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Kings supermarkets may close

Kings supermarkets in Warren Township, Bernardsville and the Gillette section of Long Hill Township may be closed early next year unless they can be sold, according to notices sent by the business to local officials.

Numerous other Kings stores in the area are being purchased by Acme Markets, Inc., however, and are expected to remain open and continue operating under the Kings banner. That includes supermarkets in Bedminster Township, Morristown, Mendham, Chatham, Florham Park, Boonton and Whitehouse Station.

"Yes, those stores have been purchased but the whole thing is still under review

by the FTC (Federal Trade Commission)" Kim Yorio, a spokesperson for Kings, said on Thursday.

Yorio said she did not have a date for the expected transition to the new ownership group, but said the stores would remain open throughout the process.

"You won't notice anything," she said. "The banners are staying the same. As long as the transactions go through, those stores are 100 percent a seamless operation."

She said there would be no change in the stores product lines. "They're not going to be Acmes - they're going to be operated as Kings, exactly as they are."

But the supermarkets in Bernardsville, Warren and Gillette are not part of the sale. The company is actively seeking buyers but if deals are not reached, they may close in early January.

Bernardsville officials were informed of the business status in a Nov. 9 notice signed by Kings Chief Executive Officer Judith Spires. The "same exact letter" was sent to officials in Warren and Long Hill Township, Yorio said.

There have been persistent rumors for months that some local Kings stores were in danger of closure, particularly after the business announced in August that it had voluntarily commenced

Chapter 11 proceedings in U.S. Bankruptcy Court.

It was subsequently reported that the Idaho-based Albertsons Co., the owner of Acme Markets, would be purchasing 27 Kings and Balducci's stores that would "retain their banners."

According to an Oct. 14 story in Supermarket News, Albertsons is the nation's second-largest supermarket operator. Kroger is the largest.

The Nov. 9 email to local officials said the Warren, Gillette and Bernardsville stores are "not presently among the stores that are anticipated to be part of the sale."

The company is "actively in the process of seeking a

buyer" for the supermarkets, it said, but if the company is unable to find a buyer, the stores will close to close and their employees terminated.

The notice was provided to the municipalities by the company to comply with legal obligations under the Federal Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification (WARN) Act. The notice was also sent to the state Department of Labor and Division of Unemployment.

Yorio said it is "100 percent the intent" to retain current employees at the other Kings supermarkets to be purchased by Acme Markets.

The Nov. 9 email from the company says the sale to Acme is being made "in light

of difficult business and financial conditions."

It further notes that managerial employees at the supermarket are not represented by a union, but non-managerial workers are represented by United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Locals 360 and 464A and "are subject to a collective bargaining agreement."

If the supermarkets need to close, the closure "will not occur for at least 60 days" from the date of the notice. Employees could lose their jobs "on or about Jan. 12, 2021, or within a 14-day period beginning that date." The date is subject to change.

Based in Parsippany, Kings has 23 stores in New Jersey

Warren Township honors veterans

By CLAUDIA CEVA
STAFF WRITER

WARREN TWP. - More than 20 residents, police officers and township officials paid tribute to the men and women of the United States military on a warm, muggy morning, Wednesday, Nov. 11.

The brief ceremony took place at the war memorial in the center of the municipal complex on Mountain Boulevard.

Mayor Michael "Mick" Marion said it was important to be able to honor "those who have sacrificed for us," especially amid the ongoing global health crisis.

Attendees were then asked to join him and rest of the Township Committee in reciting the pledge of allegiance, followed by a moment of silence as committee members Victor Sordillo, Jolanta Maziarz and Gary DiNardo placed a ceremonial wreath in front of the war memorial.

Robert Campione, a Warren resident and past commander of American Legion Post 293 who served in the U.S. Navy during the Korean War, wished everyone in attendance "great health."



Photo by Claudia Ceva

From left, Warren Township Committee members Victor Sordillo, Jolanta Maziarz and Gary DiNardo prepare to place a wreath to commemorate those who have served in the U.S. military during the township's Veterans Day ceremony on Wednesday, Nov. 11. Please see videos from the ceremony at echoes-sentinel.com and a related photo on page 4.

Deputy Mayor George Lazo then led with a prayer for all veterans.

"God, let every veteran of our nation's armed forces feel truly and appropriately honored by the attention and appreciation of their fellow citizens," he said. "Let no one feel forgotten or neglected. Let every veteran, men and women, young or old, feel a deep and adoring gratitude of the people of our nation."

Marion concluded the pro-

ceedings with a final message of hope and healing.

"With all the topics dividing our country over the past several months, it is my hope, as well as all of ours, that today we come together for our veterans," he said.

If it were not for the servicemen and women of this country, he said we would not be able to enjoy the freedoms many take for granted. "God bless our veterans," Marion said.

Local GOP candidates on cusp of victory

It remains unclear exactly how many votes are left to be counted in Warren and Watchung, but Republican candidates in both towns continue hold significant leads in races for local office.

The Somerset County Clerk's Office posted updated election results Friday afternoon, Nov. 13, but had not updated the results as of press time Tuesday afternoon. County Clerk Steve Peter said Monday there were roughly 4,000 mail-in ballots still to be counted across the county, along with roughly 9,000 provisional ballots, but information on how many ballots remained from Warren and Watchung was not available.

The count was to be finalized this Friday, Nov. 20.

With four candidates running for two, three-year seats on the Warren Township Committee, Republican incumbents George K. Lazo and Michael "Mick" Marion continued to expand their lead over Democrats and John Patrick Fahy and Ilana Goldstein-Barsky per the latest results. The Republicans each picked up about 300 new votes with the latest count, whereas the Democrats each gained about 100 votes.

The updated results showed Lazo with 5,441 votes,

Marion with 5,364 votes, Fahy with 4,019 votes and Goldstein-Barsky with 3,947 votes.

Exact turnout figures were not immediately available as the vote count continues. However, data posted by the county clerk's office show at least 72 percent of Warren's registered voters participated in the election, as some 9,976 Warren ballots have been counted thus far in a town with 13,700 registered voters.

If the results stand, Lazo and Marion will begin their fourth consecutive terms on the all-Republican committee in January.

Warren Township Democratic Municipal Committee Chair Patricia O'Byrne thanked the voters for their support and offered congratulations for Lazo and Marion.

"We'd like to thank the Warren Democratic Committee, our many supporters and all of the volunteers who contributed to our campaign," O'Byrne said. "Our candidates received nearly 8,000 votes, a Democratic record for Warren Township. Although we fell short of the votes needed to claim a victory, we are very proud of the race we ran. Our favorable results show that many Warren residents have a strong desire to see change in local govern-

ment.

"We wish George Lazo and Mick Marion well, and we will support them in any way we can as they help Warren navigate its way through its current public health and economic challenges."

Lazo and Marion declined to comment on the results until all votes are counted.

In Watchung, Republicans also widened their lead in the race for two, three-year seats on the Borough Council, but not by much. Republicans Ronald Jubin and Freddie Hayeck picked up 62 and 64 new votes with the latest update, respectively, whereas Democrats Yvette Nora and Richard Steinfeld gained 49 and 30 new votes, respectively.

Jubin, an incumbent, led with 2,030 votes, followed by Hayeck with 2,014 votes, Nora with 1,585 votes, and Democrat Richard Steinfeld with 1,462 votes.

Watchung, like Warren, also saw a staggering voter turnout of at least 70 percent. Some 3,722 Watchung ballots have been counted from the 5,257 registered voters in the borough.

The Borough Council is currently split 4-2 in favor of the Democrats with a

PLEASE SEE RESULTS, PAGE 8

LONG HILL TOWNSHIP SCHOOLS

More in-school learning coming for some students

By CLAUDIA CEVA
STAFF WRITER

LONG HILL TWP. - The district's youngest students are to receive more days of weekly in-person instruction starting at the end of November.

Long Hill Interim Superintendent Laura Morana said

the entire kindergarten and first grade would be learning from the physical classroom up to five days a week in an update to the district's hybrid reopening plan presented at a virtual Board of Education meeting on Monday, Nov. 9. The change would take effect the week of Monday, Nov. 30.

The two student cohorts in each of kindergarten and first grade would alternate between spending four and five days a week in school, with one cohort learning from home on Wednesday each week. The cohort that receives four days of in-person instruction one week,

with Wednesday at home, would receive five days the next week.

Additionally, all Long Hill students with Individual Education Programs (IEPs) and those in the English Language Learners (ELL) program would also be in-person five days a week.

General education students in grades 2-8 would receive up to three days of in-person instruction with both cohorts alternating every Wednesday.

All students would be given the option to learn fully remotely.

Morana said there were "many factors" taken into

account when formulating the updated plan, particularly the recent rise in COVID-19 cases in Long Hill, New Jersey and the rest of the country.

"The more that we interact with the Department of

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