



# COUNTY OF UNION

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ROBERT E. BARRY, ESQ.  
COUNTY COUNSEL

NICOLE L. TEDESCHI, M.P.A.  
CLERK OF THE BOARD

Dear Homeowner:

July 2005

Homeowners have witnessed historic increases in property values over the past five years. In Cranford, property values have soared more than 65 percent from 1999-2004. As we work with our partners to strengthen economic opportunities and offer innovative governmental services for seniors and our working families, Union County has become one of the great places in New Jersey to live and do business.

As your county and local government work together to improve services, your quality of life, and the value of your home, we must also work to address New Jersey's most regressive method of taxation – property taxes.

Because our property taxation is based on the State Constitution, the system cannot be reformed by municipal or county government. As homeowners, we also are impacted by property taxes.

***With this in mind, we are supporting a citizens' convention on property taxes and any other measure that would reform New Jersey's system of property taxation.*** We have sponsored a county resolution supporting the convention at the state level. **We believe New Jersey's over reliance on the property tax is unfair to homeowners and in dire need of reform.**

We're also taking a two-part approach toward a long-term solution: First, we're using economic development as a tool to build a solid tax base, and bring greater prosperity to all our residents. Second, we're developing innovations and working harder to deliver quality governmental services with greater economy and efficiency.

## ***COUNTY STRATEGY STRENGTHENS CRANFORD'S ECONOMY***

Our success at jumpstarting economic development has led to a record-rise in ratables. Over the past two years, ratables have increased by more than \$13 billion – a 28 percent increase. The rise is also due to ***the fact that Union County is a great place to live.*** All of this is quite a reversal in fortune from 1992, when Union County was last in the state in economic development.

We have worked to leverage more than \$5 billion in successful economic development projects over the past decade in Union County. We have worked with Mayor George Jorn and Deputy Mayor Dan Aschenbach and the Cranford governing body on the following projects and services over the past several years:

- We provided the Cranford school district with \$95,000 to provide Internet access through our Access 2000 program.
- We provided \$150,000 in Senior Focus funds that were used at the Cranford Community Center for two new ADA compliant bathrooms, new railings for safety, flooring, lighting improvements, furnishings and recreational equipment.
- We provided \$75,000 in historic preservation funds that were used to renovate and restore the Crane-Phillips House.

## ADMINISTRATION BUILDING

Elizabethtown Plaza Elizabeth, NJ 07207 (908) 527-4100 fax (908) 289-4143 [www.ucnj.org](http://www.ucnj.org)

***We're Connected to You***

- Thirty-seven students from Cranford use our award-winning Vocational Technical Schools.
- We have completed more than \$1 million in public works projects that have included the building of a new bridge, road resurfacings, and inspections of culverts.
- We have committed more than \$2 million in oncoming public works improvements, including flood control projects, another new bridge, intersection work, business district improvements and resurfacings.
- More than 30 Cranford residents have been assisted at Runnells Specialized Hospital.
- Seventy-seven Cranford residents take advantage of our Prescription Drug Program which provides a discount to Union County residents.
- Approximately 4,600 paratransit rides were provided to Cranford seniors this past year.
- Approximately 17,500 meals were provided this past year to seniors in Cranford through our Meals on Wheels and Congregate Meal programs.
- More than 300 Cranford seniors have enrolled for free college courses through our "Senior Scholars" program at Union County College.
- We provided more than \$600,000 in Community Development Block Grant funds that have been used for a variety of services, including the senior citizen nutrition program, senior citizen social services, and neighborhood improvement programs.
- Thirty-five Cranford students have attended Union County College for free through our Freeholder Scholars program.
- We provided more than \$175,000 through the Field of Dreams initiative to install lights at Memorial Park football field and \$106,000 that was used to renovate the Shane Walsh ballfield.
- We provided \$57,000 through the "Kids Recreation Trust Fund" that was used for scholarships, equipment and field renovations to benefit Cranford's children.

Over the past several years, Union County's Department of Economic Development has leveraged more than \$38 million in grants, funding and support that will be used to improve our infrastructure and increase the flow of goods and services in and out of Union County.

While our national economy remains uncertain, our partnership with Cranford has helped keep our local economy among the most vibrant in the nation.

**TIGHTENING OUR GOVERNMENTAL FISCAL BELTS**

We've continued to implement ways of achieving greater governmental efficiencies, whether through innovations such as shared services with municipalities, or joint purchasing programs.

This year, we trimmed our 2005 Executive Budget by more than \$1 million without cutting essential services, and have embarked on a wide range of efficiencies that have saved taxpayers millions.

Over the past couple of years, we've worked to realize savings through the privatization of our print shop, our employee furlough program, and innovations such as the targeted outsourcing at Runnells Hospital, the early retirement program and elimination of positions.

We initiated a performance-based budgeting program, which challenges our managers and employees on fiscal decisions. Our aggressive pursuit of state and federal funds has brought in \$12 million in grants more than last year.

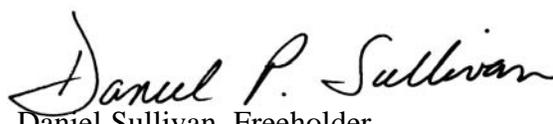
While we've held down costs, we've maintained our policy of strong public safety. We created the Freeholder Committee on Homeland Security, opened the Ralph Froehlich Public Safety Building, and fully funded our Prosecutor's Office. Violent crime has continued to drop in Union County - down more than 13.5 percent during the last period reported by the state.

Our partnership with Cranford in spurring economic development and our efforts to realize governmental efficiencies are paying off. But because of New Jersey's over-reliance on property taxes, we still need your help to achieve lasting reform. If you would like to make your voice heard on the property tax convention or need more information, please take the time now to log onto our website at [www.ucnj.org/taxconvention/](http://www.ucnj.org/taxconvention/)

Thank you for your ongoing cooperation.

Sincerely,

  
Rick Proctor, Chairman  
Union County Board of  
Chosen Freeholders

  
Daniel Sullivan, Freeholder  
Union County Board of  
Chosen Freeholders