

Sussex administrator quitting over harassment

By PATTY PAUGH

Acting Sussex County Administrator Anthony Thonnerieux said yesterday he plans to resign effective today, charging that harassment from Freeholder Joseph DelBagno and political cronyism led to his decision.

At the same time, another key county official, Fred Cooper, announced his retirement yesterday. He leaves office effective Saturday.

Cooper, who decided not to seek re-election this year, said he decided to depart before his term expires Jan. 1 so he can spend more time with his family. He named Undersheriff Michael Blahut acting sheriff as required by state law.

Thonnerieux said he was unable to fulfill the official duties of his \$56,000 a year job because of DelBagno's refusal to talk to him and threats to "get him."

He also contended restructuring of county government, which is being headed by DelBagno, has turned into a way to reward the freeholder's campaign supporters with high-paying jobs.

"DelBagno is not concerned with what's going to happen to the county government at this point in time. He's

Freeholder's pressure, cronyism blamed by acting official for move

concerned about getting jobs for people who contributed to his campaign," said Thonnerieux.

The acting administrator cited as examples the hiring of county Emergency Management Coordinator John Bopp as risk manager and Stillwater Committeewoman Billie Jane Madden as the county's director of human services this month. Both supported DelBagno's candidacy last year, he said.

The biggest split between DelBagno and Thonnerieux occurred two weeks ago over an assistant administrator appointment. DelBagno favored former Byram Manager Harold Demellier for the \$50,000 to \$70,000 post, while Thonnerieux supported another, unidentified man who lacked government experience.

Thonnerieux said DelBagno has harassed him since he failed to acquiesce to Demellier's appointment. For example, he said DelBagno is holding a

meeting on restructuring with a county adviser today, but did not invite Thonnerieux.

"To me, that's harassment," Thonnerieux added.

DelBagno declined to respond to Thonnerieux's charges yesterday. However, he accused Thonnerieux of resigning out of embarrassment after the acting administrator's choice for the second-in-command slot was not appointed. The position has not been filled.

"It was self-evident by the statements (Thonnerieux) was making that he wanted it his way or no way," DelBagno said. "I think at one point Mr. Thonnerieux considered himself the fourth freeholder."

Freeholder Director Michael LaRose conceded Thonnerieux's departure would hinder progress on some county projects, but he vowed work will proceed.

One of the biggest tasks will be

finding a new administrator, a job that will be more difficult because of the nature of Thonnerieux's resignation, according to LaRose. He said any qualified job applicant will question Thonnerieux's departure and want assurances that their job will exist next year when three new freeholders are seated as the board expands.

LaRose met with members of the county's staff yesterday to discuss the impact of Thonnerieux's resignation. Freeholder Clerk Susan Capozzoli and county Budget Director Patrick Bailey will deal with day-to-day questions normally handled by the administrator, he added.

He maintained the restructuring of county government, which is under way, will lessen the blow of Thonnerieux's sudden departure. LaRose said he continues to support efforts to streamline the government functions despite Thonnerieux's criticism of the process.

Thonnerieux said he originally favored restructuring county government to streamline operations, but he complained it has become a vehicle for creating jobs.

No one interested in Phillipsburg post

By DAVID VANHORN

Paul Rummerfield is vacillating whether he wants to keep it, and his support is shaky. Al Pianelli, Meryl Crozier, Daniel Duckworth, Gloria Decker and Ronald Titus say they don't want it, and Joseph Blanchfield isn't talking.

The cast of the drama is the Phillipsburg Town Council, and the role they're talking about is a big one—the mayor.

The town council every two years elects a mayor, who runs the council meetings but has no administrative power in Phillipsburg's council-manager form of government. The mayor will be chosen when the governing body reorganizes Saturday.

Mayor Paul Rummerfield hasn't decided whether he will seek a third straight term. Rummerfield, who became Phillipsburg's youngest mayor at age 27 in 1981 and has been mayor for six of his 10 years on the council, said the job is "time-consuming" and keeps him away from his two young daughters.

"Even though it is ceremonial, you are put on additional boards that require additional nights out," Rummerfield said.

Rummerfield has differed with the council majority on several issues. This year, he objected to an 11.9 percent raise for former town manager Peter Miller and to a lawsuit to stop one-way westbound toll collections at the Route 22 bridge.

Council members Crozier and Pianelli say they have similar reasons why they won't vote for Rummerfield. Pianelli said Rummerfield is a "gentleman" and could have been a good mayor, but has been a poor communi-

cator and failed to work with Miller.

"I think Paul has done a lousy job," Pianelli said. "We've got to get some positive thinking and communication."

Rummerfield scoffed at that criticism and said his hold on the mayor's job is tenuous because of "petty jealousies and personalities."

Crozier said, "I think we very definitely need a change. The public is definitely looking for better things, better communication on the council and definitely leadership."

Another person who wants a change at the top is Decker, one of three newcomers who won the May council election. Decker, Titus and Blanchfield will be sworn in Saturday, replacing Fred Rufe, Christopher Wameling and Francis Reilly.

"I believe that different people should serve as mayor," Decker said. "If you go by what the voters said in the election, they said they wanted some new blood in the municipal building."

Deputy Mayor Duckworth is a solid Rummerfield supporter, while Titus said he would consider supporting Rummerfield or anyone else who is interested.

"I'm not writing anybody off," Titus said.

Blanchfield, the top vote-getter in the election, declined to say if he would support Rummerfield or whether he wants to become mayor. The other five council members and council-elect said they aren't interested in the post for various reasons.

Frank Tolotta, whose appointment as acting town manager expires this week, probably will be reappointed Saturday, according to current and incoming members.

Commander of Picatinny Arsenal awaiting reassignment

Officials at Picatinny Arsenal confirmed yesterday that the base in Rockaway Township will soon lose its commanding officer.

Base spokesman Peter Rowland said Brig. Gen. Joseph Raffiani Jr. is "up for reassignment" and will leave the post "later this summer." Raffiani, a New Jersey native, was assigned to the base in July 1987.

While Rowland declined to say where Raffiani's new post would be, his confirmation ended speculation of the general's departure.

Morris County Freeholder Director Patric Hyland, who met with Raffiani last week to discuss sitting a new Morris County jail at the base, said he learned from Army officials that the

general would be going to a post in Michigan.

"Those orders are coming through now," Rowland said of the general's move. "I don't know where he is going but I'll have a release on it when it becomes available."

Raffiani, 49, is in his 28th year of military service, having done tours in

Vietnam in 1966 and 1967. Born in Paterson and a Rutgers University graduate, Raffiani also holds a degree from Tulane University.

He replaced Brig. Gen. Richard Beltson at Picatinny, Morris County's largest employer, and implemented new techniques for dealing with hazardous materials at the facility during his tenure.

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Builders fight Mendham on water connection fees

By BILL RILEY

The New Jersey Builders Association (NJBA) yesterday sued Mendham to challenge the legality of a 1987 ordinance that imposes a \$3,000 fee for new connections to the borough's water system.

The suit, filed in Morristown, contends the fee is "unreasonable, excessive and illegal" and imposes an unacceptable cost on any of the NJBA's 3,000 members who wish to construct residences in Mendham. According to the legal papers, the \$3,000 connection fee must be paid to the borough and the property must be served by the municipal water system before the municipality will issue a building permit for new construction.

The suit seeks to have a court strike down the ordinance as unjustified

and illegal.

"I can't say what an average or normal connection fee is, only that we feel that \$3,000 is excessive," said the builders' lawyer, Ben D. Shriak. He explained the nonprofit organization, which represents developers, builders, contractors and building tradesmen, "regularly reviews" local fee ordinances adopted by municipalities and utility authorities around the state.

"If we see something that appears to be excessive, the NJBA or some of its individual members will challenge the fees in court and make the municipality or authority justify it," Shriak said.

Mendham's municipal attorney, Barry M. Johnston, said he was not aware such a lawsuit had been filed and declined to comment on the issues until after he reviews the legal papers.

Drugs ruled out in fatal crash

Toxicology tests on a teen crash victim have shown he was free of any drugs or alcohol, and Denville police concluded the May 14 accident was just that.

Tests by the state Medical Examiner's Office showed "no traces" of drugs or alcohol in the system of Mark L. Adest, 17, of Montville, according to a statement issued by Denville police.

Adest died when his van struck a utility pole on Route 10 and burst into flames early that morning. His prom date, Deborah Segal of Randolph, was

rescued from the vehicle by passing motorists but died 10 days later from her injuries.

Police Chief Howard Shaw said an "intensive investigation concluded this was in fact an accident, and not caused by the involvement of another vehicle, drugs or alcohol involvement."

At the time of the accident, friends and acquaintances of Adest said the Newark Academy football player did not drink and was a member of Students Against Drunk Driving.

Man in car accident dies from his injuries

A 57-year-old Orange man hurt in a two-car accident Sunday later died from his injuries, police said yesterday.

The accident happened on High Street near Park Avenue.

Police Director Charles Cobbert identified the victim as Norm Bland and the driver of the other vehicle as Marcos W. Luddenal of North Harrison Street, East Orange.

Neither Bland nor Luddenal had driver's licenses when their cars collided about 4:30 p.m., the director noted.

Bland had "stopped on High Street, near Park Avenue, while wait-

ing for the red light to change, when his 1977 Ford was rear-ended by a 1981 Dodge driven by Luddenal," Cobbert said.

Bland was taken to University Hospital in Newark, where he was pronounced dead at 7 p.m., he added.

Besides driving without a license, Cobbert said, the victim's vehicle was unregistered.

Prior to his death, police issued Bland two tickets for the two offenses. Cobbert said authorities gave Luddenal a summons charging driving without a license. Both vehicles were impounded.

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