



HARD AT WORK...Scotch Plains Township Manager Chris Marion, pictured, left in background, discusses the proposed 2012 municipal budget last Thursday. Police Chief Brian Mahoney, right, was on hand to discuss details of the police department's budget.

Marion Resigning as SP Mgr. For Position in Old Bridge

By PAUL J. PEYTON
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

SCOTCH PLAINS – Township Municipal Manager Chris Marion announced his resignation on March 12, effective March 30, to take the position of business administrator in Old Bridge Township.

Mr. Marion, a resident of Freehold in Monmouth County, has served as Scotch Plains manager since June of 2009, replacing Michael Capabianco who resigned suddenly after only six months on the job. Mr. Capabianco had replaced Tom Atkins who was manager for 28 years. Prior to joining the township, Mr. Marion served as municipal manager in West Windsor and Marlboro. He has served on the Freehold Board of Education for the past six years.

Old Bridge has 63,000 residents and 40 square miles compared to Scotch Plains, which has 23,000 residents and nine square miles. Mr. Marion said, noting that Old Bridge is facing difficult financial decisions and had to lay off 10 police officers earlier this month.

"I was very happy in Scotch Plains Township," Mr. Marion told *The Westfield Leader*. "It's a career opportunity that I would like to pursue."

He said he would be finishing the municipal budget this week for introduction on March 20 and would hold budget workshops with the council the remainder of the month. Mr. Marion also will attend the township's Tuesday, April 17 budget public hearing and adoption vote.

When reached for comment Monday night, Mayor Nancy Malool said Township Clerk Bonnie Lacina and Zoning Officer Robert LaCosta would serve as co-managers until a new manager is hired.

"It was not a shock to me but I am very sad to see him go because I think he was very good for Scotch Plains," Mayor Malool said of Mr. Marion's decision. "He needs to do what's good for him. I understand that. So I am not happy about it, but I support him in what he needs to do."

The mayor said she is concerned that the township's track record of having had three managers in four

years and the fact this is a mayoral election year in Scotch Plains could make the manager's position unattractive to potential job applicants. A council seat also will be on the ballot this year. The council makeup is currently two Republicans and two Democrats, with Republican Mayor Malool as the tiebreaker.

"My only hope is that we're able to find somebody good and not take five steps backward because we really were able to move forward with Chris," Mayor Malool commented, noting that morale among municipal staff was impacted when municipal manager searches had to be conducted in both 2008 and 2009.

The mayor said the applicant pool for the manager's job was weak in 2009. "Finding Chris was like finding a gem in a pile of ordinary rocks," Mayor Malool said, adding that she believes Scotch Plains is "in much better shape now than we were then" with the changes made by Mr. Marion.

In addition to Scotch Plains, there are openings for administrators in Washington Borough in Warren County and Florham Park in Essex County, according to classifieds on the website of the New Jersey League of Municipalities.

Mr. Marion said he would assist in the recruitment process for a new manager and would be "available to the acting co-managers as long as they need me to be."

"I want to make sure I leave things in good order," Mr. Marion said.

Mayor Malool said she was not in favor of hiring an executive search firm to hire the next manager. In 2009 the township contracted with Jersey Professional Management (JPM) for \$10,000. The recruitment effort for a new manager was to be discussed in private session by the mayor and council on Tuesday night.

Scotch Plains Democratic Party Chairman Lou Beckerman described Mr. Marion as "a very able administrator."

"He was very good at implementing stuff. He did his job well," Mr. Beckerman told *The Times*. He also described Mr. Marion as "well spoken, well respected and a pleasure to deal with."



SPRING FLOWERS...The garden of a residence on Lawrence Avenue shows an array of spring colors as daffodils and hyacinth line the flower bed.

Westfield Board of Ed.

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cern over adding another project to the cost. Board member Gretchen Ohlig stated, "If the roofs are the number one priority, then maybe we should just consider the roofs."

Board member Ann Cary stated that the board's legislative committee would meet within the next week and would reach out to the state to let the state know the roofs are in disrepair.

Board President Richard Mattessich stated that if the board wanted to include the turf field project in the bond it had until June to decide if it wanted to drop it. Additionally, if the turf field project is not included in the bond next week, it then cannot be added on afterwards. Also, Mr. Yaniro noted, a \$28,000 Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) study was mandatory for the district to conduct before any work could be done to the field.

Finally, Mr. Yaniro gave a brief presentation about the special services and salary portion of the 2012-

2013 budget. According to Mr. Yaniro, the salaries and benefits portion of the budget has less than a 1-percent increase from last year and represents 74 percent of the total budget.

It also was reported that out of 6,335 students, 806 "receive additional help as needed during a school day." Mr. Yaniro noted that with out-of-district placements, related contracted services like occupational therapy, in-district classroom supplies and extended school year programs for children who require them, the district will spend \$9,045,714. This, he noted, will make up 22.7 percent of the budget. It additionally was noted that the majority of the \$3,678,839 received in state aid and tuition was for special education.

The next board of education meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, March 27, when a public hearing on the district budget is scheduled. It will be held at the Board of Education Administration Building at 302 Elm Street.

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cal placement." All three signs would be raised slightly away from the wall, and illuminated by lights from below. Additionally, a call box would be added at the East Broad Street side entrance, for those requiring the use of the accessible entrance. Interior renovations would include removing faux marble, and exposing the original concrete ceiling, as well as terracotta walls. The oculus would also be maintained.

When questioned by board members whether the site would have been considered without the use of basement, Ms. Sullivan responded by saying, "We probably would have passed, or needed to add a full second floor, which wouldn't have maintained the character."

Paul Grygiel of PPG LLC, Planning and Real Estate Consultants, cited the atypical triangular shape and position of the building, causing "everything to be on display" and justifying the need for the sign variance.

"This is a creative reuse of an existing building that can be used for a new purpose," Mr. Grygiel said. "It would be a benefit to the downtown to have retail in a currently empty building."

Board Chairman William Heinbokel described the application as a "unique opportunity, designed perfectly to fit in our downtown."

He said the building was originally designed for the basement area to be included in the gross floor area. With the grand stairs leading down to the vault, which had previously been used for staff areas and patrons by the bank, Urban Outfitters is "reestablishing something that is designed to occur in the space," Mr. Heinbokel said.

Board member Francis Smith added that, "The signs are scaled appropriately for the building size, which is larger than others."

The board unanimously approved the application, with the condition that proposed new HVAC units located on the roof not be visible from the street level, and that the building is painted off-white, as was presented in the plans.

Poly C LLC and Serf Realty LLC has owned the building since 2008 when it acquired it for \$2.7 million, according to the New Jersey Tax Assessors' website. Taxes on the building, which is assessed at \$566,000, are \$45,500.



SALUTE...Troop No. 104 welcomes 20 new Boy Scouts in a "New Scout Investiture" ceremony held Monday. The scouts received their "Troop Colors" (neckerchiefs) and were awarded their Scout Rank badges (the first step along their Boy Scouting trail). Troop No. 104 meets at 7:30 p.m. at the All Saints' Episcopal Church in Scotch Plains every Monday that school is in session. Those interested are invited to stop by or contact troop leaders at T-104-Leaders@yahoo.com.

MS BOE Makes Last Effort For School Bus Waivers

By MICHAEL POLLACK
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

MOUNTAINSIDE – Unless the Mountainside School Board receives a significant public response by tomorrow, Friday, the board may be forced to increase its budget by \$95,000.

The district is encouraging parents to consider waiving district-provided transportation if it is not needed.

"It's really, at this point, in the hands of the parents," Interim Business Administrator Daniel Saragnese told *The Westfield Leader*.

The district has extended its waiver deadline by one week, to tomorrow. Mr. Saragnese said a second mailing has been sent to Governor Livingston (GL) High School parents, and an e-mail blast was forwarded to all K-8 parents.

Calling it a "very sad thing," Mr. Saragnese said he and the board may be "confronted with a circumstance, next Tuesday, where [we] actually have to raise extra tax dollars to put half-empty buses back on the road because we did not get the cooperation we were looking for, at a time when the board's in difficult straits and enrollment is growing."

State law uses distance—from home to school—as the determining factor whether a student gets bused. The board must provide transportation for any child, from kindergarten through eighth grade, who lives at least two miles from school; likewise, the board must transport high school students who live 2.5 miles away.

"Those are the people we're trying to get to cooperate because the studies we've done show a vast majority of them, on a day-to-day basis, do not use the bus and strictly hold the seats for a matter of convenience," he said.

The district does not own any buses; rather, it contracts five. Running twice, buses first pick up students and take them to GL in Berkeley Heights. Then, the buses come back through Mountainside and do a second run, picking up Deerfield and Beechwood students and dropping them off.

In order to eliminate two routes and

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well as three incidents of bullying in the district, said Superintendent Teresa Quigley in her report. From the February 21 through March 20, there were six reports of bullying, four were considered normal and two were considered bullying, she said.

Negotiations Committee Chairman John Sullivan said the Garwood Education Association and the board of education are discussing salary guides. The teacher's association and the district have reached an agreement, however, the contract has yet to be ratified. "A tentative agreement is reached; we are going back and forth on salary guides," Mr. Sullivan said.

"It's the last detail that needs to be addressed before both parties ratify the agreement," said board attorney John Geppert, who said the ratification of the contract is "imminent."

one bus, the district would need 50 waivers from GL parents and 50 signatures from K-8 parents. If the district were "lucky enough" to get 100 responses each, Mr. Saragnese said the district could eliminate four routes and two buses. This, he said, would save in excess of \$90,000.

If waivers are not received, the district's \$15-million budget would have to be amended, and money would have to be returned in order to account for the difference.

"That would be about 2 cents on the tax rate that I really don't want to do, but if I don't get the waivers, I'm not going to have a choice," the administrator said.

The district currently spends \$841.14 per-pupil on transportation costs.

"That's totally outrageous to be spending that kind of money on transportation," he said. "It's just blatant extravagance and waste, and in a district this small, with the budget parameters we have in place right now, if you want to have more technology and control class sizes, you just can't spend that kind of money running half-empty buses."

The money saved by eliminating extra buses would be equivalent to the superintendent hiring a teacher with benefits and providing a classroom aide.

Venessa Rittman, co-President of the Mountainside PTA, shared the district's concern.

"Basically, I would say that the PTA supports the BOE's efforts to keep the district within our budget, especially when saving money in an area such as busing may afford us the ability to lower some of our class sizes," she said.

When asked if the difficulty is now communicating that information with the public, she said, "It's not necessarily the communication, but more of understanding how it can help the district, I think. Not enough people attend or watch the BOE meetings to have heard all of the questions asked about the waiver, questions that they themselves may have but haven't come forth to ask. It's also scary for parents who may rely on the busing, even if only in a limited way, to give up that right."

Mr. Saragnese said some parents are hesitant to sign the waiver, as they are concerned about a change in circumstance, such as a job loss, affecting their needs in the future. However, he said the board's policy accounts for such a need. In addition to the waiver, parents receive a "form to rescind" if needs change. This, he said, was "the most legitimate concern."

Conversely, he said he is "bothered" by hearing, indirectly, that GL parents "don't want to give up the bus ride because they don't want their kids driving to and from school in the snow...I find that a little bit flimsy. If it snows, school is closed. I'm not buying that excuse too much. The only happenstance where that might occur is a mid-day storm when we do an early dismissal."

Mr. Saragnese said the issue comes down to "Economics 101." "You have limited resources," he said. "Do you want a teacher or school buses? I've only got money for one or the other. What's it gonna be?"

To see the waiver, visit mountainsideschools.org.



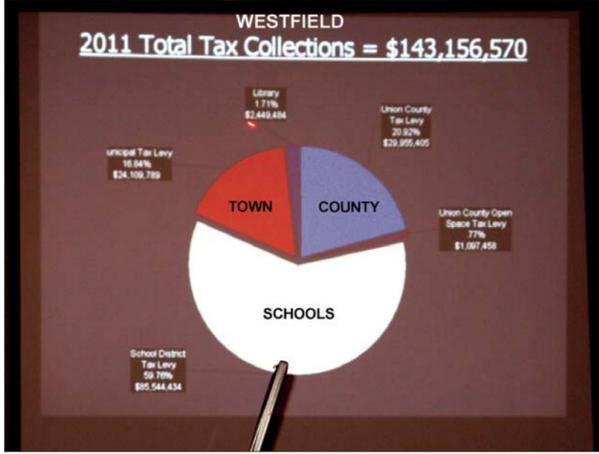
BON VOYAGE!...At the top of Act I, the cast of Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School Repertory Theatre leans to stage right to simulate the roll of the ship, the S.S. America, in the number "Bon Voyage" from *Anything Goes*. See story on page 22.



SPECIAL THANKS...Cranford's Brookside Place School first graders told a story and sang a song they wrote along with their teacher, Donna Schlencker, and Principal Michael Klimko, at the start of the Garwood Board of Education meeting to emote their thankfulness to the board for letting them use Washington School for 104 days while Brookside was renovated after the destruction caused by Hurricane Irene.



EIGHTY YEARS AND COUNTING...Union County Freeholder Chairman Al Mirabella, right, joins Rep. Leonard Lance (R-7th), second from left, and Springfield Mayor Ziad Andrew Shehady, left, in congratulating Springfield Free Public Library Director Susan Permahos, center, and Board of Trustees President Shelley Stangler on the 80th anniversary of the library during a reception held at the library on March 18. For more information about the Springfield Free Public Library, visit springfieldpubliclibrary.com.



PIECE OF THE PIE...The Westfield Town Council presented the public with a pie chart breaking down the \$36.95 2012 municipal budget into allocations at its meeting held March 13.



BUDGET PRESENTATION...Residents fill Town Hall to listen in as the Westfield Town Council presents the 2012 municipal budget at its meeting March 13. A \$36.95 million budget, as well as a separate sewer fee bill were both passed.