

Campaign Forum '99

Mr. Wiener Says Democrats 'Budgeted Wisely,' Funded Hurricane Cost in Same Year

SCOTCH PLAINS—Scotch Plains Democratic candidate Township Council candidate, Phillip Wiener, this week discussed the issue of municipal property taxes in the township.

"The public needs to understand the tax issue. In 1998, the township had a \$3 million surplus. The Democrats proposed using a large amount of this surplus to offset the tax burden," Mr. Wiener explained. "The actual burden would have been 11 points without the use of surplus. They used enough of the surplus to keep the tax burden to 5 points."

The candidate noted that the tax represents \$58 per year to the average household. An average household in Scotch Plains is assessed at \$116,000.

"It really works out to about 16 cents per day," Mr. Wiener stated.

In 1997, the actual surplus was an amount similar to 1998, the candidate continued, noting that the surplus was located in two accounts: surplus and the capital account. He said the total amount was approximately \$3.1 million.

He said when the Democrats took over the majority this year, they discovered the emergency cost of the 1998 Labor Day storm had been carried over to this year's budget. Thus, Mr. Wiener stated, "the new administration had to start \$240,000 in the hole."

"Fortunately, we budgeted wisely, and had the funds available to pay for Hurricane Floyd," Mr. Wiener noted.

During the budget process, he said there were no disagreements on the appropriations side of the budget during council discussions on the

1999 spending plan. That plan included adding additional funds for the Union County Pocket Parks program.

"Scotch Plains received the largest grant available for the first time," Mr. Wiener.

Mr. Wiener said the Democrats applied for and received \$100,000 from the county in Pocket Park funds, an increase from the \$25,000 received in 1998. He said the 1999 grant funds are being used to refurbish Kramer Manor Park and Haven Avenue Park.

He said if the Democrats had kept more in surplus funds, "We would again have had to budget for the storm of the year before (in 2000)."

"I understand what it takes to put a budget together," stated Mr. Wiener. "I have had the benefit of four municipal finance courses and have been the comptroller in private industry for the past eight years."

"I know that no one likes to pay taxes, but it is the only way that the township can raise revenue to provide the services we provide," he said.

"Did you know that Scotch Plains paid to have the trash from Hurricane Floyd picked up by a private hauler?," added Mr. Wiener.

In Westfield and other communities, residents had to pay to have their hauler take their trash away, he noted.

"The Democrats have provided responsible, forward reaching leadership during the past 10 months. I want to continue the progress the Democratic administration began back in January," Mr. Wiener concluded.



CAUTION!...Westfield's new lightning detection system was the subject of a recent segment on the 11 p.m. news on WCBS-TV, Channel 2. Seen here with reporter John Slattery at the Memorial Pool is Fourth Ward Councilwoman Janis Fried Weinstein, who proposed the system, and Third Ward Councilman Neil F. Sullivan, chair of the Public Safety Committee. WCBS contacted Councilwoman Weinstein after reading newspaper accounts of the innovative warning system. The system purchased by the town, which detects cloud to ground lightning strikes in the area, and triggers a warning siren, can easily and inexpensively be expanded to all of Westfield's active recreational areas.

Door-to-Door Campaigning Gives Councilman Sullivan Feedback on Westfield Issues

WESTFIELD—Neil F. Sullivan, Westfield Republican Third Ward Councilman, seeking reelection, reported that Third Ward voters are responding positively to his door-to-door campaign for reelection.

"I am so pleased by the positive feedback I am receiving as I visit every neighborhood and attempt to knock on every door in the Third Ward between now and Election Day. The residents of Westfield truly appreciate a positive issue-oriented campaign, and a record of accomplishment like mine," Councilman Sullivan stated.

"I enjoy talking about the things

that are important to all of our families that our town government should be doing for our community," he said. "And I am proud of the fact that I am able to point to things I have done that have made a difference in the lives of Westfield families."

"The fact that I pushed for, and succeeded in opening our Memorial Library on Sundays appears to be one accomplishment that is well appreciated by the residents I meet," Councilman Sullivan noted.

Also cited frequently has been Councilman Sullivan's ongoing work to improve the safety of Westfield's streets and sidewalks.

"The most vital role our town government serves is keeping our community safe. For four out of my five years on Town Council, I have had the privilege of serving on the Public Safety Committee, and in two of those years, including 1999, as chairman," he said.

"During that time, through the efforts of our police department and entire town staff, and dozens of dedicated volunteers, we have made significant progress in moving Westfield towards a leadership position in creating a safer environment for everyone who use our roads and sidewalks, and have laid the foundation for even greater progress in the years to come," Councilman Sullivan remarked.

"I am proud to report that speeding enforcement has increased by 70 percent."

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Councilman McDermott Tells of Improvements Planned for Downtown

WESTFIELD—Westfield Republican First Ward Councilman Gregory S. McDermott, the Town Council Liaison to the special improvement district Board of Directors, this week provided an update on the new revitalization projects the town is working on.

Thanks to a \$450,000 grant the town has received from Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders Downtown Union County program, improvements to Central Avenue will begin from North Avenue to Cacciola Place. The major improvements will consist of new sidewalks, trees and lighting.

"This project was made possible because of the cooperation of both the SID (governed by the Westfield Downtown Corporation), Town Council and residents," Councilman McDermott said. "We can all see the positive effects the SID is having in the downtown area and wanted to extend this success to the Central Avenue corridor. Central Avenue is the gateway to our downtown so it only makes sense to improve its appearance."

On October 12, the council ap-

proved \$140,000 to improve three areas of the downtown. The improved areas are behind Rialto Park, to be located on the side of the theater along Central Avenue; Bank Square, to be located at the intersection of East Broad and Elm Streets, and the Boulevard corner of South Avenue. New lighting, trash receptacles, benches and landscaping will be some of the improvements made in each location.

"With the success of the movie theater and the heavy foot traffic in our downtown area, an information kiosk and bike racks will be installed at Rialto Park," noted Councilman McDermott. "The racks will give people a safe place to lock up their bikes instead of using trees and parking meters which has become a complaint of some of the downtown merchants."

Bank Square will be part of a demonstration project with new ornamental lighting.

"By utilizing these new lights, we are hoping to improve pedestrian safety without sacrificing the historic look Westfield has maintained," Councilman McDermott said.

Claire Lazarowitz Supports 'Good Government' Proposal

WESTFIELD—Claire Lazarowitz, Third Ward Democratic candidate for Westfield Town Council, discussed "Good Government" issues this week.

"Good Government means both opening up the process of governing to public scrutiny and taking politics out of the awarding of government contracts," Ms. Lazarowitz said.

"I totally support the initiative currently in front of the Town Council dealing with 'Good Government' that would require the awarding of municipal professional services contracts on the basis of competitive requests for proposals. The ordinance would divorce the political system from the business of government," she said.

Currently, the Democrats on the council are proposing the second ordinance in a package of "Good Government" initiatives. The first ordinance, which council passed unanimously earlier this year, prevents political campaigning on government property.

The current proposal would require competitive bidding from professional service providers prior to awarding contracts.

This kind of ordinance, Ms. Lazarowitz said, has the strong support of Common Cause New Jersey, a group that, for years, has supported "Good Government" and eliminat-

ing politics from the process of awarding government contracts, she said.

"Unfortunately," Ms. Lazarowitz said, "this kind of ordinance is needed in Westfield. The time for action is now."

Ms. Lazarowitz reported, "In December of last year, the Republican majority on the council called a special meeting to vote not to renew the contract of the town's Insurance Risk Advisor of 50 years and, instead, voted to award the \$48,000 per year contract to a former mayor of Westfield and current Finance Chairman of the Union County Republican Committee."

She noted that the new risk advisor did not have to present any credential to the council before being awarded the contract.

"I vow to oppose this kind of action if I am elected to Town Council," said Ms. Lazarowitz. "I promise to support Mayor Thomas C. Jardim and the current Democrats on the council in their efforts to pass the ordinance requiring competitive requests for proposals in the awarding of professional municipal contracts."

"Good Government" is not a partisan issue. "The residents of the Third Ward were well represented by two former Republican Councilmen, Kenneth MacRitchie and Gary Jenkins, when they both helped defeat earlier efforts to switch the town's Insurance risk advisor contract in the manner that was done last December," Ms. Lazarowitz observed.

"I hope to follow in the footsteps of both Ken and Gary, in this regard. When an opportunity presents itself to vote for greater public scrutiny and accountability in government—such as the present proposal requiring competitive bidding for professional contracts—I will be a strong voice in favor of it," Ms. Lazarowitz concluded.

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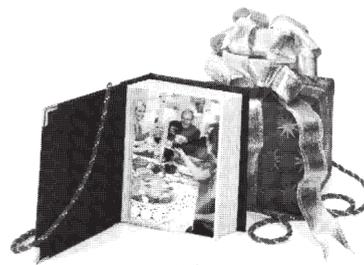
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Union County Clerk Offers Absentee Ballots For Nov. 2 Election

ELIZABETH—Union County Clerk Joanne Rajoppi is urging all county voters to apply for an absentee ballot if they believe they will be unable to vote in the Tuesday, November 2, General Election because of unavailability or illness.

"With the dire predictions of low turnout that is expected in this election," Ms. Rajoppi said, "it is even more important for anyone who is eligible to vote to do so."

The top of the ballot will be the New Jersey Assembly races, an election for Surrogate in Union County to replace the late Ann Conti, and the election of three Union County Freeholders.

In addition, there are two state constitutional questions and a transportation bond referendum on the ballot.

The Union County Clerk's Office will be open on Saturday, October 30, from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. to serve voters who need absentee ballot applications and ballots for the General Election.

The office is located at the Union County Courthouse, 2 Broad Street in Elizabeth on the first floor.

Ms. Rajoppi said that, by law, the deadline for receipt of mail-in absentee ballot applications is a postmarked date of Tuesday, October 26. Walk-in applications are accepted until 3 p.m. on Monday, November 1.

According to the County Clerk, her office has processed approximately 1,000 absentee ballots to date for the 1999 General Election, a significant decrease from former years.