

Campaign Forum '98

GOP Council Candidates Call Township Government 'A Hub for Community Life'

SCOTCH PLAINS — Councilman Robert Johnston, Paulette Coronato and Gail Iammatteo, Republican candidates for Township Council, recently stopped at the Farmers' Market held at the Municipal Building parking lot every Saturday from May until October.

"The farmers market along with many other activities demonstrate our town hall as 'a hub of community life,'" commented Councilman Johnston.

The weekly event originated as a result of a cooperative effort between area businesses and members of the Township Council. Sponsored by the New Jersey Farm Fresh Program, Scotch Plains is one of several towns in New Jersey which host the market.

"Republican leadership on the council has traditionally given strong support to the efforts of both residents and business leaders who pursue many such projects which benefit the community," said Councilman Johnston.

"Through the years, the Republican controlled council had not only assisted in the initiation of the popular Village Green Summer Series, but along with area businesses, continues to support it, bringing it under the auspices of the Recreation Commission at the request of the original group of volunteers,"

annual festival held each October which celebrates Scotch Plains cultural and historical heritage.

"From its inception 20 years ago by the Republican council, Scotch Plains Day has grown in size and number; establishing itself as one of Scotch Plains most anticipated events," according to Councilman William F. McClintock, Co-Chairman for the Republican campaign.

Scotch Plains Day features a health fair that provides free flu shots and screenings, a Lions Club sponsored flea market with over 125 vendors and a 5K running race. The Business and Professional Association of Scotch Plains will host "Street Fest '98" which runs in conjunction with Scotch Plains Day. Across the village green "Street Fest" is home to sidewalk sales, games and rides for children.

"Scotch Plains Day was developed to bring residents together to share in a day filled with revelry and festivities," said Ms. Coronato. "The Towne Center serves as an ideal place for events like Scotch Plains Day, not only because of its location or size but because of the atmosphere surrounding these cheerful events."

"Scotch Plains Day not only celebrates our town's heritage, but it re-



A HUB OF TOWNSHIP LIFE...Scotch Plains Republican Township Council candidates, incumbent Councilman Robert Johnston, left, Paulette Coronato, third from left, and Gail Iammatteo, talk with Ray Pardon, owner of Nuts 'N' Plenty, during a recent Farmers' Market in the township.

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As a member of the Cultural Arts Committee, Mrs. Iammatteo said she has contributed many "hours" to the production of the performances.

"It's with the help of citizen volunteers, such as Mrs. Iammatteo, that the council will honor their efforts on Scotch Plains Day on Saturday, October 3, commented Mayor Joan Papan, noting the volunteers latest leadership effort with volunteers includes the new gazebo which will house the scene of such community activities."

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Scotch Plains Democrats Call For An Elected Mayor System

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taxpayers receive short shrift. Problems are not addressed in a timely fashion. Citizen petitions go unanswered or are avoided. The open space issue is a classic example."

"The council, without a real mayor, has talked for years about preserving open space while simultaneously it allowed land to disappear at an ever-quickening pace into the quicksand of unplanned development. Senior citizens' housing, a long-time Democratic party priority in Scotch Plains, was studied to death on and off for nearly 20 years by the Republican dominated council."

"In the meantime the most desirable locations fell to the wayside. When it was finally built it was tucked away far from the stores and services needed by our older residents," Mr. Bromley stated.

"Downtown revitalization suffers a similar fate," exclaimed Mr. Bromley. "Some of our one-year mayors have had it as a priority while others have not. After 15 years of study we're still talking about the business district's revitalization. The council has just announced that after 15 years it is planning to add its first new baseball field."

Ms. Morgan Samuel commented, "We're not talking about spending any more money to have an elected mayor. Any public referendum that might be needed could be held at the same time as a November election. The salary for the mayor easily could be funded from the current council members salaries."

"Legal costs that might be incurred should be a part of the township attorney's basic services. It's clear that flip-flopping the mayor every January 1st is not serving the best interests of Scotch Plains. Long range planning clearly has suffered as issues confronting the township mount up year after year. There is little if any responsibility or accountability," Ms. Morgan Samuel stated.

Mr. Donatelli, Mr. Bromley, and Ms. Morgan Samuel concluded in a joint statement that, "Having five mayors in five years allows little of substance to be accomplished and leaves many regularly asking 'who's in charge this year?'"

"Moreover, the head of the local government—the mayor—should be directly elected by and accountable to the citizens not be someone who was able to cut a deal with two political compatriots on the council."



DISCUSSING THEIR PLATFORM...Scotch Plains Township Council candidates Franklin P. Donatelli, Tarquin Jay Bromley, and Geri Morgan Samuel, review details for a directly elected mayor for Scotch Plains. The present system of local government has council members select the mayor. The Democratic trio for council supports a change in the charter that would allow the voters to directly elect the mayor in order to streamline government operations.



NOT THE BEST USE OF SPACES...Westfield Republican Second Ward Councilman James J. Gruba, who is seeking reelection, spoke recently about parking in the central business district and noted that one of the points made in the most recent Parking Task Force report addressed the variety of parking options in the town's municipal lots. The report further suggested that better management of the town's parking assets would help in solving the parking problem. Standing beneath a sign denoting eight-hour parking on one side and two-hour parking on the other, Councilman Gruba observed that long-term parking adjacent to downtown retail businesses is not the best use of parking spots.

GOP Freeholder Candidates Rip Use of County Funds For Computers in Schools

Juan Fernandez of New Providence, Andrew MacDonald of Fanwood and George Gore of Plainfield, the three Republican candidates running for the Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders, this week labeled the use of county funds by the Democratic majority on board for computers and Internet access in public schools as inappropriate.

"During its September 10 meeting, the Democratic Freeholders approved the issuance of \$3 million in county bonds to help pay for computers, teacher training and Internet access in Union County schools."

"While this venture appears noble on the surface, it is nothing more than governmental intervention that threatens the independence and integrity of local school boards, and abuses the use of county tax dollars," the Republicans stated.

"Local boards of education, and their budgets, are voted on by the residents in non-political school board elections. The school board portion of the property tax is listed separately on each citizen's tax bill, as are the taxes collected for the municipality and the county."

"These local boards of education take great pride in their independence from local governing bodies, including the Freeholder board. They run their programs without being obligated to local or county government, with budgets approved by their constituents. This program undermines that independence and integrity," the candidates stated.

"In an attempt to sidestep this important right, the Democratic Freeholders are using county tax dollars to pay for services and equipment that is supposed to be paid for by local school board tax dollars. The Freeholders are, in effect, increasing our school tax without asking our permission."

"When local school boards want to implement new programs, or buy additional equipment, they put these proposals into a budget and present that budget to the taxpayer. Taxpayers vote for or against these budgets. Sometimes budgets are voted down, and certain programs are eliminated or, at times, cut back."

"That is democracy, the will of the people. Most times these budgets are approved, but by the voters and not by a 9-0 Democrat Freeholder Board," the candidates said in their statement.

The Republican candidates have proposed the utilization of county tax dollars for county services such as fiscal relief for county residents who suffered financial hardship resulting from natural disasters like the recent Labor Day storm, fixing potholes in county roads and maintenance of county parks.

"If there is any county surplus the Freeholders can't spend on legitimate county services, why not return that money to the taxpayers and let them decide how best to use the funds?" the Republican candidates said.

"We would also insist on returning a portion of these monies to the taxpayers who will use the returned tax dollars to improve the quality of life for their families, and, by extension, the economy of Union County."

"The bonding of this project by the 9-0 Democratic Freeholders, merely delays the eventual payback to all present and future taxpayers of Union County. One day, the piper will have to be paid," the statement continued.

The Republicans said that local school boards should maintain their independence to raise and spend their tax dollars as they are directed to by the voters who approve or disapprove of their budgets without county government funds.

Noreen Lund Discusses Issue Of Public Safety on the Stump

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our Town Council. I know that I find it difficult to try to have traffic merge back together. I was grateful that others feel the same," Ms. Lund observed.

"Sight lines along Westfield's streets are also a major concern. One neighbor pointed to the intersection of Dorian Road and Westfield Avenue as a particularly troubling spot, especially when the (Westfield) High School traffic is letting out. Since the intersection is offset and there are so many cars parked on that street, it is difficult to see traffic, especially southbound traffic on Westfield Avenue."

"I think the town should consider extending the no parking area both north and south of the intersection on Westfield Avenue to give drivers a better view," the candidate said.

Noting that general road conditions are of recurring concern to almost everyone, Ms. Lund said, "Over the past couple of years a general

level of deterioration, including pot holes, has been evident on many streets. One resident on Boynton Court was not only annoyed by the appearance of his neighborhood's road, but felt that safety of children playing was being compromised by the road's condition, which impact quality of life.

"Another person mentioned that tree branches have obscured some Westfield stop signs which is an obvious safety issue."

Ms. Lund concluded by noting that the issues that her constituents raised over the past week may seem minor, but require a "strong voice" on the Town Council to see that they are addressed.

"Through communication with residents, planning with the necessary town services and a diligent watch, I feel these safety concerns as they interface with our quality of life, can be resolved," Ms. Lund concluded.



GETTING HER POINT ACROSS...Westfield Republican Third Ward candidate Noreen Lund, left, talks with Maureen Brehm on resident concerns during her continuing door-to-door campaign in the ward.

Joe Stoner Advocates for Deck For Downtown Westfield Area

WESTFIELD - Westfield Democratic Second Ward Town Council candidate Joe Stoner of the Second Ward likens the problem of parking in the downtown area to the weather: Everybody talks about it, but nobody has been able to do anything about it.

"This has been a topic of heated local conversation the entire time I've lived in Westfield. Some say the problem goes back as far as 1913," said Mr. Stoner recently.

"There have been several proposals floated for parking decks over the years, but they've all bogged down in controversy over costs, esthetics and location. We've had committees formed to study the situation that have been paralyzed by indecision," he said.

"Now we're in a position where the town cannot effectively enforce its own commercial regulations for parking," Mr. Stoner continued, "because it has not provided sufficient facilities to allow businesses to comply."

"We're at a point now where there is little room for debate or indecision. We have to act in the very near future to provide more parking facilities, or we will face the threat of losing some of the very fine commercial enterprises we have attracted to our central business district," the candidate explained.

"The nature of downtown commerce has changed over recent years," Mr. Stoner noted.

"We've moved from a predomi-

nance of retail shops that only do business during the daytime to a more complex blend of retail, dining and entertainment establishments that do business through the evening hours, too.

"With our downtown vacancies down to almost zero, we have to better provide for the extended needs of these businesses to accommodate their customers. And we are the customers," Mr. Stoner stated.

While in the past there has been opposition to building a parking deck in the downtown area on the grounds that a deck would spoil the area's appearance, Mr. Stoner said he believes a deck is the only viable solution to the problem.

"We know from observing how several other prosperous towns in our area have managed the problem that it is, certainly possible to create a facility in harmony with the town," Mr. Stoner said.

How to finance such a facility has also been a point of contention in the past. That problem, too, Mr. Stoner asserted, can be solved with ingenuity, determination and some of the sophisticated financial instruments now available to municipalities.

"We can do this," insisted Mr. Stoner, "and we can do it without placing a greater tax burden on the citizens of Westfield."

Mr. Stoner invites Second Ward residents to contact him with their concerns at (908) 232-8334.

Tom Cusimano Supports Cooperative Effort to Fix Town's Parks and Fields

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community," commented Mr. Cusimano.

"Private donors and organizations can not be relied upon solely for field maintenance and upgrades. The Recreation Department must continue to demonstrate its leadership and long-range commitment to improving existing parks and fields. It has been a privilege to serve on Recreation Commission for the past year and to make my contribution," he added.

"With co-operative efforts such as Houlihan and Gumbert Fields, Westfield can continue to provide first class recreational facilities for our youth. This can be accomplished most effectively through the continued joint efforts of both the

public and private sector. I will work to continue these types of successful cooperative projects," Mr. Cusimano stated.

The candidate invites anyone with suggestions or comments regarding the town's parks and fields to call him at (908) 654-9660.

Deadline For Release Is: 4 p.m. Fridays