

CROSS ROADS

PUBLISHED BY THE OAKLAND COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
SPONSORED BY THE BOROUGH OF OAKLAND AND THE OAKLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS

SPRING, 2006
VOL. 10, No. 1

Spotlight On Our Community OAKLAND FATHERS' CLUB

Since 1958, the Oakland Fathers' Club has been a community organization that has dedicated itself to serving the youth of our community through the support of various Education, Recreation and Safety programs.

Membership in the OFC is comprised of fathers within our community who contribute their time and talents to raise funds to provide for, among other things, holiday gifts to children of families in need, support for our recreation programs through the purchase of scoreboards and trophies. OFC volunteers provide labor to build or re-build playgrounds, dugouts and refurbish recreation fields. The OFC is also a supporter of Safety Town, Project Graduation and the Valley Middle School Social.

The OFC also awards college scholarships through its Scholarship Award contest. It has annually awarded two \$1000 scholarships and, starting this year, the OFC will award three \$1000 scholarships.

With more than 100 members, the OFC has given more than \$50,000 back to our community through the various projects mentioned above over the past six years. The OFC is a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

The OFC meets once a month at the Danny D'Elia building. Meetings are held the third Monday of the month from September through December, and the third Thursday of the month from January through May. For more info: Gary Geresi, OFC@Oakland-NJ.org.

THE MAYOR'S MESSAGE ... WELCOME, SPRING

Spring has arrived and we now look forward to warmer weather, outdoor fun, the onset of baseball and softball seasons and festive activities. Despite a near-record snow storm that struck the Borough in February, this past winter was fairly mild and uneventful. This is good news for the Borough's budget since each storm costs the Borough money in material and manpower.

Speaking of budget, the Mayor and Council are working hard on the 2006 budget. We have been meeting on off-Wednesday nights and on Saturday mornings with the various departments, commissions, committees, borough administrator, our auditor and finance officer to create a fiscally responsible budget for the Borough.

As always, we are focused on trimming the budget to keep costs down while trying to maintain the level of services that the residents of Oakland have come to expect.



Mayor John Szabo

In these trying fiscal times this is quite a challenge. The budget should be completed and presented to the public for adoption by mid-spring. In the meantime, all budget meetings of the Mayor and Council are open to the public and all are invited to attend.

Significantly, there has been an added dimension to the budget review process this year. In addition to the budget, we have also been critically analyzing the operations of Borough Hall and have begun the process of instituting needed reforms within the Borough's budgeting and purchasing system to ensure that strict purchasing and budgeting guidelines are followed. These reforms will not only improve the overall efficiency of Borough Hall, but will also produce long-term savings resulting in a greater level of fiscal responsibility and accountability. My deepest thanks goes to Councilman Frank Di Pentima, who, as finance chairman, has invested a tremendous amount of his time and accounting expertise in driving the budget process and recommending needed financial reforms (*see article on page 2*).

As part of the budget review process this year the Mayor and Council are also critically reviewing the Borough's insurance program in order to identify ways of saving Borough taxpayers money while also honoring our contractual obligations to the various municipal unions. An ad hoc committee consisting of myself, Council President Kazmierczak, Councilman Di Pentima, our Borough Administrator, Auditor, Finance

(Continued on page 3)

The Municipal Budget Process Explained • By Councilman Frank Di Pentima

Many folks have stopped me over the past few weeks and asked me questions about the process our town goes through in terms of creating and monitoring of our municipal budget. With this in mind, I thought I would try to provide a brief outline of what the Mayor and Council do to create the annual budget.

The process of creating an annual budget in many ways is not much different from what many residents do when they create a budget for their own spending needs. The Governing Body, as well as all department heads, have goals and objectives that they would like to achieve during the fiscal year and the budget creation process needs to align those goals and objectives so that we have one formulated plan for spending taxpayer monies in a fair and responsible manner.

The process begins by reviewing where we have spent money in previous fiscal years, as well as the revenues we have raised in those years. The next stage of the process is where our Business Administrator compiles all budget information from every department. This was done in early December.

Reviewing With Department Heads

As Finance Chairman this year, I reviewed the budget worksheets with the other members of the Finance Committee — CFO Raymond Herr, Business Administrator Charles Smiley, Councilman Donald Burns and Mayor John Szabo. These budget sheets, created by Mr. Smiley, contain the details by department of where we spent money in the past five fiscal years. This gives us a good background and understanding of the outflows of our municipal spending.

In early January, the Governing Body passed a Temporary Budget, which represented 25% of the prior year's budget. This procedural move allows us to operate our departments in the current fiscal year even though we have yet to finalize, introduce and pass the 2006 municipal budget.

This year, we held budget review meetings, which were open to the public, with all of our major departments,

including Police, Fire, the Department of Public Works, and Administration. At these meetings, we reviewed major line items and discussed with the department heads three categories of spending:

- Critical spending that is required by statute surrounding essential services.
- Spending that supports essential services.
- Spending that does not impact essential services.

The department heads are required to supply the Governing Body with detailed support for all spending line items for which they are requesting budget dollars.

The Finance Committee then makes recommendations to the entire Governing Body as to the amount of budget money that is supportable based on two factors: anticipated revenues for the upcoming fiscal year and the amount of money needed to be expended to support the ongoing service levels of the Borough. The Governing Body then discusses these recommendations with the Finance Committee and the Borough's auditor.

Once final budget adjustments are made, the 2006 budget will then be introduced at a council meeting and advertised to the public. After introduction, the budget is sent to the State for review. The public will then get to review the budget and ask questions about its contents at a public hearing.

Any amendments that result from the initial public hearing are then incorporated into the budget, which is re-introduced and advertised once again to the public. After the final public hearing, the budget will be voted on and adopted by the Governing Body. The final budget cannot be adopted until the review process with the State has been completed.

In New Jersey, budgetary spending is broken down into two areas — Cap and Non-Cap spending activity. By law, spending increases for Cap items cannot increase above the prior year's budgeted amount by more than 2.5%. Cap items represent spending that supports all of our departments, such

as Administration, Recreation, the Senior Center, Police, Fire and DPW departments. Non-Cap items do not have an increase restriction and cover costs such as health and liability insurance, pension payments, repayment of municipal bond principal and interest, and the support given to our Public Library.

Budget Facts and Figures

Some interesting facts to note regarding our budget using 2005's budget data:

- Roughly 40% of the Borough's spending relates to salaries and wages paid to employees; 60% relates to spending for operational expenses such as insurance, pensions, professional training, professional services such as legal, engineering and audit fees, office supplies, general repairs and maintenance of buildings and equipment and utility costs.

- Using our 2005 budget of \$14,199 million, spending for Cap line items was budgeted at \$8.6 million, or 60.8%, and spending for Non-Cap line items was budgeted at \$5.6 million, or 39.2%.

- For the budgeted spending on Cap items in 2005, \$5.2 million related to salaries and wages and \$3.4 million related to general expenses.

- For the Non-Cap budget, \$5.2 million, or almost 93%, of the spending related to general expenses, and only \$411,000 represented salaries and wages.

- Of the \$5.2 million worth of budgeted Non-Cap spending for general expenses, the costs provided to cover insurance, repayment of our debt service and our reserve for uncollected taxes amounted to \$4.1 million, or almost 79% of Non-Cap activity.

The goal of the Mayor & Council and all department heads is to control the growth of spending while still being able to provide essential services to our community. As Finance Chairman, my job is to work with our CFO and Borough Administrator to monitor the spending activity against our budget as well as to find ways to reduce and/or remove costs from future operating budgets.

Spotlight On Our Community ...

Health Dept. Searching for Polluters

Stream pollution is a serious threat to our streams, fish, wildlife and water supply. One of the major contributors to our stream pollution here in Oakland is grey water (laundry) discharges diverted into our storm drain system. Soap bubbles, bleach and the fragrance of detergent have been found in many storm drains and cause unsightly messes where the drains discharge to an open stream.

The Health Department is actively searching for these pollution sources and asks the residents of Oakland to assist us in this effort. If you see or know of any laundry discharges entering the storm drains, please contact the Health Department at 201-337-6747 to report it. These violations must be stopped to protect our environment and our community.

Shade Tree Commission at Senior Center

Stop! Before you cut down that tree blocking your view of the neighbor's house, come hear what the Shade Tree Commission has to say about it. They will be at the Senior Center on Wednesday, May 3, at 1 p.m. for an open discussion group meeting. Representatives of the Commission will talk about growth, removal and Borough ordinances. Advice on planting will also be provided. This event is open to everyone.

Public Events Committee Sets Entertainment Schedule

- Egg Hunt: Saturday, April 8, 11 a.m. at the Recreation Field. Infants to 3rd grade welcomed. Rain date is Sunday, April 9.
- Memorial Day Parade: Sunday, May 28th, 1 p.m. Groups will be told where to gather.
- Town Carnival:
Wednesday, July 5, 5-11 p.m.
Thursday, July 6, 5-11 p.m.
Friday, July 7, 5-11 p.m.
Saturday, July 8, 3 p.m. until fireworks at dusk.
- Halloween Parade: Saturday, October 28, 9 a.m., at Valley Middle School.
- Holiday Lighting Ceremony: Sunday, December 3, 6 p.m. at Veteran's Park, in front of the Library.

Volunteers are always needed! For more information call Public Events Chairman Bob Fabrizio at 917-440-5778.



FLOW FOLLIES ... The annual FLOW Follies extravaganza took a trip to the shore this year, with four entertaining shows at Ramapo High School in early March. Funds raised go towards college scholarships for graduating seniors from Indian Hills and Ramapo High Schools. Last year FLOW Follies raised more than \$20,000 and provided 20 scholarships for each high school. FLOW Follies is part of the district's PTSO/ATPSO organizations.

Congratulations, George Maturi Hall of Fame Class of 2006

Congratulations go out to our own **George Maturi**, a member of the Oakland Communications Commission who was inducted into the Oakland Recreation Hall of Fame during the annual Sports Association Dinner/Dance March

24 at Portobellos. George was recognized for his years of volunteering to the borough's recreation programs. Also honored during the Sports Association event were former football commissioner **Mike Milich**, long-time Sports Association volunteer **Andrea Vanmansart** and football coach **Chris Maragulia**.

Mayor's Message

(Continued from page 1)

Officer and Insurance Representative has been meeting since January carefully analyzing our current programs and developing a comprehensive reform plan that if implemented will substantially reduce the borough's insurance costs. This plan is presently being reviewed by the entire council.

The Downtown Improvement Plan was unveiled at a special meeting held at the Senior Center on January 17, 2006. The plan was presented by the Borough's Planning Consultant and was well received by those present. A second public meeting was held in late January. I hope to have this plan formally adopted by the Planning Board this spring and we will

then immediately begin to plan for needed downtown improvements.

The saga of the flood control project continues. Although some of the stop logs have been installed, permitting the Army Corps to begin the removal of the first coffer dam, inexplicably the funding to complete the project is now threatened. I am working with our Flood Commission and legislative representatives on both the federal and state levels of government to fight to secure continued funding to complete the project by this summer. It is imperative that this project be completed as quickly as possible in order to bring the flood relief long promised to the residents of the Pleasureland area. This continues to be a priority of my administration.

— Mayor John Szabo

Medical Reserve Corps Forming In Town • By Councilman Pat Pignatelli

After September 11, thousands of Americans volunteered their time and experience to help fellow Americans in need. Many Americans asked, "What can I do to help?"

The President responded by creating the Citizens Corps. The Medical Reserve Corps is a component of this volunteer organization, bringing volunteers such as health professionals and others together to supplement existing local emergency plans and resources in towns throughout the United States.

In order to be most effective when called upon, volunteers must be organized and trained to work in emergency situations. The Medical Reserve Corps has been organized in Bergen County to provide that training and organization. In Bergen County, the primary mission of the MRC will be to assist local health agencies in staffing clinic sites for distribution of vaccines or antibiotics as a result of a bioterrorism attack or significant disease outbreak in Bergen County.

Bergen County urgently needs physicians, dentists, nurses, pharmacists and physician assistants to staff our Point of Dispensing Sites (PODS). If you volunteer, you and your family will receive the medication first, so that you can respond and feel confident that your family has been taken care of. Any licensed or certified health professional can volunteer his or her services.

In mid-February, Commissioner of Health Fred M. Jacobs MD, JD, announced that a Medical Reserve Corps has been established in all 21 counties in New Jersey. "We know from experience that volunteers are a vital part of our emergency preparedness response. I am pleased that New Jersey has a strong statewide network of volunteers who will continue to help us prepare for public health emergencies, both state and local."

Work has begun to organize a Medical Reserve Corps in Oakland. I held the first meeting on February 27 in the Council Chambers, and 15 health professionals who live in Oakland attended the meeting. A presentation was made by Jim Dockery from the Bergen County Division of Health Services.

The next meeting will take place on

April 10 at 7:30 p.m. in the Council Chambers. Over 100 nurses and other health professionals have been invited to attend. If we don't have your address and you are interested in attending, please come to this meeting on April 10. All health professionals mentioned earlier are also invited to attend.

Once organized, Oakland's group will become part of the Bergen County

Medical Reserve Corps so that it will be covered for liability insurance under the Emergency Health Powers Act.

In the event of an emergency, residents of Oakland would receive a message via the Reverse 911 Messaging Service with information on where they would go to receive the vaccination or antibiotics. Oakland's Office of Emergency Management would direct this response.

Brisk Activity at the 'New' Library

The Oakland Public Library staff reports that both adults and children are flocking to the recently opened new Library building. The library is open 54 hours a week to serve all of Oakland. Hours are Monday, Tuesday and Thursday from 10 a.m.-9 p.m. On Wednesday, Friday and Saturday, hours run from 10 a.m.-5 p.m.



The Children's Department hosts many regular and special programs for young readers. More information can be obtained by calling 201-337-5236. Beginning in early June, that number can also be called to get information on the summer reading and entertainment programs. Residents are urged to stop in and get acquainted with the new facilities. *In photo: Children's Librarian Debbie Pfeuffer and friends celebrate Dr. Seuss.*

You Can Star On Oakland Television

Ready on the set ... Roll tape ... Cue music ... Fade from black ... Action!

Have you ever dreamed of being the director of a movie or the star of your own TV show? Do you have your own video camera and wish that you could do something more with it? Now you can!

The Oakland Television Committee is seeking volunteers to help make television. No experience is necessary and the training is free in exchange for a couple of hours per month. If you were to go to school to learn these skills it would cost you lots of money. No kidding.

Learning the creative and technical aspects of television production and making new friends is only the beginning. Now is the perfect time to join, as we are

expanding our training classes for novice videographers.

You will be trained in camera operations, getting good sound for video, being an on-air personality, directing, and, finally, how to edit your work into a show.

Our volunteers attend our monthly staff meeting on the first Wednesday of each month, help televise at least one Mayor and Council meeting per month, and are involved in helping to produce one show per month.

Have we piqued your interest? Take the no-risk offer to join Oakland TV for six months. If you don't like it, then you walk away with no guilt. Download our application at www.oakland-nj.org; call 201-405-7590; or e-mail com72@optonline.net.

News From Oakland Schools

Message From The Superintendent ... Congratulations VMS

We are pleased to announce that our Valley Middle School ranks among the top 25 public schools teaching eighth grade students in New Jersey! This ranking was determined by the total average passing rate of a school's students on the 2005 Grade 8 State tests, and was reported in the *Star Ledger* on February 2, 2006.

Only six Bergen County schools made the best passing rate list, and this means that Valley Middle School's student achievement was among the top 10% of all New Jersey schools whose students took the required Grade Eight Proficiency Assessment.

This strong achievement of our students reflects our District's belief that every child can learn. It also speaks to the incredible strength of our Board, administrators, teachers and staff, as well as the academic commitment of our students. As important, we are appreciative that our students' parents and our community members

prize education and children, in general. Within such an environment, children can grow, learn, and "reach for the stars."

The community-home-school commitment to shared goals has helped to make Oakland such a special place to raise children. By all of us working together, Oakland's children benefit.

The State's Grade Eight Proficiency Assessment (GEPA) is administered to all public school eighth grade students in New Jersey in language arts literacy, mathematics and science. The passing rate averaged general education and special education students' scores on all of these tests. Valley Middle's average passing rate was 93.2%.

When informed of this recognition, Dr. Christopher Lane, VMS Principal, said: "We are thrilled to have been listed in the *Star Ledger* as a school in the top 10% total average passing rate on the GEPA. Our students, teachers, parents and staff worked hard to gain this success

and we are grateful for this acknowledgment."

This achievement shows that students are learning the Core Curriculum Content Standards mandated by the N.J.

Department of Education; thus, Oakland's students, upon graduation from Grade 8, are well prepared for high school.

The other Bergen County towns on the best passing rate list are: Ho-Ho-Kus, Old Tappan, Woodcliff Lake, Demarest, Allendale and Upper Saddle River.

Thank you, Oakland, for your support of children and for our schools.

*Sincerely, Dr. Richard G. Heflich
Superintendent of Schools*



School Board President Urges Residents To Get The Budget Facts and Then Vote April 18

It is that time of year again when the citizens of Oakland are asked to vote on their local K-8 school budget. The date this year is Tuesday, April 18th, from 2:00 p.m. until 9:00 p.m. at your local polling site.

As a member of the Board of Education, I can assure you that the budget was reviewed line by line by the Board, and that it is solid. The Board, together with Superintendent Dr. Heflich, and Business Administrator Louis Pepe, worked hard to keep the budget acceptable for the Oakland taxpayers while still providing the necessary funds for our schools to operate at a level where Oakland's children are given the opportunity to succeed in a challenging and safe environment.

Many factors come into play when putting together a budget. Almost 80% of the budget is made up of costs that the Board has little or no control over. Items such as transportation, benefits, salaries, utilities, special education and educational programs are mandated by the State, but come with no extra State money (*see related story on page 6*). In fact, the Oakland School District will probably receive the same state aid this year as it has for the past five

years. Trust me when I tell you that our basic operating costs have gone up a great deal over that time. Your Oakland schools try to operate each year working with less monetary resources from our State government. Eventually, the lack of money will be felt by our children in the classroom.

On Tuesday, April 18, you will be asked to vote on the school budget. As a Board of Education member, obviously, I want you to support the budget. It is the fairest for the taxpayers; but, more importantly, the best for the children of Oakland.

You owe it to the Oakland community to vote. Too many times voters minimize the school election, with typically less than 20% of the public voting. It is our right as American citizens to vote and to have a say in how our schools operate and educate Oakland's most valuable resource — children. Please take the time to learn about the school budget, ask questions, get the facts, and then vote!

*Jim Gaffney
President
Oakland Board of Education*

Voter Registration Changes In Place for 2006

NEW LEGISLATION HAS BEEN passed regarding elections. The voter registration deadline is now 21 days before a scheduled election, instead of the previous 29-day deadline. That made the last day this year to register to vote prior to the School Board election Tuesday, March 28 for the Tuesday, April 18 election.

The last day to register to vote prior to the Primary Election will be on Tuesday May 16. The Primary Election will take place on June 6. The polls will be open from 6:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.

The Borough Clerk's office will be open until 9:00 p.m. on the last day to register to vote, prior to any election. Please call the Borough Clerk's office with any questions you may have on Elections, at 201-337-8111.

Board Struggles With School Budget Amidst State Fiscal Uncertainty

Preparing a budget that ensures quality education for all students is a daunting task in the best of times. This year, the Board's work has been further complicated by the State's fiscal dilemma.

As of mid-March, the State still had not informed local school districts of the amount of State aid each would receive for the 2006/2007 school year. The cause of this delay is the revenue shortfall that the State is experiencing. New Jersey's new Governor, Jon Corzine, is working to develop a balanced budget while expenditures far exceed revenues.

Local districts, therefore, have been instructed to assume that there will be no increase in State aid when the final figures are announced. For Oakland, that will mean that we have had no increase for the last five years — despite rising enrollments and rising costs. Thus, State aid pays

a smaller and smaller percentage of the cost of educating children in our schools. In fact, if aid figures remain flat, the State will pay for less than 5% of education costs in Oakland.

Our 2006/2007 budget is feeling the pressure of rising costs in the following areas: heating school buildings, special education tuition, transportation, benefits, salaries/increasing enrollment, and facility needs.

- The District's heating costs have doubled from one year ago.

- Students attending out-of-district special education schools have increased from 18 to 24, thus driving tuition costs up 27%.

- Gasoline prices are driving transportation costs higher and out of district placements are resulting in expensive transportation contracts.

- Enrollment is expected to rise by 60 students next year; special education placements are ris-

ing as well, both of which require additional staff.

- Aging facilities repairs and improvements continue to be addressed year by year, with masonry deterioration and window/door replacements priority items in this year's budget.

To offset increased costs, the Board has sought to flat line discretionary spending, with no increase in supply accounts and with reductions in many. Additionally, the Board has sought to develop creative cost containment solutions to spiraling special education transportation costs. Rather than contracting these routes to an outside provider for in-District routes, the District will purchase a small vehicle and transport students in 2006/2007. With these initiatives, the Board is maintaining its commitment to the Oakland community to provide quality education in the most cost-effective manner possible.

Creating a Healthy Student Body • By Adam Silverstein, VMS Vice Principal

Recently, a great deal of attention has been paid to what an article in *Time* magazine referred to as "America's Couch Potato Epidemic." The unfortunate truth is that American adolescents, and many adults for that matter, are making extremely poor choices when it comes to the food they put in their bodies. Add that to a more sedentary lifestyle that results from countless hours playing video games, instant messaging friends, and surfing the Internet, and you

have a recipe for trouble.

Not only are teens that live such lifestyles at greater risk for developing diabetes, obesity and heart disease, but research tells us that they are also putting themselves at a severe disadvantage academically. There is a strong correlation between a poor diet, lack of exercise and difficulty in school. The good news is that the reverse is also true: healthy eating habits and a regular exercise routine often translate into academic success.

As a result, one of the district goals for the 2005-2006 school year has been for students in all grade levels to demonstrate an increased understanding of sound practices relative to exercise and nutrition, and the role each plays in maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

Every one of Oakland's four schools is hosting a healthy living day, where health and fitness will figure into every part of that day's curriculum. The schools will also host assembly programs geared toward healthy habits and various sports-o-thons to bring attention to various causes while keeping fit. Most importantly, food committee meetings will focus on improving the nutritional quality of the food served in the cafeterias.

Although the district goal officially concludes at the end of this school year, the obvious long-term goal is to help children develop healthier habits that last a long, long, lifetime. Here's to your health!

Eighth Annual Alice McDermott Art Show Slated for May

April showers bring more than May flowers! On May 9, students from the FLOW Public Schools will have the opportunity to display their talent and creativity. The 8th Annual Alice McDermott Art Show, held at Indian Hills High School, will include artwork from students in grades seven through 12. Pieces from a variety of mediums will be featured, including drawing, painting, digital media, photography, sculpture, ceramics, and two-dimensional mixed media. The opening reception will begin at 6:30 p.m. in the Auditorium.

Awards, which are determined by an independent panel of professional artists and art educators, will be presented beginning at 7:30 p.m. on May 9. We are proud of our students and invite you to join us for this special evening celebrating art.

School Roof and Heating Systems Deemed 'Emergent' By State

The New Jersey Department of Education recently declared the roofs on Manito Elementary School and Valley Middle School and the heating system at Valley Middle School "emergent projects." This designation indicates the critical need to replace these systems in the very near future.

The roof that covers the 200 and 300 wings at Valley Middle School has become porous, leading to considerable water seepage. Ceiling tiles have started to become swollen with water and barrels line the hallway during rainstorms and after snowfalls. The western section of this flat roof, which covers the gymnasium, cafeteria and library, was replaced, with State assistance, during the summer of 2005. The remaining sections of this roof are now also in need of immediate attention.

At Manito, the roof is original and dates back to 1961. Considerable leakage has begun and water is seeping into walls and interior areas of the school. This school year, locker rooms needed to be closed for several weeks because of the concerns that existed from the saturated ceilings.

The Valley Middle School heating and ventilation mechanical system is inefficient, unreliable and dangerous. In December, ruptures in the aged pipes that carry steam to heat the school's lower section caused the students and staff to evacuate the building in subfreezing temperatures. They were required to remain outside the school without outerwear as police and fire officials inspected the building after emergency repairs were made. Only after official approval was given could students and staff return to a designated common area while

clean-up continued and the building was deemed safe for occupancy. This incident followed an earlier system malfunction that occurred prior to the beginning of school on the same day. The two incidents on December 15 were the latest in a series of malfunctions in this aging mechanical system.

As emergent projects, the replacement of the two roofs and the heating system are fully eligible for State funding assistance. Therefore, the Board has requested the State contribute 40% of the cost of these projects, through Debt Service Aid, thereby reducing the annual costs of principal and interest payments on bonds. The Board will request Oakland's residents to approve 15-year bonds in the amount of \$2.73 million at a cost of approximately \$28.57 per year for the average assessed home, after Debt Service Aid is applied.

VMS Students Cross A Different Bridge

Why are Bill Gates and Warren Buffet willing to put up \$1 million to fund a program to teach bridge in American middle schools? Thanks to Amy Nellisen, an accredited Bridge teacher and ACBL Club director, a number of Valley Middle School students have discovered that playing this most popular card game does improve mathematics, logic and reasoning skills, as well as the ability to work as a team player.

Ms. Nellisen has been volunteering her time in an eight-week after-school program for the past three years to instruct VMS students in this challenging and educational game. Both Ms. Nellisen and Anne Solomon (club advisor) are thrilled with the amount of enthusiasm



these young players have been bringing to the club on a weekly basis. This year's club members include **Christopher Schneiweiss, Stephanie Vabre, Joseph Pille, Lauryn Hilpmann, Paul Ilge, Christian Arcari, Josh Berrian, Kevin Conlon-Riser, Brian Keihm, Sarah Polanski, Mark Itman and Kyle Mulligan.**

Show Choir Performance: Martin Luther King, Jr. Unity Service

The Valley Middle School Show Choir was invited to sing at the Martin Luther King, Jr. Unity Service on January 16 at the Ramapo Valley Baptist Church in Oakland.

The Oakland/Franklin Lakes Interfaith Council has joined together for many years to celebrate Dr. King in our community. The Show Choir was honored to be able to take part in the interdenominational service remembering the life of a leader who promoted unity and tolerance.

The students not only gave an outstanding choral performance, but equally set a fine example of the dedication and commitment of young people in our schools. It was a very rewarding experience for all and I thank my choir members and their families for showing such great support of the vocal music program at the Middle School and for their continual support of music education in the Oakland schools.

— Suzanne J. Hartsuiker
Choir Director
Valley Middle School

Read Across America Comes To Oakland Schools

Once again, the Oakland Public Schools celebrated Read Across America, a nation-wide literacy event, on March 3 with a variety of activities. This annual celebration commemorates the birthday of children's author Theodor Seuss Geisel, better known as Dr. Seuss.

Since this year's theme was "Cultural Diversity - Celebrating Differences," guest speakers Board of Education members **Jennifer Matts** and **John Scerbo**, VMS teacher and drama advisor **Jay Wordsman**, and **Karen Rockefeller**, District Reading/Language Arts Coordinator, began the day by reading a multi-cultural poem entitled "The Crayon Box That Talked," by Shane DeRolf. Using crayon box and crayon templates, teachers discussed the poem with students. Then students enjoyed a variety of art and writing activities.

In addition, the Oakland Education Association hosted a Read Across America Cafe in each school library during lunch periods. Students were able to go to the libraries to read in a cafe-like atmosphere. A special treat for Dogwood Hill School was the arrival of the Cat In The Hat, who read to Grade One students. Please enjoy "The Crayon Box That Talked."

The Crayon Box That Talked by Shane DeRolf

While walking in the toy store
The day before today
I overheard a crayon box
With many things to say

"I don't like the Red," said the Orange
and Green said, "Nor do I"
and no one here likes Yellow
But no one knows just why

"We are a box of crayons
that doesn't get along"
Said Blue to all the others
"Something here is wrong."

Well, I bought that box of crayons
And I took it home with me
And laid out all the colors
So the crayons could all see

They watched me as I colored
With Red and Blue and Green
And Black and White and Orange
And every color in between

They watched as Green became the grass
And Blue became the sky
The Yellow sun was shining bright
On White clouds drifting by

Colors changing as they touched
Becoming something new
They watched me as I colored
They watched until I was through

And when I'd finally finished
I began to walk away
And as I did the crayon box
Had something new to say

"I do like Red," said Orange
and Green said, "So do I"
and Blue you were terrific
so high up in the sky

"We are a box of crayons
each one of us unique
But when we get together
The picture is complete."

Reading With The Principals Brings Children To The 'New' Oakland Public Library

The students of the Oakland Public Schools are used to seeing their principals in a variety of places. From classrooms to cafeterias, playgrounds, art rooms and assemblies, the students know they can count on seeing their principals throughout their schools. This past winter, however, students in kindergarten through second grade had the opportunity to see the principals in a new setting — the Oakland Public Library.

In a concerted effort to celebrate reading, increase opportunities of appropriate leisure time activities and to acquaint children with the new children's wing of the public library, Barbara Ciambra of Heights School, Dr. Barbara Tillman from Manito School and Glenn Clark of Dogwood Hill School all took turns reading to their students at the public library.

Ms. Ciambra read to a group of over 30 children on January 17. She brought her "Stella Louella's Runaway Book," by Lisa Campbell Ernst, "A Bad Case of Stripes," by David Shannon, and "The Wonderful Happens," by Cynthia Rylant.

On February 7, Mr. Clark visited the Oakland Public Library with a

number of his favorite books. Explaining to the children that reading is one of his all-time favorite activities, Mr. Clark shared a number of wonderful children's stories — "Sneetches," by Dr. Seuss, "Swimmy," by Leo Lionni, and "A Fine, Fine School," by Sharon Creech.

Dr. Tillman read at the Oakland Public Library on March 1 to nearly 60 children from Manito School. Some of Dr. Tillman's selections included "Silly," by Mercer Mayer, "Boy's Soup or When the Giant Caught A Cold," by Loris Leysinski, and, "Elsina's Clouds," written by Jeanette Winter.

The head of Children's Services for the Oakland Public Library, Debbie Pfeuffer, was present for each of the special readers. Miss Debbie, as the children quickly come to know her, gave the children a tour of the new children's wing and stayed to assist any first or second grade children with signing up for library cards.

The principals and Tom Coyle, Director of the Library, all agreed that the objectives were met. The children saw that their principals certainly enjoy reading and, Dr. Tillman, Ms. Ciambra and Mr. Clark were all invited back in the fall for another guest reading.

Valley Middle School Athletic Report ...

BOY CHALLENGERS HAVE ANOTHER WINNING SEASON

The Valley Middle School Challengers boys' basketball team posted an 8-4 record for another solid season on the hardwood. Team captains **Brian Greer** and **Jason Chalmers** proved to be outstanding leaders throughout the season. Brian achieved a season-high 21 points in one game, while Jason used his passion for the game to pace the team to their eight victories. Both served as wonderful role models on and off the court.

Eighth grader **Chaz Werba** also proved to be a dominant player as well as a positive influence on the younger members of the team. Chaz led the team with 98 rebounds this season. Starter **Bryan Menduke** was a tremendous defensive asset to the team, as was **Nick Fiore**, who assisted the team both offensively and defensively with his natural athleticism.

Rounding out the team were **James Gaffney**, **Michael Laubauskas**, **Andrew Ballester** and **Jason Ogull**, who led the team with his intensity and his ability to draw charges against his opponents. The seventh grade members of the squad, **Jason Haddy**, **Nick Finizio**, **Joseph Wetzler**, **Andrew Sariyan** and **Thomas IX**, all made positive contributions to the team at crucial moments throughout the season.

The Challengers were also fortunate to have manager **Hunter Blatz** help the team stay refreshed and sharp during each game.

— *Coach Lorenzo Deraco*

Coach Deraco and his Boy Challengers Basketball Team had a good season.



Coach Jay Wordsman and his Lady Challengers had a super season — yet again!

GIRLS HOOPS TEAM REACHES NEW HEIGHTS

The Lady Challengers won an unprecedented 12 straight games en route to a spectacular 12-1 record, the team's ninth consecutive winning season.

Among the highlights of the season are a thrilling 48-41 victory against previously undefeated Ramsey, and an exciting 47-40 win against Glen Rock, which also entered the game undefeated. **Jessica Dittmer** led the Lady Challengers in scoring and blocked shots, while **Alexis Durando** paced the team in steals. Jessica and Alexis, the team captains, also started every game in the last two seasons.

Allison Setter led the team in rebounding, **Danielle Marceca** led in steals, and **Lindsay**

Rock paced the squad in three-pointers. **Victoria Guiliani** was a rugged defender and rebounder off the bench, while super-subs **Kelsey Mital**, **Theresa Wetzler**, **Kathleen Caporoso** and **Katie Enright** all enjoyed two solid seasons with the team.

With seventh graders **Jill Hochuli**, **Kerianne Pacheco**, **Jessica Schoepflin** and **Jasmine Yacoub** returning next season, along with the aforementioned Allison and Lindsay, the future of Oakland's girls' basketball team appears secure. The coach of the Lady Challengers

is **Jay Wordsman**, who has had an Oakland winning record of 113-39 during his 12 years at the helm. — *Coach Jay Wordsman*

CHEER TEAM HAS BANNER SEASON

Thanks to the ongoing support of administrators, faculty, family and fellow students, this year's VMS cheer squad had a spectacular season. Led by captains **Marisa McGuire** and **Nicole Pinto**, the squad of 15 started the season pumping up students at the annual pep rally, and ended the season winning a "degree of excellence" trophy in an area competition.

In between were hours and hours of practice spent perfecting routines that they would use to

cheer on both the boys' and girls' basketball teams. Sporting new pom-poms, the squad motivated the players and entertained spectators. From the first "hello" cheer to the spectacular half-time performance, to the terrific variety of sideline cheers, the squad's hard work and dedication really paid off this season.

— *Coaches Phylissa Avolio and Tracy Nabba*

Oakland's VMS cheer team cheers on both the boys' and girls' basketball teams.



'15-Minute Child Break' Coming To Oakland April 6

The Partnership for a Drug-Free New Jersey (PDFNJ) is bringing its successful parenting program – "The 15-Minute Child Break" – to Oakland. This FREE one-hour program is designed to empower and assist parents in building better communication with their kids. The program is being hosted by the Oakland PTO Council.

The "15-Minute Child Break" presentation will be held at Valley Middle School on April 6 at 7:00 p.m. A brief question-and-answer period will follow. Local resource materials and information will also be provided.

The "15-Minute Child Break" was developed based on research from PDFNJ's 2000 Middle School Study on Substance Use, which found that kids who have consistent communication with a parent or caregiver every day are 67% less likely to engage in substance abuse.

Please contact Lorraine Knox at 201-651-0988 for additional information.

You Can Help Oakland Save Money

Did you know that every time you throw your junk mail or cereal boxes in your household trash you're taking away from Oakland's total recycling tonnage? That's money down the drain – and too many of us are letting it happen!

Please recycle ALL your paper material, including all cardboard, cereal boxes or chip board, mixed office paper, computer paper, newspaper, magazines, telephone books, junk mail, wrapping paper, books, etc. Paper contaminated with food should not be included.

We need to reduce, reuse, compost and recycle as much as possible. Recycling is not only good for the environment; it also makes good business sense. If we could take more items out of the solid waste stream by recycling, we would reduce our costs as a Borough.

OAKLAND BOROUGH COUNCIL

Mayor John Szabo

Council President Matt Kazmierczak

Council Members

Donald T. Burns • Frank Di Pentima

Karen Marcalus • Pat Pignatelli

Betsy Stagg

U.S. POSTAGE PAID
NON-PROFIT
Presort Standard
Permit No. 7
Oakland, NJ

OAKLAND BOARD OF EDUCATION

Superintendent Dr. Richard G. Heflich

Business Administrator Louis J. Pepe

Board of Education Members

James Gaffney **President**

Jennifer Matts **Vice President**

James Mulcahy • John Scerbo

Marybeth Visconti

POSTAL PATRON
OAKLAND, NEW JERSEY 07436

COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION

Michael Jacobsen **Chairman**

George Maturi **Vice Chairman**

Fred Birks • Peter Foley

Ron Lottermann • Seth Stansfield

CROSSROADS STAFF

Michael Jacobsen • Karen Marcalus