

# Coming in May: *This Is Westfield 2014* Our 42nd Annual Edition

## Lance Awarded 'Spirit of Enterprise' by U.S. Chamber

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Rep. Leonard Lance (R-7th) has been awarded the "Spirit of Enterprise" Award by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce in recognition of his support of pro-growth, pro-jobs policies during the first session of the 113th Congress.

"My top priority in Congress is to give the private sector the tools needed for businesses, large and small, to grow and create good paying jobs. I am honored by this recognition, but the real work of building our economy for the 21st century belongs to the entrepreneurs, innovators and hard-working middle class men and women who will be empowered by lower taxes, fewer regulations and less red tape," Mr. Lance said after the ceremony.

"The year 2013 was challenging, but Congressman Lance worked to pass legislation and enact policies that will keep our country moving forward economically," U.S. Chamber President and Chief Executive Officer Thomas J. Donohue said. "The Spirit of Enterprise Award recognizes legislators like Congressman Lance who have demonstrated their commitment to supporting pro-growth policies in the 113th Congress."

The award is based on rankings the U.S. Chamber gives members of Congress for key votes on legislation that would promote economic growth. Votes that were ranked for 2013 include:

Repealing the President's health care law ObamaCare, which the Congressional Budget Office recently estimated will compromise 2.5 million jobs; enacting an "all-of-the-above" national energy policy that includes the Keystone XL pipeline and other development that would bring down fuel prices on the consumer and create more American jobs while reducing U.S. dependence on foreign energy, and passing a budget that balances.

Jim Coyle, president of the Gateway Regional Chamber, said Mr. Lance understands the needs of New Jersey's small businesses and job creators in the Garden State.

"It is no surprise to hear that Con-

gressman Leonard Lance has been awarded the U.S. Chamber's highest honor," Mr. Coyle said. "Congressman Lance has listened to our concerns and effectively advocated in Washington on our behalf. We appreciate Congressman Lance is working to lower taxes and standing up against policies that would hurt New Jersey's job-creating small businesses."

The U.S. Chamber is the world's largest business federation representing more than three million businesses of every size, sector and region.

### Pulaski Meeting Set for Union County

COUNTY — Union County commuters and other stakeholders will get a chance to learn firsthand about their travel options during the upcoming Pulaski Skyway closure at a public meeting hosted by the New Jersey State Department of Transportation (DOT). The meeting will be held on Wednesday, April 2, from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m., at the Kean University STEM Building, opposite the main campus at 1000 Morris Avenue. Free parking is available at the rear of the building.

DOT will close both of the north-bound lanes on the Pulaski Skyway for two years starting on Saturday, April 12. The closure is needed in order to perform rehabilitation work on the 80-year-old structure.

The Skyway is not located within Union County but the closure is expected to impact traffic patterns throughout the region, including Interstate 78, Route 1&9, and Route 22.

For more details about the Skyway closure, including rail, bus, vanpooling, and carpooling options, visit DOT online at pulaskiskyway.com.

Convenient links to all regional transit are also available on the Union County website at ConneXions, ucnj.org/connect.

See it all on the Web!  
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## Freeholders Take Action to Sell Runnells Hospital; Seek to Complete Transaction by Mid-July to Center Mgmt. Group

By PAUL J. PEYTON  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

COUNTY — The Union County Freeholder Board last Thursday gave the county's improvement authority authorization to negotiate the sale of the Runnells Specialized Hospital in Berkeley Heights to Wayne-based Center Management Group, one of five nursing home operators that responded to the county's request for proposals issued last fall.

The other companies responding to the county were Ocean Health Care in Lakewood, Runnells Realty LLC of Old Bridge, Regency Acquisition of Wayne and Care Point of Jersey City. Human Services Director Frank Guzzo, who gave the presentation of the Runnells Hospital Evaluation Team's report to the freeholders, said Care Point was eliminated from the process because of "material flaws in their proposal."

The county hopes to complete the sale by mid-July. While no sale prices were released by officials due to ongoing negotiations, a county consultant's report estimated the value of the Runnells building itself at between \$23 and \$26 million. County Counsel Robert Barry said the county will require of the new operator that employees "in good standing" are given "first right of refusal" for jobs at Runnells or other Center Management nursing homes, a five-year capital improvement plan at Runnells, revenue sharing with the county, a deed restriction requiring that Runnells remain a long-term-care facility and that a certain percentage of beds be available for Union County residents and indigent patients.

Center Management, which has been in business for 10 years, serves in total more than 1,330 patients in its nursing homes, with its largest facility having 736 beds. By comparison, Runnells has 300 long-care beds and 44 beds in its adult psychiatric unit, Cornerstone.

The freeholders' action follows a February 7, 2013 report by Complete HealthCare Resources, which found Runnells was being subsidized by the county to the tune of \$17 million annually. According to the 2014 executive budget by County Manager

Al Faella, the subsidy for 2013 was \$13 million. The Runnells' deficit has been blamed on declining Medicaid and Medicare reimbursement rates. Seventy-five percent of Runnells patients are covered by Medicaid.

"The reimbursements just do not cover the expenses and the gap keeps getting wider and wider," Mr. Guzzo said. He said a shift to community-based nursing care as an alternative to nursing homes "has significantly affected the patient and fiscal operations" at Runnells.

The freeholders voted 7-1 in favor of moving ahead with negotiations to sell Runnells. Freeholder Angel Estrada, whose mother is a resident at the facility, was the lone dissenter, with Freeholder Bette Jane Kowalski absent. He said he was concerned over the quality of care.

"I am very concerned with the level of service" at Runnells, he said. "Are they (Center Management) going to be able to provide the same level of service? I hope so, but the reality is that we'll see."

Freeholder Chairman Chris Hudak, in discussing declining reimbursement rates, said, "We didn't change the way we were playing the game; the game changed." He said a third of the state's 21 counties also have sold county-owned nursing homes.

"I don't like the idea of selling this hospital. No one on this board likes the idea of selling this hospital. This has been a very difficult decision and I think one that every member of the board has had to come to grips with," he said. He said the board will make sure "that the employees are treated fairly" by the new operator.

Prior to the board's vote, many employees and some former patients and family members of patients urged the board not to sell Runnells, which has been in operation for over 100 years.

Barbara Egger, president of Local 5112 of the Health Professionals and Allied Employees, representing 70 registered nurses at Runnells, said she believes the county, "should do all that it can to ensure that New Jersey residents have continued access to quality health care by the dedicated staff that works there to-

day." She urged that as part of the sale that the new operator honor employee contracts and "bargaining rights and workplace standards."

Judy Harrison of Cranford, whose husband is a patient at Runnells, said she is, "very concerned and perplexed about the future of Runnells." She said the current staff "make a huge impact on the mental, emotional and physical well-being of the patients that they serve."

"We must keep Runnells as the facility that it is. We cannot sell Runnells Specialized Hospital," she said.

Betsy Thornton of North Plainfield, a 35-year nurse who previously worked at the former Muhlenberg Medical Center in Plainfield and now is at Runnells, said, "You almost can't put a price on quality of care," noting that patient-to-nurse ratios are much higher at Center Management's facilities than exist at Runnells.

Jay Harris of Cranford, whose father is a patient at Runnells, said patients are "just scared of what's to

come" with the sale of the facility and are worried that the quality of care "will take a serious dive."

Berkeley Heights Mayor Joseph Bruno spoke in favor of the plans to sell Runnells, as the county and township are expected to receive a combined tax revenue estimated at \$500,000 annually as the property will be put back in the tax rolls.

"I applaud you for your efforts...Government should not be in the medical practice business. There is someone who can do it better and that is the private industry," Mayor Bruno said.

He said Berkeley Heights residents voted for secession recently because of "frustration" over the "expenses the county was incurring."

"This is a great first step towards mending those fences," he said.

"This now becomes a ratable for the county and for the Township of Berkeley Heights," Mayor Bruno added. He said the board's decision "shows good fiscal sense."

## Kean, Bramnick, Muñoz Applaud Passaic Grants

TRENTON — Senate Minority Leader Tom Kean, Jr. (R-21, Westfield), Assembly Minority Leader Jon Bramnick (R-21, Westfield) and Assemblywoman Nancy Muñoz (R-21, Summit) said that Governor Chris Christie's \$3 million in stream cleaning grants for the Passaic River Basin municipalities will protect against flooding in the 21st District.

Under a grant announced last week, counties and municipalities in the 21st District will receive \$300,000 as part of an ongoing, long-term effort to reduce flood impacts in communities in the Passaic River Basin. That listing is as follows: Union County, Morris County, Chatham Borough, Florham Park, Long Hill, Summit, New Providence, Berkeley Heights, Bernards, and Warren Township.

"These funds will go a long way in helping communities perform the preventative work that's needed to mitigate the risk of flooding," Sen. Kean said. "Keeping waterways free of

brush and debris is critical to preventing flooding, but it's tough for municipalities and counties to tackle those types of projects on their own with limited budgets. With these resources, towns can make sure the work gets done and residents in flood-prone areas will be better protected."

Last August, Governor Christie signed legislation that re-appropriated \$3 million from the "Dam, Lake, Stream, Flood Control, Water Resources and Wastewater Treatment Project Bond Act of 2003" to fund state flood control projects.

"These grants are welcome news for the homeowners and businesses impacted by chronic flooding," Asm. Bramnick said.

"This funding will help to minimize floods by enabling municipalities and counties to remove the trees and debris from the river," Asw. Muñoz added.

"I am grateful that this funding has been appropriated and these much needed projects can begin," she said.

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