

MR

LAW & ORDER

Police say man sent teens indecent texts

DENVILLE: A Pompton Plains father was charged with child endangerment and harassment after police said he carried on an inappropriate correspondence with two of his son's female classmates, Denville police said yesterday.

Steven Petrarca allegedly sent them text messages with sexual innuendo for several months, police said.

Police filed the third-degree charges against Petrarca on Tuesday. He was arrested and released on \$25,000 bail, officials said.

The girls, one 15, the other 16, attend Morris Catholic High School and their cell phone numbers are filed in the boy's cell phone.

That's where Petrarca, 44, of Pompton Plains, looked to find their numbers, police said.

The school contacted police last week to alert them to Petrarca's alleged activities, authorities said. If convicted, he faces three to five years in prison and a maximum \$15,000 fine per third-degree charge.

Driver is sought in fatal hit-run

ROXBURY: Authorities are seeking a hit-and-run driver who killed a man on Route 80 early this morning.

The accident happened around 4 a.m. as Dwight Baardsen, 59, of Chester stood by his 1998 minivan on the eastbound side of the interstate in Roxbury, State Police Sgt. Steven DeBenedictis said.

Baardsen was pronounced dead at the scene.

Police said they were looking for a vehicle with heavy front-end damage. They are asking anyone with information to call them at (973) 347-1001.

Troopers chase down drug suspects

ROCKAWAY TWP.: Two state troopers investigating a car parked at a closed and darkened gas station soon found themselves in a scuffle and a chase, authorities said.

Upon approaching the car at the station on Hibernia Road at 11:51 p.m. Tuesday, the troopers smelled marijuana coming from the open windows, police said.

The officers said they subsequently found crack cocaine in the pocket of passenger Kleve Panayoty of Brooklyn, who they said began struggling with the two officers.

The other occupants got out of the car and ran into nearby woods, triggering a search and apprehension by state and local authorities, police said.

Panayoty, 25, remained in the Morris County Jail yesterday. Police said he is charged with aggravated assault, tampering with evidence, resisting arrest, hindering and possession of cocaine. His bail was set at \$300,000.

The driver and the other passengers were identified as Kuwan Stanton, 25, and Terell Patrick, 23, both of Brooklyn; Ramell Blake, 19, of New York; and Charles Lawson, 25, of Queens. They all remain in jail.

Big turnout a boost for county Democrats

Party expects increase in registered voters after Tuesday's primary

BY LAWRENCE RAGONESE
STAR-LEDGER STAFF

A flow of blue voters to the polls on Tuesday in predominantly red Morris County had county Democratic Party Chairman Lewis Candura seeing gold yesterday, counting potential riches of new members who might jump-start his minority party to player status in county politics.

Hundreds of unaffiliated voters, who normally shun party connections and don't vote in primary

elections, swarmed to the polls in the county's 39 municipalities, intent on having a say in the Democratic battle between Sen. Hillary Clinton of New York and Sen. Barack Obama of Illinois.

"We're hoping we can get a lot of interest from these people, to interest them in our organization," said Candura. "What we need to do between now and November is contact these people, urge them to work with us, help at phone banks or put up signs or in some way par-

ticipate in the Democratic effort in the general election."

For sure, the numbers of registered Democrats will swell a bit. People who were not affiliated with either party but chose to vote Democratic on Tuesday are now registered Democrats. County Superintendent of Elections Rose-Anne Travaglia said there will not be an official count until the end of this week.

But the current voter registration breakdown — 41,280 Democrats, 96,916 Republicans, 153,967

unaffiliated — will likely change as a result on Tuesday's election.

In most municipalities, the number of people casting Democratic ballots far exceeded the total of registered Democrats. For example, Chester Township has 424 registered Democrats but 590 people cast Democratic ballots Tuesday. Jefferson has 1,269 registered Democrats and 1,675 people voted the Democratic line.

In Randolph, there are 2,002 registered Democrats but almost 3,000 people voted mostly for Clinton or Obama on Tuesday.

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A TOWN'S DOGGED TUNNEL VISION



David Quirk, the owner of the historic Luke Miller House, talks with Madison Mayor Mary-Anna Holden during yesterday's search for the tunnel entrance in the cottage. Between them is Madison Police Chief Vincent Chirico.

Madison digs in to solve mystery

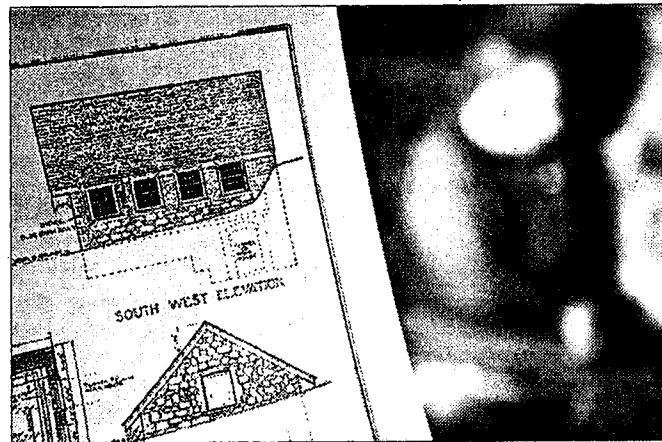
BY LESLIE KWON
STAR-LEDGER STAFF

Yesterday morning, a small group of Madison officials and historic preservationists began unraveling a mystery beneath the borough's oldest known home.

With shovels, sledgehammers, crowbars and a 1930s map, they peeled back plywood floor boards, hacked through cement, and shoveled out soil on the property of the historic Luke Miller House.

They unearthed fragments of glass and pottery, then hit a sewer line before finally striking gold — the top of a tunnel.

For decades, Madison historians have circulated theories about a mysterious tunnel that runs from the main house to a small cottage located several hundred feet away. Experts have suggested several potential uses for the "secret tunnel"



A survey map from the 1930s shows the location of the underground tunnel that connected the main house to the cottage, which may have housed a blacksmith forge.

depicted in old government maps: an Indian raid refuge, a part of the Underground Railroad, a water cistern, a root cellar.

Madison Police Chief Vincent Chirico and Mayor Mary-

Anna Holden, along with members of the Madison Historical Society, prepared the site yesterday for a formal excavation in May. The project will be funded by a \$10,000 grant from the New Jersey Historical Commission,

which will be used to excavate the site. Items found will determine if a blacksmith forge once existed in the cottage and date it, as well as determine the purpose of the tunnel, society officials said.

"There are an awful lot of unanswered questions about this building we hope this dig can reveal," said Kathie Coultis, president of the Madison Historical Society.

The Luke Miller House, located at the entrance of the Bottle Hill Historic District, was built in the early 1730s and was home to Luke Miller, a major in the Revolutionary War. Historical documents indicate that George Washington visited the home many times while stationed in the Morristown area from 1779 to 1780.

After the Miller family sold the house in 1889, the property went through a series of owners, [See TUNNEL, Page 40]

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PHOTOS BY ROBERT SCIARRINO/THE STAR-LEDGER

A 1930s map shows a tunnel connecting the blacksmith forge cottage, left above, to the Luke Miller House, in the rear, Madison's oldest known home. The distance between the buildings is several hundred feet.

TUNNEL

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 35

Madison beginning to unearth mystery

until the borough purchased the property in 2004 and auctioned off the house a year later for \$555,000. The cottage, where archaeologists hope to unearth one end of the

tunnel, remains borough property. According to borough lore, a homeowner may have sealed off the tunnel because he was afraid it would cave in while his children played, Holden said. Another theory is that a cocktail party-throwing homeowner closed the tunnel after repeatedly finding drunken guests inside.

The tunnel was most likely closed sometime after the 1930s, Holden said. Ralph Sandello, who works in the public works depart-

ment, recalls seeing a tunnel in the house as late as the 1960s, when he accompanied his father there on plumbing jobs.

"I don't remember much. I just remember some stone and dirt, and a hole big enough to walk through," said Sandello, 48, who helped the group shovel yesterday.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the tunnel, David Quirk said he is eagerly awaiting the results of the excavation. Quirk purchased the main house from the borough in

2005 because he has "always been intrigued by secret passageways."

According to the 1930s map, the tunnel runs from the blacksmith forge to the basement of Quirk's house, which currently houses his wine collection. If experts find the tunnel is intact and unfilled, Quirk promised to knock down his basement wall and install lighting so visitors can come glimpse a piece of history.

Leslie Kwok may be reached at lkwok@starledger.com or (973) 539-7910.

DENVILLE

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 35

The department's Junior Police Academy, however, will remain canceled this summer because officers cannot be trained in time,

Wagner said. It will return next year, he said.

Hussa also is proposing to bring a New Jersey National Guard anti-drug program to the schools to supplement the township's DARE program. The program has speakers available for middle school classes, he said.

"I'm personally very excited about it for what it brings to the children," he said.

Wagner said he was open to working with the mayor and the National Guard.

"It could be a good program," he said, noting he had met with the administrator of the Guard's program and was interested in learning more. "I actually look forward to the opportunity to work with him."

School board president Drucilla Clark said she would share information Hussa provided with the board of education. "I'm sure they're going to look at it and decide whether it's an appropriate program for the schools or not," she said. "The mayor has been trying to work with us on all of these

programs and I appreciate that."

She noted the district was eager to have the DARE programs. "I very much like having the strong relationship with the police department," she said. "I would like that to continue."

At a budget workshop Tuesday night, Wagner also made a separate request for the town to hire four additional patrol officers — at a starting salary of \$52,282 each — for next year, noting that the department has seen the annual number of calls almost double to more than 37,000 since 1995. He said the department had not added any patrol officers in that time period.

Paula Saha may be reached at psaha@starledger.com or (973) 539-7910.

Former owners parking lot bac

BY RALPH R. ORTEGA
STAR-LEDGER STAFF

The asking price in a real estate listing for a 170-year-old church in Hunterdon County is a tempting \$400,000 and suggests the old building could be converted into a charming home or business. But there's a catch.

The sale price doesn't include a parking lot once used by the former First English Presbyterian Church of Amwell in Raritan Township. The 1.84-acre tract — valued by the township at \$526,000 — could bring in a hefty sum if sold separately.

But the Presbytery of New Brunswick, the owner of record, is embroiled in a legal battle with the parking lot's former owners, Irvin E. Hockenbury and his wife, Vilma. Longtime members of the church before it closed in 2006, the Hockenburys sold the parking lot to the Presbytery for \$25,000 in 1982 and now want it back.

A lawsuit filed by the couple last week claims ownership reverted to them, under the terms of a conveyance that required the former church on Old York Road to own the property for at least 50 years. If the church ceased to exist before then, according to the suit, the lot was to be turned over to Hunterdon County for recreational purposes.

The county freeholders, however, passed on taking ownership in September.

"They could not figure out what to do with the property," Michele Lamar, an attorney representing the Presbytery, said of county officials.

Lamar declined to comment on the lawsuit. "We really haven't reviewed the complaint," she said.

The Hockenburys, when reached by phone, also declined to comment. "The lawsuit spells

it out," Irvin

The couple the lot and church in the reopen unconditional faith lawyer. The turn to the both attend lives, attorney tlesey said.

"Mr. Hockenbury has been church through Whittlesey's

The church est in the c in 2006 by membership Ernest W. tery's head

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A listing the building doesn't meet the parking erty remain township ta the lot at more than enburys wer

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Ralph R. (at rortega@starledger.com 429-9925.

VOTERS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 35

them because many of these unaffiliated people really like their independence. I wouldn't be surprised if many switch back."

County Republican Party Chairman John Sette, who also is the chairman of the Morris County Board of Elections, said

his office h

calls from p switch pa doesn't thir a Democrat political rea

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Charges dropped in bab

BY JENNIFER GOLSON
STAR-LEDGER STAFF

The Somerset County Prosecutor's Office is dropping the charges against a North Plainfield woman who was arrested after a baby boy died in her care, officials said yesterday.

Demelin Castillo, 24, was accused of second-degree endangering the welfare of a child following the Nov. 1 death of 6-month-old Justin Lopez.

The medical examiner recently ruled Sudden Infant Death Syndrome was the cause of death, county Prosecutor Wayne Forrest said yesterday.

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Somerset Prosecutor called his the prosec Lord said h papers.

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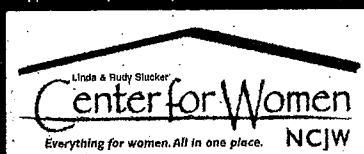
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