

# Cellular Phone Donation Program Aimed At Helping Victims of Domestic Violence

By DEBORAH MADISON  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

SCOTCH PLAINS — In an effort to help protect victims of domestic violence, State Senate President Donald T. DiFrancesco (R-22<sup>nd</sup>) last week launched the Union County Cellular Telephone Donation Program and announced Senate action on an anti-domestic violence bill to be introduced for the next scheduled session.

The announcements were made at a press conference held at the Scotch Plains Municipal Building on December 8.

Senator DiFrancesco kicked off the cell phone program along with fellow Republican District 22 legislators, Assemblymen Richard H. Bagger and Alan M. Augustine, Union County Prosecutor Thomas V. Manahan and Elaine O'Neal, Victim/Witness Program Coordinator in the Prosecutor's Office.

"Battered women must live with the threats of murder, assault and harassment every day," said Senator DiFrancesco. "This program can help

to restore a sense of security to their lives."

The program uses old, wireless portable phones from designated drop-off areas, sends them to Bell Atlantic Mobile, where they are programmed to dial 911 at the touch of a button and distributes them to victims of domestic violence.

"Emergency cell phones can make all the difference when an abusive relationship erupts into life-threatening violence," said Senator DiFrancesco. The Senator stated that he will encourage all Union County residents to donate their old cell phones to this important program.

The bill, S-2273, introduced for a full Senate vote on December 13, will establish a domestic violence central registry to help track offenders.

"The Legislature has a strong record in fighting domestic violence," said Senator DiFrancesco. Last month, legislation was passed that requires the fingerprinting of domestic violence offenders arrested for assault and harassment and on

December 6, the Legislature passed a measure that provides unemployment insurance to domestic violence victims, according to a memo distributed by the Senator's office at the press conference.

The Union County Prosecutor said that this program was vitally important to the victims of domestic violence. According to Mr. Manahan his office has collected over 200 phones so far.

Other drop-off points for collecting the donated phones, besides the Prosecutor's office, are Assemblyman Augustine's office at 1811 Springfield Avenue in New Providence and Senator DiFrancesco's office at 1816 Front Street in Scotch Plains.

Scotch Plains Mayor Geri M. Samuel said at the press conference that she will announce the program at the next Township Council meeting and encourage cell phone donations from Scotch Plains' residents.

Ms. O'Neal stated that domestic violence victims could apply for a 911 phone at their local police office

or through the Union County Prosecutor's office.

In a related matter, Mr. Manahan discussed with *The Times of Scotch Plains/Fanwood*, a program launched by his office that has updated the procedures followed by the police in domestic violence cases. Police have been retrained in updated protocols, which would establish a better support network for victims of rape, according to Mr. Manahan.

A computerized information system was also established that enable the police to determine if perpetrators of domestic violence have any weapons licensed to them and gives the police the authority to retrieve those weapons. The computer is operated by the State Police.

According to the memo distributed by Senator DiFrancesco's office, there were a total of 81,454 domestic violence offenses throughout the state in 1998, including 5,231 in Union County. One act of domestic violence occurs approximately once every six minutes, according to the memo.



Deborah Madison for The Westfield Leader and The Times  
**HELPING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE VICTIMS...** State, County and municipal officials display the 911 emergency cell phones that will now be donated to victims of domestic abuse. In addition, state legislation introduced for a full Senate vote will establish a domestic violence central registry to help track offenders. Pictured during last week's press conference in Scotch Plains, from left, are: State Senate President Donald T. DiFrancesco, Victim/Witness Program Coordinator Elaine O'Neal, Assemblyman Alan M. Augustine (R-22), Union County Prosecutor Thomas V. Manahan and Scotch Plains Mayor Geri M. Samuel.

## Consultant Questioned at Forum On Proposed Town Parking Deck

By SONIA V. OWCHARIIV  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

WESTFIELD — Where should a parking garage be located and how should it be designed to keep Westfield's look in mind?

These questions were raised and discussed December 1 by residents and Rich & Associates, a Southland, Mich.-based consulting firm hired by town council to study the downtown parking situation, during a public forum at the Municipal Building.

Rich & Associates, a parking engineering and consulting firm, started its work in September to prepare a parking improvement report for downtown Westfield.

Standing in front of an easel with a map of Westfield and the possible designated garage sites, Rick Rich of Rich & Associates commented, "We are at the stage right now, where we have no preconceived ideas and no cost. We are here to get input from you on how you want this [garage] to look and to get the design team up to speed."

The following are locations under consideration for a possible parking deck:

- Lot 1: off Prospect Street — behind Trader Joe's.
- Lot 2: adjacent to the fire station on North Avenue.
- Lot 3A: at the south side of the train station.
- Lot 4: between Mountain Avenue and Elm Street — behind Baron's Drug Store
- Lot 5: across from the First Congregational Church of Westfield on Elmer Street.

• Lot 7: across from the post office on Central Avenue.

• Lot 9: near the corner of Central and North Avenues, also known as the Shell lot.

The consultants and 20 some members of the public shared their thoughts on some of the sites being considered.

Comments made at the public forum varied from the aesthetics of the structure to cost efficiency. Other comments centered around the lots under consideration to concerns about creating more traffic congestion in the downtown.

Ferris Street resident Wendy Packer commented about a possible disadvantage of Lot 1: off Prospect Street (behind Trader Joe's), stating, "I'm concerned about adding additional traffic due to traffic already from the YMCA and the church. I'm concerned about the children on those streets."

Rich & Associates is also exploring the viability of a shuttle or valet system to transport drivers from a remote lot to their final destination in downtown Westfield.

During the discussions, the consultant noted that the construction of a parking structure could take nine to 12 months.

That news, however, has some downtown businesses concerned, particularly if sites Nos. 4 or 5 were to be used. Concern is that it will interfere with customers pulling in and out and getting into local stores while the construction is going on.

Mr. Rich indicated the first formal presentation from his firm will come after January 1, 2000.

## Army National Guard Receives Accolades for Emergency Efforts Made Following Floyd's Fury in September

By SONIA V. OWCHARIIV  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

WESTFIELD — It was a cold, quiet Sunday afternoon when the 250th Signal Battalion of the New Jersey Army National Guard at the Westfield Armory received warm accolades and recognition from Congressman Bob Franks.

The men and women were hon-

ored for their heroic feat of immediate response and recovery of stranded residents from second-floor windows and other rescue operations during the Tropical Storm Floyd emergency evacuation in Bound Brook and Manville last September.

New Jersey was immediately declared a disaster area by President Bill Clinton and Governor Christine

Todd Whitman, which allowed federal financial assistance to residents and to businesses in the eight counties that were declared disaster areas. Those counties were Union, Somerset, Middlesex, Essex, Bergen, Passaic, Mercer and Morris.

However, more importantly, the State of Emergency also entitled Governor Whitman to deploy the

National Guard, which celebrated its 363rd birthday on December 13, to the rescue, according to Mr. Franks.

"I'm here today, because I saw you in action and time after time, it was the National Guard. This should make you all so proud and make you feel good. Thousands will not forget, but again, the National Guard will con-

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## Freeholders Receive Retroactive Salary Hikes

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and that the board has been consistent in maintaining its policy on how it grants waivers to the policy. He said the county needs to have some flexibility "in order to handle individual situations."

The waivers were recommended by the County Manager, Mr. Scutari explained.

Mr. Holmes said he voted against the waivers due to what he viewed as a "bit of confusion" in the process of how the decision to seek approval of the waivers was conducted.

During the meeting, some 30 members of the Union County parks maintenance workers union approached the board to ask them to work to solve a stalemate in contract talks that have been ongoing for two years.

Joe Petrosky, President of UE 194, said the union agreed to drop eight other items they were seeking in a new contract "just to get a fair raise." The

union is seeking 3.5 percent each year over the course of a three-year pact.

"This is the longest we have ever been without a contract," the union president stated. There have been 25 negotiation sessions between the union and county since October 1997.

Alex Chappotin, union vice president, said the workers "major beef" is that all other collective bargaining units, along with county officials and freeholders, have come to agreements on pay increases.

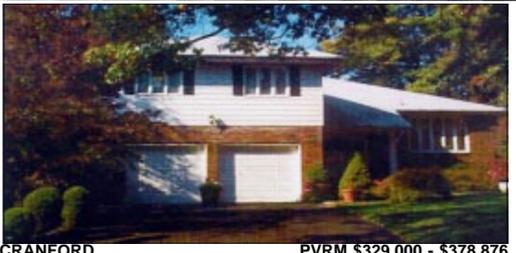
"We are the only ones, basically, in Union County, and they (the board) don't want to throw us that percentage rate," Mr. Chappotin noted.

Another worker exclaimed that Mr. Lapolla "is making \$127,000 while we are getting peanuts."

Mr. Scutari said the board could not comment on ongoing contract negotiations.



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