



THE TIMES

Scotch Plains - Fanwood



Happy Valentine's Day

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FIFTY CENTS

SP-F BOE Remains Hopeful Of Contract Settlement

By DEBORAH MADISON
Specially Written for The Times

Negotiations with a state-appointed mediator, over the course of six months of meetings, have failed to bring about an agreement in Scotch Plains-Fanwood between the Teacher's Association union and the Board of Education.

"The protracted teacher contract negotiations in the Scotch Plains-Fanwood school district will hopefully come to a resolution in the near future," Board of Education Contract Committee Chairperson, Lance Porter, told *The Times of Scotch Plains - Fanwood*.

Union leader, Edward Leonard of The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Teacher's Association (SPFEA), did not return calls to *The Times* when sought to comment on the stalemated talks.

Many parents have expressed their concerns, both in "Letters To The Editor" of *The Times* and at board meetings that the quality of education falters when teachers' contracts remain unsettled. Several parents have encouraged both sides to settle quickly, at any cost. Other residents in the district have expressed concern over the rapid rise in property taxes, driven primarily by the escalating cost of public education.

According to Mr. Porter, the next step in the process has been the hiring of a professional Fact Finder, with more expertise in settling this type of situation. If the Fact Finder's attempts to negotiate a settlement fail, he will then write a non-binding recommendation. Both sides will have an opportunity to accept or reject that recommendation, Mr. Porter explained.

The Fact Finder conducted the first meeting on February 2 and the next fact-finding meeting will be held on February 20.

"The district came to this point three years ago, with the same Fact Finder, and the contracts were resolved by him at this point in the process," Mr. Porter stated.

The major conflict in settling the

negotiations has been disagreement over the health benefits package, Mr. Porter said. The board's position has been that it is unrealistic for the teachers to expect that the district can continue to afford to contribute 100 per cent for a traditional-type health insurance plan. Board President, Dr. Donald Sheldon told *The*

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Delay In State Budget To Have Local Impact

By HORACE CORBIN
Specially Written for The Times

In an apparent move to obtain more time to cope with the New Jersey state budget shortfall and to deal with impacts of administration changes, the Legislature has passed Senate Bill S-671 on an emergency basis.

The bill gives Governor James E. McGreevey until Tuesday, March 26, to transmit his first state budget to the Legislature. Current law provides that the district have expressed concern over the rapid rise in property taxes, driven primarily by the escalating cost of public education.

On Monday, February 11, the State Assembly passed the bill by a vote of 47 to 29. The bill was passed in the State Senate on January 15 by a vote of 36 to 0.

Senate Bill S-671 was sponsored by Senators Wayne R. Bryant and Robert E. Littell, Co-Chairmen of the Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee. The bill has been presented to Governor McGreevey

for his signature and enactment into law. The Governor is expected to sign it soon.

This state delay of budgeting has resulted in several local ramifications. Particularly, the date for submission of state aid details to local public school systems has been delayed. The delay will cause postponement of school board elections and school budget votes.

Candidate filings for school board elections were due on Monday, February 25. School board budgets cannot be prepared at this time without knowledge of the state aid figures. No revised schedule is known at this time.

School board elections and a public vote on the annual school budgets were scheduled for Tuesday, April 16. The statutory deadline for school districts to submit their 2002-2003 budgets to the County Superintendent of Schools for review is Monday, March 4, of this year. This requirement cannot be met due to the

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Council Names Capt. Domanoski Acting Police Chief of Fanwood

By KIMBERLY MERZ
Specially Written for The Times

Captain Donald Domanoski was appointed as Fanwood's Acting Chief of Police, longtime Fanwood resident Richard Bard was honored, and "Free Enterprise Week" was proclaimed during the Fanwood Borough Council's regular meeting Tuesday night.

However, the public hearing on an ordinance supporting a redevelopment plan for a 6.5-acre block of downtown property was postponed until next month.

The Borough Council is awaiting a resolution from the Fanwood Planning Board, confirming the board's January 23 endorsement of the redevelopment plan, according to Council President Joel Whitaker.

The Planning Board is expected to respond to the council with its resolution at its Monday, February 18 agenda session, Mr. Whitaker said. A second reading on the redevelopment plan ordinance is slated for the

governing body's Tuesday, March 12 regular meeting.

Applause broke out among Fanwood police officers at the meeting after the council unanimously appointed Captain Domanoski as Acting Police Chief by a 5-0 vote.

The current Chief of Police, Robert Carboy, will retire on Monday, July 1, and will be away from headquarters as of Tuesday, February 19. To preserve the continuity, Mr. Whitaker said it was necessary to appoint a Chief for the interim.

"I am sure he (Captain Domanoski) will do a superb job as Acting Police Chief and I am sure he will do a great job as Chief, but we haven't gotten to that point yet," Councilman Whitaker commented.

Chief Carboy said he was very pleased with his replacement.

"I want to thank the council for appointing Captain Domanoski as acting Chief. He is a natural replacement for myself; very easy to work

with," Chief Carboy remarked.

Mr. Bard, who recently moved to Toms River, resided in Fanwood for 41 years. The longtime resident's many volunteer activities included serving on the Scotch Plains-Fanwood Board of Education and the Long Range Planning Committee and as a volunteer at the Fanwood Recycling Center.

"He was a terrific asset. I think he viewed himself as a curmudgeon from time to time, but relished the role," Councilman Whitaker said, while expressing his gratitude to Mr. Bard for his contributions to the community.

"Dick, thank you very much and a lot of the success of the Recycling Center is because of you," said Councilwoman Katherine Mitchell.

Representing the Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School chapter of DECA, students Naor Chazan and Michael Hessemer were presented with a proclamation by Mayor Louis Jung, declaring February 11 to 18 as

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Party Pride... On Tuesday evening, the Union County Republican Party held its traditional Lincoln Day celebration at The Westwood in Garwood. Several Republican state leaders were in attendance. Pictured, above, former Acting Governor Donald T. DiFrancesco accepts the spirited gift of a ceramic elephant, the party's mascot, while Union County Republican Chairman Ron Frigerio looks on.

George Washington and History Are On Trial With The NJEA

By DEBORAH MADISON
Specially Written for The Times

A controversy over the best methods of teaching traditional American history has been heating up as the result of a movement to place portraits of General George Washington in every classroom in New Jersey schools.

As innocuous and positive for education as this proposal sounds, it has drawn criticism and unlikely opponents from the educational sector.

Mountainside resident William Sanders has been attempting to get a bill passed that would allocate \$135,000 in state monies to fund one portrait of George Washington for each of New Jersey's 600 school districts to honor the 200th anniversary of the First President's death.

Mr. Sanders explained that his intentions were to stimulate a revival of honoring the Founding Fathers and serve to remind us of "the ideals, devotion and love of country that were so strongly exemplified by our nation's first President." His plans were to then fund additional portraits, one for every classroom, through private sector and corporate donations.

After the bill passed through two committees of the State Assembly, the Educational Committee of the New Jersey Senate voted against the bill proposed by Mr. Sanders. He believes that the bill was squelched by undue influence on the Senate Committee by the leadership of the New Jersey Education Association (NJEA), which opposes the project on baseless grounds, he claimed.

He maintained that since New Jersey was the crossroads of the American Revolution and a home to George Washington's most heroic accomplishments, it would be a very posi-

tive example to set for the rest of the nation for New Jersey to participate in his proposal.

A spokesperson for the NJEA, Karen Josephs, told *The Westfield Leader* and *The Times of Scotch Plains-Fanwood* that the NJEA opposes Mr. Sanders' project for several reasons.

First, she contended that merely hanging portraits in a building would have no educational value. Secondly, she stated that the money could be spent in better ways, especially taking into account New Jersey's budgetary crisis.

Finally, she pointed out that singling out one individual was "insulting to other, equally important his-

torical figures, which children should also learn about."

"There are better ways to teach history and the whole notion of spending this money for portraits is frivolous," she stated.

Mr. Sanders said that this type of egalitarianism fails to recognize the greatest leader of America's history and the origins of our great nation. He claimed that Ms. Joseph's position reflects a recent trend in educational curriculum to water-down, exclude and change significant historical facts in the interest of being politically correct.

"Our Founding Fathers are being excluded from the history books in

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Preserving History... Circa 1999, William Sanders of Mountainside began to establish a program to preserve and value the history of America's founding fathers. Pictured, left to right, are: current State Senator Richard Bagger, Mr. Sanders, former Governor Christine Todd Whitman, former Acting Governor Donald T. DiFrancesco, and late State Assemblyman Alan Augustine during the insipient phase of the program.

Police Chief O'Brien Praised by SP Council; DECA Students Honored

By FRED ROSSI
Specially Written for The Times

Scotch Plains Police Chief Thomas O'Brien, who has headed the police department since 1996, was saluted by the Township Council on Tuesday night for his 38 years of service. Chief O'Brien, who is retiring on March 1, was praised first in a council resolution and then by the individual members and others for his service, modesty and sense of humor.

Mayor Martin Marks, in presenting a plaque expressing the council's appreciation to Chief O'Brien, told him that "you have made an impact on people's lives that will last longer" than the 38 years of service the Chief gave to the community. Police Captain Marshall Nelson, who will become Chief of Police in March, called



Thomas O'Brien Chief O'Brien "a true gentleman" and singled out his "fairness in dealing with everybody" as well as his

"wit and humor."

Township Manager Thomas Atkins listed several attributes, including Chief O'Brien's modesty, honesty, "excellent work ethic" and the fact that he "always gave credit to everyone besides himself."

With about a dozen members of his family, including his wife JoAnn, present for the ceremony, Chief O'Brien, after offering a joking thanks to township officials "for memorizing the (laudatory) scripts I gave you," said that "basically I'm just a cop who was lucky enough to be chief."

He said he would not have been able to rise through the ranks during his 38 years of service without the support of his family and his departmental colleagues. "They're the ones

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WELCOME TO THE NEIGHBORHOOD...Luigi Iarussi from "Formals by Luigi," left, welcomes restaurateur Lin from the new upcoming Main Star Chinese Restaurant on Park Avenue.

Residents, Temple Representatives Weigh Parking Lot Expansion Plans

By DEBORAH MADISON
Specially Written for The Times

WESTFIELD -- The Community Room of the Westfield Municipal Building was filled with more than 75 individuals on Sunday evening, as Westfield residents and representatives from Temple Emanu-El discussed the temple's parking lot expansion plans.

The meeting was arranged by residents of the group called UNITE or United Neighbors Investigating Temple Expansion.

Rabbi Charles Kroloff, Temple President Steve Rosenberg and Temple Executive Director Carolyn Shane attended on behalf of the temple. Approximately 25 of UNITE were present. Other residents of the temple neighborhood, as well as a small group of interested parties from outside the area, comprised the bulk of the attendees.

Second Ward Councilman Matthew Albano, who is a resident of the neighborhood, opened the meeting as spokesperson for the members of UNITE. He explained that the residents objected to the temple's purchase of the 1.1 acres residential lot, adjacent to the temple, with the intentions of adding 100 parking spaces to their existing 60-space lot.

Councilman Albano stated that a parking lot of that size did not belong in a residential neighborhood and would destroy the quality of life, depreciate the value of their homes and negatively impact safety in their community.

The temple has approximately 1,130 member families, which is reportedly the largest membership of any synagogue in New Jersey.

Mr. Rosenberg confirmed that the temple has entered into a contract with real estate developer Michael Mahoney to purchase the adjacent residential property in question, predicated on town approval.

"This proposal will increase drainage and noise problems, will attract exhaust and increase serious traffic and safety problems," Mr. Albano stated. He also said that the temple did not testify that they needed an additional parking lot during Westfield Planning Board hearings, which occurred several years prior, when the temple applied for a building expansion.

Rabbi Kroloff expressed the temple's position that during previous planning board hearings, the temple told the board that their building expansion would not increase membership and would therefore not increase parking needs. However, he stated that insufficient parking for the temple has been an issue for more than 20 years.

He explained that the building expansion and the parking lot expansion were only playing catch-up with their existing membership, which has not grown in five years.

Rabbi Kroloff also expressed that their chief concerns were the safety of their congregants as well as traffic safety and parking issues for the entire neighborhood.

He related that several injuries have occurred due to congregants having to park several blocks away due to icy sidewalks and poor lighting at night.

Insufficient parking also resulted in a fatality when a nanny for a Westfield family, Anna Tkacova of Perth Amboy, was killed when attempting to cross East Broad Street at Jefferson Avenue to pick up children from the Hebrew School in February 1999.

"Some of our older members can no longer attend important life-cycle events because of the insufficient parking situation," he said. He maintained that by increasing the parking spaces from 60 to 160, many congregants would be able to park closer.

However, residents contend that a 100-space increase would hardly resolve the parking problems during High Holy Holidays, special events or most Friday nights, when attendance at the Temple is well in excess of 400 families.

Several UNITE members told the temple leaders that they have often been blocked into or out of their driveways due to cars parking illegally or idling in the street, waiting to pick up temple members. Many residents expressed their opinion that a larger parking lot would attract more temple members. They contended that this would exacerbate the existing problems, not solve them.

Fairacres Avenue resident Liz Jacobello said that she and her husband bought their house with the hope that the quality of life in their neighborhood would not be eroded by uncontrolled development.

Rabbi Kroloff responded that Westfield was fully developed, and therefore the residents did not need to be concerned

that temple membership would continue to grow. He maintained that the need was to serve existing members and that the temple had no intentions of increasing membership, building size or events.

There was considerable discussion regarding the temple's intended uses of the lot. Rabbi Kroloff and Mr. Rosenberg stated that they did not believe that the lot would be used for building expansions or additions in the foreseeable, near future.

Several residents asked if the temple would be willing to put that commitment into writing in their application before either the planning board or the Westfield Board of Adjustment.

"We do not intend on applying for any other use other than for parking," Mr. Rosenberg told the residents. "However, I cannot commit to or predict what will happen 30 years from now," he added.

Mr. Rosenberg said that he would discuss the residents' request for that condition in writing with the temple board and have an answer for the residents in the near future.

During the meeting, Councilman Albano cautioned the audience several times that comments and questions relating to temple statistics, the number of out-of-town temple members, the percentage of Westfield's Jewish population or the relevance of large social events to the practice of Judaism were a violation of First Amendment rights. Thus, he said that questions or comments of this nature were not appropriate.

Several residents voiced their opinion that such questions were relevant to traffic concerns, and that the comments were innocuous in nature.

Rabbi Kroloff stated during the meeting and in a written statement, which he issued after the meeting, that "a few of

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Times that the plan has to be made congruent with today's waning economy.

"The teachers and their union leaders need to recognize that, in this economy, it is not realistic for the district to continue to provide the same costly benefits it has in the past," Dr. Sheldon stated.

Other districts, as well as most of the business sector, have had to switch to a more cost-effective method of providing health coverage, which includes employee-contributions to defray the cost, Mr. Porter explained.

"The teachers' union needs to recognize that every district has been affected by the current economic crunch," Dr. Sheldon added.

When asked why this district seems to have had a history of protracted negotiations, Mr. Porter commented that, "the board changes members every three years. There have been different issues each time, so that question is difficult to answer." He commented that the union leaders have made inflammatory comments in the paper, which are not in the best interest of resolving this situation.

Both Dr. Sheldon and Mr. Porter said that they hoped the process would come to a resolution during the next meeting, because no one wants the process to escalate to the next step, which would require the board to impose its decision on the district.

"This Fact Finder was successful three years ago, and I am confident that we will find common ground," Mr. Porter remarked.

Mr. Porter said that the board has received hundreds of emails from parents, concerned about the delay in reaching a settlement.

The teachers have participated in several job actions resulting in their reduced participation in extra-curricular school activities, such as after-school conferences, class-trips, bulletin board decorating and others. Several teachers have discussed their job actions with students in the classroom, when asked by students why activities have been reduced or eliminated, this year.

Mr. Porter said that he understands the public's anxiety about the delay, but that the board has a responsibility to be fiscally prudent to the taxpayers.

the comments from those in attendance were clearly offensive, and that he wished others would have spoken out against those types of remarks."

Several members of the audience objected to the insinuation that they were being anti-Semitic.

"We're not anti-Semitic," Tremont Avenue resident Dominic Fontana exclaimed. "We're just anti-parking lot!"

Several other residents voiced their position that they would be fighting this proposal whether it was a church or a supermarket imposing a parking lot on their residential neighborhood.

UNITE group members emphasized that inflammatory comments made during the meeting were from persons not part of their group, and that these comments were not representative of their views.

Generally, Rabbi Kroloff said he thought that the meeting was very productive and a good exchange of views. He said that the majority of comments were thoughtful and supportive of the reconciliation that the temple was trying to achieve.

Several alternative solutions to the

temple's parking problems were suggested by residents. These included shuttles to and from nearby parking lots, improved lighting and the need for traffic studies.

Mr. Rosenberg suggested that a temple committee regularly meet with a residents' committee to address their issues on a regular basis and to insure open lines of communication. He also said that the temple is prepared to have their engineer meet with the residents in order to incorporate their issues and concerns into the parking lot design plans. Their next step in the process will be to hire an engineer, he stated.

UNITE group members issued a written statement after the meeting expressing their belief that the meeting was a "productive exchange." They also stated that the UNITE group "is very proud of the strength of the religious institutions of Westfield" and that their concerns "do not relate to the nature of the institution."

UNITE group members told *The Westfield Leader* that they are in the process of seeking out an attorney to represent them.

George Washington, History Are On Trial With the NJEA

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favor of teaching a more pluralistic, but inaccurate version of history," he claimed. "We are so afraid of offending, that we deprive American children of the truth."

Mr. Sanders stated that the state Department of Education, which has a board that establishes core curriculum standards for the state, has recently decided to exclude the majority of history regarding the Founding Fathers from the curriculum in addition to changing and twisting other historical facts and events.

Mr. Sanders believes that this trend is a great disservice to the education of our children.

A previous bill to have school children memorize and recite the preamble to the Declaration of Independence was also opposed by the NJEA and declined by the Senate last summer for similar reasons, Ms. Josephs admitted.

"We don't demonize the Founding Fathers, but history lessons need to be put in the proper perspective. One reason we study history is to evaluate events in the correct context," Ms. Josephs stated. "Memorizing speeches or hanging up one portrait has no education value," she claimed.

When asked if the NJEA had influence on the decisions of the Educational Committee of the State Senate, Ms. Josephs said that she hoped so and that their lobbyists would continue to explain their position to the State legislature.

Mr. Sander's opinion is that the NJEA leadership and the State Senators, which he claimed are unduly influenced by the NJEA, are not representing their constituents. "I can't believe that someone would throw stones at our Founding Fathers," he said. "They are responsible for everything that makes this country as great as it is today."

Mr. Sanders said that many educators and local school districts have been receptive and want to participate in displaying George Washington portraits. He has been carrying out his project with private funding, but said that endorsement by the State would carry weight and make his mission easier.

He claimed that accurate and thorough American history began to disappear from the history books in the 1960's due to the influence of leftist groups of that era and a change in leadership in the NJEA.

Mr. Sanders said that since then, statistics bear out how ignorant of history our children have become. According to Mr. Sanders, in a survey of fourth graders, seven out of 10 students thought that Illinois, California or Texas were among the 13 original colonies. Six out of 10 students had no idea why the pilgrims came to America, and only 7 percent of fourth graders could identify "an important event" that took place in Philadelphia in 1776.

Further, in recent tests administered to high school seniors, only one in 10 could be considered proficient in American history. Only one in four Americans can recognize whose picture is on the \$1 bill.

In recent years, opponents to outward displays of patriotism in schools have spoken out against the alleged inaccuracies of traditional American history. These educational reformers claim that traditional history books portray a very ethnocentric version of history that is culturally biased.

Specifically, they point out that history has been written with a decided focus away from the significant contributions of religious minorities, people of color and women. Similar criticisms have been made against the Declaration of Independence for referring to the equality of men, not women and the presumption that it did not apply to minorities.

Other historians, however, have claimed this was not the intention of the creators of the Declaration, but the impression that the Founding Fathers repre-

sented a justification of slavery, racism and sexism, still lingers.

Mr. Sanders claimed that this misperception is not accurate and the solution to the misinformation is to clarify and add to history, not eliminate it, as the "NJEA is ignorantly promoting," he said.

Mr. Sanders claims that this egalitarianism has watered down the traditional education of history to include only 10 percent of its pre-1960s content.

"History is history. You can't change it," Mr. Sanders claimed. "You can correct misinformation, but it is a grave disservice to our children to eliminate it for fear of offending someone."

"How much dumber do we want our children to be?" Mr. Sanders asked. "We have people in positions of power putting together core curriculum who have no concept of what is accurate," he stated.

The bill is due to be reintroduced this session, but must go back to the Assembly and start from the beginning, Mr. Sanders explained. In the interim, he is continuing to seek funding from private sources for his portraits in the schools project. To date, he has placed 60 portraits in New Jersey Schools.

He has also presented portraits to several Governors and State Leaders for placement in their respective offices. Mr. Sanders is scheduled to make a presentation of a portrait to the President of the United States in the near future, he said.

Mr. Sanders said that he will fight this battle "against the ignorance of the NJEA" for as long as it takes for the sake of the future of this country.

"I really believe that if we don't fight for this, we will not survive as a nation," he said.

The NJEA states that its mission is to advance and protect the rights, benefits, and interests of members, and promote a quality system of public education for all students.

Further, the NJEA said it is a diverse, democratic organization working to create an optimal environment to achieve excellence in public education in New Jersey.

Fanwood Council

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Free Enterprise Week.

The DECA chapter was recognized with this annual proclamation for its contributions in promoting a better understanding of global economy and the free enterprise system, therefore promoting freedom and a better way of life, the proclamation stated.

Students involved with DECA have been interviewing Chief Executive Officers and executive members in big corporations from around the United States, asking their opinions about the economy, in light of the September 11 attacks, according to Naor.

Approximately 60 students have conducted workshops at the Terrill and Park Middle Schools with the eighth graders, to help ease their transition into high school and make better decisions. Discussions were led about school violence, drugs and relationships.

"Anything that students have a problem with. Also mixing in with the crowd. Basically, this was a project to help eighth graders coming into the (high) school (to) better cope, so they don't feel as nervous," Naor explained.

DECA is currently selling discount cards to help promote the local businesses of Scotch Plains and Fanwood, for \$2 each.

Bagger, Kean and Munoz Schedule Open House

WESTFIELD — Senator Richard H. Bagger, Assemblymen Thomas H. Kean, Jr. and Eric Munoz, representing the 21st Legislative District, will hold an open house on Sunday, February 24, to mark the opening of their new legislative office at 203 Elm Street in Westfield.

The new office is located downstairs from the previous office occupied by Senator Bagger. Included are private offices for Senator Bagger and Assemblyman Kean and a conference room for meetings with constituents and

officials.

Assemblyman Munoz' office is located at the legislators' satellite office, located at 57 Union Place, Suite No. 207, Summit. Assemblyman Kean moved from his previous office in Scotch Plains, which is not in the district, to the new location on January 23.

The open house will be held from 2 to 4 p.m. and refreshments will be served.

All three legislators, their staffs, as well as countless elected officials, will be in attendance. The community is invited to attend.



Cheri Rogowsky for The Times
SCOTCH PLAINS WINNER...During the Little Opera Company of New Jersey's competition for vocal excellence, which was held at The Presbyterian Church in Westfield on Saturday, Scotch Plains resident William Shore, 9, took home the gold in the 7-9-year-old category. Pictured with William are his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Roy Shore of Scotch Plains.

Delay In State Budget To Have Local Impact

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state budget delay. Republican State Senate President John Bennett told *The Westfield Leader* and *The Times of Scotch Plains-Fanwood* that the formula for state aid for schools is so indeterminate that it is impossible for school systems to be able to calculate what might be their fair share of state aid. "So, it leaves them up in the air," said Senator Bennett.

Senator Richard Bagger of Westfield told *The Leader* and *The Times* that each school system was advised that they were to be "held harmless," meaning that they are to expect the same absolute amount of state aid as last year.

This can create difficulties for districts with increased enrollments compared to last year such as Westfield and Scotch Plains-Fanwood, the Senator said.

"It would be more logical if the school districts were held harmless with an absolute amount on a per pupil basis," Senator Bagger remarked.

Assemblyman Eric Munoz of Summit told *The Leader* and *The Times* that state aid for school systems is a difficult issue, particularly in areas where the aid does not effectively get to the students.

Police Chief O'Brien Praised by SP Council; DECA Students Honored

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who made me shine." He also thanked the council for its support over the years. "Working with politicians can be difficult," Chief O'Brien said in concluding his remarks, "but I never found that here."

After the council's tribute to Chief O'Brien, members of the DECA Chapter at Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School performed their annual custom of running a full council meeting.

Filling the Mayor's chair on Tuesday night was David Baumwoll. Robert Mattar sat in for Councilman Frank Rossi, Brian Kopnicki filled in for Councilwoman Geri Samuel, Joshua Finkelstein sat in for Councilwoman Paulette Coronato and Andrew Pavoni filled in for Councilman Guy Celentano. Jay Cordes played the role of the Township Manager, while Jack Egan sat in for Township Attorney Douglas Hansen and Sara Finkelstein filled in for Township Clerk Barbara Riepe.

The council introduced an ordinance that will streamline somewhat the procedures for local businesses to renew their special use permits. A public hearing on the ordinance will be held at the council's next meeting on February 26.

Separately, the debate over gun control injected itself into the meeting during a routine approval of an application by the New Jersey State Fund Committee of the National Rifle

Association (NRA) to hold a raffle at a function it is holding at Pantagis Renaissance restaurant in May. Mr. Kopnicki, the DECA student filling in for Councilwoman Samuel, read a statement on her behalf saying that "while I abhor what the NRA stands for," she would still vote to approve the application because she supported the group's constitutional right to meet.

Mr. Finkelstein, reading a statement on behalf of both himself and Councilwoman Coronato, said that since they were both NRA members, they would abstain from voting on the application.

At the end of the meeting, Mayor Marks read proclamations declaring February to be Black History Month and the week of February 10 to 17 to be DECA Free Enterprise Week.

Mayor Marks, taking the reins after the meeting's formal agenda had been completed, praised the DECA students and, in an indirect reference to the incident last month in which five local high school students were accused of sexually assaulting a middle school student, said, indicating the DECA students, that "this is the norm of our Scotch Plains youth. This is what we expect from our students and this is what we get."

Those accused of being involved in last month's incident, the Mayor said, were the exception.

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Good News

But let your "Yes" be "Yes,"
And your "No," "No."

Matthew 5:37

THE GOSPEL