

School Officials Express Concern About Rising Class Size in District

By MARIA WOEHR
Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

SCOTCH PLAINS — The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Board of Education has added one extra teacher at Brunner Elementary School to cut down class size. Currently at Brunner there are 12 to 22 students in each class in kindergarten through fourth grade, and the fifth grade has 19 to 24 students, school officials said at Thursday's board meeting.

"We are required to add one new position to the staff to create an additional section, meaning we now have 18 new teachers," said Superintendent of Schools Margaret Hayes.

The BOE hired 59 certified staff for the district. The 18 new teachers replace the 16 who resigned and the two who retired. The new teachers' \$45,000 salary is being covered by

funds set aside in the budget for staffing and retirement.

"The district was very aggressive in going out to the local universities and we hired a credentialed staff that meets all of the New Jersey requirements and the No Child Left Behind Act," said BOE member Randal Kanter.

As of September 14, the district has 5,468 enrolled students. The number of students increased by 148 from last year and 672 from September 2001, officials said.

Ms. Hayes said that the district would monitor the increasing number of students in the schools and discuss ways of cutting down class sizes. One of the solutions the board is considering this year is the creation of an additional period in the middle school for the 2007-2008 school year.

"We are filled to capacity this year in both of the middle schools. We will be working on this issue," Ms. Hayes said.

"We are meeting with the principals of all the schools to determine what steps to take," said Anthony Del Sordi, BOE business administrator. The BOE also discussed the new nutrition policy. The board sent to parents the amended nutrition policy, which encourages parents to send in healthy snacks for birthday parties, holidays or events. The policy also says that food with no nutritional value is not allowed on the premises. "We are encouraging the parents to provide healthy treats," he said.

"It is being suggested but parents still have the option to bring in candy," board member Betty Anne Woerner said.

BOE member Jane Costello, a member of the McGinn Parent-Teacher Association, thanked the BOE for the nutrition policy.

"The response from the parents and teachers has been great. However, the website needs to be updated with the latest menus so parents can see what their children are being offered," Ms. Costello said.

BOE member Linda Nelson updated the board on the Trenton Public School Funding Reform Task Force. Ms. Nelson is a member of the Garden State Coalition, which is to provide Governor Jon Corzine with ideas for legislation to fund public schools by November.

"The atmosphere in Trenton is similar to that of which it was 15 years ago, which is what brought about the coalition. They are having a lot of discussions about how the public schools spend their funds, but they are not discussing how the Legislature is spending (tax dollars). I am concerned they are going to act in haste again," she said.



MEET AND GREET...Assemblywoman Linda Stender greets Fanwood residents at Fanny Wood Day last Sunday. Mrs. Stender is seeking to become the 7th Congressional District's Representative to the U.S. Congress.

Resident Wants to Move Richmond Ave. House

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

SCOTCH PLAINS — A homeowner on Plainfield Avenue has asked the township government to consider allowing him to move a house that is slated for demolition on Richmond Street to his own property.

The house in question, which is located at 2377 Richmond Street, was recently purchased by the township so that it can be razed and the property converted in additional parkland at Jerseyland Park.

He said the homeowner would incur all costs involved in moving the house. Since the township would be incurring costs to raze the house, as was the original plan, he recommended the possibility of moving the house at least be investigated.

In other business, Mr. Atkins reported an auction held earlier Tuesday resulted in the sale of two township-owned parcels of land on Park Place. One lot was sold for \$185,000 and the other was sold for \$130,000.

The council will consider an ordinance to boost the fees it charges to organizations to hold raffles. The fee is presently \$20, with \$10 going to the state and \$10 staying in township coffers.

Township Clerk Barbara Riepe said the state is increasing its share of the fee to \$20 and urged that the township likewise increase its share to \$20. Mr. Atkins said an increase was justified due to the administrative efforts in processing applications for raffles.

The council also held a special public hearing to approve an ordinance that is required to ensure that Scotch Plains continues to participate in the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) flood insurance program.

On Tuesday, October 17, the Union County Bar Association will hold its annual memorial service at the Union County Courthouse to honor members of the county bar who died in the past year. Douglas Hansen, who served as township attorney from 2000 until his death last December, will be among the 11 deceased members who will be remembered.



REMEMBERING ROBERT...McGinn Elementary School Principal Mariana Cassidy presents Ryan Cleary with an art-inspired playground sign that will greet children entering the school's enhanced play area - "Robert's Rainbow Playground of Learning and Fun." Ryan's parents donated money for the playground in memory of their son Robert, who passed away two years ago.



HEALTHY EATING...Jane Costello, a McGinn PTA member, thanks the Scotch Plains-Fanwood BOE for the district's new nutritional policy.

SP Will Pay \$25,000 to Cops In Reverse Discrim. Lawsuit

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

SCOTCH PLAINS — The four township police officers who had filed a reverse discrimination lawsuit against the township police department, a former African-American police chief and the chief's white predecessor will each receive a \$25,000 payment, while their attorney will receive \$210,000 in legal fees, according to details of the settlement agreement provided to *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times*.

All parties involved formally approved the settlement, which was reached in April, this month. Township Attorney Brian Levine told *The Times* the township settled with the four officers because of mounting legal expenses the municipal government was incurring and because "the publicity of a trial would not have benefited either the township or our officers."

The matter dates back more than six years, when police officers Kevin Lonergan, Brian Cheney, Matthew Fugett and Brian Garbinski were reprimanded by then-Captain Marshall Nelson for their performance during an April 2000 traffic stop involving four African-American men.

The four officers' alleged that Mr. Nelson, an African-American who served as police chief from 2002 to 2004, had improperly reprimanded them for their performance during the traffic stop, had said that excessive force had been used on the men being stopped and had made racially-biased comments on the manner in which the four white officers handled the stop of the vehicle. The officers' lawsuit also claimed that, despite then-Chief Thomas O'Brien being made aware of Captain Nelson's unprofessional conduct, no measures were taken against the captain.



COUPLE OF THE DAY...Mrs. and Mr. Fanwood (June McCarthy, left, and her husband, former borough councilman Bob McCarthy, right) join Fanwood-Scotch Plains Rotary Club past President Joe Qutub at the Fanny Wood Day festivities on Sunday.

Chemidlin Tells F-SP Rotarians Of Captivity In Sierra Leone

By NORDETTE N. ADAMS
Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

SCOTCH PLAINS — Last April, Michael Chemidlin, 58, of Scotch Plains went to Africa, snapped a picture and landed in a Sierra Leone prison. He saw no signs posted saying he couldn't photograph the United Nations (UN) Courthouse.

"There were no laws against it," Mr. Chemidlin told members and guests of the Fanwood-Scotch Plains Rotary Club last Wednesday at its luncheon, at which he was the guest speaker. Nevertheless, he spent two months eating bread and water in the company of murderers and thieves, threatened with a possible 15-year prison sentence.

"He thought he was going to die over there in Sierra Leone. I thought he was, too," said Fred Chemidlin, Mr. Chemidlin's brother and a member of the Rotary Club. He introduced his younger brother to the club at its luncheon, which took place at Pantagis-Renaissance in Scotch Plains.

The guest speaker said, "I guess it was 37 years ago today that I left for Vietnam. Prior to that I had not been

out of Jersey." The Army National Guard sergeant also served in Iraq, returning last October.

"After two wars, I thought this would be easy, but it wasn't," he said,

ist, he brought his camera and photographed people and places in Freetown, Sierra Leone's capital.

However, after he photographed the UN courthouse, his life unraveled. The



FREE AT LAST...Fred, left, and Michael Chemidlin attend the Fanwood-Scotch Plains Rotary Club luncheon last Wednesday. Michael spoke to Rotarians and guests about his two-month imprisonment in Sierra Leone earlier this year.

referencing his visit to the countries of Liberia, Ghana and Sierra Leone.

He said while serving as a guard for food services facilities in Iraq last year, he met African men who worked in the kitchen. Soon they began meeting for Bible study, and he promised one day he would visit their country.

Mr. Chemidlin, who'd taken a course in missions through the Terrill Road Bible Chapel in Scotch Plains earlier in his life, left for Africa April 13. He anticipated spending two weeks in Ghana and two weeks in Sierra Leone. Coincidentally, he also would attend a weekend religious conference in Ghana sponsored by a ministry with which he is affiliated, he told the audience.

In Sierra Leone, about two days before his departure, he ventured out to sightsee with a man named Felix Rogers, whom he'd met during fellowship meetings. Like any other tour-

building housed former Liberian president Charles Taylor, accused of the war crimes of supporting rebels who murdered and tortured thousands of people during Sierra Leone's civil war that ended in 2002.

Recalling the furor after he snapped his photo, Mr. Chemidlin said, "The Mongolian UN force instigated the whole thing. They called and blew the whistle on me and had me brought in by the police."

In a July interview with *The Star Ledger*, Mr. Chemidlin said, "They feared Charles Taylor because of what he did to them. There are people walking around in Sierra Leone with no hands and feet because of what his (militias) did to them."

He told *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times* that he saw the maimed walking around the country. He met some of them in prison.

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HARLEY'S ANGEL...On Sunday, thousands joined in New Jersey Rolling Thunder's "Ride for Freedom XI" from Warinanco Park in Roselle to the New Jersey Vietnam Veterans' Memorial in Holmdel. Rolling Thunder is a volunteer group that dedicates itself to helping veterans and seeks a full accounting of POWs and MIAs. See additional photos on page 6.

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