

The first 30 days of my administration has been extremely busy and educational. I have met with each of our town's department directors, supervisors and professionals. Everyone has been cooperative, helpful and supportive. During this time, I have also met with Mayor Harry Robbins of Lakehurst to exchange ideas and possibilities of shared services.

I have met with Freeholder Vicari to discuss a number of issues, among them, soliciting additional assistance for senior services. Did you know that Manchester's Senior Services Department provides 31 percent of the information and assistance requests and 33 percent of all benefit screening requests, county-wide?

Internally, I have had an opportunity to review and modify a number of policies, including our take-home vehicle policy. We have limited the number of take-home vehicles to those individuals who would be required to appear on site at any time for an emergency, i.e., police supervisors, detectives, utility supervisors and public works supervisors. Obviously, these vehicles are to be used strictly for township business.

An informal committee has been formed to address Manchester's school funding formula issues with the state. As some of you know, the state funding formula deems Manchester Township as a "rich" district even though we rank in the last 10 percent in the state for average income and home value. As a result of the inequities in the state formula, Manchester receives little assistance from the State for our schools. In fact, Manchester residents pay 85 percent of the costs to run our schools. By contrast, Toms River pays only 55 percent of their schools' costs. The committee's purpose is to develop and implement a strategy to effectively lobby the state for assistance. We are reaching out to Berkeley Township officials to join us in this venture, as Berkeley's demographics are similar to Manchester's. There is strength in numbers.

As I pledged during my campaign, it is one of my goals to make your local government more accessible. We have recently met with a website designer to upgrade our website and make it more user-friendly, informational and functional. We are looking to provide more forms and information at your fingertips so you feel more connected with the town's business. I hope to have the new site up and running in the next few weeks.

We have started making our annual visits to each of the senior communities. As I pledged during the campaign, I, along with township representatives, will go to each senior community once a year to provide an update about town issues, services, events, and to hear your concerns and answer your questions.

On a somber note, recently, Mr. Fred Lund of Leisure Village West passed. For those who follow our municipal government, they know the term "concerned citizen" was created for him. Mr. Lund often addressed our government leaders and urged fiscal responsibility, conscientious spending, and transparency in government. He will be missed.

It is my intention to write an article each month as a means to keep you informed about our town's business. After 30 days, I can tell you that I am still humbled to have been elected your Mayor and look forward to writing the next 47 articles.