



Candidate Forums



Downtown, Volunteerism Among Key Issues At Forum for Fanwood Council Candidates

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

FANWOOD — The four candidates seeking two open seats on the Fanwood Borough Council and the two candidates for Mayor participated in a Candidate Forum last Friday evening in the Fanwood Council Chambers.

The program was sponsored by The Times of Scotch Plains-Fanwood and the Westfield Area League of Women Voters and videotaped for later broadcast on Fanwood's Channel 35. Horace R. Corbin, Publisher of The Times, served as the moderator.

In this year's council races, Councilman Stuart S. Kline and Thomas P. Ryan are running on the Republican ticket, while Pat Plante and Adele Kenny represent the Democrats. The following is a synopsis of the council candidates' portion of the Fanwood forum.

The Times: Please discuss your past voluntary service in the Borough of Fanwood. What do you believe to be an issue of special interest to you for the borough that differentiates you from your opponents? What is your position on this issue?

Mr. Ryan: "My volunteerism began with my involvement in the opposition to the Dean Oil site apartment building. I sacrificed a great deal of time with many of my neighbors over the past several months to fight this proposal. We were successful in doing that."

"That also directly relates to the most important issue to me, which is downtown development. I am very concerned that this property is a vulnerable property and it may be developed into high density housing, which I think is highly inappropriate for Fanwood."

"In this way, I hope to pursue the appropriate commercial development of the downtown, anchored by the removal of the Post Office from its current place to somewhere in our core commercial district. My volunteerism was extraordinary because it took an enormous amount of time. In this way, I have demonstrated a very intense interest in local Fanwood issues. This differentiates me from my opponents, in a very obvious way."

"I took a very distinct role and I offered myself to the Planning Board as a means of obtaining evidence, as well as offering myself to the people of Fanwood."

Mrs. Plante: "The Dean Oil situation and the recent application before the Planning Board was a very difficult time for Fanwood. It became a very emotional issue. The meetings were held in Park Middle School because so many people cared about this issue."

"I think all of the credit for the decision goes to those individuals who sat on the Planning Board, who studied law, zoning codes and regulations, in greater depth than any of us anticipated. To that, we all owe a great deal of thanks for all of the hard work that they did."

Ms. Kenny: "I began as a volunteer in the community a couple of years ago, when I approached Mayor Connelly with an idea I had for establishing a cultural arts program in town. I have always been involved in the arts,

personally, and I think that it is an area that enriches our community life."

"Poetry readings have been quite popular throughout the state and we discussed starting a poetry reading series. In order to do that, I felt that it would be appropriate for me to apply for some kind of funding, so as to not increase the taxpayers' burden. So I applied for a grant, which was successfully funded. It came from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts through the Union County Office of Cultural and Heritage Affairs."

"From there I proceeded to invite some of the finest contemporary poets living in the country today. The overwhelming success of that series was so affirming and exciting, that we decided a more comprehensive cultural arts program would be in order. I applied for two additional grants, which were funded, and applied to establishing a full program."

"I also volunteered on several committees in town. I am a member of the Long Range Planning Committee and a Liaison to the Union County Air Traffic Advisory Board and generally, I volunteer wherever and whenever my services are requested. I haven't learned how to say no yet. My involvement in the community is very enthusiastic and very strong."

The Times: So your main differentiation is your contribution to the arts in town?

Ms. Kenny: "I would say that my volunteerism began with the cultural arts and has now expanded into other areas."

Mr. Kline: "I commend Ms. Kenny for her efforts in bringing the cultural arts to Fanwood. However, I recall a few months ago, a world renowned poet, by the name of Gerald Stein, was offered a poetry reading series and used such language that Mr. Weiss (TV-35 producer George Weiss) couldn't even televise the poetry reading."

"So I would just like to say, there are senior citizens here and people bringing children to the poetry readings. I was offended that my tax dollars are going to offer that kind of poetry reading and that maybe we could offer some better programming to our residents."

Mr. Kline: "Back in the ancient days, in 1994, I first became involved in what was then called the Parks Renewal Committee that was an effort to improve LaGrande playground and Second Street I had been in town for about five years and I was very desirous of getting involved somehow."

"Since then, I have become a member of the Fanwood Lions and I have also become an Assistant Coach in the Fanwood-Scotch Plains Baseball Association and the Soccer League. As far as an issue that's close to my heart, first let me say that there are two issues: keeping taxes as stable as possible and maintaining the quality of our parks and recreation areas."

"I take my children to the parks quite frequently, whether they are playing soccer or on the playground equipment. I think that we have excellent playground equipment and I would like to work to maintain that quality and preserve our recreational areas."

The Times: So therefore, you differentiate yourself from your opponents with your work in the parks and recreation.

Mr. Kline: "That's correct."

Ms. Kenny: "First of all, I would like to say that I do appreciate Mr. Kline's concern for his tax dollars and how they're being spent, but I would like to clarify one issue. The poet was not Gerald Stein, it was Gerald Stern. He was the 1998 National Book Award winner. The incident in question was one word in one poem. It was obviously a word which might have been considered offensive. Certainly, it was a word we've all heard, but it was out of order."

"Unfortunately, the incident was translated into a much bigger situation than it actually was. The reading was, in fact, videotaped and televised, and the word was simply cut out. I copied the video. Mr. Kline, I'd be happy to lend it to you. The word was used in a particular context; it was in a quotation, in a very literary context. There were no children there. This was an evening reading billed as such. And there were no repercussions, other than Mr. Kline's comment."

Mrs. Plante: "My volunteerism in Fanwood began in 1995, when I became a member of the Fanwood Centennial Committee. There's a few members of that committee in this room. It was a lot of hard work and a lot of fun. I enjoyed that so much that I then became a member of the Board of Health. I was on that for several years. I then became a member of the Recreation Commission, which I am currently on."

"Almost everyone in Fanwood has seen me at Memorial Day in the Park, the Easter Egg Hunt and my all-time favorite, the Halloween Parade, of which I get to be a judge. An issue that I think differentiates me from the other candidates is an issue which I think is very important to me and very important to Fanwood."

"I am a member of the Raritan Valley Line Commuter Coalition. That coalition was formed in order to obtain a one-seat ride, which takes Fanwood's Raritan Valley Line train and brings it into Manhattan, hopefully, sometime in the near future. This is a very good thing for Fanwood."

"It is very important to the commuters here. This is a commuter town. If we have a one-seat ride, we could see our property values going up, just like they did in Summit, in Maplewood and in Millburn, anywhere from 15 to 25 percent. I think that's a good thing and I'm going to work very hard for Fanwood to get to that point."

"I currently am on the Shared Services Committee for Union County and I'm on the Union County Transportation Advisory Board. I'm a member of the PTA. How I do all this and work full-time is amazing. But I am here, and I care, and I love this town. I will continue to be a volunteer, because I think it is an important thing for this town, that has been so good for all of us."

The Times: What role does the political party play in the borough? How

do the political parties work together to achieve good government? Are there any special challenges that this creates?

Mr. Ryan: "The political parties in town form a basis for channeling energy for volunteers for working towards establishing good government in our borough, towards insuring that we have excellent representatives, that our town and our taxes are properly managed and that we see continual growth and preservation of a kind of character that we all enjoy, in raising our families in this town."

"We work together. We have an opportunity to work together. We agree on budgets. We're required to work together on all of those issues. I think that once the parties get past the partisanship, I think we all have Fanwood's best interests in mind. It is a distinct pleasure for me to work with people like Lou Jung, who has been involved in this town for many years and has been involved in a Republican Club and Republican Party for many years."

"It is through these parties that we find an exemplary volunteerism, and it has done nothing but help Fanwood continue into the next century."

Ms. Kenny: "Mr. Ryan made some very good comments and I would just like to add to those. Fanwood is a small town. It is not unusual to see Republicans and Democrats volunteering together on the same committees and working together. And I think one of the very special characteristics about our community is that once we get past this 'Superbowl of Suffrage' that we call our campaign, we tend to go back to doing the work that we have committed ourselves to."

"We share efforts; we pool resources. Fanwood is a community where people have a lot of history of working together. Political parties notwithstanding, that work and that team spirit goes on and on."

The Times: Volunteerism is very important to the borough. Please discuss some of the key volunteer activities existing in the borough. As a member of the council, what efforts would you recommend to promote volunteerism and to assist the programs?

Ms. Kenny: "Volunteerism is a very key element in our community. I was particularly impressed by the efforts of our volunteers when I started becoming involved myself."

"I volunteer for the Long Range Planning Committee and Pat Plante volunteers for the Recreation Committee; we (Fanwood) have a volunteer fair. This is the time when our volunteers get together and distribute literature, get out there and meet people and new volunteers are encouraged to participate."

"I would like to go into a slightly different area. Under Bill Populus' watch and through his leadership, the Assessment Committee came into being and this committee resulted in a general and thorough taking stock within our community, identifying the strengths and weaknesses throughout the borough."

"Under the auspices of the Assessment Committee, all of the action groups in Fanwood presented reports

Mayoral Candidates Discuss Key Issues At Fanwood Forum

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

FANWOOD — A candidate forum sponsored by The Times of Scotch Plains-Fanwood and the Westfield Area League of Women Voters last Friday evening in the Fanwood Council Chambers featured the Republican and Democratic candidates for Mayor, as well as the four candidates for two open Borough Council seats. The event was videotaped for broadcast on Fanwood's Channel 35.

Two incumbent councilmen are running for Mayor in Fanwood this year. They are Republican Louis C. Jung and Democratic Council President William E. Populus, Jr. The moderators for this portion of the candidate forum were Horace R. Corbin, Publisher of The Times, and Assistant Editor Suzette F. Stalker.

Below is a synopsis of the Mayoral portion of the forum.

The Times: Downtown development in a small borough can be challenging. What do you believe to be the most important areas and opportunities for development? What do you think the goals should be?

Mr. Jung: "I think the downtown revitalization project is our number one priority. The Post Office could be used as an anchor store for the downtown area. As a first priority, the western end of the downtown block. The area from west of the parking lot to Second between South to LaGrande. This should be our top priority."

"We should look at the Post Office as an anchor store to draw retail customers for the future. We need to develop a comprehensive plan, which will include looking at the Post Office."

"To get there, at this point, I have proposed that we establish a committee composed of six different groups. The land owners, the business people, two people from the council, two people from the Downtown Committee, members of the public and various professionals, such as real estate appraisers, lawyers, etc."

"I would give this group a mission, if I am elected, to come back to the Mayor and the council with a recommendation within, say, six to eight months. This should be our top priority."

"It's a win/win if the downtown becomes thriving and expanding and helps the rateables. According to the high school DECA survey, done last winter, people do want a thriving and expanded downtown. We've heard that going door-to-door, from our campaign so far from the public."

Mr. Populus: "I guess Councilman Jung has forgotten that we hired a consultant a couple of years ago to come up with a downtown plan. We spent \$10,000 and hired a professional. We had a five-year plan in place."

"Aside from that, to arbitrarily say 'move the post office' would be capricious. You have to have a professional come in, look at the entire town and see what the best spot is for

the post office. It might not be the Dean Oil site. So the Democrats on the council did vote against Lou when he first came up with the post office."

"It has been in discussion for years. Then I went out and got \$10,000 for a consultant to come in and analyze the entire town and see where the best place for the Post Office would be. This is good planning. That you look at the entire situation, instead of just one store."

The Times: What do you feel to be the most effective ways to keep property taxes to a minimum? As the leader of the borough, in what ways can you work with the Board of Education and the county to see that property taxes are kept under control?

Mr. Populus: "I think that the first thing that has to be done is that we have to become proactive and work with the people in Trenton. They are the ones that are avoiding the issue of property taxes, allowing us to continue supporting the school board."

"This is the crux of the problem. It's in Trenton. There is nothing the school board can do or that we can do with them to reduce property taxes. They are dependent upon the taxes that we collect and give to them. Our leaders in Trenton have to bite the bullet and work on this problem."

"There are numerous states that have other programs where the homeowners are not burdened as much as they are in New Jersey. Just to reiterate, the county can't do anything. It's a strange form of government, the county government. Most states don't have that type of setup. And I have spoken to some of our legislators about it."

Mr. Jung: "I think there are several ways to lower taxes, and one is to have a strong commercial area, a core commercial district. If we aggressively market our downtown, that could be a plus for us. And Bill, I never said that the Post Office should have been at the Dean Oil site. I think that it should be somewhere in the downtown block."

"We could look at cost-effective spending. How the Mayor and council, how we spend our money and spend it wisely. We could explore more shared services with the county. I know we do share some things with the county. We could try to do more of that. And of course we could look at more grants to try and lower taxes."

The Times: Do you support moving the Fanwood Post Office? Do you believe that the Dean Oil site is the best location and why? Are there other alternatives, other costs involved, and other considerations such as traffic? And you mentioned it as an anchor store. Could you explain this?

Mr. Jung: "Just a little background. The process of moving the Post Office requires the town to petition the postal service to examine the possibility of moving the Post Office and they come up with all of the alternatives that you have proposed. We're

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