

ANNUAL ADDRESS

Political leaders support county executive

BY ANDREW SEGEDIN
Special to Verona-Cedar Grove Times

Some of the state's most powerful political leaders descended upon Essex County Hospital Center in Cedar Grove Tuesday evening for County Executive Joseph DiVincenzo's State of the County Address.

New Jersey Senate President Stephen Sweeney, New Jersey Assembly Speaker Sheila Oliver, Newark Mayor Cory Booker and others took to the podium

to show their support and admiration for the county executive. Just as the line of dignitaries appeared to end, DiVincenzo took the floor.

"Where's my friend?" the county executive asked.

Gov. Chris Christie then entered to a roaring applause.

Nodding toward his own collaborations with the Democrats in the room, including Sweeney, Oliver and DiVincenzo, Christie called for all New Jersey public officials to set aside politics and focus on rebuilding New Jersey in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy.

"It's an important time in our state's history ... we have enormous challenges before us as a state because so many of our people are suffering," Christie said. "Forty thousand families in New Jersey are still homeless after Hurricane Sandy. Life for most folks in New Jersey has gotten back to normal, but for those 40,000 families, life is still turned completely upside down."

Alluding to those New Jerseyans who lost their homes and memories in the October storm, Christie highlighted the importance of not only restoring New Jersey, but building a better state — one that is strong enough to bare the brunt of "100-year storms" that appear to have become the norm.

DiVincenzo, both in introducing Christie and in speaking with The Montclair Times following his address, credited the governor with coming to Essex County's aid and securing \$60 billion in federal aid to help rebuild the state.

"You know the thing is, he was in constant contact with us with the situations we had here, the problems that we had here," DiVincenzo told The Times.

Calling restoration "still very much a work in progress" Oliver said that uncertainty regarding federal funding has prevented New Jersey from embarking on a massive rebuilding effort, including the reconstruction of

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WEST ORANGE TEACHER PLEADS GUILTY

VHS alum to register as sex offender

BY LILLIAN ORTIZ

Editor

Erica DePalo, a West Orange High School teacher and graduate of Verona High School, pleaded guilty to child endangerment for having sex with a 15-year-old student, according to the Essex County Prosecutor's office.

DePalo, who was once dubbed

Essex County's "Teacher of the Year," pleaded guilty to third degree endangering the welfare of a child for having sexual relations with the male student during the summer of 2012, according to Tony Gutierrez, an assistant prosecutor who handled the case. DePalo, a Montclair resident, was originally charged in August 2012 with first-degree aggravated sexu-

al assault, second-degree sexual assault, and endangering the welfare of a child, according to the prosecutor's office. She plead not guilty to those charges during a September 2012 arraignment, according to an article in The Montclair Times, a sister publication of the Verona-Cedar Grove Times.

The victim, a student in DePa-

lo's English class, visited the VHS alumna at her apartment and the two had sexual relations on more than one occasion, the release indicated.

"This is a just resolution of the case because it frees the victim from having to testify in open court," Gutierrez stated. "The victim's family is also relieved that their son can now move forward."

DePalo, 33, is scheduled to be sentenced on April 29 before Judge Peter V. Ryan at the Essex County Veterans Courthouse in Newark.

She is expected to receive a three-year suspended sentence with lifelong parole supervision, the release stated. After 15 years,

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50 simultaneous, arranged marriages



More than 500 guests went to The Grove catering hall in Cedar Grove on Saturday to watch as 50 couples wed in an international mass ceremony. The event, which consisted of arranged marriages, was telecast to 17 locations in the United States and 194 nations by the Unification Movement Church. **Read the story on our website, found at www.northjersey.com/verona-cedargrove.**

ADAM ANIK/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

THE ANNUAL HUNT

Six years later, the deer debate rages on

Editor's Note: This is the first in a series of articles in which the Verona-Cedar Grove Times will take a closer look at debates surrounding Essex County's annual deer hunt.

BY MARIA KARIDIS
Managing Editor

In this year's six-day deer hunt, 104 deer were removed from Essex County's Hilltop Reservation, the old hospital center in Cedar Grove and South Mountain Reservation, according to the office of county executive Joseph DiVincenzo Jr. In its sixth year, the 2013 hunt consisted of nine sessions, down from the inaugural 24-session hunt in 2008 because the local deer herd has shrunk to levels that require less intervention, officials have publicly stated.

Essex County notes the detail on its hunt documentation for the public and media every year, those numbers do not have to be reported to the state.

The fetuses are not counted in state tallies because "recent studies in Pennsylvania have shown that 50 percent of fetuses don't live to be fawns 6 months of age," wrote Susan Predle, principal biologist for the NJ Division of Fish and Wildlife, in an email obtained by the Verona-Cedar Grove Times.

At this time last year, DiVincenzo announced that he was unsure as to whether there was a need to have a hunt in 2013. He subsequently hired Hot Shot Infrared Inspections Inc. to perform an aerial, infrared observation conducted on two nights in March 2012 to assess deer populations on county land. Then, during the same month, county employees conducted a spotlight count of the same areas from inside a motor vehicle.

According to a letter from Hot Shot Infrared Inspections Inc. to the Essex County Park Commission, there were 85 deer total counted — 10 in Eagle Rock, 34 in Hilltop and 41 in South Mountain.

During the spotlight count, according to an official report



At left, an over-browsed forest with conditions reportedly similar to those of local reservations in Hutcheson Memorial Forest in Franklin Township. At right, a relatively healthy forest in Duke Farms in Hillsborough makes use of a deer enclosure. (Photos taken in 2012.)

obtained by the Times, 29 deer in South Mountain, 23 in Hilltop and four at Eagle Rock Reservation were found. However, much of the reservations, "because of topography, forest cover or road access" are not viewable by spotlight, the report says. So, county officials multiplied the amount of deer they did see by the percentage of land they could not survey to come up with estimated totals of deer. Their estimations yielded 211 deer total — 131 in South Mountain, 64 in Hilltop and 16 in Eagle Rock, according to the report.

Verona resident Marilyn English and West Orange resident Carol Rivelle, both who have launched multiple lawsuits against the county in relation to its hunts, argue that the infrared and spotlight counts are both questionable and not indicative of the need for a hunt.

"Something's off with these numbers," Rivelle said, noting that the spotlight count estimates are far higher than the infrared findings.

"Eighty five deer? Come on. Does that sound like enough to merit another slaughter," English asked, citing the infrared survey. "I don't think so."

Meanwhile, Theresa Trapp of the Hilltop Conservancy maintains that deer overpopulation is a major problem from an ecological standpoint.

After DiVincenzo had publicly expressed his uncertainty about the hunt's future, members of

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Spirited squads

Cheerleading teams
perform well
in competition season.

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Camera shy?

Verona town council debates
televising additional meetings.

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GUILTY

FROM PAGE A1

DePalos may apply for relief from parole supervision, the release indicated.

DePalos must also register as a sex offender under Megan's Law, forfeit her teaching license, and she can never seek work as a public employee.

When DePalos was presented a commendation from the Essex County Board of Chosen Freeholders for being named the county's "Teacher of the Year" in 2011, she said, "I am merely a representative of all the hardworking dedicated teachers, especially those with whom I work at West Orange High School ... teachers who are committed to their students, who consistently advocate for their students, and who exceedingly go above and beyond

their everyday duties and job descriptions," according to an article in the Verona-Cedar Grove Times.

At that time, DePalos was working on a Master of Education degree in educational leadership at The College of New Jersey, according to the article.

One of the presenters of the commendation was District 4 Freeholder Leonard M. Luciano, a school teacher in the Newark School District. At the time, Luciano said it was nice to read more positive news about public education as there are many negative pieces in the press.

When the Times reached out Luciano Wednesday, he said, "As



Erica DePalos

the Essex County District 4 freeholder and a public school teacher of nine years, I am deeply saddened by the unconscionable acts of Mrs. DePalos. It is our responsibility, as elected officials and public school teachers, to perform our duties as leaders in our communities and schools with the utmost professionalism and conduct ourselves in a manner that would never put a child in the position that Mrs. DePalos has done.

"I hope the members of our communities understand the seriousness of such behavior and I hope that moving forward the parents and family members who send their children to school know that our public schools are to be a safe haven where children – both male and female – should feel comfortable with their teachers."

Email: ortizl@northjersey.com

TROOP 20341**Girl Scouts make dresses, help change lives worldwide**

The Verona Girl Scout Troop 20341 recently worked on their "Dress a Girl Around the World" project. The project is run by Hope4Women International and helps to give back to females

around the world by providing them with a dress of their own. The troop's co-leaders, Rosa Nunez and Kristin Shea, are now asking area residents to join the cause by donating supplies.

For more information on the project and how to get involved, contact Nunez at rosy@coolmacgames.com or visit www.dressagirlaroundtheworld.com.

COUNTY

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roadways and bridges, and loans to impacted homeowners and business owners.

"I think we were in emergency-assistance mode for families, and I don't think we have yet seen the actual rollout of reconstruction," Oliver said.

A walk in the parks

During his address, DiVincenzo focused on the ever-expanding county parks-and-recreation options and the county's practice of using shared services as a revenue generator.

"Everyone talks about shared services, but we're doing it, saving

counterpart agencies money and creating new revenue," DiVincenzo said during his address.

Asked by The Montclair Times following his speech for specific examples, DiVincenzo credited Essex County's partnerships in housing federal, state and other counties' prisoners for bringing nearly \$47 million into the county last year. Essex County Hospital Center, the location of this year's address, generated an additional \$13.6 million in 2012 by providing care and services to patients from the state and outside counties, DiVincenzo said.

The county executive excitedly spoke of Turtle Back Zoo's \$4.3 million in revenue in 2012 as well as its upcoming 50th birthday celebration, which will bring in a new

children's playground, an 82,000-gallon sea lion pool and a 1,600-gallon touch tank full of sharks and sting rays.

Locally, the county executive announced improved water management in Montclair's Anderson Park, revamped lighting and entranceways for Brookdale Park, and native plant revitalization in nearby Hilltop Reservation.

"While we will offer new sites and grounds to explore, our team remains committed to improving the quality of life for all 22 towns," said DiVincenzo.

Andrew Segedin is a staff writer for The Montclair Times.

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