Communications, which makes the T-Mobile cell phone brand, and Sprint.

Todd Mahay, a professional engineer, explained that the tower would be located at the rear of the 10-acre property, located between South Avenue and the railroad tracks. The new tower will sit about 170 feet from the street and be partially obscured by the large dome that contains road salt, Mr. Mahay told the board.

Unless federal aviation authorities require warning lights to be placed atop the tower, Mr. Mahay said there were no plans to light the tower.

Township emergency personnel services, such as the police and fire departments and the local rescue squad, will also have the option of placing their own antennas on the tower, county officials said. Construction is expected to begin the spring and take one to three months to complete.

Prior to the county's presentation,

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LET THERE BE LUNCH...Fanwood Mayor Colleen Mahr and Union County Freeholder Chairman Al Mirabella of Fanwood stand in the new kitchen of the Forest Road Park Senior Citizen Community Center upon the kitchen's official opening on Monday.

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