



David Samsky for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times
PAL BOWL...Irvington Raiders PAL football players take the field at Giants Stadium during Sunday's halftime to play in front of nearly 70,000 football fans. Westfield PAL coach John Dugan and members of the Giants administration arranged the special event for the Irvington Raiders as a Christmas gift.

Something Special this Christmas

Westfield Helps Irvington PAL Play in Giants Halftime Show

EAST RUTHERFORD – Sunday evening at Giants Stadium in East Rutherford was cold and windy for some who attended the Giants-Redskins game. But for the kids from the Irvington Raiders PAL football team, the weather was perfect. It was their chance of a lifetime to play in front of nearly 70,000 fans at halftime.

A few weeks ago, the Giants contacted Westfield PAL Coach John Dugan about fielding a team for halftime. Beth Roche, director of marketing services and youth program development for the Giants, said, "The Westfield PAL has always been a great partner with the Giants over the years, and we knew that we could count on them for a solution to the halftime show."

From there, the Giants and the Westfield PAL determined that the Irvington Raiders, another team in the Suburban Youth Football League (SYFL), would be the best choice for the halftime show.

"As the bus pulled into the parking lot of the Meadowlands on Sunday evening, the players' faces just lit up; they were really excited," Coach Dugan said. "We had the opportunity to do this a few times before with our players, and we remember the impact that this had on the players, as well as the community."

"As an organization, the PAL felt that the players, from Irvington really deserved to have something special this Christmas season. These kids have a lot to deal with on a daily basis, and we thought that an opportunity like this – to play football in front of a Giants Stadium crowd – would be a great idea and let the people in Irvington know that the Westfield PAL cared about them. This is what our PAL program is all about – when

another PAL program needs us, we are there for them," he said.

"Excited cannot describe how these kids reacted when we told them," said Ken West, the Irvington Raiders coach. "The coaches were just as excited, too. We all had a great time out on the field Sunday night and we cannot thank the Westfield PAL enough for this wonderful gift to our kids."

"Westfield has been very good to our program over the years, donating shirts, cleats [and] trophies, among other items," Coach West said.

Coach Dugan said, "[The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times] also got involved as did some people who assist with photography for the PAL. Once Horace and Dave Corbin (Times publisher and assistant publisher, respectively) learned of this event, they immediately asked how they could help and provide one of their top photographers, Dave Samsky, who accompanied PAL photographer Karen O'Leary to Giants Stadium."

"We got some really great shots of these boys; I can't wait to see the looks on their faces when they get these photos," Ms. O'Leary said.

The Leader provided glossy prints for each of the 44 players as a holiday gift that they will receive this week.

The Giants videotaped the halftime program and will give the video to the Irvington PAL as a gift.

As the bus pulled away from Giants Stadium after the halftime show, Coach West remarked how quiet and tired the kids were because it was such a late game.

"I heard one of our players say, 'That was the best thing that I have ever done in my life. I will never, ever forget this day for as long as I live,'" Coach West said.

SP-F Board of Education

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approved rates and will anticipate the addition of five students, principal budget allowances will remain at the current levels and natural gas will include an increase of 20 percent while electricity will include a 15 percent increase.

Mr. Del Sordi also presented the state aid for 2008-2009 the New Jersey Department of Education has proposed. The proposed funding formula could potentially give the Scotch Plains Fanwood district a 10-percent increase in state aid. "That is better than we anticipated," he said.

The district would lose money towards bilingual and consolidated aid but would see an increase in transportation aid and special education, as well as money towards security aid, which the district did not have for the 2007-2008 school year. The district received \$4,505,354 in 2007-2008 and could see \$4,956,000 in 2008-2009, an increase of \$450,646.

"Certainly, a 10-percent increase in funding is better than the flat state aid we've received over the past six years, and it is more than I was expecting for our district," Linda Nelson, BOE vice president, told The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times. "But because of that flat funding and our growing enrollment, we actually will be receiving less special-education aid per pupil than we received in the 2001-02 school year," she continued. "I also am concerned about what happens at the end of the three-year 'hold-harm-

less' period. It seems to me that the very fact that the state felt it necessary to include such protection for the first three years indicates that some districts will feel harm in the future. And I am very bothered by the rush to approve this formula when the state has released no data that shows how the formula will work, how it will impact each district and how the state will pay for it."

Mr. Del Sordi said that the board would look into that topic more in depth in the upcoming months. See related school-aid report on page 1.

He said he plans to "present a budget that we feel will be satisfactory."

Later, an audience member addressed the board regarding the "significant graffiti" that is on the building in the back of Brunner School. "Every day for about a month they [the students] have had to walk past it," she said. "I think it sends the wrong message to the kids." The woman noted that she has made Principal Jodi Frank aware of the problem and that Mrs. Frank did put in a work order for it to get fixed right away, but that it has yet to happen. Mr. Del Sordi said that it will be looked into.

During the report for the facilities committee, board member Rob O'Connor said that workers on the turfing project at Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School are "on track to finish it in a timely fashion."

The board will meet tonight for a regular public meeting.

State Education Aid Formula

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In addition, the state would now fund 75 percent of special-education per-pupil costs that exceed \$40,000 for an in-district program or \$55,000 for out-of-district programs.

Scotch Plains-Fanwood Superintendent of Schools Margaret Hayes said that, while she was happy to receive a 10-percent increase in aid while other towns received 2 percent, the district's special-education per-pupil funding from the state has decreased over the past six years.

She said special-education funding in the district was \$2,922,326 in 2001-2002, which equates to \$4,887 per student, compared to aid of \$3,202,000 and a per-pupil aid of \$4,191 in 2007-2008.

There were 598 district pupils classified as special-education students in 2001, compared to 764 in 2007-2008. Special-education aid projections are \$3,668,000 for 2008-2009, which would result in state aid of \$4,649 per special-education student for the projected 789 special-education students for 2008-2009.

She said some categories have been eliminated while others have been added. Ms. Hayes said school officials are seeking more information on the aid categories and how the formula was calculated "so we can build a budget logically."

"Once we know, it will help us with our long-range planning," Ms. Hayes said. Despite the increase in aid, she

said the district is "concerned" that its school budget would still mainly be funded through property taxes.

Assemblyman Jon Bramnick (LD-21, Westfield) said he is mobilizing an e-mail campaign to oppose the new formula, saying the state did not take into account that "many" districts, including Westfield, have been flat-funded for years.

"District 21 is behind the curve [in education funding]. We need to be on equal [footing] with other districts," Mr. Bramnick told The Times. "I think it is fundamentally unfair that [flat funding of districts] has not been part of this formula."

"I intend to fight on the floor of the Legislature against a formula that is not fair to all districts," he said. "I am extremely disappointed and not happy that the formula is unfair, but the fight is not over."

Assemblyman Eric Munoz (LD-21, Summit) said the 21st Legislative District, which includes Cranford, Summit, Millburn, Mountainside and Westfield, pays "\$800 to \$850 million" in state income taxes annually but receives around \$27 million in education funding, which, he said, breaks down to 3 cents on the tax dollar in education funding. "So really, it is an abomination," he said.

"We're the cash cows and they (Democrats) control the state government," Mr. Munoz said.

He said legislation to make the new formula state law should be introduced in the "next two weeks" in the lame-duck session, which he expects will be passed by the Democrat-controlled Legislature.

The Times also placed calls for comment to Senator Nick Scutari (LD-22, Linden), Assemblywoman Linda Stender (LD-22, Fanwood) and Union County Superintendent of Schools Carmen Centuolo.

Proposed State Education Aid For Local School Districts

School District	Increase (%)	Increase (\$)
Westfield	2	99,000
Cranford	20	604,000
Scotch Plains-Fanwood	10	451,000
Mountainside	20	148,000
Garwood	20	112,000
Union County Vo-Tech	20	745,000
Millburn	10	361,000
Bernards	20	826,000
New Providence	10	156,000
Watchung Hills Regional	10	158,000
Glen Ridge	10	114,000

FW Recreation Department To Fund Senior Programs

By BETH BUDNICK
Specially Written for The Scotch Plains Fanwood Times

FANWOOD – The Fanwood recreation commission approved extended funding for senior programs, in addition to discussing facility usage, ice-skating and summer programs, at its meeting Tuesday night.

Senior services became a topic of discussion due to Recreation Director Robert Budiansky's budget report. In his report, he detailed a surplus of funds from in the commission's trust, and that the commission was "on target" with this year's budget.

The surplus funds, Mr. Budiansky said, would be best used to continue the senior-services program throughout the winter, "given the demand of the public." He said three 12-week sessions would run throughout the year. The classes currently offered are tai chi, aerobics, line dancing or water exercise, all held at the Forest River Park building, with the exception of water exercise, which takes place at the JCC.

Continuing the classes throughout the year comes to \$5,074 in instructor fees, Mr. Budiansky said, and the senior-citizen participants pay for roughly \$1,800 of these funds, or a fee of \$10 for a 12-week class session.

To pay for these classes, the commission passed a motion to use the surplus funds, so long as the funds do not exceed \$3,000.

Mr. Budiansky said, "Of our budget, the majority goes to programs for children – Christmas, Halloween, the Easter Egg Hunt...I think we should use the money from our surplus."

"It's a landmark thing, it's a revolutionary thing; seniors are never getting a nickel," Joan Feller, a commission member, said.

In support of the measure, Mr. Budiansky said, "It's not like we're reaching into our wallets and pulling out the last dollar."

The commission agreed, but commission member Bruce Zakarin had one objection.

"I agree 100 percent that we should use the money towards the senior pro-

grams," he said. "But when the seniors are coming from outside of Fanwood Scotch Plains...that's when I don't think we should be subsidizing."

"This is our town. This is being subsidized by our taxpayers to pay less than \$1 per class. We take care of our taxpayers," he continued.

Mr. Budiansky added, "I don't have any loyalty for anyone outside of this town" in regard to taxpayer fees.

Commission chairman Pamela Sayles said, "There's nothing wrong with saying \$20 for anyone outside of the town involved in the programs."

The commission then passed a motion to charge double the registration fee, or \$20 versus the original \$10, starting with the spring program.

The commission also discussed the usage of the Carriage House Park. Borough council liaison to the commission Dave Valian reported the borough council "took the park away from us" to use as a "passive park" at which no sporting activities could occur.

The commission wants to use the park for "pee-wee" sports. Mr. Valian said, "It's important for [the council] to understand that this is for young children." However, he said, "people don't want a car door slamming at 9 a.m. on a Saturday morning."

"It's public land, we have a right to use it for something," Ms. Feller said. The commission then made a motion "to get [the issue] on the [council's] January agenda," Ms. Sayles said.

Mark Noble of the Children's Technology Workshop (CTW) also requested permission to use the Forest River Park building for his iCamp summer program. Mr. Noble described the program as a "technology day camp" for kids who do not want a "typical athletic day camp." The program houses 15 campers per week and runs for two weeks. The commission agreed upon the predetermined fee of \$10 per head for CTW to pay the recreation department.

Mr. Noble also discussed the possibility of using the LaGrande Park building to house a program he may conduct with home-schooled children during a traditional school day.

The commission agreed that they could rent the building to Mr. Noble and CTW, however, Ms. Sayles said, "This can't be something we're supporting. We have to rent it like we'd rent to anyone else."

Additionally, Mr. Budiansky drew attention to the issue of ice-skating in his Director's Report. In past years, the borough had offered ice-skating in which a field is flooded and residents can skate. The commission supported renewing the idea for this winter, and discussed having skating from 3 to 5 on weekdays and open "all day" on weekends. Further information will be posted on the commission's website at fanwoodrecreation.org.

Tuesday's meeting was the last for two commission's members, Russell Wells and Phyllis Mirabella. Mr. Wells has served the commission for 12 years, and Ms. Mirabella has served four.

The work of both has "been really appreciated, and they will be greatly missed," Ms. Sayles said.



courtesy of the Union County Prosecutor's Office

ON THE LOOSE...Prisoners Jose Espinosa, 20, of Elizabeth and Otis Blunt, 32, of Tom's River escaped from the Union County jail Saturday night by removing one cement cinderblock between their cells and one along the back wall of Espinosa's cell (at right) before jumping to a rooftop below. They then leaped over a 25-foot-high barbed-wire fence, as shown above. Multiple law-enforcement agencies are searching for the two men.

Union County Prison Break

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rant Squad and Canine Unit and all local police departments are conducting a search for the inmates. A statewide alert has also been issued.

According to County Sheriff Ralph Froehlich, the canine unit was able to follow the scent from the point of impact, where the inmates are believed to have landed on the ground outside the fence, to the spot where they split up.

"The dogs have the scent. We'll be able to use that to our advantage," Sheriff Froehlich said.

Authorities have said the two men

are considered dangerous. Union County Police Chief Daniel Vaniska, whose agency is heading up the search, has asked anyone with information on the case to contact Detective Scott Pence of the Union County Police at (908) 654-9800 or call Crimestoppers at (908) 654-TIPS.

Crimestoppers is offering a reward of up to \$5,000 for the arrest and conviction of Espinosa and Blunt. All calls to Crimestoppers are strictly confidential and anonymous, the prosecutor's office said.

POLICE BLOTTER

Westfield

Wednesday, December 12, three juveniles, all of Plainfield, were arrested and charged with possession of stolen property after they were stopped at North and Lenox Avenues in an automobile that had been stolen out of South Plainfield.

The driver, a 17-year-old male, also was wanted on an outstanding detention warrant from the Union County Sheriff's Department. He was turned over to the Juvenile Detention Center in Elizabeth.

One passenger, a 16-year-old male from Plainfield, was wanted on a state warrant and was turned over to state authorities. A second passenger, a 15-year-old female, was released to a responsible adult.

Thursday, December 13, Paul Flores, 26, of North Plainfield was arrested during a motor-vehicle stop at South and Windsor Avenues on a contempt-of-court warrant out of Piscataway. He posted \$90 bail and was released.

Saturday, December 15, David Rudnicki, 30, of Westfield was arrested at Westfield police headquarters on a contempt-of-court warrant. He was processed and released after posting \$500 bail.

Sunday, December 16, Leonard Cusumano, 26, of Laurence Harbor was arrested at Central and Ayliffe Avenues for allegedly driving while intoxicated. He was held pending release to a responsible individual.

Monday, December 17, three people were arrested on drug charges after police responded to a report of a suspicious motor vehicle at an apartment building on Central Avenue. Officers located the vehicle and conducted an investigation, after which the arrests were made.

Cristal Core, 23, of Cranford was charged with possession of ecstasy, possession of heroin and possession of drug paraphernalia. William Fedirko, 19, of Cranford and Robert Scherer, 20, of Garwood each were charged with possession of ecstasy. All were released on their own recognizance pending a grand-jury action.

Mountainside

Wednesday, December 12, Lynwood T. Johnson, 36, of East Orange was arrested at the Essex County jail on an outstanding warrant in the amount of \$2,183.

Scotch Plains

Friday, December 14, a student at the Union County Vocational-Technical School reported that someone stole his iPod, valued at \$300, from his locker.

Friday, December 14, a resident of Rolling Knolls reported that someone obtained his credit-card information without authorization and made several hundred dollars worth of purchases.

Friday, December 14, a resident of Raritan Road reported that someone broke the window on the side of his house.

Saturday, December 15, a resident of Morse Avenue reported that he did work for a homeowner and the check he was given for payment came back for insufficient funds. According to police, the homeowner now refuses to pay for the contracted work.

Sunday, December 16, Raheem Byrd, 28, of Las Vegas, Nev. was arrested on an outstanding warrant after a motor-vehicle stop. According to police, Byrd was trans-

ported to headquarters, where he was processed and released.

Sunday, December 16, Anthony Perdigao of Newark was arrested and charged with unlawful taking of a motor vehicle and possession of a controlled dangerous substance. According to police, a report was taken from a woman who said she lent her car to Perdigao, who failed to return it. The suspect was apprehended with the vehicle at which time crack cocaine was found in his possession, police said.

Sunday, December 16, a resident of Harwich Court reported that he received several packages along with bills for orders he did not place. According to police, the victim does not know how his credit-card information was obtained.

Fanwood

Friday, December 14, a resident of Park Avenue reported that sometime between December 13 and December 14, someone removed her wallet from her unlocked vehicle while it was parked on the 300 block of North Avenue.

Saturday, December 15, a resident of the 100 block of Farley Avenue reported that sometime between December 14 at 11:30 p.m. and December 15 at noon, someone entered his unlocked vehicle and removed a camera bag containing a camera, lens and a flash card.

The victim also reported that a similar incident occurred sometime between Friday, December 7, after 11 p.m. and Saturday, December 8, before 10 a.m., when someone entered another unlocked vehicle and removed expensive sunglasses and sterling silver earrings. Police are investigating both incidents.

Saturday, December 15, Kathleen D. Filippone, 59, of Roselle was arrested on an outstanding Cranford warrant after a motor-vehicle stop on Martine Avenue.

Monday, December 17, John W. Moshal, 40, of Scotch Plains was arrested on an outstanding Garwood warrant after a motor-vehicle stop on Midway Avenue.

Tuesday, December 18, Stacy L. Theofilos, 24, of South Plainfield was arrested for DWI and refusal to submit to a breathalyzer after a motor-vehicle stop on Terrill Road.

Tuesday, December 18, Michael R. Ross, 26, of Scotch Plains was arrested and charged with an outstanding warrant out of Irvington after a motor-vehicle stop in the 300 block of LaGrande Avenue.

Scotch Hills

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would turn into "a free-for-all," with every member "coming from a different direction" and making it difficult to reach a consensus.

In the meantime, Mr. Poerio said, he wants to move ahead with engineering work at the site, including environmental analyses of the land and the existing building and a topography survey. He said this work would take 30 to 60 days to complete, and then RBA could formulate more exact cost estimates for the project, which, if approved by the council, could be completed by early 2009.



Horace Corbin for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

SADLY, SANTA IS GONE...Helen Rentoulis of Vicki's Diner in Westfield stands next to her remaining Santa Claus in the lobby. Santa signs to her patrons. Last week, vandals stole her other prized Santa that greeted passersby outside of the restaurant on East Broad Street. As her Christmas present, she said she hopes Santa will be returned in the true spirit of the season. See related letter on page 5.

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