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ON THE WEB



Local news, sports and more, only a click away.

Friday



Builder's Frankford deal expires

Agreement had set aside land at Ross' Corner for 270 homes

By **CHRISTINA TATU**
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FRANKFORD — An agreement between developer Lorterdan Properties and a township resident, which set aside 130 acres at Ross' Corner for a 270-unit housing development and six- to nine-hole golf course, has expired. With limited space available at the proposed town center, which is also the proposed site of the Sussex Commons outlet mall, a wastewater treatment facility, grocery store and several restaurants, Lorterdan has few, if any, options to relocate

its housing project. Lorterdan and Sussex Commons both agreed to share the cost to construct a wastewater treatment facility, which in 2005 was estimated to cost about \$7 million. Robert Jackson, a managing member of Lorterdan Properties, said Lorterdan will — and still plans to — pay 25 percent of the full cost, or \$1.7 million, and Sussex Commons would pay the remaining 75 percent. "This does alter our plan for being involved in the town center and how that's going to take place, but we still want to be involved with the

planning of the town center," Jackson said, declining to elaborate on how Lorterdan's participation with the development of Ross' Corner would change. According to the "option agreement" between Lorterdan and Westview Properties Inc., owned by resident Tico Lin, Lorterdan paid Lin an annual fee to hold the parcel of property until the developer was ready to purchase. The agreement expired Jan. 29 and so far has not been renewed. "There are no plans to build (on the 130-acre proper-

ty) in the immediate future, but you never know where things are going to end up," Jackson said. Jackson declined to comment on where the housing project could be relocated, or exactly how it would change if it could not be constructed on Lin's property, just north of Skylands Park, off state Route 206. Lin said it's been six months since he spoke with Jackson. Lin was not aware the contract expired, and said if Lorterdan is not interested in purchasing the property, he plans to keep it, at least until the economy

improves. Jackson said the agreement was not renewed because of a disagreement between the two parties. "Sometimes, when you are working on a project, you don't have a meeting of the minds and go different directions. That's what it was," Jackson said. It wasn't the first time Lorterdan Properties and Westview Properties had differing ideas. In 2007, Lorterdan sued Westview, alleging a breach of its 2007 option agreement.

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EVENING OF WINE, ROSES ... AND RACHAEL RAY



Photo by Daniel Freel/New Jersey Herald

Celebrity chef Rachael Ray, center, with her husband, John Cusimano, right, stops to talk to guests as she makes a special appearance at the Evening of Wine and Roses benefit for the Newton Memorial Hospital Foundation at the Crossroads Corporate Center in Mount Olive Thursday.

Celebrity chefs lend glamour to hospital's annual fund-raiser

By **ALLYSON GRENNILLE**
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MOUNT OLIVE — Pretzel crusted salmon, scallops with chocolate mashed potatoes and plates with built-in cup-holders are great reasons to attend the Newton Memorial Hospital Foundation's annual Evening of Wine and Roses, but not the most important. "It's a tradition of community support," said John Brand, the hospital's coordinator of public relations and government affairs.

Despite the recession, this year's event boasted a record-breaking number of attendees (more than 900), including two culinary heavyweights: celebrity chefs Rachael Ray and David Burke.

Ray, a television personality and pioneer of the "30-minute meal," drew a mob during her brief appearance in the event's V.I.P. room, during which she highlighted the importance of supporting community hospitals in the midst of the country's health care debate.

Burke, whose book signing drew a sizable crowd of its own, mingled throughout the event, at one point sampling fresh cheese from Vernon-based Bobolink Dairy.

"It's nice to be able to give back," Burke said.

This marks the fourth year that An Evening of Wine and Roses has featured celebrity guests. Past chefs have included Lidia Bastianich, Francis Anthony and Nick Stellino.

Held at the Morris Crossroads Corporate Center, this year's event signaled a change in venue for the fund-raiser, previously held at the Sussex County Fairgrounds and Legends Resort in McAfee.

The change in scenery was widely well-received.

"(The event) keeps getting bigger, which is great," said Al Ruddy, of Randolph-based High Grade Beverages.

Jim Furgeson, vice president of marketing and business development at the hospital, highlighted other positives of the shift to the larger, strikingly modern venue.

"We're moving around the geographic area we serve," he said.

A strong bond between the hospital and the community was echoed throughout the evening by vendors, guests and volunteer event staff alike.

"This event brings the hospital staff and community together. That's the

backbone of the event, the teamwork we all exemplify. We're indebted to the community," said Denise Streefer, an event volunteer and executive secretary in the hospital's Center for Mental Health.

Sponsored by RoNetco Supermarkets Inc., the annual fund-raiser showcases fare from area restaurants, along with fine wine and spirits. This year's list of participants included Barone's, Salt, Andre's Restaurant and numerous others.

Other highlights included a drawing for a Mercedes E350C, valued around \$50,000, and a trip for two to San Francisco.

Proceeds from this year's event, which raised more than \$100,000, will benefit the 2010 Annual Giving Program, specifically the acquisition of new imaging equipment, a bone densitometer and digital mammography.

Tom Senker, president and CEO of Newton Memorial, noted that keeping the hospital's technology on the cutting edge will offer a wide range of benefits to the community.

"It's all about providing better health care for the people we serve," Senker said.

Aid loss worse in some towns

Watershed areas face double hit

By **SETH AUGENSTEIN**
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HARDYSTON — Towns supplying much of the state's drinking water were hit above the state aid cuts unveiled by Gov. Chris Christie last week.

Every New Jersey municipality was hit by about 20 percent in state aid cuts to property tax relief, energy tax receipts and Garden State Trust funds. But money to offset property tax losses in the Highlands and Pinelands, and additional funds to assist municipalities in other sensitive watersheds, were all completely axed out of the state's proposed budget last week.

Simply put, the additional cuts hit the municipalities with water resources more than the those that were just hit by the statewide series of flat cuts.

Hardyston Township, which was socked by a 37 percent overall aid cut — instead of the announced 20.45 percent for just the property tax relief and energy tax receipts — is leading the push-back for the towns that have felt the most acute need.

Marianne Smith, the township manager, sent a letter Wednesday — addressed to "fellow losers of Highlands and Pinelands aid" — inviting more than 50 municipalities that are affected by the watershed cuts to a meeting Tuesday morning. There they plan to strategize their objection, possibly legal, to the extra hardship imposed on their towns.

"If 20 percent was the number that was assessed, it's not really fair to assess some communities at significantly higher rates," Smith said Thursday. "In this economic crisis, everyone's going to feel some pain — we just don't agree some towns should be

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Fatal crash speed over 100, trooper testifies

By **TOM HOWELL JR.**
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A Montague man accused of causing the death of a 28-year-old Sussex Borough resident in 2007 was likely driving at speeds above 100 mph when his red Dodge Stealth ran off State Highway 284, a state police expert said Thursday.

A grand jury indicted Matthew Fritz, 26, on a charge of vehicular homicide — a second-degree crime punishable by up to 10 years in prison — for the Feb. 24, 2007, incident in which James

Moraski was ejected from the sports car at 3:23 a.m.

The third day of his trial in Superior Court in Newton focused on technical testimony from Sgt. Robert Babitz Jr., a member of the state police Fatal Accident Investigation Unit.

Babitz told jurors he measured tire marks, the roadway's friction coefficient and other factors to calculate Fritz's estimated speed just before the crash.

The tire marks were "yaw marks" with diagonal striations, meaning the tires were

rotating as they slid, much as a car's back wheels slide outside the radius of the front wheels during a turn in the snow, he said.

His calculations showed Fritz's car was traveling at 107 to 109 mph before heading up a steep embankment off the southbound shoulder, striking three trees and coming to rest upside-down in the roadway, according to Babitz.

The formula actually underestimates most speeds, he said.

"That's the most conservative estimate, with the best

benefit to the suspect?" Assistant Prosecutor Michael Briegel asked on direct examination.

"Correct," Babitz said. The prosecution says Fritz's speed, coupled with a few drinks he had with Moraski at a Unionville, N.Y., bar, amounted to reckless driving. State troopers also found marijuana and smoking pipes at the crash site.

Fritz's attorney, George Daggett, has argued his client had no drugs in his system and his blood alcohol content was below the legal

driving limit.

He says Fritz's car slid on black ice on the cold winter night, causing it to crash into a retaining wall and deploy the airbag into Fritz's hands before careening up the embankment.

State troopers testified there was no black ice, debris or defects in the road.

Daggett will be able to cross-examine Babitz Tuesday, after Briegel plays a taped statement Fritz gave to state police nearly one month after the crash.

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