

Cross Roads

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Important Information For Oakland's Senior Citizens

Oakland's senior citizens should know that the State of New Jersey offers eligible elderly a Property Tax Reimbursement Program. Details about this program were shared at the Board of Education's recent Public Forums and is available at the Board of Education Offices, located next to the library, or go to www.state.nj.us/treasury/taxation/claim.htm

Know that you may be eligible for a reimbursement of the difference between the amount of property taxes you paid in the base year (the year you first became eligible) and the amount paid in the year for which you are applying for a reimbursement if:

1. You are age 65 or older or receiving Federal Social Security disability benefits; and
2. You have lived in New Jersey continuously for at least the last 10 years, as either a homeowner or a renter; and
3. You have owned and lived in your home (or have leased a site in a mobile home park on which you have placed a manufactured or mobile home that you own) for at least the last 3 years; and
4. You have paid the full amount of property taxes (or site fees if you are a mobile home owner) that were due on your home for the base year and for each succeeding year, up to and including the year for which you are claiming the reimbursement; and
5. You meet the income limits for the base year and for each succeeding year, up to and including the year for which you are claiming the reimbursement.

Residents applying for the 2004 reimbursement must have total income for 2003 that is less than \$40,028 for single applicants and \$49,082 (combined income) for married couples, and total income for 2004 that is less than \$40,869 for single applicants and \$50,113 (combined income) for married couples.

THE MAYOR'S MESSAGE ... A BUSY SPRING AHEAD

After numerous meetings and the exertion of pressure by our residents and elected officials there is finally movement to resolve the flooding issues associated with the Army Corps of Engineers Flood Protection Project on the Ramapo River. The Army Corps has agreed to take a number of actions in an attempt to relieve the residents of the Pleasureland Area from the backwater flooding affecting their properties as a result of the project. These measures include:

- Installing two high power pumps to move water flow over the dam.
- Tapping into a 78-inch pipe owned by the North Jersey Water District Commission to allow water flow from the pipe.
- Opening a 36-inch line to increase flow around the spillway and possibly lowering the height of the exposed spillway by 12 to 18 inches for a distance

of about 70 feet to increase existing flows.

If implemented together, these measures will significantly restore much of the flow now being restricted by the coffer dams. Realizing that it is a race against time with Spring already here, we are continuing to pressure the appropriate Federal and State officials to implement these relief measures.

The Borough's court-ordered property revaluation program is nearing completion and all property owners should by now have received their updated property valuation notices. Please know that you should not use the current tax rate against this updated value to calculate your new real estate tax. With the revaluation of all properties in the Borough, the rate by which properties are taxed will be adjusted downward to reflect the revised total property value. The amount of tax to be paid will finally be determined by the various budgets – municipal, school and county – that make up the total tax bill.

My hope is that the process conclusion will relieve residents of some of the anxiety concerning their tax bill. The issue is and will always remain our diligence as the Governing Body and community in finding ways to save taxpayers money in our budgetary process and seeking grant aid whenever possible to supplement the Borough's revenue stream.

A great deal of concern has been expressed by the public regarding local

(Continued on page 2)



Mayor John Szabo

An Update on Oakland's Revaluation • By Scott Holzauer, Tax Assessor

The municipal-wide Revaluation of all real property in the Borough of Oakland is basically complete. Revaluation is a periodic program undertaken in order to appraise all real estate in terms of its full and fair market value. Also known as tax equalization, the goal of a revaluation is to insure that all property owners' pay their fair share of the tax burden based on the actual market value of the property they own.

The 2005 Tax Book has been printed and is available to the public for inspection at Borough Hall any time during regular business hours.

Appraisal Systems Inc., the company that has performed the revaluation, has been extremely pleased with the level of

cooperation that they received from Borough residents during this program. As the Assessor, I would like to complement Appraisal Systems for the professional manner in which they conducted the entire revaluation program from start to finish.

I would also like to provide some facts and figures to help enlighten the public with regard to certain questions that are being asked most often as this program draws to a close.

When is the deadline for filing an appeal with the Bergen County Board of Taxation?

Typically, the deadline for filing appeals is April 1. However, NJ law also provides that appeals can be filed anytime within 45

days from the date of official mailing of the Chapter 75 Assessment Notification Postcards. This mailing of the postcards in Oakland occurred on March 8. Therefore, the deadline for filing appeals will be extended to April 22.

How many people came in to "discuss" their assessment with the reval company after receiving their new assessment letter?

Excluding the cleanup day (March 18), the Reval Company conducted 525 individual scheduled meetings with Oakland property owners to discuss the new assessments. The first of these informal "hearings" occurred on February 2. Altogether, Appraisal Systems had hearings on 23 different days which included 15 weekday hearing dates, 14 evening hearing dates, and four Saturday hearing dates. The reval company made every reasonable attempt to accommodate the property owners during this process. All hearings were conveniently conducted within the Borough utilizing the Council Meeting Room.

Is this response from the public normal?

Actually, this response is considered extremely good by typical revaluation standards. In most municipalities, the response for individual hearings by the taxpayers after a revaluation typically ranges from 15-20% of the total number of ratable line items. Oakland has 4,819 total ratable line items. Accordingly, the request for individual hearings in Oakland represented less than 11% of the total ratable line items.

The land value portion of my new assessment seems to represent a much larger percentage of my overall assessment than it did after the last revaluation. Why is the land value so high?

All assessments are divided into two component parts as a matter of assessment administration — land and building. This breakdown between land and building is for "allocation purposes only". The only legally relevant figure concerning any given assessment is the TOTAL ASSESSED VALUE.

As a practical matter in trying to understand the process of this allocation, just take

Mayor's Message

(Continued from page 1)

traffic and vehicular speeding through our residential neighborhoods. As part of my ongoing program of traffic calming I am pleased to announce that the Borough has submitted a revised ordinance reducing the traffic speed on Yawpo Avenue from 35 miles per hour to 30 and on Dogwood Drive from 30 to 25 miles per hour. While these may appear to be minor improvements, they are certainly a step in the right direction. We should know soon whether the New Jersey Department of Transportation has approved our final ordinances. I have met with NJDOT representatives and I am confident that they will uphold our revised ordinances without comment.

As a further measure to make our streets safer for our residents, I have introduced and the Council has passed an ordinance commonly referred to as "John's Law". This ordinance will enable our Police Officers to impound vehicles and hold any individual stopped and charged with driving while under the influence of alcohol for at least eight hours until blood alcohol levels return to legal limits. It is vital to

the safety of this community that we do all we can to discourage and stop drunk driving, and this ordinance is another means of securing the safety of our residents. My appreciation and gratitude goes out to the entire Council for their support in moving this measure so expeditiously.

With Spring in the air, I am sure we are all looking forward to warmer weather and the joys of returning to our outdoor activities. Be safe, have fun, and, if you can, volunteer whatever time you can give to our various programs that are so important to making Oakland such a great place to live. There are countless ways you can get involved and if you would like to volunteer for any Borough-sponsored committee, agency or activity please email me directly at mayor@oakland-nj.com and I will make sure you will be directed in to the right agency.

Presently, we have particular need in the Oakland Communications Commission for volunteers to operate cameras and video public events. So please consider donating some of your time. I assure you it will be a richly rewarding experience.

— Mayor John Szabo

any given sale of a residential dwelling as an example. Say a 1,500-square-foot ranch house, built in 1965 and situated on a 60 X 180-foot lot, sold on October 1, 2004 for \$450,000. An appraiser or revaluation company would determine the "replacement cost" of the building by utilizing a building cost manual – much the same way an insurance company does. In this case the manual utilized is the New Jersey Assessor's Manual. If the depreciated cost of the building was calculated out to be \$175,000, then the remaining balance of the sale price – in this case \$275,000 – would be "allocated" to the land for its contribution to the overall price.

Another way to look at this is to consider that sale prices for most residential properties have more than doubled since the time of the last revaluation. Yet during this same time period (absent any major additions or renovations) the physical buildings on these properties have actually depreciated simply as a function of age. And while the cost of labor and materials may have risen during this same time period in accordance with typical inflation, this increase in building replacement costs is generally offset to a large degree by the element of depreciation.

However, the overall sale price of properties continues to rise. This is directly a function of the "land component" in the value equation. Quite simply, land generally doesn't depreciate – and there is a finite supply of it that is suitable for development. Therefore, continued demand with limited supply will

result in a further increase in the "appreciation" rate of land value.

What is the new tax rate?

The new tax rate will not likely be determined until sometime in June, after participating local and government agencies report and approve their budgets for 2005.

Is there any way to know what impact the revaluation has had on my taxes?

The total assessed value of property (the "ratable base") utilized to compute the 2004 tax rate (pre-Reval) was \$1,176,976,017. The completed revaluation has resulted in a change in the ratable base to a figure of \$2,524,648,350 (subject to any adjustments from late hearings conducted after the new assessment information was turned over to the County Tax Board on 2/25). Consequently, the new assessment total represents an average increase in assessed value of 2.14 times from the pre-Reval assessment total.

Looked at another way, the total amount of money raised by property taxation in 2004 was \$39,428,696 (utilizing the tax rate of \$3.35 per \$100 of assessed value (x) the 2004 ratable base of \$1,176,976,017). In order to generate this same amount of tax money based on the new 2005 ratable total after the revaluation, the tax rate would decrease to a figure slightly above \$1.56 per \$100 of assessed value. But please be mindful that this latter figure is based on the 2004 budget, and does not include any budgetary

information relevant to the 2005 tax year, which could likely increase this rate by an additional 5-10% (based on past trends).

What would an actual appeal be based on, should I file one?

The appeal can only be based on two items: the total MARKET VALUE of the property, and/or a factual discrepancy pertaining to an item from your property record card (such as an incorrect building size, incorrect lot size, wrong number of bathrooms, etc.). Subjective items, such as the influence of topography, wetlands, floodplain, easements, the condition of the building, etc. may ultimately serve as grounds for consideration with regard to the assessment, but do not automatically result in adjustments to an assessment. Items of this nature are addressed on an individual basis.

I hope this has helped to answer some the remaining questions concerning this important program. Until a better system is implemented, real property taxation remains a "necessary evil". The ultimate goal of this revaluation was to spread the tax burden out as equitably as possible. To that end, I feel that the Oakland Revaluation was a success. Thank you for all your cooperation during the past year. As always, if you have any remaining questions on this matter, please contact the Assessor's Office for assistance.

Oakland Volunteer Fire Department Installs 2005 Officers

The Oakland Volunteer Fire Department held its Annual Installation Dinner in January at the Brownstone House in West Paterson. The 2005 officers are: Chief Steven Milano, Assistant Chief Robert Knapp Jr. and Assistant Chief Peter Sondervan, Captain Patrick Kellett and Captain James Vulgaris, Lieutenant Curtis LeRoy, Lieutenant Gary Walker, Lieutenant Thomas Torpey, Lieutenant James Raymond Hans, Fire Mechanics Peter Warnet Jr. and Roy Bauberger, and Secretary Joseph Gallup. We wish them all a safe and productive year.

Pictured from left: Lt. J.R. Hans, Secretary Joseph Gallup, Lt. Curtis LeRoy, Department Chief Steven Milano, Lt. Thomas Torpey, Captain Patrick Kellett, Assistant Chief Peter Sondervan, and Assistant Chief Robert Knapp, Jr.



Oakland's OCC: Committed To Communication

As anyone with a television or a computer or a mailbox to receive *Crossroads*, for that matter – certainly knows, the Oakland Communications Commission is continuing to pursue its mandate from the Mayor and Council to provide open, non-partisan communications to the residents of Oakland. It has been quite a few months for this dedicated group of volunteers as we continue to expand our programming, upgrade our website and publish this *Crossroads* newsletter.

• First, a welcome to our two newest members — **Karen Marcalus** and **Pete Foley**. Both bring a wealth of knowledge in various areas of the general field of “communications” and, perhaps most importantly, a passion for open communications. Karen is head-

ing the *Crossroads* Newsletter Committee and Pete is the Commission's liaison to the town's official web site, www.oakland-nj.org.

• The unique **Exit 58 Live!** television show – public access programming BY the residents of Oakland, FOR the residents of Oakland – continues to showcase important personalities, groups and talent in our borough. The next live show is scheduled for **April 11** on Channel 77.

• The OCC continues to air the bi-monthly Mayor and Council meetings and for the first time ever we are airing the Board of Education Budget Hearings.

• We continue to urge borough residents to submit their videotapes for airing on Channel 77. It's easy. Just tape the event – softball

game, graduation ceremony, dance recital, anything – fill out the Videotape Submission Form (found at www.oakland-nj.org or at Borough Hall) and drop off the tape at Borough Hall. If you need technical assistance, call and leave a message for us at 201-405-7590 and we'll help you out.

• Finally, we are always looking for volunteers who share our commitment to communications. We have accomplished some great things in the past three years, have helped opened up our town's government by televising the Mayor and Council meetings, and have provided a forum for many of Oakland's organizations to publicize their events and recognize their members. Come and be part of the fun and contribute something to your town. Email us at com72@optonline.net or call 201-405-7590.

An Oakland Photo Gallery



Elwood Benefit

A very proud Matthew Everist poses at Valley Middle School with Chris Snee, offensive guard for the New York Giants. Snee was attending the Jack Elwood ALS Benefit on March 5, which raised nearly \$11,000 for the Elwood family. Jack Elwood, who suffers from ALS is a teacher in Ridgewood who lives in Oakland.



Recreation Hall of Fame

The Oakland Sports Association recently held its annual Dinner Dance at Portabellos to raise money for the town's recreation programs. The highlight of the event was the induction of long-time Oakland resident Michael Jacobsen (right) by George Maturi into the Oakland Recreation Hall of Fame. The Hall recognizes and honors individuals who have volunteered considerable time to the borough's recreation programs.



Elks Essay Contest

Brian Sladek was the winner of the recent District Elks Club Essay Contest. Brian came in first place over 300 other entrants with his essay, "What Old Glory Means to Me." Pictured with Brian is John Schaus, representing the North District Elks.

THE OAKLAND STORMWATER MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

The Borough of Oakland has commenced implementation of its Stormwater Management Plan. The ultimate goal of this plan is to prevent pollution of water due to stormwater runoff.

In 2005, each storm sewer will be inspected and cleaned. Over the next five years, the Borough will implement a program

to label storm sewers. Each storm sewer will be identified as to the location of outfall. Information will be distributed to residents to advise them how they can help keep our water clean. Information will also be distributed to the local schools so students can learn the role they can play in this program.

The Borough looks forward to working towards a cleaner environment along with the residents of Oakland.

Oakland Students Continue To Excel Nationally

Dear Members of the Community:

As Spring beckons and the snowy days of the Winter of 2005 recede into memory, we find our schools busier than ever. Our students are working hard to master an increasingly complex curriculum. State testing has just been completed, and we are confident that our students will continue to demonstrate the high levels of proficiency that the residents of Oakland have come to expect.

This edition of CROSSROADS highlights just some of our students' many accomplishments. Once again, Valley Middle School's Future Cities Team earned first place in the New York City Regionals, and carried the banner of "the greatest city in the world" to the Washington, D.C. national competition. The team placed fifth nationally, and their entry earned team members the Best Infrastructure award.

In addition, Oakland's eighth grade Law Adventure Team placed second

in the New Jersey Bar Association's State competition. Team members will be traveling to New Brunswick in April to present their entry at The New Jersey Law Center.

And, most recently, one of our sixth grade students won the District Elks Club Essay Contest with an outstanding essay, entitled "What Old Glory Means To Me." This essay will now be in consideration for the State Elks award.

As we've discussed before, schools reflect their communities, and the Oakland community is integral to the success of our schools and the high achievement of our students. We are grateful for the support that you give to our schools, the encouragement that you give to students, and the backing you give to our special events. The latter includes most recently the Oakland Education Foundation's Annual Dinner/Dance and the Manito School P.T.O's Jack Elwood Benefit. Community support



*Dr. Richard Heflich,
Oakland Superintendent of Schools*

for both of these fundraisers will help a family in need and our school district meet the challenges that lie ahead, and we are most appreciative of your generosity.

Another valued demonstration of interest in our schools has been the participation of so many community members in the Board of Education's Public Forums on our District's facilities needs. We were all enriched by the discussion and the suggestions of residents as we, as a school district, wrestled with the options of how best to address the overcrowding that is occurring in our schools, as well as the infrastructure needs of our aging school buildings. The Board is now considering the input gathered as it prepares a facilities plan that the community can support. Board members will soon finalize a plan, and present it for approval to you.

We look forward to our continuing partnership as we meet the needs of children and community.

**With best wishes,
Dr. Richard G. Heflich
Superintendent of Schools**

The Oakland K-8 Board of Education has spent the last four months immersed in facilities and referendum planning. In photo, the Board spent a recent Saturday work session evaluating the reams of information gleaned through public forums and demographic and geological surveys. The Board hopes to develop a cost effective and educationally sound facilities program that will gain the support of Oakland's residents.



A Culture of Caring: Tsunami Relief in the Oakland Public Schools

By Adam I. Silverstein,
Vice Principal, Valley Middle School

The latest estimates place the number of victims of the tsunami disaster at an incomprehensible 300,000. As high as that figure is, it is sadly misleading, for it discounts the hundreds of thousands of additional lives that were instantly shattered by a catastrophe that literally shook the earth at its core. The human spirit, however, was not as easily shaken. The images of utter despair that saturated the airwaves in the days and weeks after the tragedy have slowly begun to morph into images of hope and renewal. In an unprecedented display of global compassion, millions of dollars have been raised in an effort to help those affected piece their lives together again. Proudly, the children, parents, and teachers of the Oakland Public Schools have opened their hearts and their wallets to support this worthy cause.

The fundraising efforts at VMS began as soon as students returned from the holiday break. Student Council members placed large canisters in each lunch period and asked students to donate their spare change. Those spare nickels and pennies quickly added up to \$400.

Not content to rest on their laurels, the Student Council wanted to do something bigger, something with even more significance. Student Council President **Conor Quinn** ultimately inspired the idea that evolved into Oakland's Wave of Love. For several weeks, the Student Council took orders for packets of three glow bracelets that sold for five dollars each.

A sticker and an inspirational quote were included in each packet of bracelets. Inspired by the project, Heights and Dogwood Hill Elementary Schools decided to become involved as well. In a show of solidarity, support and compassion, students throughout the district wore their bracelets on Monday, February 14, Valentine's Day. In all, over \$4500 was raised through this project alone.

In addition to participating in the Wave of Love, students at Dogwood Hill School initially approached **Ms. Elizabeth Miggels**, the Student Council Advisor, to see how they could help the tsunami survivors. The call went out through the Student Council for all of the students to bring in their extra change. Every morning pennies, nickels, dimes and quarters came streaming into Dogwood Hill School, as children opened their piggy banks or decided to skip dessert at lunch. One child in third grade donated his entire coin collection from the past few years. As soon as the parents became aware of what the children were doing, ten and twenty dollar bills began to appear in the collection jars. Checks started coming in, as well, and the total surpassed \$2000 dollars for the school.

The second phase of Dogwood's efforts began with the annual "Souper Bowl" drive, where students were asked to bring in a can of soup and a dollar to help feed the hungry. The Share and Care Foundation in Paramus received half of the cash donations, which will go to feed hungry children in Asia.

At Heights, the effort began with a Wave of Change. Throughout January,

the Heights Student Council collected spare change. By the end of the month, hundreds of dollars had been collected. By that time, Heights also joined Valley's Wave of Love. All of the money raised at Heights was donated to the International Red Cross.

At Manito, students in grades K-2 combined mathematics with their generosity, as they worked with their families to tape coins onto a money puzzle. All of the money collected was added to the penny war that was conducted in grades 3-5. In this program, dubbed "Coins for the Cause," students in each grade level placed coins in large glass containers. Silver coins were deducted from the total amount, whereas pennies were added to that amount. The project was a great deal of fun for all of those involved. In the end, the students in Grade 3 won, raising a total of over \$2000. In addition, the upper elementary children sold rubberized bracelets that read "Manito Cares," for two dollars each. To date a total of \$6000 has been raised between both projects. The money will be donated to the disaster relief effort through the Save the Children foundation.

Finally, instrumental music teachers throughout the district sent letters home to parents with the intent of raising money through pledges based upon the amount of time their children practiced.

We thank all of the students, teachers, administrators and everyone else involved in making all of these initiatives so successful. Everyone's compassion and generosity will forever be appreciated by those who so desperately needed it.

TUNE IN TO CHANNEL 77 for BOE BUDGET HEARINGS

For the first time ever, the annual Board of Education Budget Hearing was recorded live and is now playing on Oakland's own Channel 77. Tune in to see it, as well as to hear the Board of Education candidates introduce themselves.

BOE/BUDGET VOTE • TUESDAY, APRIL 19, 2-9 PM

A Win In Court For Valley Middle School Students

A team of six eighth graders from Valley Middle School has been awarded Second Place in the New Jersey State Bar Foundation's 2005 Law Adventure Competition.

Since September, Gifted and Talented Workshop students **Matt Allan, Alexandra Farrell, Amanda Parisi, Brian Sees, Ken Takahara** and **Jason Voss**, with the help of their teacher/coach **Jeanne Schulze**, have been researching and writing a criminal case entitled "The Bad Parent." The team had

expert help from volunteer, **Carol Russek**, who served as the group's attorney/mentor, teaching them to think and write as lawyers do. In their case, the students explored the question of whether a parent can be criminally responsible for delinquent acts of a child.

In total, 113 schools entered the competition in the seventh and eighth grade category. Cases were evaluated on how well the entry promotes understanding of the law and the U.S. justice system;

focuses on the theme provided; and follows the Law Adventure rules and procedures. The quality of the writing, grammar, punctuation and spelling also entered into the determination of the winners.

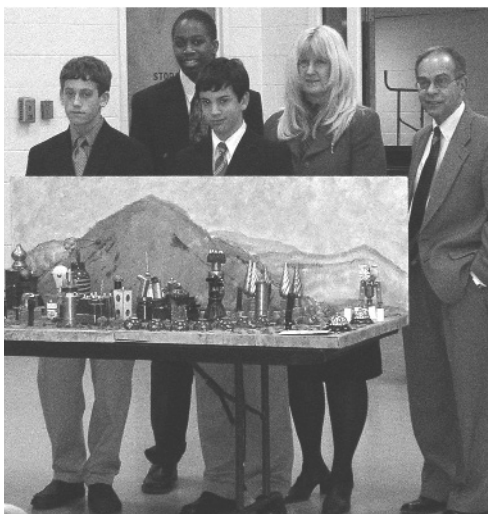
Valley Middle School's Law Adventure team will travel to The New Jersey Law Center in New Brunswick on April 19 to perform their case in front of a judge and an audience of students, who will act as a jury and deliver a verdict.

An Oakland Schools Photo Gallery



FLOW Follies

Many Oakland residents participate each year in the FLOW Follies, a variety show which raises funds for scholarships at Indian Hills and Ramapo High Schools. This year's show, which had as its theme "Who Will Buy?", was held March 10-13. The organization hopes to donate more than \$14,000 in scholarships this year.



Future Cities

During Winter Break, Valley Middle School eighth grade students Marquise Francis, Jack Potash, and Charlie Russek went to Washington, D.C., to participate in the Future City Competition national finals. Oakland's team came home with the Fifth Place trophy and the Best Infrastructure Award. Congratulations!

Here, the students are pictured at a recent Board of Education meeting with Superintendent Richard Heflich and Gifted and Talented teacher Judith Vihonski.



OEF Dinner Dance

Oakland Education Foundation annual dinner dance co-chairs Lette Magrini and Nancy Grasso welcome School's Superintendent Richard Heflich and VMS Principal Christopher Lane to the celebration. Over \$9,000 was raised for special school projects at the dance, which took place on March 11 at the Sheraton Crossroads.

Important Borough Dates and Notes ...**Soccer Signups • Danny D'Elia Recreation Building**

Saturday, April 2, 9:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

Wednesday, April 6, 6:00 p.m.- 9:00 p.m.

Saturday, April 9, 9:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

Wednesday, April 13, 6:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.

Saturday, April 16, 12:30 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Go to www.oakland-nj.org to download and fill out the soccer registration form in advance.

Football Signups • Danny D'Elia Recreation Building

Sunday, April 17, 12:00 p.m.-3:00 p.m.

Wednesday, April 20, 6:30 p.m.-8:30 p.m.

Saturday, May 7, 9:00 a.m.- 12 p.m.

Meet The Coaches Night, Thursday, April 7, 7:30 p.m., at Valley Middle School

Tennis Registrations

• Registrations for the Youth Tennis Program will be mailed to all residents within a few weeks. The Youth Program runs from early June through mid-July.

• Anyone interested in purchasing tennis badges for the 2005 season should contact Jane Koch at 201-337-4246. Badges cost \$20 per family, \$10 per individual.

Channel 77 Tape/Bulletin Board Submissions

Any Oakland resident can submit a videotape or Bulletin Board notice for airing on our Public Access Channel 77. It's simple! Just go to the Borough's web site at www.oakland-nj.org and follow the instructions. No computer? Then just stop by Borough Hall and pick up a form.

**The Third Annual Oakland/Knights of Columbus Carnival is June 29 and 30, July 1 and 2.
The Annual Fireworks Spectacular is Saturday, July 2**

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