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FRIENDS, COLLEAGUES OFFER REMEMBRANCES OF REV. THOMAS PETERS

By NICOLE ZANCHELLI
STAFF WRITER

LONG HILL TWP. – Father Richard Carton of St. Vincent de Paul Catholic Church in Stirling often took walks with his three dogs to get to know the neighborhood when he moved here a decade ago.

One day, in the corner of his eye, he noticed a man briskly walking towards him, hurried. When the man drew closer, a warm smile stretched across his face, he offered his hand:

"Hello, welcome to Stirling. I'm Tom Peters, your neighbor."

Turning strangers into friends wasn't out of the ordinary for the Rev. Dr. Thomas Peters, former pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in Stirling.

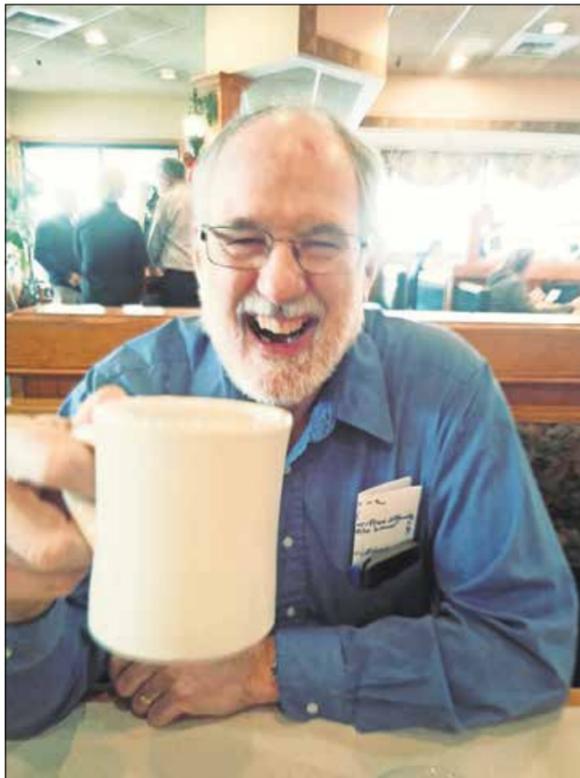
"There were no strangers. He loved meeting new people, loved seeing people he already knew and was really connected to the people in the congregation," said the Rev. Barbara Aspinall, interim pastor of the First Presbyterian Church. "He was in many ways a shepherd of that flock."

Hospitable, encouraging, engaging and upbeat — it was just the kind of man he was.

Peters passed away on Friday, July 9 at the age of 65 after suffering complications from a bone marrow transplant he received in February.

He is survived by his wife of 42 years, the Rev. Barbara Grace Peters, his son Trevor and his daughter Alison.

"As a man of faith, his commitment to God and his service to those in need impacted the lives of his congregation and many others," Carton said. "He was passionate about finding ways to reach out and assist both locally and further afield."



The First Presbyterian Church of Stirling's beloved former pastor, the Rev. Dr. Thomas Peters, was remembered fondly this week by friends and congregation members. Peters passed away on July 9. A memorial service is planned on Saturday, July 31 at Wilson Memorial Union Church in Watchung.

When Tom and Barbara Peters moved to Stirling in 1990, he became the pastor of the First Presbyterian Church, where he served his congregation for more than 30 years until his retirement in January.

His wife also found her calling as pastor at Wilson Memorial Union Church in Watchung and retired in January, fulfilling their dream of beginning their lives in the clergy together and retiring together.

"It was always a joy when Tom would be able to join us at Wilson events," said the Rev. Michael Droege, acting pastor at Wilson Memorial. "No one perceived Tom as a 'second pastor' but as a friend who knew their names and cared about their lives. I always looked forward to when our paths would

PLEASE SEE PASTOR, PAGE 8

WATCHUNG BOROUGH COUNCIL

Watchung Council ethics probe 'inconclusive'

By DAVID POLAKIEWICZ
EDITOR

WATCHUNG – It is "inconclusive" whether any Borough Council member or official committed an ethics violation by improperly disclosing information from a July 2020 executive session.

That was the finding of Calvin Souder, an outside legal counsel hired by the borough to investigate the matter. Souder's 13-page investigative report, with portions redacted, was released to the council and public on Friday, July 23.

"Unfortunately, after conducting the investigation, interviews and reviewing documents in this case, the finding is inconclusive as to whether or not there was improper disclosure," Souder wrote in a cover letter.

Later, Souder added: "We are unable to conclude with a degree of certainty if there was a breach of the required confidentiality of the discussions in executive session, or in the alternative, whether the specific information was obtained prior to and/or outside the realm of the executive session discussions."

According to Souder, the recommended course of action in such an inconclusive finding is to mandate ethics and compliance training. He noted that Mayor Keith Balla had already provided such training to the council prior to issuance of the investigative report.

The council voted unanimously to authorize the investigation last September after an alleged leak of information from a July

30, 2020 executive session that was conducted virtually by Zoom due to the pandemic. At that time, Balla said he had been contacted by a resident who provided detailed information discussed at the confidential executive session three days after it occurred.

Balla alleged that a meeting participant had either shared a detailed account of the session with a member of the public or allowed someone to listen in. At the time, he called the leak "a complete breach" of the oath of office and a "clear ethics violation."

No Subpoenas

The borough's contract with the Board of Education to lease school district-owned Phillips Field was the topic of the executive session, according to Souder's report. The borough's prior three-year field-use contract expired at year-end 2019. Ultimately, the council approved a subsequent one-year contract and convened the July 2020 executive session to discuss it prior to a vote.

All witnesses voluntarily answered questions for the investigation so no subpoenas were necessary, Souder wrote.

Six governing body members, Balla and council members Stephen Black, Wendy Robinson, Pietro Martino, Lindsay Goodloe and Ronald Jubin, participated in the July 30, 2020 executive session. Borough Administrator James Damato hosted the virtual meeting and Borough Clerk Edith Gill also participated.

PLEASE SEE ETHICS, PAGE 8

WARREN TOWNSHIP BOARD OF EDUCATION

\$8.9M school referendum planned

By NICOLE ZANCHELLI
STAFF WRITER

WARREN TWP. – A \$8.9 million referendum that would fund school facilities projects and capital improvements in the grades K-8 school district will appear on a Tuesday, Dec. 14 ballot.

The Board of Education unanimously authorized the referendum at its Monday, July 19 meeting.

"The board has already saved its share of the costs, so approval of this referendum would make necessary upgrades to the health and



MATTHEW MINGLE

safety features of the schools with zero impact on the local tax levy," said School Superintendent Matthew Mingle in an interview on Thursday, July 22.

"This is entirely a process to get the state to kick in a share of the cost."

The proposed projects would include: fire alarm upgrades and safety improvements at all schools; HVAC

upgrades at Central Elementary, Woodland Elementary, and Warren Middle Schools; window replacements at Angelo L. Tomaso Elementary; and security updates at Woodland.

These projects, part of the board's long-term capital plan, prove to be "essential to the health and safety of the district's students and staff members," Mingle said.

The cost of the projects will not exceed \$8,970,699, and will be funded through a short term bond/note.

State aid will cover about 34 to 40 percent of the total

project costs in the form of debt service aid. That will reduce taxpayer's portion of the projects to between 60 and 66 percent of the total project cost.

"The board expects to fund its local share of debt service with monies that will be available in the Capital Reserve Fund, so it is anticipated that no new tax dollars will be raised to pay for the projects," the referendum question reads.

Mingle said the board has preemptively made annual deposits into its capital reserve to pay for the projects.

New editor named for Echoes-Sentinel

Veteran newsman David Polakiewicz has been named editor of the **Echoes-Sentinel** by New Jersey Hills Media Group. Polakiewicz succeeds Alex Parker-Magyar who is the new managing editor of the company's Madison Eagle group, a group of three newspapers in Madison, the Chathams and Florham Park.

Polakiewicz has worked as a community journalist for nearly four decades. He joined **The Bernardsville News**, a sister newspaper, in 1982.



DAVID POLAKIEWICZ

During his tenure there he served as editor, staff writer and contributor, winning awards for opinion, political, enterprise and education writing from state and national press organizations.

Prior to his time there, Polakiewicz worked as a contributing writer at **The Courier-News** in Bridgewater.



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