



Happy Thanksgiving!

Serving the Community Since 1959



THE SCOTCH PLAINS FANWOOD

www.timesnj.com

TIMES

OUR 47TH YEAR - ISSUE NO. 47-2006

USPS 485200 Periodical - Postage Paid at Scotch Plains, N.J.

Thursday, November 23, 2006

Published Every Thursday Since 1959 www.timesnj.com

(908) 232-4407 press@goleader.com

SIXTY CENTS

Fanwood Holds Contract Talks With Borough Police Union

By MEGHAN GILL... FANWOOD — The Borough of Fanwood and the Policemen's Benevolent Association Local 123 will hold a second contract mediation at the end of November as negotiations

continue. The 21 members of the police department have been working under the previous contract, which expired on January 1, 2006.

Greco, the PBA would like to add all holiday stipend pay to their pension. The current contract allows for five days of holiday stipend pay to be allocated toward pension, rather than all 13-holiday stipend days.

The borough is also "looking to change" its health insurance provider program from the Preferred Provider Organization (PPO)/HMO plan to a direct access plan offered by Blue Cross/Blue Shield.

Mr. Greco said the new plan would apply to all members of the force, excluding the chief, reflecting a savings of \$58,000 per year for the borough.

"There is a third party looking into this new plan," Mr. Greco said.

The plan would increase out-of-pocket co-pays from \$5 to \$10 for doctor visits. The proposed new policy would add a third tier co-pay of \$25 for special "exotic" prescription drugs, while the present co-pays of \$5 for generic drugs and \$12 for non-generic drugs would remain the same.

Mr. Greco also said the PBA is looking for a 4-percent annual increase over the course of the next contract, the same annual increase negotiated in the previous contract.

"The last offer from the town was a 3.5-percent increase. We negotiated a 4-percent increase last time without saving the town \$58,000," he said.

Fanwood Mayor Colleen Mahr told The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times, "It's always been the position that we don't comment while we are in negotiation, that we take care of this (negotiation process) in closed session. It's down to a few issues, and we hope for a resolution by the end of the year."

She said, "We are very proud of our police department."

Councilman Jack Molenaar, chairman of the council's Committee on Public Safety, has been working closely with the PBA, along with council members Bruce Walsh and Joan Wheeler, said Mayor Mahr.

Unless the borough and PBA come to an agreement next week, another final mediation will take place in December.

If there is no agreement finalized in December, the negotiations will go to arbitrator James Mastriani, Mr. Greco said. Mr. Mastriani, who was assigned by the New Jersey Public Employment Relations Commission (PERC), recently ruled on the new contract between Westfield and its firefighters union after negotiations went into binding arbitration. Neither side appealed the decision.

Renovation Work Begins At SP Municipal Building

By FRED T. ROSSI... SCOTCH PLAINS — The renovation of the township's municipal building is underway, with work starting on the roof of a first-floor hallway and major roof repairs set to get underway as soon as next week.

Township Manager Thomas Atkins told The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times that the police department's communication center has been moved to a trailer in the parking lot next to the municipal building and will remain there for "the next several months."

The \$3.9-million project will include the replacement of the building's flat roof, which has been increasingly prone to leaks in both summer and winter weather, with a slanted roof; the installation of a new heating and



Happy Thanksgiving To You and Yours

BEGINNING TO LOOK A LOT LIKE CHRISTMAS...Festive wreaths adorn lampposts in Fanwood around the train station in anticipation of the holiday season that follows Thanksgiving.

Marks, Glover, Strauss Vow To Work for Bi-Partisan Council

By FRED T. ROSSI... SCOTCH PLAINS — Both sides in Scotch Plains appear ready to set aside their differences after a contentious campaign for township council, with Democratic Councilman-elect Kevin Glover expressing his belief that Democrats and Republicans "will agree more than not" on issues like property taxes, senior-citizen matters and ballfield development.

Mr. Glover was the top vote-getter on Election Day when he and running mate Jeffrey Strauss won two seats on the five-member governing body, giving the Democrats their first representation on the council in four years. Republican Councilwoman Nancy Malool won re-election to a second term.

Mr. Glover told The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times he believes the five council members will be able to work together once the new term begins in January. "This can't be about partisanship. It has to be about the township," he said.

"We clearly had our differences" in the campaign, he said. "But our differences should be worked out together." He said he and Mr. Strauss want to be "consensus-builders" but added that they "have strong ideas

about where we need action." One is "how we spend our money," which Mr. Glover called "my main issue." Deliberations of the 2007 township budget will begin in earnest soon after the new year, and the incoming Democrat said he wants to "identify potential savings" so that taxpayers "are getting the biggest bang for their buck."

Republican Mayor Martin Marks, a frequent target of Democratic cam-

paign literature, told The Times he doesn't "expect there to be any problems ahead. I've served on unanimous Republican councils. I've served in a minority and I've served on split councils. I've seen it all. The process works," said the mayor, who is finishing his 10th year on the council. "I think we'll be fine."

He said he has "reached out to both Democrats and invited them to sit

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10



GIVING THANKS...More than a century ago, this local family gathered to share their joy in being together and to give thanks for their many blessings. Happy Thanksgiving everyone from the staff of The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times. For the enjoyment of those 100 years from now, we invite you to e-mail your family Thanksgiving photo to editor@goleader.com for the archives.

Joint Panels Release Reports to Reduce Property Taxes

By PAUL J. PEYTON... TRENTON — The state's four joint legislative committees last week submitted 98 recommendations for reforming the state's property tax system to Governor Jon Corzine.

"Property taxes...are the largest single source of state and local revenues, raising approximately \$20 billion annually," the report from the Joint Legislative Committee on Constitutional Reform and Citizens Property Tax Constitutional Convention said.

Among the recommendations are increasing the state retirement age to 62, limiting the state pension system to full-time employees, requiring all public employees to contribute towards health-insurance premiums, banning dual-office holdings and double-dipping on pensions, implementing a cap on property taxes and developing a new school-aid formula based on an "individual district's ability to pay."

They recommended establishing an office of state comptroller, moving school board elections to November and limiting school-budget votes to spending plans that exceed the state cap, eliminating "unnecessary" state mandates on schools, establishing a pilot program for county administration of school districts and giving county superintendents the power to oversee local school district administrative spending and abolishing the New Jersey Commerce and Economic Growth and Tourism Commission.

The Joint Legislative Committee on Government Consolidation and Shared Services reported that the state has 566 municipalities, 616 school districts and 486 local authorities and special districts, "a system that lends itself to redundancy and inefficiency, which are major contributing factors to high property taxes."

The committee determined that "political resistance remains a potent barrier to consolidation and...local officials are often least willing or able to spearhead needed change." The panel said consolidation of municipal services would produce "efficiencies and cost savings."

"School superintendents in local districts are subject to very little oversight with respect to administrative spending," and the state must "eliminate duplicative administrative spending," the committee stated.

The panel has recommended the creation of a reorganization and consolidation commission "to facilitate municipal mergers and shared services."

The Joint Legislative Committee on Public Employee Benefits Reform, co-chaired by Senator Nick Scutari (LD-22, Linden), whose district includes Scotch Plains and Fanwood, determined that the state's retirement systems have an "\$18-billion unfounded liability," with State Health Benefits Program expenditures currently at \$3.6 billion annually, a number that is expected to double by the year 2010.

"A key focus of our committee was eliminating the abuses of the retirement system that harm both taxpayers and honest, hard-working public employees," Mr. Scutari said. "To that end, we developed several reform measures designed to curtail the 'padding' and 'tacking' that create significant unfunded liabilities and threaten the pension system's financial stability."

The Joint Legislative Committee on Public School Funding Reform estimated that in 2007, more than \$10 billion of New Jersey's \$30-billion budget "will be allocated to support preschool through grade 12 education."

The panel recommends that school funding should be "based equally on a district's relative property wealth and income."

Westfield Superintendent of Schools William Foley told The Westfield Leader that his biggest concerns are an increase in the power of county superintendents over local district budgets and a change in how state aid is calculated to focus on the wealth of a

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10



HAPPY BIRTHDAY MCGINN...Staff and students at McGinn School recently celebrated the school's 40th anniversary with a parade, left, as these youngsters, right, sport the school's lettered shirts and birthday hats. The Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School marching band and local officials took part in the November 14 celebration.

SP to Hold Holiday Celebration Dec. 3

SCOTCH PLAINS — The Scotch Plains Business and Professional Association and Scotch Plains Recreation Department will sponsor the annual town holiday celebration on Sunday, December 3, from 2 to 5 p.m. on the Alan Augustine Village Green, located on the side of the Municipal Building on Park Avenue.

Activities will include horse-drawn carriage rides (for a fee), a petting zoo, pony rides, an ice sculpture and the arrival of Santa at 3 p.m. Santa will visit with children until 5 p.m. in the gazebo. Parents are encouraged to bring cameras. The lights will be lit on the Village Green at 5 p.m.

SPF-BOE Discusses Tax Relief and Funding Formula

By DEBORAH MADISON... SCOTCH PLAINS — Scotch Plains-Fanwood Superintendent of Schools Margaret Hayes presented the revised district goals for the 2006-2007 school year to the board of education at the board's monthly agenda meeting on Thursday, November 16.

The board discussed the goals, which are divided into three main improvement areas involving student achievement, facilities and technology applications. Meeting the No Child Left Behind benchmarks and improved parent/teacher communication through the Internet/e-mail system were also listed as goals under these areas of need. The final draft will be discussed and voted on at the board's next regular monthly meeting on November 30.

The New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) mandates that boards of education update their district goals periodically. A long-range plan for SP-F will be discussed in January and developed in the spring of 2007, Ms. Hayes said. Board members also discussed the need to evaluate a long-range plan for facilities upgrades after they receive an updated demographics report, which is expected in the near future.

Board members Linda Nelson and Donald Parisi reported on the status of the legislative task forces commissioned to review property tax reform. Ms. Nelson reported that they would not know how the committees' findings would impact the district until the committees publish a more de-

tailed funding formula.

The new funding formula being proposed by the school funding task force could result in a monetary loss for the district, as monies are redistributed to more middle-class districts, Ms. Nelson said.

And the new formula may eliminate Abbott Districts in favor of having the money follow children as they move from district to district, Mr. Parisi explained.

Mr. Parisi said that among the recommendations was a cap on school spending with an allotted adjustment for increased enrollments. The consolidation of districts into countywide districts was not widely supported, Mr. Parisi reported. However, that

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10

Fanwood Holiday Celebration Set Dec. 3

FANWOOD — The annual Fanwood holiday celebration will take place on Sunday, December 3, from 3 to 5 p.m. at the North Avenue Train Station in Fanwood. The public is invited to enjoy an afternoon of music, holiday crafts and refreshments. There is no charge.

The celebration starts at 3 p.m. with the arrival of Santa Claus. Children can visit Santa and have their picture taken with him. Contests will be held with prizes for the winners. The celebration concludes with the lighting of the Fanwood Christmas tree on the train station lawn. The event is sponsored by the Fanwood Recreation Department.



FANWOOD PROGRESS...Construction work on South Avenue in downtown Fanwood across from the train station proceeds with earnest.

PAGE INDEX

Table with 3 columns: Regional, Editorial, Community, Obituary, Education, Sports, Real Estate, Classifieds, A&E.