

**MINUTES OF THE
SWEARING-IN AND**

REORGANIZATION CEREMONY FOR

MEMBERS OF THE UNION COUNTY BOARD OF CHOSEN FREEHOLDERS

JANUARY 4, 2004

1 P.M.

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The Honorable Edward W. Beglin Jr., Assignment Judge, Superior Court of the County of Union called the meeting to order, and then introduced the Master of Ceremonies, Senator Raymond Lesniak, who substituted for Mistress of Ceremonies Charlotte DeFilippo, Chairman, Democratic Committee of Union County, who was unable to attend due to illness.

MASTER OF CEREMONIES

State Senator Raymond Lesniak, substituting for The Honorable Charlotte DeFilippo, Chairman of the Democratic Committee of Union County

GREETINGS:

INVOCATION:

The Honorable Reverend Donald Hummel, Pastor of Saint Bartholomew's Roman Catholic Church, Scotch Plains, NJ

THE PRESENTATION OF THE COLORS
Sheriff's Office of Union County

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:

The Honorable Ralph Froehlich, Sheriff of Union County

STAR SPANGLED BANNER:

Marie Oakie

CERTIFICATION OF ELECTION:

Read by Joanne Rajoppi, County Clerk

*Alexander Mirabella, Freeholder
Deborah P. Scanlon, Freeholder
Chester Holmes, Freeholder*

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OATH OF OFFICE:

The Honorable Neil Cohen, Esq. swore in Freeholder Alexander Mirabella.

The Bible for Freeholder Alexander Mirabella was held by his wife, Phyllis and children Alex and Micayla.

COMMENTS:

FREEHOLDER ALEXANDER MIRABELLA

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OATH OF OFFICE:

The Honorable Joseph Cryan swore in Freeholder Deborah P. Scanlon.

The Bible for Freeholder Deborah P. Scanlon was held by her husband, The Honorable Patrick Scanlon, her daughter, Lisa Chacon and granddaughter Alyssa Chacon and grandson, Jason Chacon.

COMMENTS:

FREEHOLDER DEBORAH P. SCANLON

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OATH OF OFFICE:

The Honorable Frederick McDaniels swore in Freeholder Chester Holmes.

The Bible for Freeholder Chester Holmes was held by his daughters, Cheryl Rolle, Jackie Grey and granddaughter, Zakirrah Holmes.

COMMENTS:

FREEHOLDER CHESTER HOLMES

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HONORED GUESTS:

*The Honorable Frank Lautenberg,
U.S. Senator
The Honorable Donald M. Payne,
U. S. Congressman, 10th District
The Honorable Raymond J. Lesniak,
NJ State Senator 20th District
The Honorable Neil Cohen,
Assemblyman, 20th District
The Honorable Joseph Cryan,
Assemblyman, 20th District
The Honorable Jerry Green,
Assemblyman, 22nd District
The Honorable Wilfredo Caraballo,
Assemblyman, 29th District
The Honorable June Fischer, Democratic
National Committeewoman*

Master of Ceremonies Senator Lesniak turned the meeting over to Sharda Badri, Clerk of the Board of Chosen Freeholders, for roll call and reading of the "Open Public Meetings Act."

The first order of business was the selection of a Chairperson. The Clerk called for nominations of a Chairman Pro-Tem to conduct the election of a Chairman. Freeholder Scutari nominated Freeholder Scanlon for Chairwoman Pro Temp. Freeholder Mirabella seconded the nomination. Roll call showed nine members of the Board voted in the affirmative.

The Chairwoman Pro-Tem called for nominations for the election of Chairman for The Board of Chosen Freeholders for the year 2004. Freeholder Sullivan nominated Freeholder Estrada for Chairman. Freeholder Mingo seconded. Roll call showed nine members of the Board voted in the affirmative.

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The Honorable Roberto Alcazar administered the Oath of Office to the newly elected Chairman Angel G. Estrada, who then assumed the seat as Chairman of the Board of Chosen Freeholders for the year 2004.

The Bible for Chairman Estrada was held by his wife Tere and their children Jorge and Daniel.

The next order of business was the election of a Vice-Chairman for the Board of Chosen Freeholders for the year 2004.

The Freeholder Chairman called for nominations for the office of Vice-Chairman of the Board of Chosen Freeholders. Freeholder Holmes nominated Freeholder Proctor for Vice Chairman. Freeholder Ruotolo seconded the nomination.

The Clerk calls the roll for the election of Vice-Chairman Proctor for the Board of Chosen Freeholders for the year 2004. Roll call showed nine members of the Board voted in the affirmative.

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The Honorable James Kennedy administered the Oath of Office to Vice-Chairman Proctor.

Holding the Bible for the Vice-Chairman was The Honorable Bob Simon, President of Rahway Democratic Party.

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ANNUAL MESSAGE BY THE FREEHOLDER CHAIRMAN

See attached at the end of the Minutes.

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PRESENTATIONS BY MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

A gift presentation to Freeholders Alexander Mirabella, Deborah P. Scanlon and Chester Holmes was made by The Honorable Carolyn Vollero, Cranford Municipal Chairwoman.

A gift presentation to Chairman Angel G. Estrada was made by The Honorable Carolyn Vollero, Cranford Municipal Chairwoman.

Union County Women's Political Caucus Former State and County President, Joanne Rajoppi made a gift presentation to Freeholder Deborah P. Scanlon.

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A gift presentation to Vice Chairman Rick Proctor was made by The Honorable Carolyn Vollero, Cranford Municipal Chairwoman.

A gift presentation to Chairman Angel G. Estrada was made by the Hispanic American Association for Political Awareness President, Dr. Orlando Edreira.

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BENEDICTION: The Honorable Ralph Milteer

A FIVE-MINUTE RECESS WAS HELD AND THE NORMAL ORDER OF BUSINESS WAS RESUMED.

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BUSINESS PORTION

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CHAIRMAN ESTRADA called the meeting to order.

Chairman Angel G. Estrada presided. Roll call showed Vice Chairman Rick Proctor, Freeholder Chester Holmes, Freeholder Lewis Mingo, Jr., Freeholder Alexander Mirabella, Freeholder Mary P. Ruotolo, Freeholder Deborah Scanlon, Freeholder Nicholas Scutari and Freeholder Daniel P. Sullivan present. Also in attendance were County Manager George Devanney, County Counsel Robert Barry and Clerk of the Board Sharda Badri.

OPEN PUBLIC MEETINGS ACT was read by the Clerk of the Board.

The Chairman called for a motion to approve the minutes. On a motion by Freeholder Sullivan, seconded by Freeholder Holmes, roll call showed eight members of the Board voted in the affirmative with Freeholder Ruotolo abstaining on the minutes of the December 18, 2003 meeting.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: DECEMBER 11, 2003 AGENDA MEETING AND DECEMBER 18, 2003 – REGULAR MEETING

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**MEETING OPEN TO THE PUBLIC
FOR THE PURPOSE OF COMMENTING
ON RESOLUTIONS ON THE AGENDA**

There were no comments.

PUBLIC COMMENT PORTION CONCLUDED

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The Chairman called for a motion to move Resolutions 1-2004 through 41-2004. Prior to the vote, Freeholder Scutari commented on Resolution 1-2004 and Freeholder Mingo commented on Resolution 28-2004 with a correction on the name “Gibbons”, which should be “Gibson”.

On a motion by Freeholder Sullivan, seconded by Freeholder Mirabella, roll call showed nine members of the Board voted in the affirmative.

THE FOLLOWING RESOLUTIONS WERE BEING OFFERED FOR ADOPTION:

1-2004 **CHAIRMAN ESTRADA**, adopting the By-laws and Rules of Procedure for the year 2004.

On a motion by Freeholder Sullivan, seconded by Freeholder Mirabella, roll call showed nine members of the Board voted in the affirmative.

2-2004 **CHAIRMAN ESTRADA**, adopting the Temporary Budget for the year 2004.

On a motion by Freeholder Sullivan, seconded by Freeholder Mirabella, roll call showed nine members of the Board voted in the affirmative.

3-2004 **CHAIRMAN ESTRADA**, approving the Temporary Debt services for the year 2004.

On a motion by Freeholder Sullivan, seconded by Freeholder Mirabella, roll call showed nine members of the Board voted in the affirmative.

4-2004 **CHAIRMAN ESTRADA**, authorizing certain signatures for the Park Police Pension Fund for the year 2004.

On a motion by Freeholder Sullivan, seconded by Freeholder Mirabella, roll call showed nine members of the Board voted in the affirmative.

5-2004 **CHAIRMAN ESTRADA**, establishing certain change funds for the year 2004.

On a motion by Freeholder Sullivan, seconded by Freeholder Mirabella, roll call showed nine members of the Board voted in the affirmative.

6-2004 **CHAIRMAN ESTRADA**, designating depositories wherein all public monies and funds of the County of Union shall be kept for the year 2004.

On a motion by Freeholder Sullivan, seconded by Freeholder Mirabella, roll call showed nine members of the Board voted in the affirmative.

7-2004 **CHAIRMAN ESTRADA**, authorizing certain signatures for checks, wire transfers and other disbursements of the County of Union for the year 2004.

On a motion by Freeholder Sullivan, seconded by Freeholder Mirabella, roll call showed nine members of the Board voted in the affirmative.

8-2004 **CHAIRMAN ESTRADA**, establishing certain petty cash funds for the year 2004.

On a motion by Freeholder Sullivan, seconded by Freeholder Mirabella, roll call showed nine members of the Board voted in the affirmative.

9-2004 **CHAIRMAN ESTRADA**, appointing members of the Board as liaisons to various advisory and other boards.

On a motion by Freeholder Sullivan, seconded by Freeholder Mirabella, roll call showed nine members of the Board voted in the affirmative.

10-2004 **CHAIRMAN ESTRADA**, adopting the meeting schedule for the Board of Chosen Freeholders for the year 2004.

On a motion by Freeholder Sullivan, seconded by Freeholder Mirabella, roll call showed nine members of the Board voted in the affirmative.

11-2004 **CHAIRMAN ESTRADA**, designating the Star Ledger, La Voz, Worrall News, Courier News, The Home News & Tribune, City News (Plainfield), The Rahway News Record, Clark Patriot, North Jersey Newspapers Publishing and Luso Americano as the newspapers to receive legal notices for the year 2004.

On a motion by Freeholder Sullivan, seconded by Freeholder Mirabella, roll call showed nine members of the Board voted in the affirmative.

12-2004 **CHAIRMAN ESTRADA**, adopting the Freeholder Standing Committee Assignments for the year 2004.

On a motion by Freeholder Sullivan, seconded by Freeholder Mirabella, roll call showed nine members of the Board voted in the affirmative.

13-2004 **CHAIRMAN ESTRADA**, appointing Don Readlinger of Hale Insurance Brokerage, LLC, as Insurance Broker of Record to the County of Union for the year 2004.

On a motion by Freeholder Sullivan, seconded by Freeholder Mirabella, roll call showed nine members of the Board voted in the affirmative.

14-2004 **CHAIRMAN ESTRADA**, awarding a contract to Suplee, Clooney, & Company, Westfield, NJ, to provide statutory audits of accounts of the County of Union and its agencies for the year 2004.

On a motion by Freeholder Sullivan, seconded by Freeholder Mirabella, roll call showed nine members of the Board voted in the affirmative.

15-2004 **CHAIRMAN ESTRADA**, awarding a contract to Schenck, Price, Smith & King, LLP, Morristown, NJ, to provide Special Counsel Services for Labor Negotiations for the year 2004, in an amount not to exceed \$150,000.

On a motion by Freeholder Sullivan, seconded by Freeholder Mirabella, roll call showed nine members of the Board voted in the affirmative.

16-2003 **CHAIRMAN ESTRADA**, awarding a contract to Garrubbo, Romankow, Rinaldo & Capece, Westfield, NJ, to provide Special Counsel Services for Personnel Affairs for the year 2004, in an amount not to exceed \$175,000.

On a motion by Freeholder Sullivan, seconded by Freeholder Mirabella, roll call showed nine members of the Board voted in the affirmative.

17-2004 **CHAIRMAN ESTRADA**, appointing Neil Cohen Esq., Montclair, NJ, as Special Counsel for the County of Union Planning Board for a term commencing immediately and terminating on December 31, 2004, at an annual salary of \$27,500.

On a motion by Freeholder Sullivan, seconded by Freeholder Mirabella, roll call showed nine members of the Board voted in the affirmative.

18-2004 **CHAIRMAN ESTRADA**, adopting the Freeholder Special Committee Assignments for the year 2004.

On a motion by Freeholder Sullivan, seconded by Freeholder Mirabella, roll call showed nine members of the Board voted in the affirmative.

19-2004 **CHAIRMAN ESTRADA**, awarding a contract to Rogut & McCarthy, PC, Cranford, NJ, to provide specialized counsel services

in connection with the issuance of bonds or notes by the County of Union for the year 2004.

On a motion by Freeholder Sullivan, seconded by Freeholder Mirabella, roll call showed nine members of the Board voted in the affirmative.

20-2004 **CHAIRMAN ESTRADA**, awarding a contract to Kean University, Union, for computer and management information systems in an amount not to exceed \$60,000.

On a motion by Freeholder Sullivan, seconded by Freeholder Mirabella, roll call showed nine members of the Board voted in the affirmative.

21-2004 **CHAIRMAN ESTRADA**, authorizing payment of postage to the Postmaster/US Postal Service for 2004 in an amount not to exceed \$780,000.

On a motion by Freeholder Sullivan, seconded by Freeholder Mirabella, roll call showed nine members of the Board voted in the affirmative.

22-2004 **CHAIRMAN ESTRADA**, authorizing payment of telecommunications bills for the period of January 1, 2004 to December 31, 2004, in an amount not to exceed \$1,375,000.

On a motion by Freeholder Sullivan, seconded by Freeholder Mirabella, roll call showed nine members of the Board voted in the affirmative.

23-2004 **CHAIRMAN ESTRADA**, awarding a contract to Ruderman & Glickman, Esqs., Springfield, NJ, to provide Special Counsel Services for Personnel Affairs for the year 2004, in an amount not to exceed \$100,000.

On a motion by Freeholder Sullivan, seconded by Freeholder Mirabella, roll call showed nine members of the Board voted in the affirmative.

24-2004 **CHAIRMAN ESTRADA**, designating Freeholder Chester Holmes as the Union County Delegate to New Jersey Association of Counties and Freeholder Lewis Mingo, Jr. as the Alternate.

On a motion by Freeholder Sullivan, seconded by Freeholder Mirabella, roll call showed nine members of the Board voted in the affirmative.

25-2004 **CHAIRMAN ESTRADA**, designating Freeholder Daniel P. Sullivan as the Union County Delegate to New Jersey Transportation Planning Authority and Freeholder Chester Holmes as the Alternate.

On a motion by Freeholder Sullivan, seconded by Freeholder Mirabella, roll call showed nine members of the Board voted in the affirmative.

26-2004 CHAIRMAN ESTRADA, appointing the following to the Advisory Council on Aging: Dennis Vodarsik, Hillside, effective 1/1/04 to 12/31/06.

On a motion by Freeholder Sullivan, seconded by Freeholder Mirabella, roll call showed nine members of the Board voted in the affirmative.

27-2004 CHAIRMAN ESTRADA, appointing the following to Citizens Insurance Review Board: Chairman; Ann C. Lord, Hillside, Anthony LaPorta, Westfield, Joseph E. Infante, Linden, Carlos Alma, Elizabeth and Charles J. Crane, Linden, effective 1/1/04 to 12/31/04.

On a motion by Freeholder Sullivan, seconded by Freeholder Mirabella, roll call showed nine members of the Board voted in the affirmative.

28-2004 CHAIRMAN ESTRADA, appointing the following to Public Health/Weapons of Mass Destruction: John N. Surmay, Elizabeth, Warren J. Hehl, Cranford, Harold Gibbons, Plainfield and Joanne Gemenden, Rahway, effective 1/1/04 to 12/31/06.

On a motion by Freeholder Sullivan, seconded by Freeholder Mirabella, roll call showed nine members of the Board voted in the affirmative.

29-2004 CHAIRMAN ESTRADA, appointing the following to Cultural and Heritage Advisory Board: Vernell V. Wright, Union, and Nickie Jurado, Rahway, effective 1/1/04 to 12/31/06.

On a motion by Freeholder Sullivan, seconded by Freeholder Mirabella, roll call showed nine members of the Board voted in the affirmative.

30-2004 CHAIRMAN ESTRADA, appointing the following to Union County Open Space, Recreation & Historic Preservation Trust Fund Public Advisory Committee: George Jorn, Cranford, effective 1/1/04 to 12/31/06.

On a motion by Freeholder Sullivan, seconded by Freeholder Mirabella, roll call showed nine members of the Board voted in the affirmative.

31-2004 CHAIRMAN ESTRADA, appointing the following to the Union County Hospice & Home Health Care Advisory Board: Clara T. Harelik, Springfield, effective 1/1/04 to 12/31/06.

On a motion by Freeholder Sullivan, seconded by Freeholder Mirabella, roll call showed nine members of the Board voted in the affirmative.

32-2004 **CHAIRMAN ESTRADA**, appointing the following to the Runnells Specialized Hospital Board of Managers: Alfonso Vollero, Cranford, Reni Erdos, Summit and Dr. Michel Bitritto, Summit, effective 1/1/04 to 12/31/06.

On a motion by Freeholder Sullivan, seconded by Freeholder Mirabella, roll call showed nine members of the Board voted in the affirmative.

33-2004 **CHAIRMAN ESTRADA**, appointing the following to Local Advisory Committee on Alcoholism & Drug Abuse: Charles Watts, Hillside, Samuel McGhee, Hillside, Ronald Ginsberg, Cranford and Charles Collette, Cranford, effective 1/1/04 to 12/31/06.

On a motion by Freeholder Sullivan, seconded by Freeholder Mirabella, roll call showed nine members of the Board voted in the affirmative.

34-2004 **CHAIRMAN ESTRADA**, appointing the following to the Advisory Board of the Status of Minorities: Linda Lewis, Union, effective 1/1/04 to 12/31/06.

On a motion by Freeholder Sullivan, seconded by Freeholder Mirabella, roll call showed nine members of the Board voted in the affirmative.

35-2004 **CHAIRMAN ESTRADA**, appointing the following to the Motion Picture & TV Advisory Board: Peter Corvelli, Hillside, effective 1/1/04 to 12/31/06.

On a motion by Freeholder Sullivan, seconded by Freeholder Mirabella, roll call showed nine members of the Board voted in the affirmative.

36-2004 **CHAIRMAN ESTRADA**, appointing the following as Members to the Union County Planning Board: Michael Timoni, Clark effective 1/1/04 to 12/31/06.

On a motion by Freeholder Sullivan, seconded by Freeholder Mirabella, roll call showed nine members of the Board voted in the affirmative.

37-2004 **CHAIRMAN ESTRADA**, appointing the following as Members to Industrial Pollution Control Authority: Deborah P. Scanlon and Daniel P. Sullivan effective 2/1/04 to 2/1/06 and Rick Proctor and Chester Holmes, effective 2/1/04 to 2/1/07.

On a motion by Freeholder Sullivan, seconded by Freeholder Mirabella, roll call showed nine members of the Board voted in the affirmative.

38-2004 **CHAIRMAN ESTRADA**, appointing the following to the Commission on the Status of Women in Union County: Carmella Colosimo, Kenilworth, Jane Livesey O’Hara, Westfield and Joan Abitante, Roselle, effective 1/1/04 to 12/31/06.

On a motion by Freeholder Sullivan, seconded by Freeholder Mirabella, roll call showed nine members of the Board voted in the affirmative.

39-2004 **CHAIRMAN ESTRADA**, appointing the following to the Shade Tree Advisory Board: Jim Nichadowicz, Cranford, effective 1/1/04 to 12/31/06.

On a motion by Freeholder Sullivan, seconded by Freeholder Mirabella, roll call showed nine members of the Board voted in the affirmative.

40-2004 **CHAIRMAN ESTRADA**, appointing the following to the Union County Fire Advisory Board: Chief Leonard Dolan, Deputy Chief Joseph Dooley, Chief William Severage, Chief Fred Fretz, David Maas, Chief William Konecney, Jay Rice, Chief Joseph Signorello, Chief Leonard Spina and Ben Laganga effective 1/1/04 to 12/31/04.

On a motion by Freeholder Sullivan, seconded by Freeholder Mirabella, roll call showed nine members of the Board voted in the affirmative.

41-2004 **CHAIRMAN ESTRADA**, appointing the following to the Emergency Management Council: George Devanney, Harold Gibson, Ben Laganga, Christopher Scaturro, Daniel Vaniska, Leonard Dolan, Gareth Williams, Jeff Sias, Sebastian D’Elia, Ronald Kanterman, JoAnn Gemenden, Theodore J. Romankow, Ralph Froehlich, Frank Dann, Gerald Miller, Richard McCutcheon, Denise Santiago and Glenn Tillou, effective 1/1/04 to 12/31/04.

On a motion by Freeholder Sullivan, seconded by Freeholder Mirabella, roll call showed nine members of the Board voted in the affirmative.

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***MEETING OPEN TO THE PUBLIC
FOR THE PURPOSE OF COMMENTING
ON ANY MATTER***

There were no comments.

PUBLIC COMMENT PORTION CONCLUDED

FREEHOLDER COMMENTS

Freeholder Mingo offered congratulations to the newly elected Chairman and Vice Chairman, and stated that the election of the Board's first Hispanic Chairman said a lot about the character of this Freeholder Board.

Freeholder Ruotolo offered congratulations to the newly elected Chairman and Vice Chairman, and stated that she loved the Chairman's speech and that it gave great insight into what the Chairman is all about.

Freeholder Scutari offered congratulations to the newly elected Chairman and Vice Chairman. He also congratulated the reelected Freeholders, Holmes, Mirabella and Scanlon, on a well-deserved victory. He stated that the Board has come a long way in six years and that his years on the Board have been an eye-opening experience.

Freeholder Sullivan echoed Freeholder Ruotolo's words about the Chairman's heartfelt speech. He stated that it was a pleasure to see Freeholder Estrada elected as Chairman. He also congratulated the reelected Freeholders, Holmes, Mirabella and Scanlon, and he congratulated Freeholder Scutari on being elected to the State Senate.

Freeholder Scanlon congratulated the Chairman and Vice Chairman and thanked her running mates, Freeholders Holmes and Mirabella, for the kindness and companionship during the election season. She thanked all of those who helped get the Freeholders reelected.

Freeholder Mirabella stated that it was a pleasure to see Chairman Estrada and Vice Chairman Proctor in their new positions on the Board, and stated that this year would be a great one, with a lot of experienced former Chairpersons and Vice Chairpersons on the Board. He stated that a lot of good initiatives were outlined in the Chairman's speech and that he was looking forward to moving forward.

Freeholder Holmes offered congratulations to the newly elected Chairman and Vice Chairman, and stated that he enjoyed the Chairman's speech and found much to reflect upon in it. He stated that it was very touching and insightful and that it was good to know how the Chairman feels about the issues, as well as about this nation. He congratulated his running mates Freeholders Mirabella and Scanlon on their reelection, and stated that he was proud to serve on this Board.

Freeholder Proctor thanked those who supported him for Vice Chairman, and congratulated Freeholder Scanlon on her year as Chairwoman.

Freeholder Scutari interjected that he thanked Vice Chairman Proctor for supporting him for State Senate.

County Manager Devanney offered congratulations to the newly elected Chairman and Vice Chairman, and congratulated the Chairman on an impassioned and emotional speech. He stated that he looked forward to working with the Board in the coming year.

Chairman Estrada thanked everyone for their support today. He said that he appreciated the commitment of this Board to bring the community together.

The Chairman called for a motion to adjourn the meeting. The Board voted by acclamation to adjourn.

ADJOURNMENT

Sharda Badri
Clerk of the Board

SB/amc

Chairman Estrada's Remarks

BUILDING BETTER COMMUNITIES

42 years ago I fled communist Cuba. My parents put me, my brother, and sisters on an airplane never knowing if we would ever reunite. They did so in hopes of providing their children freedom and opportunity. Who would have guessed a little kid from a small town in Cuba would stand before you as the Chairman of the Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders.

Only in America would we witness today's events. This is not a tribute to me, but our country, our state, our county, the city of Elizabeth who have embraced *us* and allowed *us* to be part of the process and contribute to the political mosaic that weaves the fabric of our society.

As we look forward to the next year, a retrospective view is very appropriate.

Last year I was honored to serve as Vice Chairman while Freeholder Deborah Scanlon served as our Chairwoman.

Chairwoman Scanlon worked hard to champion programs that have helped make Union County a better place for our children and our families. She did so with devotion, dedication, and strong leadership. Debbie, we thank you for your service to our community.

In 2003, this Freeholder Board met great challenges with innovative solutions.

Chairwoman Scanlon created a Committee on Homeland Security, Chaired by Freeholder Chester Holmes, which brought together law enforcement, public safety and emergency management officials to provide a unified approach for the protection of the citizens of Union County against the threat of terrorism. In doing so, we distributed millions of dollars of equipment to first responders in every town in the county.

Last year we kept our children safe by expanding the scope of our child car seat inspections. We expanded the protection of our children by taking the child seat inspections *to* the people - by offering them in communities, at local events, auto dealerships and toy stores. **We aim to save lives.** I am proud to say that we will continue in that direction in 2004.

In 2003, we developed a grant program to preserve the historic places in this county to inform people about Union County's role in America's history.

Also last year, we put our money where our hearts are and provided uninterrupted health and pension benefits **AND** paid the differential between military pay and civilian pay for our county's men and women deployed in the defense of our nation. We wish them a safe return home.

We also dedicated a memorial at Echo Lake Park in remembrance to the men and women who lost their lives on September 11. A committee chaired by Freeholder Al Mirabella spear-headed the effort by using donated materials, fundraising, two steel beams from the ruins of Ground Zero, and with the volunteer labor of employees and several labor unions. If you have not yet visited this memorial, I invite you to see it.

Union County reached its goal of preserving more than 100-acres of open space with the preservation of a 23-acre farm in Scotch Plains. I'm proud to say that we will continue to preserve even more land in the coming year.

The initiatives Chairwoman Scanlon created, and the direction she set when she announced 2003 as **'The Year of the Family'** is making Union County a safer and better place to live. Again, thank you Debbie.

County Government plays a critical role in the lives of more than half a million people who live in our 21 towns. It is imperative to continue to provide vital services that keep families safe, and improve our quality of life. It is also the business of government to invest in the future of our community and to foster economic development.

As chair of this great board, I am proposing to my colleagues on the Freeholder Board and to Union County Government that we focus on programs and initiatives that will define our upcoming year as a year for **Building Better Communities**.

My first initiative is the implementation of a **211 Info Line**.

Recently, we completed a gaps assessment of social services, and we learned that access to information and services needs improvement.

I have learned that the questions and the needs of the community must be answered in a more direct fashion. There are gaps that need to be bridged. For example, seniors that are looking for transportation assistance, families looking for daycare, people in need of mental health services, and citizens requesting essential services such as food and shelter. This need may strike at any time. It affects all aspects of our community, including those who experience language barriers and even the hearing impaired.

In hopes of providing direction through the maze of social service agencies, residents will have one easy-to-remember number. 2-1-1.

While providing a vital service, 2-1-1 also takes the burden from the service that our current 9-1-1 emergency service provides.

2-1-1 is not just an info line, it's a life line.

We will also focus on helping Union County families stay healthy.

Families need to make critical health-care coverage choices. Illness affects all of us. But access to health care disproportionately affects low-income families. This year we plan to invest in a health educational program. With information about diabetes, asthma, diet and nutrition, and heart disease, we can help limit health care costs down the road and keep families healthy.

We will also tackle the growing concerns families have about the rising cost of prescription drugs.

The most recent studies show that spending on prescription drugs is the fastest growing component of health care in the U.S. The cost of prescription drugs has risen 15% in the past several years. Prescription drug costs account for more than ¼ of the increase of health care costs in this country, and are considered a significant cause of the increasing cost of health insurance premiums.

Last year we developed a pharmaceutical assistance program to help residents over age 55 or those with disabilities to purchase drugs at a lower cost. I'm proud to say that more than a thousand households in Union County have signed up for this program and have saved money on life improving and life saving pharmaceuticals.

This year we will make our prescription drug plan available to ALL Union County families.

Many families don't have adequate medical coverage. While some county residents live just above the income poverty level set for state and federal prescription assistance. Other families struggle because they are self-employed and can't afford to pay for their own insurance. This plan is now available to those families. There will be no income barrier for this initiative.

This initiative will help participating families save money and afford them greater peace of mind. Moreover, it will be accomplished at no cost to taxpayers. It is based on a user fee which is offset by the savings they receive.

Our **third initiative** is an investment in the arts that builds on the economic development successes we supported over the past five years.

The Arts enrich our lives. They bring new energy to our communities and our families. They ALSO bring new visitors to our communities, and with them, economic activity.

Similar endeavors have realized tremendous success. In fact, communities such as Red Bank and New Brunswick have seen their downtowns turn around because of investing in the arts. This year we will make such an investment in the City of Rahway, where Mayor James Kennedy plans to use the historic **Union County Arts Center** as the centerpiece of an **arts district** in that city's downtown.

Our goal is to further elevate and establish the Union County Arts Center as a premier Northern NJ performing arts establishment. This initiative will include the purchasing of this living landmark and several adjoining spaces and transforming this developed property into a year 'round cultural center. The Arts Center's insightful Board of Directors and professional management team would continue to run the programs and day-to-day operations of this facility.

Union County's investment in the Arts Center will join many other major improvements in Rahway's Downtown Arts District. The Arts Guild of Rahway was improved with, state, county, and city dollars. County dollars also helped renovate "Arts District Park," home of Mayor Kennedy's popular Summer Concert Series. A 500-vehicle parking deck and 100-room Holiday Inn Express will be built only blocks away. And patrons could also come to performances utilizing the newly renovated NJ Transit station, which serves more than 2,000 passengers a day.

With these investments in the Arts Center we will create a MAJOR performance space for northern New Jersey with the potential to attract new performers and bring new vitality to a great town.

Our **next initiative** is directed towards helping Union County's children. Motivating our younger generation to engage in physical activity helps children battle obesity. Recreational and Athletic facilities are important to eliminating the couch potato syndrome.

That's why we are developing the **Kids' Recreational Trust**. This trust, funded through a public-private partnership, will have three components:

FIRST, we will help low income children participate in athletics with scholarships to Pop Warner, the Little League, Pee-Wee athletics and the other non-profit recreation programs throughout the county. We will provide funds **to those** recreation programs for children whose families meet our financial guidelines. Low-income children will be able to play soccer, baseball, softball, football or any other group sport without worrying about the expense to their family.

SECOND, we will help youth leagues in EVERY town to purchase new, safer equipment.

THIRD, through the **Kids' Recreation Fund** we will assist every municipality in making field and recreation center improvements.

Using a public-private partnership is one of many ways that Union County will provide more services with fewer taxpayer dollars. This initiative is an investment in healthier, stronger children - and in doing so, healthier, stronger communities. It's one I think we can all be proud of.

All of these initiatives share a common theme of **building better communities**. My last initiative is no exception. **Greening Union County** will help us improve the environment of this county, literally from the ground up.

By planting trees in urban areas, we can lower air pollution, improve the air that we breathe, lower energy costs, and improve the overall quality of life. In short, trees can make a community healthier.

We hope to plant almost 4,000 trees in our 21 municipalities this year through the **Greening Union County** initiative. Every tree will come with a one-year warrantee to ensure that the trees take to their new environments.

We will give every town the opportunity to apply for a **Greening Union County** Grant. Union County will match that municipality's investment and provide the municipality with the forestry professionals to make their communities greener and healthier.

Beyond these initiatives, I would like to announce some of the other programs that will be on the agenda of County Government in 2004.

As a former member of the Elizabeth School Board, education is very close to my heart. A thorough and efficient education helps us meet our goals and achieve our dreams. A good education increases economic opportunity and creates an attractive workforce for business and investment.

Union County College is a vital component of this county's plans to provide educational opportunities. This highly rated institution offers great classroom space, workshops, labs, an excellent library and state of the art computer facilities. Its four campuses offer access to students across the county. We want to ensure that all residents have the opportunity to use its facilities to better themselves and their families.

To that end, we plan to continue the **Freeholder Scholars** program. This program has helped more than 1,500 working and middle-class residents get an associates degree from Union County College at no expense to their families - a first step into a higher-level degree or to better jobs and opportunities.

We will look to expand our **Senior Scholars** program, which has provided college-level courses at Union County College to thousands of seniors at no charge.

We will be using the facilities of Union County College, and a vehicle with computers wired to the internet for our **Literacy and Excellence for All Program**. The program helps seniors learn to use the Internet to keep in touch with loved ones and get information they need. Computers can help liberate seniors and provide them with better resources.

Furthermore, we will continue the **College for Teens** program, which has given thousands of high school students a taste of college-level study and allowed them to work on projects with young people from other parts of the county. As of today, about 600 of our youths haven taken part in this initiative and we hope to expand the number greatly this year.

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