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SIXTY CENTS

Investigation of Fanwood Officer On Sexual Misconduct Continues

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

FANWOOD — The investigation into an allegation of sexual misconduct against a decorated Fanwood police officer is continuing.

Officer Brian Bartiromo, who has been with the Fanwood Police Department four years, has been suspended without pay since last fall after two women filed separate complaints accusing him of inappropriate sexual contact.

Detective Sergeant Brian Donnelly of the Scotch Plains Police Department confirmed receiving the first complaint, in which a teller at the Unity Bank in Scotch Plains alleged

that Officer Bartiromo, a bank customer, grabbed her breast as they chatted on the street outside of the bank on September 10.

Lieutenant Richard Trigo of the Fanwood Police Department confirmed that their office received a complaint from a second woman. The report resulted in an internal investigation, he said. No other details of that report were made available.

Both reports were transferred to the Union County Prosecutor's Office. Executive Assistant Union County Prosecutor Robert O'Leary told *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times* that his office was reviewing the allegations and that charges were

pending as the investigation was nearing completion. He could not estimate when the case would be determined.

Typically, a local police department would file charges if probable cause were found, law enforcement officials said. However, because of the close professional association between the two departments, the case was immediately handed up to the prosecutor's office to avoid any appearance of impropriety, Det. Sgt. Donnelly said. Inappropriate sexual contact is an indictable offense, he told *The Times*.

Fanwood's case was also turned over to the prosecutor's office due to Officer Bartiromo's association with that department.

Scott Mitzner, Officer Bartiromo's former attorney, told *The Times* that the woman who filed the second complaint was not credible because she purportedly called Mr. Mitzner to ask for money in lieu of testifying against his client. As a result of that phone call, Mr. Mitzner stepped down as Mr. Bartiromo's attorney in order to testify as a witness on his behalf, Mr. Mitzner told *The Times*.

Mr. Mitzner said Officer Bartiromo maintains his innocence and anticipates returning to the force after he is cleared on all of the charges.

Officer Bartiromo told *The Times* that he is in the process of choosing a new attorney. He would not comment any further on the allegations.

Prior to coming to the Fanwood Police Department in 2002, Officer Bartiromo was an officer in Irvington for six years. He was decorated by the Irvington Police Department for the arrest of a suspect after a car chase in 2001.



Victoria McCabe for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times
FROLIC IN THE PARK...Family and fowl flock to Brookside Park in Scotch Plains at the first signs of spring. A firm has reportedly developed conceptual site plans for the park that, through the Open Space Trust Fund, would call for the construction of a 40,000-square-foot recreation center, an artificial-turf soccer field, a baseball field, lighting and a 216-space parking lot. Scotch Plains Advocates for the Conservation of the Environment (SPACE), along with individual residents, has denounced the drawing of these plans, saying that such changes would change the character of the park.

State Aid Numbers Could Impact Scotch Plains Budget

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

SCOTCH PLAINS — The township council, while reviewing expenditures in the proposed 2006 municipal budget, discussed revenues Monday night with Township Manager Thomas Atkins, who said that his "biggest concern" is the level of state aid this year.

He noted that assistance from Trenton has essentially been flat for the past seven years, except for "very small" increases in 2001 and 2004. Last year, state aid to Scotch Plains totaled \$3.127 million, and Mayor Martin Marks said at the council's budget meeting on Monday that he has no reason to believe there will be any increase this year.

Local officials will get a better idea of the situation once Gov. Jon Corzine puts forth his proposed state budget on Tuesday, March 21. Until then, Mr. Atkins said, "we don't know what's going to happen." He said if state aid to municipalities is cut, township officials would have to find additional revenue or make commensurate cuts in expenditures in order to balance the municipal budget as required by state law. He said a 5-percent decrease in state aid would leave the township with a \$156,000 shortfall, equating about one-and-a-half tax points. A cut of 10 percent would equal \$312,000, or three tax points, Mr. Atkins explained.

Mayor Marks noted that state aid as a percentage of the municipal budget has been "plummeting" over the past several years. In 2001, assistance from Trenton funded about 18 percent of the township budget; by last year that figure was about 15 percent.

While awaiting word about state aid levels, the council continued its review of certain expenditures in the proposed \$22-million budget submitted by Mr. Atkins in late January. He focused a good deal of his comments on the public works department's budget, noting that funding for curbside recycling is included, as well as any funding needed to implement the permit-based bulky household waste collection set for June. That program, which was initiated last year, generated \$114,000 in revenue from permits in 2005. Mr. Atkins told the council he anticipates the same level of revenue this year from the sale of permits, which will again cost \$60.

Although the February blizzard was "costly" to the township, Mr. Atkins said that overall, "the winter hasn't killed us" in terms of the budget. He noted that funding set aside for outside contractors to assist with snow removal has not been "substantially depleted." Without providing details, he also said he has provided money in the budget for possible new options for collecting leaves this fall in order to make the township compliant with new storm-water management regulations publicized recently.

The department, Mr. Atkins said, "is undergoing some very major changes this year" in terms of personnel. Public Works Director Walter DiNizo retired at the beginning of February and was succeeded by Charles Cerami. In addi-

tion, other retirements are expected in 2006, including Earl Jackson, who holds the number-two position in the department.

Mr. Atkins also reviewed the health department's budget, saying that it looks increasingly likely that Union County will institute a county-sponsored animal control program. Presently, Scotch Plains pays about \$42,000 annually to a private entity, Associated Humane Societies of Newark, to provide this service. Township dog and cat license fees offset about \$8,000 of that expense. If a county effort does come to fruition, Mr. Atkins said it would be financed either as part of the county budget or, more likely, in his estimation, via a user fee involving the towns that choose to participate.

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FW Boro To Update Storm Water Management Plan

By TED RITTER
Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

FANWOOD — Borough Council President Donna Dolce presided over the mayor and council's Tuesday night meeting at Borough Hall, where the body focused on firming up the agenda for next week's regular mayor and council meeting.

At the meeting, which Mayor Colleen Mahr could not attend, topics of local interest generated considerable discussion.

Borough Engineer Joseph Pryor brought the council up to speed on a storm-water management ordinance scheduled for first reading at next week's meeting.

Mr. Pryor said that the borough's current plan must be updated to meet state requirements, noting that Fanwood is one of the few municipalities to have such a plan on the books, and he said the proposed update "is not that different from what we're used to."

The measure would address a variety of technical issues not clearly or fully covered in the borough's current regulations.

In addition, Mr. Pryor said the new ordinance would apply only to projects classified as "major development" of more than an acre or those that significantly increase a land parcel's impervious surface.

Mr. Pryor told the council the borough would have to adopt a separate ordinance to retain planning authority over smaller projects, such as residential ones. He said this should be seen as a positive move because many of the local regulations pertaining to non-major development represent "old thinking."

"In some cases, the regulations (applying to non-major development) are like using a sledgehammer to kill a flea," he said, indicating that the borough's floodplain regulations will be retained for now but need to be amended in the near future to keep in

step with more modern regulations. He said that though the current regulations are out of date, the council does not want to run the risk of having nothing on the books. Work to that end is already underway, he said.

In other business, the council considered an issue raised by Councilman Bruce Walsh regarding two properties on Staggard Place, a local road that connects South and LaGrande Avenues.

He said that lots 11 and 12, which are "significantly larger" than most on this road, are the only two in a primarily residential neighborhood with the zoning designation of light-industrial use, and he asked the council to discuss whether it would be a good idea to change the zoning to residential to preserve the character

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Zoning Bd. to Vote Next Month On Gulf Station Expansion

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

SCOTCH PLAINS — At its meeting next month, the zoning board of adjustment will discuss and vote on the application of Cumberland Farms, the owner of the Gulf gasoline station on Route 22, to expand the facility, a proposal neighborhood residents have opposed.

After Cumberland Farms' representatives presented some last-minute revisions to the revised site plan they had put forth in January and residents voiced their opposition, board chairman James Fawcett noted that of the seven board members in attendance last Thursday, six had attended the previous hearing on the application two months ago. At least five affirmative votes are needed for an application to be approved.

As a result, Mr. Fawcett gave Gary Rosensweig, Cumberland Farms' attorney, the option of going forward with an immediate vote — meaning five of the six board members would have to cast a favorable vote for his client to prevail — or allowing the two absent board members to read the transcript of last Thursday's meeting and then be available to cast a vote at the board's April 6 meeting. Mr. Rosensweig chose the latter option, meaning that at least five of seven board members will have to vote affirmatively next month for the application to succeed.

Earlier in the evening, engineer Brett Skapinetz outlined some final revisions to the site plan for the property, including the addition of six additional employee-only parking

Teachers Rally Again as Contract Talks Resume With Fact-Finder

By MEGHAN GILL
Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

SCOTCH PLAINS — Sporting banners, signs, hats and gloves, approximately 400 district and out-of-district teachers, aides and secretaries participated in a walking rally last Wednesday evening at dusk, gathering at Park Middle School to support contract negotiations with the board of education (BOE) at the kick-off of the fact-finding process.

District teachers, aides and secretaries have been working under a previous contract, which expired on July 1, 2005. The group, ushered by the Scotch Plains Police Department, walked along the sidewalk north on Park Avenue and turned east onto Westfield Avenue,

chanting and beating a drum. They finished up at the BOE Administrative Offices behind Evergreen Green.

"I am proud to be here to support our negotiating team for a fair and equitable settlement. Our members are working hard and have put their hearts into everything. They deserve a fair contract," First Vice President of the Scotch Plains-Fanwood Education Association (SPFEA) Dominick Giordano told *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times*.

SPFEA President Barbara McGuane explained that members of Plainfield and Watchung Hills school districts were joining the marchers to show their support for the teacher contract negotiations. "I would like for nothing more than a settlement,"

she told *The Times*.

Ms. McGuane has worked in the district for 19 years and currently teaches seventh- and eighth-grade English and special education at Park Middle School.

When the procession reached the administrative offices, Ms. McGuane addressed the group. "Tonight, your negotiating team will be meeting with a state-appointed fact-finder who will try to mediate a settlement.

"We are wearing our walking shoes to send a message to this board. We won't be fooled; we won't get tired, we won't give up, and we won't give in!" she exclaimed.

BOE President Linda Nelson said she did not have the opportunity to observe the rally.

"The board is disappointed that the teachers association would choose to create such a confrontational atmosphere as we enter fact finding," Ms. Nelson told *The Times*. "The board will not be intimidated by public demonstrations and mass mailings; they do not change the issues."

"The board is aware of its responsibility to the entire community, not only teachers but also students, parents and taxpayers," she said.

The fact-finding meeting, which included representatives from the New Jersey Education Association, lasted four hours. Fact-finder Joel Weisblatt has served as a grievance arbitrator in thousands of disputes in both the public and private sectors. Some public sector matters he has mediated involved employers and unions at all levels of public employment in New Jersey.

Ms. Nelson confirmed that Mr. Weisblatt was encouraged by what he heard at Wednesday's meeting. His goal, she explained, is to gather as much information as he can. He has set a tentative meeting for late March to continue the negotiation process.

The contract negotiations will most likely not be resolved before the board of education election on Tuesday, April 18, however, Ms. Nelson said, "The fact-finder was hopeful that we can reach a settlement at some point."

Ms. Nelson also added that, "Our focus is trying to save jobs. We are trying to get the best settlement. It is up to the voters to make a decision."



GULF COASTING...Next month, the Scotch Plains Zoning Board of Adjustment will vote on the application of Cumberland Farms, the owner of the Gulf gasoline station on Route 22, to expand the facility, which neighbors oppose.



SPRING FASHIONS FROM WESTFIELD — Margaret MacIntyre, left, and Connie Klock craft centerpieces that will decorate tables at the College Club of Fanwood and Scotch Plains benefit fashion show on Sunday, April 2, at the Shackamaxon Country Club in Scotch Plains from 11:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. The event also will feature lunch, raffles and a silent auction. See story on page 10.

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