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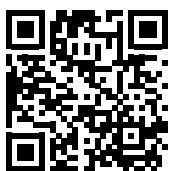


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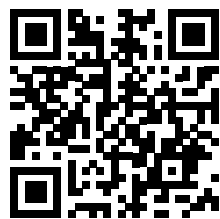
Somerset Woods resident Ann Zando, second from right, recently celebrated her 109th birthday. There for the celebration was Stephen Baker, former NY Giants "Touchdown Maker," who presented Ann with some gifts.



We spoke with Frank Resta and Marie Fiorello about a play being presented at The Villagers as a fundraiser for a reward meant to help solve the 40-year-old murder of Sharon Thor.



Sister 2 Sister Network, the Breast Cancer Survivor organization on Hamilton Street, receives a \$10,000 Grant from the Connie Dwyer Breast Cancer Foundation



At the Township's Independence Day celebration in the Municipal Complex on DeMott Lane.



Mother Of 6-Year-Old Girl Killed On School Bus Has Questions For School Board



GRIEVING MOTHER – Najmah Nash speaks to the Board of Education at its July 27 meeting.

The mother of a 6-year-old girl killed on a school bus earlier this month had two questions for the Board of Education at its July 27 meeting.

Najmah Nash wanted to know if the District is investigating the Montauk bus company, on whose bus her daughter Fajr Atiya Williams was riding when she strangled

on a harness holding her on her wheelchair, and also what the District is doing to make sure an accident like that never happens again.

Nash said she felt the

answers she was given by schools Superintendent John Ravally were "broad."

Nash's daughter, who could neither speak nor walk, was attending a summer program at Claremont Elementary School. On July 17, she was killed on the way to school when, after the bus hit a few bumps, she slumped in her wheelchair and was strangled by the four-point harness keeping her in her wheelchair, which was secured in the back of the bus.

The bus monitor, a 27-year-old New Brunswick woman, was charged with manslaughter and endangering the welfare of a child after police said she was sitting in the front of the bus attending to her cell phone while wear-

Continued on Page 6.

Opponents To B9 Warehouses Get Their Say At Planning Board Meeting

Opponents of a proposed two-warehouse development at Schoolhouse and Mettlers roads got the chance on July 19 to convince the Planning Board that the application should not be approved.

The opponents, the majority of whom are Canal Walk residents, relied on the testimony of an engineer, a sound consultant and a planner to make their case that the B9 Schoolhouse warehouse project, proposed by Link Logistics, should be denied.

The takeaways from that testimony were that the applicant's engineers may have underestimated the amount of water runoff that will be generated by modern-day storms, and that a proposed dam may fail because of tree plantings, that there hasn't been any substantial study of the noise that will be generated by the warehouse operation, and that the property's zoning did not anticipate warehouses.

As have the past four



OPPOSITION IS HEARD – Mary Paist-Goldman testifies about the B9 Schoolhouse warehouse project's water management plan while attorney Stuart Lieberman looks on.

hearings on this application, the July 19 session was held in the Board of Education's administrative campus community room, where more than 200 people sat patiently – for the most part – during the 2.5-hour hearing.

The plan calls for

the construction of one 144,450-square-foot warehouse and one 70,970-square-foot warehouse on the 20-acre lot.

The engineer hired by the opponents, Mary Paist-Goldman, told the Board that she had several concerns about

the project: a study of the site's water tables was done at the wrong time of year, when water levels would naturally be lower; that the stormwater management plan will steer about 1 million gallons of water to a dam that might not

Continued on Page 7.

New EAS VP Named By School Board

Edgar Vazquez Molina was named the new vice-principal at Elizabeth Avenue School at the Board of Education's July 27 meeting.

Molina was previously a teacher at Pine Grove Manor School. He replaces Jennifer Stein, who was named last month as principal at Franklin Park School.

"I'm very excited to take on this new journey as I transition from teacher to administrator," Molina said. "I'm really grateful to continue to serve Franklin township and

its beautiful, diverse community, and I want to tell the families, the community that they can reach out to me with any concerns, any questions."

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Monthly Digest

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Five New FTPD Officers, Lieutenant, Sergeant Sworn In At Council Meeting



TAKING THE OATH – FTPD Lt. Brandon Domotor is ceremonially sworn in to his new rank at the July 11 Township Council meeting.

Four rookies – one of them a township native – and a seasoned officer were ceremonially sworn in to the Franklin Township Police Department at the July 11 Township Council meeting.

Also at the meeting, two newly minted Sergeants and a Lieutenant were sworn in to their new ranks.

The officers starting their law enforcement careers with the FTPD are Franklin native Justin Scott, 23; Tyrell Judson 27, and Marcus Rountree 28, both of Piscataway, and

Abdul-Aziz Oudeh 23, a native of Livingston. Also joining the force is Carron McCluney, 32, of Orange. McCluney served as a Maplewood police officer from 2019 to 2023.

The new hires bring the total number of uniformed FTPD officers to 101. More hires are in the offing, according to FTPD spokesman Det. Sgt. Vincent Wilson.

“We are happy to have the manpower, we are happy to have these distinguished gentlemen,” Public Safety Director Quovella Maeweather said of the new recruits.

Sworn in as Sergeants were Meghan McCarthy, an 11-year FTPD veteran, and Altwain Burwell, an 18-year FTPD veteran, and sworn in as a Lieutenant was Brandon Domotor, a 17-year FTPD veteran.

McDonald’s Finally Gets Blessing From HPAC

It took a few go-rounds, but the McDonald’s Corp. finally got the needed approval from the township Historic Preservation Advisory Commission

July 18 for its new restaurant in Rutgers Plaza on Easton Avenue.

The sticking point was architectural drawings for the new structure that will take the place of the former Burger King. Commissioners refused to vote on the plan until the drawings reflected what Commissioners were told would be the materials used for elements of the structure, particularly the trash enclosure.

McDonald’s lawyer for this application, Dan Klein,

was told at the June meeting what the Commissioners were looking for: for the design elements on the page matched what they were being told.

But, at least according to Commission chairman Andrew Burian, they didn’t get what they wanted, but it was close enough.

“I don’t think it’s worth belaboring this,” said Burian – who is an architect – after looking at new renderings presented by Klein. “It’s not drawn correctly, still, but I

think it’s fine to move on.”

Burian was concerned that bricks represented on the drawing were not the bricks Klein said would be used in the construction.

“When I asked the engineers, they said they would have to hand-draw each brick,” Klein said.

“So, that’s what they need to do,” Burian said. “That’s a terrible excuse. When we specifically asked for something to be graphically represented, that’s what the expectation is.”

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School District Seeks Permission From State To Continue To Use Modular Classrooms

As promised earlier in the year, an application to the state to use trailer classrooms at five township schools during the 2023-24 school year was approved by the Board of Education at its June 20 meeting.

The trailers would be used at Pine Grove Manor, MacAfee Road, Hillcrest

and the Franklin Park annex elementary schools and at Franklin Middle School - Sampson G. Smith campus.

The trailers are needed to “provide more flexibility for building administrators when planning unique smaller group learning experiences,” District spokeswoman Mary Clark said in an email.

“Also although PreK classes can not be hosted inside the modular spaces, we have been able to use the modulars for elective offerings such as art class, music class, etc.,” she wrote. “This then makes more space inside those main buildings for hosting Pre-K sections.”

The application was sent

to the state Department of Education, as was an application in January to use the trailers during the just-completed school year.

The portable classrooms were first leased in 2013. The leases’ terms were for five years, after which the District owned them.



File photo of modular classrooms.

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Life Stories

Richard H. Kaiser, Jr., 78;
Founded Kaiser Landscaping



Richard H. Kaiser, Jr. of Somerset passed away on June 30 at home, surrounded by his loving family. He was 78.

Born in Jersey City and raised in Secaucus and Piscataway, he had lived in Somerset for most of his life. He enjoyed spending any time possible on Long Beach Island and always had a copy of the Sandpaper with him.

Rick worked as a technician for Bell Laboratories in Murray Hill for 30 years and established Kaiser Landscaping in Somerset more than 60 years ago. The company grew to include more than 50 em-

ployees with the support of his sons, Steve and Rob.

He was respected for his strong work ethic, often working 2-3 jobs at a time. He always enjoyed his work, whether it was fixing up an old house, remodeling another or building something new. He was passionate about landscaping from an early age when he started mowing lawns as a young boy. He was very active with Cook College and learned as much as he could about landscaping and turf management.

He was an avid outdoorsman, fisherman, boater, gardener, mechanic, and never missed a chance to operate a tractor or heavy equipment. Classic car shows were an event not to be missed as well as the annual Chowderfest in the fall at LBI. After retirement, he tended to chickens and livestock at home and enjoyed morning visits from local deer and wildlife.

He was a regular parishioner of St. Matthias Church in Somerset and is predeceased by his parents, Richard and Madeline Kaiser.

Most of all, Rick cherished spending time with his family. Surviving are his wife of 56 years, Madeline; sons and daughters-in-law, Michael and Neile Kaiser of Wailuku, Hawaii, Steve and Tina Kaiser of South Bound Brook and Rob and Beth Kaiser of Piscataway; daughter, Jenny Kaiser of Piscataway; eight grandchildren, Clay and wife Carolyn, Finn, Leif, Steven and wife Yulia, Randy and his wife Ashlynn, Haley, Justin and Liz; as well as great-grandchild Carter. His favorite dogs, Leo and Stella will miss kissing him on a daily basis.

Private cremation services have been handled under the professional direction of the Gleason Funeral Home, Somerset.

Mary Ann Jones, 83;
Volunteered For Many Groups



Mary Ann Jones of Somerset passed away on July 24 at home. She was 83.

Born in Elizabeth, she lived in Linden for many years before moving to Rahway, then Somerset earlier this year.

She worked as a manager for various pharmaceutical companies throughout New Jersey before her retirement.

Mary Ann was an active volunteer with various support groups throughout the state, most notably Relay for Life in Rahway and the Circle of Hope. She was also a member then later moderator of the private online Facebook group Loss of a Child.

Her son, Richard C. Jones died in 2013. She is also predeceased by her parents, Arthur F. and Helen Kirk; and brother, Edward E. Kirk in 1964.

Surviving are her daughters and sons-in-law, Jeanne Marie and Vincent Rotola of Rahway, Lois Ann Tekula of Linden and Karen and Gary Belcher of Piscataway; sister, Jacquelin A. Cocozza of Somerset; brothers and sisters-in-law, Arthur F. Kirk Jr.

and his wife Beverly of New York and Florida and John R. Kirk and his wife Amy of South Orange; six grandchildren, Tara J. Nadler, Kirk Jones, Jessica Jones, Nicholas Tekula, Katelyn Belcher and Matthew Belcher; and nieces and nephews, Megan Kirk, John R. Kirk Jr., Arthur F. Kirk III (wife, Brianne), Whitney Kirk, Arthur F. Kirk IV, Griffin Kirk and Piper Grace Kirk.

Donations in her loving memory can be made to Relay for Life of Rahway, New Jersey, ATTN: Renee Sarnicki, Rahway Regional Cancer Center, 892 Trussler Place, Rahway, New Jersey 07065.

Watershed Protection Topic Of Talk

Protecting the Lower Raritan Watershed and the region's water supply is the topic of a presentation set for 6 p.m. August 22 at the Franklin Township Library, 485 DeMott Lane.

The program will be presented by the Franklin Township Environmental Commission, the Lower Raritan Watershed Partnership and the Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions.

LRWP Board Members Heather Fenyk and Nandini (Dini) Checko will present the program. For info, call (732) 873-8700, ext. 110.

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Answers Sought In Death Of 6-Year-Old On School Bus

Continued from Page 1.

ing ear buds, police said.

Responding to Nash's questions, Ravally said the District has been working with local police and the Somerset County Prosecutor's Office "to investigate any and all potential leads to anybody who might have been involved."

Regarding Nash's second question, Ravally said, "We do several things to ensure compliance and we're going to continue to do those things."

The answers weren't specific, Nash said, "but given the environment, I figure I will get more of a thorough explanation at a later time once I reach out directly to the Board."

Nash said after the meeting that two things will bring her satisfaction.

"I won't be satisfied until (the defendant) is in prison and doing time for what she's done," she said.

"I also won't be satisfied until something happens, something changes, a policy change," she said. "The procedures, safety, everything. Once things are actually changing and they sit down and say we're going to do this and we're going to do that, and actually do it, then I will be satisfied."

Ravally started the meeting with an extended statement about the girl's death, focusing on the District's efforts to ensure the safety of its students.

"Our thoughts and prayers continue to be with the family and friends of the young student who lost her life due to what law enforcement has described as negligence on the part of an employee of one of our transportation vendors," he said.

"As a Board, we do want to convey that transportation safety has been and continues to be a top priority for the district," he said. "Our transportation department imparts clear expectations on all of our vendors with regard to safety and in recent days has taken steps to remind those vendors of our expectations to ensure their compliance."

Compliance spot checks have been conducted over the past several weeks, he said, "and these checks, as well as other compliance oversight activities, will remain an important part of our procedures as all of our students return to school in September."

The District is also reviewing its contracts with its bus vendors, "to learn what options are available when and if it is necessary to act," he said. Montauk has the most contracts for regular transportation of students to and from school, said Board business administrator Brian Bonanno.

"In addition, as we move forward, especially given the increase in the number of vendors needed to cover bus routes for the district, the Board is working to further tighten bid specifications when bidding out supplemental and additional bus routes that sometimes results in the hiring of new companies," Ravally said.

"Finally, as a Board we pledge we will continue to seek ways to further compliance with policies, rules and regulations as they pertain to safely transporting students," he said. "We will continue to work with our vendors to make sure safety remains a top priority."

Bonanno said that the District's specializations for transportation vendor contracts "talk about not wearing ear buds, not using cell phones."

"Their full attention should be on the students," he said.

Montauk's contract for the 2023-24 school year has already been renewed, Bonanno said.

The New Brunswick woman charged in the death of Fajr Atiya Williams was released on July 25 after her detention hearing. Superior Court Judge Christopher Edwards ordered the woman released with the conditions that she have no contact with children or with the girl's parents.

Montauk president John Mensch issued the following statement on the incident: "We at Montauk Transit are all devastated by the loss of Fajr. We all extend our deepest condolences to the family and are grieving as a Company. All of our employees know that the safety of children we transport is our top priority, which is why we are fully engaged in the law enforcement investigation and support any punishment that the justice system determines appropriate."

The woman was charged with manslaughter July 19, according to a press release from the Somerset County Prosecutor's Office.

Township police responded to the school at about 9:04 a.m. and found the child unresponsive, according to the release. After being given CPR by the officers, the child was then taken to an area hospital, where she was pronounced dead, according to the release.

The bus monitor was charged with 2nd Degree Manslaughter, and 2nd Degree Endangering the Welfare of a Child, according to the release.

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B9 Warehouses Opponents Begin Their Case At Planning Board

Continued from Page 1.
be able to handle that volume of water, and that between 50 and 75 trees and other plantings are planned for the area around the dam, which is not allowed under the state's dam safety rules.

Paist-Goldman also told the Board that the stormwater management plan uses outdated precipitation charts that were last updated in 1999. She said the state Department of Environmental Protection has recently enacted a new rule requiring that precipitation rates of current storms be used instead. She said that although the plan was created prior to the new rule going into effect, engineers have known about it for about a year.

Mark Healey, the Township's principal planner, said that he has seen many plans that have trees and landscap-

ing in and around retention basins.

"Can you explain why this application you feel that the applicant placing landscaping in and around the basin is inconsistent with the rules?" he asked.

"In the basin is generally OK, it's outside on the berm itself where vegetation is prohibited under the dam safety standards," she said. "Putting vegetation on the down slope of the embankment ... is what tends to cause those feeder roots" that cause dams and retention walls to fail.

Paist-Goldman contended that because the soil and water table tests were done in the summer, rather than between January and April, those test results should not be accepted.

But township engineer Darren Mazzei said that he's seen many applications where

soil tests were done during other parts of the year.

Paist-Goldman argued that because the applicant's engineers unilaterally reclassified the type of soil in that area from what is indicated on official maps, state regulations require that the tests be done from January to April.

The final witness, Carlos Rodrigues, a planner, told the Board that "the site will not be recognizable after their site plan has been implemented."

"My contention is that the BI zone did not anticipate the current crop of warehouses," he said.

Rodrigues's assertions were challenged by Peter Lanfrit, Link's attorney. Lanfrit was unable to complete his questioning of the planner due to the late hour.

He did ask a number of questions about Rodrigues's



FULL HOUSE – Once again, more than 200 people showed up for the B9 warehouses hearing.

understanding of the BI zone and whether a certain portion of Canal Walk is covered by the Mettlers Road scenic corridor overlay zone.



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Call Crimestoppers: 1-888-577-TIPS (8477) or email tips@888577tips.org with any information.

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