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SIXTY CENTS



CELEBRATING BEGINNINGS...St. Bart's Roman Catholic Church in Scotch Plains celebrated the 60th anniversary of its founding with a parade and other festivities on Sunday.

Mahr 'Sets Record Straight' on TDR In Response to Editorial

By PAUL J. PEYTON

FANWOOD - Mayor Colleen Mahr said on Tuesday that it was "vitally important that the overall facts" on Fanwood's Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) program are accurately presented to borough residents.

Under this program, developers purchase rights to build in a "receiving area" - an area that is targeted for growth, in this case the downtown business district. The funding will then be used to permanently preserve land in a "sending area" - Fanwood's historic district.

In support of the program, the mayor said, "An incentive-based approach to preservation and development, from where I sit, [is] most effective in both protecting and revitalizing our economic base. And that is why TDR is attractive to me."

The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times interviewed the mayor in its offices on Tuesday in response to last week's

Times editorial titled, "How Much Growth is Smart for Fanwood's Development?"

"There were a few things that caught our attention," the mayor said. "We wanted to set the record straight."

Mayor Mahr said the editorial was inaccurate in saying other TDR towns have dropped their programs due to issues of complexity. She said the other five demonstration projects are still active and that one town has submitted its plan to the state for approval while the others, including Fanwood, are in the process of adopting their plans.

"If we didn't think [TDR] had a clear point, I would have walked away from this myself," the mayor said.

She said Fanwood's program should be in place by the end of the year. The borough's program is the only one geared toward preserving a historic district. The other towns' plans are focused on farmland and open-space preservation.

A public hearing is scheduled for this Monday before the borough's planning board, as the board begins to consider approving the plan as part of the borough's master plan, last updated two years ago. Officials said a second board hearing is likely.

Mayor Mahr said Fanwood has a historic preservation ordinance that includes the Carriage House, the train station and a home on Midway Avenue that was the borough's original post office.

"To put a local ordinance truly into effect, it would be more a mandatory blanket ordinance that would affect

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SP Council Launches Search For New DPW Director

By FRED T. ROSSI

SCOTCH PLAINS - Township officials will embark on a search for a new public works director after Charles Cerami's resignation last week.

At its meeting on Tuesday, the township council authorized Jersey Professional Management to assist in the recruitment process for a new director to replace Mr. Cerami, whose June 4 resignation was announced by Township Manager Thomas Atkins.

Mr. Cerami, who became public works director in February 2006, was indicted in Hunterdon County last December for allegedly keeping more than \$200 from scrap metal sales during his tenure as public works director in Clinton Township.

In March, he entered a plea agreement and pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor/disorderly persons offense in which he admitted keeping money collected from recyclables instead of turning it over to Clinton Township finance officials.

In other business, the council tabled a special-use permit application from Maria's Restaurant on Park Avenue. The owners wanted to place three tables and six chairs outside the rear of the restaurant for outdoor dining, but the township zoning officer and police department both cited safety concerns given that the tables would be situated next to the municipal parking lot.

The police department said that

TIB Asks BOE to Incorporate Comm. Service Projects

By JESSICA E. JASKULA

SCOTCH PLAINS - Seventh grade Thinking Is Basic (TIB) students from Terrill Middle School began Thursday's Scotch Plains-Fanwood Board of Education meeting with a PowerPoint presentation urging board members to incorporate community service into the middle-school curriculum.

Terrill Principal Kevin Holloway joined the students. "Once you establish community service when you're younger, you're more likely to continue [doing community service projects] when you're older," said presenter Priya Kamdar.

The idea for community service opportunities at a middle-school level

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LeStrange Files Defamation Suit Against Mayor, Ex-Police Chief

By FRED T. ROSSI

SCOTCH PLAINS - Neal LeStrange, an unsuccessful Democratic candidate for township council in 2006, has filed a lawsuit against Republican Mayor Martin Marks and former township police chief Thomas O'Brien, charging that they defamed him during last fall's campaign when they "created a false impression" that Mr. LeStrange was a racist and an anti-Semite, according to a lawsuit filed May 24 in state superior court in Elizabeth.

Mr. LeStrange, who retired from the township police department a year ago after a 22-year career, attended a 1990 gathering in Tennessee called the "Good Old Boys Roundup," a three-day camping, fishing and golfing trip that attracted hundreds of federal, state and local law enforcement officials, nearly all white, from around the nation.

In 1995, after media reports about overt racism - including skits, tee shirts, signs and mock shooting targets aimed at African-Americans - at the annual outing, the Senate Judiciary Committee held hearings to examine the involvement in the event of federal law-enforcement agencies such as the U.S. Marshals Service and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms.

At a 2002 deposition in an unrelated lawsuit, Mr. LeStrange said he had gone to the event but had been "disgusted by it and never went again."

In his deposition, Mr. LeStrange said he went to the event with a friend and his friend's two Secret Service colleagues. "We were supposed to play golf and go canoeing," he said in the deposition. "When I found out it had racial background to it, I went camping and camped outside" the grounds of the event.

The mayor, in reaction to Mr.

LeStrange's attendance at the Tennessee event, was quoted in New Jersey Jewish News last October as saying he didn't want "someone who went to what amounts to a Ku Klux Klan meeting for police representing me." Mr. LeStrange's complaint claims that Mr. Marks "knowingly created the false impression that [Mr. LeStrange] was a member of an organization that hated Blacks and Jews" and "created the false impression that [Mr. LeStrange] was a racist and an anti-Semite."

Mayor Marks told The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times this week that "it isn't the first time that someone unsuccessful at the polls has resorted to lawsuits for vindication, and probably won't be the last." He said he did

not know whether or not the township would pay his legal fees in connection with the lawsuit.

"It's something that is being discussed," he said. Mr. O'Brien, township police chief from 1996 to 2002, wrote a letter to The Times last October that called attention to Mr. LeStrange's attendance at the Tennessee event, which Mr. O'Brien described as "an event with derogatory racial overtones [that] had received national press coverage back in the nineties." Mr. LeStrange's complaint accuses Mr. O'Brien "of knowingly misreporting [Mr. LeStrange's 2002] deposition testimony to give the false impression that [Mr. LeStrange] was a racist"

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007...The Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School (SPFHS) Class of 2007 forms a human "07" at its senior class picnic on Tuesday, June 5, in Scotch Plains, with SPFHS Principal David Heisey looking on in the foreground.

Inmate Pleads 'No Contest' In Murder of SP Woman

By PAUL J. PEYTON AND MICHAEL J. POLLACK

SCOTCH PLAINS - Ronald James Ward of Montana pleaded no contest on Tuesday to the rape and murder of a 25-year-old Scotch Plains woman at an Arkansas rest stop in 2000, according to the Conway County, Ark., prosecutor's office.

Ward, 40, who has been convicted of one murder and linked to another two homicides, will be sentenced today, June 14, for the first-degree murder of Kristin Ann Laurite on August 26, 2000. Ms. Laurite had been driving to California to join her boyfriend. Authorities discovered her nude body near a rest stop along Interstate 40 in Conway County. She had been raped and stabbed 11 times, authorities said.

When reached by The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times for comment yesterday, Prosecutor Tom Tatum said, "He (Ward) wouldn't give enough detail for a guilty plea, so we decided on a no-contest plea. It will

be treated as a guilty plea to first-degree murder."

Ward, a former truck driver and father of six, has been in a Montana prison since June 2001, according to The Arkansas Democrat-Gazette. He was officially charged last spring with the first-degree murder of Ms. Laurite. Authorities announced in July 2005 that Ward had been linked to the Laurite homicide through a DNA match.

Ms. Laurite had stopped at a central Arkansas rest area to walk her two dogs, which were later found wandering along the highway. Authorities said Ms. Laurite left her Scotch Plains home in a 1972 Volkswagon van on August 21, 2000, and was driving at night to avoid "the extreme heat."

Mr. Tatum said he and the defense attorney "are looking at a life sentence" for the defendant. It would be Ward's second; he is serving a life sentence for the 2000 murder of Craig Petrich, 43, of Montana, who was reportedly robbed, beaten and shot to death in Montana on October 16, 2000.

Ward also has been linked by DNA to the murder of Jackie Travis, 49, who was beaten to death in her in Merced, Calif., apartment on December 7, 2000; Ward has been charged in the January 2001 homicide of Shela Polly, 32, in Ravalli County, Mont., on December 30, 2000.

Mr. Tatum said he was surprised by the defendant's plea. "I was surprised. I heard over the weekend that he didn't want an attorney and wanted to get it over with. You never know, but when he got in, he said he wanted to get it over with," Mr. Tatum told The Times.

He said the Laurite family was "surprised and pleased (by the no-contest plea). It's coming to the end for them. They'll be present for the sentencing." "I'm glad it's resolved," Mr. Tatum said.

007...The Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School (SPFHS) Class of 2007 forms a human "07" at its senior class picnic on Tuesday, June 5, in Scotch Plains, with SPFHS Principal David Heisey looking on in the foreground.



TRANSFER OF DEVELOPMENT IDEAS...Times Assignment Editor Paul Peyton, left, speaks with Stan Slachetka of T&M Associates and Fanwood Mayor Colleen Mahr about the borough's TDR program in the Times offices on Tuesday.

Council Honors Local Units For Roof Collapse Response

By EBONY S. McQUEEN

FANWOOD - Mayor Colleen Mahr and the borough council presented "star performance" awards Tuesday night to Fanwood's police and fire departments, rescue squad and department of public works (DPW) for their emergency response to the May 15 building collapse on South Avenue.

"We couldn't let tonight go past without paying thanks to you," said Mayor Mahr.

The mayor also read a "thank you" letter from Garry Wilbor, owner of Livingston-Wilbor Corporation, the roof of which collapsed during the incident last month. Mr. Wilbor, one of three people rescued after being trapped by the collapsed roof, stated in his letter, "I hope all of you understand how much I appreciate you."

As a result of the incident, a resolution has been moved for a professional services contract between the Borough of Fanwood and Allan Klein, Mr. Klein, a licensed structural

engineer, has been hired to advise the borough on how to properly fix the problems that caused the Station Mews construction site to collapse.

"It would be our hope and expectations that the cost for Mr. Klein will be reimbursed to us by the responsible party," said Borough Attorney Dennis Estis.

In other business, Mayor Mahr made proclamations to Girl Scouts Emily Nering, Deirdre Scully and Sarah Boruch. The young women were recipients of the highest award in Girl Scouting - the Gold Award.

Eagle Scout Award recipients Michael Lubinski and Christopher Rau also were honored with proclamations for their "hard work and service to others." Eagle Scout is the highest rank available in Boy Scouting.

Bob Sommerich, president of the Fanwood-Scotch Plains Recycling Association, made grant donations to the Fanwood Rescue Squad, the DPW, Fanwood Department of Parks and

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Scotch Plains, Fanwood Seek Lacrosse Program

By MARIA WOEHRE

SCOTCH PLAINS - More than 30 Scotch Plains and Fanwood residents attended Scotch Plains' recreation commission meeting on Monday to present plans for a new lacrosse program.

"Scotch Plains students have been playing on Westfield teams, and we think that the demand is great enough to create our own league here in Scotch Plains," said Tim Gordon, acting president of the Scotch Plains-Fanwood Lacrosse Program.

According to Mr. Gordon, 30 Scotch Plains and Fanwood children are on Westfield lacrosse teams. Since the sport has been gaining popularity, more than 35 Scotch Plains and Fanwood parents of interested children met on May 15 and created the beginnings of a lacrosse club. The organization has already filed an application to be a non-profit and will work with the U.S. Lacrosse Association, the New Jersey Lacrosse Foundation, New Jersey Junior Boys and Girls Lacrosse Leagues and the Westfield Lacrosse Club to get itself off of the ground. "We have a great network of people who are going to help us get this put together," Mr. Gordon said.

The proposed lacrosse program will be for boys and girls from third to eighth grades. The program will have eight divisions: boys third and fourth, boys fifth, boys sixth, boys seventh, boys eighth, girls third and fourth, girls fifth and sixth and girls seventh and eighth.

"My only concern is that you are

asking for 24 time slots, which is two fields for the whole season [March through May]. It's already tight with Little League and soccer," said Ray Poerio, Scotch Plains' recreation director. "Plus, what I expect is this will be really popular and we will have an overflow of kids, so more teams and more field time."

Another concern the recreation board addressed was field damage. "Lacrosse is known to be the most damaging sport to fields because of its compassion and the movement,"

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SILVER SCREEN WIT...Movie writer Ira Lewis of Westfield entertained a packed audience last Sunday at the Northside Trattoria during the screening of Chinese Coffee, a film he wrote, starring and directed by Al Pacino. See story on page 24.

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