

## Borough PBA and Council Discuss Municipal Layoffs

By TED RITTER

*Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times*

FANWOOD - Mayor Colleen Mahr and the borough council, and members of the local police officers' union, Tuesday night continued to discuss the amended municipal budget, particularly with respect to the proposed layoffs of a police officer and two other borough employees (one full-time and one part-time).

At the governing body's monthly agenda meeting, PBA Chapter 123 delegate Ron Greco said, referring to the budget amendment approved last week, "I think what you did was despicable; you didn't even tell us that there was an amendment to lay

off employees."

Councilman Bruce Walsh - who serves as the borough's police commissioner - noted a letter of apology he wrote, explaining that "there was some miscommunication on that issue."

Councilman David Valian said, "We have tried to be very careful in the way that we kept the public informed [about the budget]; I'd like to apologize for not getting that information [regarding the budget amendment and layoffs] across the way it should have been."

Later in the meeting, resident Tom Tzerofos, referring to the layoffs in the amended budget, asked, "Are we

going to save any money?"

Mayor Mahr responded that laying off three employees is one of several ways the governing body is trimming a budget that was introduced last spring and would have required an overall tax increase of nearly 30 percent (local, county and school taxes combined).

"The savings that we make across the board...are to get us through this year and to look at what we can capture [in savings] next year and the year after that; we're trying to reduce the cost of running the borough," said Mayor Mahr.

When Mr. Greco asked why one of the layoffs had to come from the police department, instead of another borough office, Mayor Mahr said, "What I heard loud and clear [at the community budget meeting] July 9 was, 'What are you guys doing about taxes...why don't you do more [shared services] with Scotch Plains?'"

"It's too easy to say that what's gone on in this borough during the past eight months can be compacted into 'we don't care.'"

PBA 123 President Phil Ugoni said, "You seem to focus only on people who want their taxes reduced," adding that "some people don't mind paying more" in taxes in order to maintain borough services.

Mayor Mahr again pointed to the governing body's efforts to make "\$610,000 worth of reductions" from the \$8 million introduced budget.

The mayor said a combination of increases in revenue (including charging for bulk trash pickup) and budget reductions enabled the governing body to reduce the tax rate from 29 percent to 16 percent.

"That is still an unacceptable increase, but it's a hell of a lot better than nearly 30 [percent]," she said.

Also regarding the budget, now scheduled for adoption after a public hearing on Wednesday, August 20, Councilwoman Katherine Mitchell asked whether the previously suggested idea of setting up an "ad hoc" budget review committee is "still something we want to do."

"I don't want to lose sight of this," Ms. Mitchell said.

Council President Joan Wheeler, noting "all the stress we're under" regarding the budget, said she "would not support" establishing the committee until early next year.

"I think we have to trust ourselves that we're making the decisions that are best for our residents and our employees," said Councilwoman Wheeler.

Councilwoman Donna Dolce said, "We really need to look at the charge [of a budget review committee] in order to clearly define its mission."

Councilman Walsh also added, "You have to be careful as elected officials not to transfer your responsibilities."

The mayor and council then segued into a general discussion of whether to establish a joint/shared services

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## Muhlenberg Closing Adds To Increased ER Intakes

By CHRISTINA M. HINKE

*Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times*

AREA - Pregnant women who would have normally had treatment at Muhlenberg Regional Medical Center's OB/GYN services have shifted to Trinitas Hospital, as of June 30, a plan that was introduced by Gary Horan, chief executive officer of Trinitas, when it was originally proposed to divide patients to three or four different hospitals.

It was reported that Trinitas would see an expected 800 additional births per year, and Dr. Kamran Khazaei, chairman of the OB/GYN department at Trinitas, told *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times* on Monday that this number is approximate.

As of Friday, 41 deliveries have occurred at Trinitas, according to Rudine Smith, President and chief executive officer of The Plainfield Health Center, a community clinic for residents of Plainfield that is working in collaboration with Trinitas.

The six midwives at the health center do rounds at Trinitas to help cover shifts, and the center is recruiting to fill one or two more open positions. Trinitas has two part-time midwives and four that are full time.

"The transition has gone relatively smooth," Ms. Smith said. "The staff



Katie Rogers for *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times*  
**THE TOWN GOES ALL OUT...** Scotch Plains residents fill the Village Green for the township's participation in National Night Out, including a concert by New Jersey rock band Dog Voices. This year marked the 25th anniversary of the National Night Out program.

## New Manager Calls SP Post 'Opportunity of a Lifetime'

By FRED T. ROSSI

*Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times*

SCOTCH PLAINS - Michael Capabianco, who will be formally introduced next week as the new township manager, calls Scotch Plains "one of the best towns in the state" and says it is "the opportunity of a lifetime to be able to lead this town."

Mr. Capabianco, whose appointment was unanimously agreed to by the township council late last month, spoke with *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times* earlier this week. His appointment will be announced at next Tuesday's meeting and his first day on the job will be August 18. He will succeed Thomas Atkins, who is retiring at the end of this month after 28 years of running the day-to-day operations of the municipal government and overseeing 123 full-time and about 50 part-time township employees.

Since May 2007, Mr. Capabianco, who is 31 years old, has been the shared services coordinator for the Hunterdon County Chamber of Commerce, where he has worked with 26 municipalities and mayors as well as 30 school districts. He was borough manager for two years in Folcroft, Pa. and served as assistant director of municipal planning for nearly four years in Norristown, Pa. Mr. Capabianco grew up in Summit and earned master's degrees in criminal justice from St. Joseph's University and public administration from Kean University.

He said his top priority will be to "learn as much as possible" in an effort to replace the "28 years of lost

experience" resulting from Mr. Atkins' retirement. In addition, initial work on the 2009 municipal budget will start soon after Labor Day. Mr. Capabianco calls his budgeting experience "decent but not exceptional," but Mayor Martin Marks noted that Mr. Capabianco will be able to rely on township personnel like Chief Financial Officer Lori Majeski and the township auditors as the budget process moves forward into next year.

such arrangements should "improve the services while lowering or maintaining the costs."

Mr. Capabianco said he has done some work with Special Improvement Districts (SID) in previous positions and will be available to offer any "guidance, assistance or hands-on experience" to the board of the newly-enacted SID. Deputy Mayor Nancy Malool, who will be a member of the SID board, wants Mr. Capabianco to meet with the SID board once the group begins its meetings this fall.

Addressing the heated political rancor that over the past two years has made Mr. Atkins a target of some local Democrats, Mr. Capabianco said his goal would be to lay out the "pros and the cons of an issue and then make recommendations. I'm a bureaucrat. I'm not a politician."

Mr. Capabianco called Scotch Plains "a fantastic place to be and work," noting that it has "one of the best school systems, one of the best parks and recreation departments, and it's one of the safest towns."

"This was not an easy decision," Mayor Marks told *The Times*. "We were not looking for someone to replace Tom because he is irreplaceable." Instead, he said the council was "looking for someone competent and intelligent to succeed Tom." The mayor called Mr. Capabianco "an intelligent guy and a personable guy" who is enthusiastic and able to deal with the public. "We have a young Tom Atkins on our hands, perhaps."

Mr. Atkins, who was born and raised in Scotch Plains, told *The Times* that Mr. Capabianco should "not be expected to walk in here and know Scotch Plains" in as great a detail as Mr. Atkins does.

Mayor Marks added that Mr. Capabianco will be able to rely on Mr. Atkins in his first weeks on the job and then on "the fantastic staff of department heads" in the municipal building.



Michael Capabianco

Asked whether he would be as conservative in the use of the township surplus as Mr. Atkins has been, Mr. Capabianco said it would depend on the circumstances of that particular budget year, but he added that it was "important to look down the road three, four or five years" to see what longer-term expenses might need to be addressed.

Mayor Marks said Mr. Capabianco was "going to have a challenge" with next year's budget. "We were aggressive with the surplus this year," the mayor said. "But if it's not regenerated, there's going to be a hole" in next year's budget.

Mr. Capabianco said he favors further shared services initiatives "if they're fair and equitable." He said



Beth Budnick for *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times*  
**SLAM DUNK...** Lt. Joseph Zito holds on tight to his seat after getting dunked in the D.A.R.E. "Dunkin' Cops" tank at the Scotch Plains National Night Out. The dunk tank was one of several carnival games at the Night Out festivities.



Ted Ritter for *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times*  
**PUBLIC COMMENT...** Fanwood PBA 123 delegate Ron Greco speaks at Tuesday night's borough council agenda meeting. Seated from left are Councilwomen Katherine Mitchell and Donna Dolce and Borough Attorney Dennis Estis.

## Stender's Campaign Finds Strong Local Support

By LAURA MORTKOWITZ

*Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times*

**Editor's Note:** The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times spent the day with Assemblywoman and Seventh Congressional District candidate Linda Stender last Thursday and will be doing the same for Republican candidate, Leonard Lance.

AREA - A visit to a local pharmacy, a diner, Overlook Hospital and a Democratic picnic in Summit are all in a day's work for Assemblywoman Linda Stender (LD-22, Fanwood), the Democratic candidate for Congress from the Seventh District.

Mrs. Stender has been meeting with local business owners, showing her support and talking to them about the issues they find important.

Robert Riedinger, owner of Devine's Pharmacy in Edison, greeted Mrs. Stender outside with a welcome sign situated just inside the doors to his pharmacy.

"Healthcare is a big [issue]," said Abby Curran, campaign advisor for Mrs. Stender. "Over 41 million are not insured, and many more are underinsured."

Mrs. Stender expressed her preference for local pharmacies - and their personal service and touch - over the larger companies.

"I'm a big supporter of community pharmacies," she told Mr. Riedinger. "CVS is just not the same. It doesn't meet the same kind of need."

Mr. Riedinger expressed his own concerns over healthcare companies that take advantage of their customers and his desire for one federal plan that would take care of everyone, a

belief that Mrs. Stender said she would one day like to see.

"I think that we need to have a real commitment and focus on providing quality and affordable health insurance," Mrs. Stender said. "It's a matter of shared responsibility."

"The government's got a responsibility...with people with low-income and working people, [to make health insurance] so that it's in an affordable range," she added. "Businesses will continue to have a responsibility."

As she told Mr. Riedinger before she left Devine's, running for Congress is "a marathon. You have to do some of it each day."

And the next stop for her was Reo's Diner in Woodbridge for a meet and greet.

"This time of the year, it's always a little quiet, but it's still important to be out there," Mrs. Stender said. "I'm determined to win this one."

Some extra support for Mrs. Stender's campaign came in the form of two diner patrons: Jack McGreevey, the father of former New Jersey Governor James McGreevey, and Jeff Moon. Both men are working with Senator Joseph Vitale (LD-19, Woodbridge) and expressed their support for Mrs. Stender's campaign.

After a tour of Overlook Hospital in Summit, Mrs. Stender attended a Summit Democrats' picnic, which was also attended by Mayor Jordan Glatt, Summit's first Democratic mayor, and Terri Tauber, a Democrat running for Summit's all-Republican

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Laura Mortkowitz for *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times*  
**CAMPAIGN TRAIL...** Assemblywoman Linda Stender (LD-22, Fanwood) of Fanwood and candidate for Congress talks with Jack McGreevey, right, father of former Governor and former Woodbridge Mayor James McGreevey, and Jeff Moon in the Reo Diner in Woodbridge. Mrs. Stender was campaigning throughout the Seventh Congressional District.

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