

COMMUNITY FORUM

EDITORIALS

Belt tightening

When Gov. Chris Christie presented his proposed budget to the Legislature two weeks ago, he spoke positively of his plan. For residents of Orange and East Orange, however, another season of local budget anguish likely will ensue.

If the Legislature adopts the budget with minimal changes, residents of Orange and East Orange may see reductions in services as the proposed allocations do not keep pace with inflation.

For the state's public schools, while Christie's budget includes a \$135 million increase in basic education aid, not all districts fared well.

In Orange, the schools would receive an \$838,000 increase, to \$72 million; however, this 1.2 percent increase is outstripped by inflation. The district has had small state-aid increases in recent years, but Board of Education members still produced budgets that cleverly managed instructional reductions. We believe the members will again solve this shortage with few negative effects.

The story will be tougher in East Orange as it was one of the 97 districts which are projected to receive less aid for the 2012-13 school year. After a period of several years in which district officials and the Board of Education had to release several hundred employees and reduce or eliminate extracurricular activities and services, the district likely will face the same options this year as the Christie budget proposes a \$3 million decrease, to \$176 million.

For municipalities, the proposed funding statewide, \$1.47 billion, is level with this fiscal year, which ends June 30. In Orange, the city would get about \$8.4 million in state aid, while East Orange will receive \$22 million. These levels are the same as the previous years, but the municipalities will have to deal with the effects of inflation.

City halls in Orange and East Orange were a hotbed of emotions in early 2011 as city officials, spurred by the introduction of the 2-percent cap, were forced to fire a large number of city employees and reduce some services. While grants received during the year allowed the cities to re-hire some employees, with aid not increasing and costs inflating, we're not sure how firings can be avoided again.

There is time to advocate for changes. Staff and service reductions affect the residents who utilize the particular services. Fewer office staff could mean a longer wait for a concern to be addressed. A reduction in garbage collections would become a quality-of-life issue.

We view 2012 as another year for our communities to do more with less.

Girl Scouts turn 100

The Girl Scouts will celebrate its 100th anniversary on Monday. Celebrations have already begun. The Girl Scouts had an anniversary float in the Rose Bowl Parade in January. The U.S. Mint is preparing a special commemorative silver dollar to mark the anniversary; the coin will be released in 2013, to launch the organization's second century. On June 9, thousands of Scouts are expected to converge on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., for a sing-along titled "Rock the Mall."

The Girl Scouts of the United States of America, an organization for American girls ages 5 to 18, has roughly 2.3 million members and 877,000 adult leaders. This highly respected organization, which urges girls to be honest, fair, friendly, helpful, considerate, caring, courageous and strong, was begun with a single late-night telephone call.

On March 12, 1912, in the peaceful years before the outbreak of World War I, an American woman then living in England, Juliette Gordon Low, known as Daisy to her friends, arrived in Savannah, Ga., to visit her family. That night, she called her cousin and reportedly said, "Come right over. I've got something for the girls of Savannah, and all of America, and all the world, and we're going to start it tonight." The 100th anniversary of that telephone call will be celebrated by Girl Scouts nationwide on Monday. The entire week is officially Girl Scouts Week.

While in England, Low had helped Robert Baden-Powell with his scouting organizations and was determined to bring the concept to America. The two cousins formed the first troop, which had 18 girls, designed its logo, pledge and bylaws, and the organization grew from there.

As a community newspaper, we have had much contact with Girl Scouts, and are always impressed by their positive nature. Whether its gathering for World Thinking Day, participating in a community service project or patriotic event, the individual Girl Scouts earn our respect. Probably best known today for their sale of Girl Scout cookies, a fundraising tradition that began in 1917, the Girl Scouts also offer a Gold Award, similar to the Eagle Scout Award in Boy Scouting. For this community-service project, the Girl Scout must improve an existing situation.

We extend congratulations to the Girl Scouts on their first hundred years and for their unfailing support of strong family values, community service and patriotic ideals.



HARAMBEE AWARD WINNERS — Muzamil Mohamed-Stevens, left, chairman of the East Orange Housing Authority, and Deborah Stevens Falcon, right, present awards to, from second to left, East Orange City Councilman Ted Green, former Essex County Prosecutor and state Attorney General Paula Dow, Sierra House founder Keely Freeman and business owner Dawn Fitch during the recent Oranges Section of the National Council of Negro Women's annual Harambee Breakfast in Newark.

Someday soon, his dance card will be filled

This would be my grandson's first school dance. He's 11 years old and had to be coaxed by his three best friends to attend.

"There will be girls and records to dance to," one of Scott's friends informed him. "But best of all, there will be great refreshments!"

I think the word "refreshments" sealed the deal.

The mom of one of the other boys volunteered to drive and pick up the foursome.

"Once we were there we were held captive for two hours, like it or not," Scott blurted out.

"Did you like it?" I questioned him over the phone, "And, did you dance with anyone?"

"Well, it was OK," he answered to the first question, and "Almost!" was his puzzling retort to the second.

"What does 'almost' mean?" I asked, feeling like I was in jail interrogating a prisoner.

"Well, I was standing with my friends on the sidelines, next to the

That's Life

By Irene Maran



refreshment stand, when a tall, older girl walked toward me. I wanted to hide behind my pals but she looked me straight in the eye, said I was cute and asked me to dance. I was so embarrassed! At first I thought she was a teacher or one of the dance chaperones, but she was just a tall girl, probably a few grades ahead of me."

I was feeling a little nervous listening to my grandson's account of the dance and couldn't wait to hear his reaction.

"What did you say to her?" I asked.

"Well, I said that I had to go to

the bathroom and high-tailed it out of there."

"A smooth move," I said laughing, "Way to go."

My grandson spent most of the next two hours with his friends, holding up the plaster on the gym walls, eating and watching a few cute girls on the dance floor.

The not-so-cute or bashful ones were dancing in girl groups next to the boy groups. I am sure they were all sizing up each other for a future school dance. Scott did end up talking to a girl in his class about sports and discussing the latest Ranger and Devils hockey trades.

"She was the coolest girl at the dance," was a phrase he repeated often during our conversation.

It was not a dance connection, I observed, but they had made a positive sports connection.

"Would you go to another school dance?" I asked Scott out of curiosity.

"Oh yeah," he said before I

ended my sentence, "The refreshments were great, especially the mini hot dogs."

And, because I am nosy as well as curious, I asked if he had seen the tall girl again.

"Yeah," he replied, "She spent most of the night hanging out around the boys' bathroom."

I'm sure my grandson will save all his fancy dance moves for the goalie position on the school hockey team, and not necessarily the dance floor.

But, he is still young and has a long way to go in both developing his social and dancing skills. His appetite has already developed.

Irene Maran retired to the Shore, where she runs a writing group, after living in Maplewood and South Orange for 40 years. Two of her sons, Spencer and Steven, are firemen in and residents of South Orange. Contact her maran.irene@gmail.com.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Too many missteps in Orange

To the Editor:

At the non televised Feb. 21 Orange City Council meeting, Gloria Stewart, a local school staff member and regular citizens' comment participant, instructed stakeholders to know all the facts before they voiced an opinion on any matter.

Numerous events occurred last week that challenged the character and integrity of the administration of Mayor Eldridge Hawkins Jr.

On Feb. 27, I met with South Essex Avenue Urban Renewal LLC and its counsel. We agreed the redeveloper and tax-abatement agreements needed to be amended. I asked the deputy clerk to disclose under what statutory authority certain Tony Galento project-application documents, prepared by the city's outside auditors, were exempted from production under the state's Open Public Records Act.

On Feb. 29, I attended a local Main Street business forum that was organized by the Hawkins administration. Although the mayor prohibits department directors from attending council meetings, the city's police director and new police captain, public works director, deputy planning director, two building inspectors, an Urban Enterprise Zone related employee and the mayor's confidential aide attended this forum.

When I questioned the status of the city's Main Street New Jersey program, the mayor cut me off. The mayor tried to incite me and to cause me to storm out of the forum. Another business owner calmed me down. I told the mayor I was not a police officer who would be intimidated by him. At that time, I did not know about the embarrassing situation with the mayor and Billy Hathaway.

Later that evening, two department directors made comments that they believed would intimidate me. The public works director suggested a Home Depot should open in the city. The police director suggested merchants parked all day on Main Street should not be ticketed, but that unloading delivery trucks should be ticketed.

On March 1, I discovered the tabled revaluation-funding ordinance had not been corrected as had been promised. I immediately notified the deputy clerk of the two drafting errors and omissions.

On Friday, Judge Rothschild invalidated the city's annual Certificate of Habitability inspection ordinance. The court granted plaintiffs and the intervening local-landlord consortium 14 days to examine the reasonableness of the city's \$100 fee and the city's right to keep the \$36 difference between the fee and outsourced cost.

These facts do not bode well for Orange stakeholders. They only support my allegations of rampant deceit, intimidation, unaccountability and disregard of the rule of law by the Hawkins administration.

Jeffrey S. Feld
Orange

Editor's note: Jeffrey S. Feld is a Main Street business owner.

Public must know economics

To the Editor:

What is meant by the economy? How can you understand what the TV and newspaper pundits are talking about? How do you know if it's good or bad?

As an engineer and manager, I studied and worked with economic data. Many people, like me, understand the importance of economic study and were gratified that Gov. Jon Corzine's business task force recommended that it be part of the regular school curriculum.

Let's set forth the definition and some of the details of the economy. According to the World Book Dictionary, economy is the system of managing the research, development, production, distribution and consumption of wealth and goods. What the media reports is simple data, such as unemployment, jobs, wages, housing and layoffs, that managers and others in education and government may use to run their organizations.

It also gives the government information on the state of our debt. If it

isn't reported to the public properly, however, they get a distorted picture of our economy. About four weeks ago, some of us received information that the nation's debt had reached an amount equal to 100 percent of the gross domestic product, which is the value of all goods and services produced, that I've written about previously. In addition, we've been told that GDP is growing at a rate of 2.8 percent. Knowledgeable people know it requires a GDP increase of 7.8 percent to recover from a recession like the one we've experienced.

In addition, the unemployment information the U.S. Department of Labor has published is really 8.8 percent because of an error made in 2009. Gallup recently released a study that shows the unemployment rate to be 9 percent. Someone in Washington either lacks the knowledge or is not telling the truth.

Congress must not have enough people with backgrounds in math, finance and economics to hold these people accountable. I'll remind you of an earlier example: Congress voted for the Troubled Asset Relief Program even though many of us warned them because the bill designated no one responsible for the funds and their usage. Look what happened; there's money still missing.

What must you do? You need to read the financial pages of the newspapers, watch TV programs and news, read financial magazines, if you have the time, and listen to radio financial shows. Remember that numbers are not political but people are. Some of those people depend upon having good relations with the Washington administration and it colors their reporting. What you and I must do is search all the sources and find three or four people we can trust to put together a proper story and following their reporting.

The politicians benefit from an uninformed public, so we must demand the school systems educate objectively and to the utmost.

God Bless America.

William R. Lewis
Orange

Editor's note: William R. Lewis served the South Ward on the Orange City Council from 1990 to 2006.

Legislative contacts

Residents who wish to contact their state legislators may reach them or their staffs through their offices:

34th Legislative District

Sen. Nia Gill: 425 Bloomfield Ave., Montclair, N.J. 07042; Telephone: 973-509-0388.

Assemblyman Thomas Giblin: 1333 Broad St., Clifton, N.J. 07013; Telephone: 973-779-3125.

Assembly Speaker Sheila Oliver: 15-33 Halsted St., Suite 202, East Orange, N.J. 07018; Telephone: 973-395-1166.

Letter guidelines

The *Record-Transcript* welcomes submissions from their readers. Letters to the editor or opinion pieces on any subject will be considered for publication on the opinion pages.

This opportunity is open to all residents, officials and employees of Orange, East Orange and Essex County. The *Record-Transcript* reserves the right to edit all submissions for length, content and style. Writers must include their name, address and day telephone number for verification.

Letters must be no more than 400 words; longer pieces must be arranged in advance with the editor. The *Record-Transcript* accepts letters to the editor and columns via email at eorecord@thelocalsource.com.

Letters and essays may also be mailed to 1291 Stuyvesant Ave., Union, NJ 07083. All letters and guest columns must be received by 9 a.m. Monday to be considered for publication in Thursday's edition. Letters received must be on topics of interest, preferably about news events or in response to content that appeared in the newspaper.

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