

Livingston pastor takes leave of absence amid sexual allegations. Page 21

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Dems' criticism of Christie just plain cheesy

By Bill Wichert
 STAR-LEDGER STAFF

If New Jersey voters thought Gov. Chris Christie's helicopter rides to his son's baseball games were inappropriate, Democrats have another example of personal spending on the public dime — Gorgonzola cheese.

Two days after Christie took a helicopter for the second time to one of his son's baseball games, the New Jersey Democratic State Committee issued a press release calling on the Republican governor to disclose information about previous taxpayer-funded travel for Christie and his staff.

"Previous public records requests have yielded a significant number of blacked out pages with redactions," according to the June 2 press release.



STATEMENT:

Gov. Chris Christie owes the state money "for amenities like extra Gorgonzola cheese for his staff on these trips."

Date: June 2, 2011

Context: News release by Democratic State Committee

RULING

False. The statement is not accurate

"However, these documents do show that the Governor continues to owe thousands of dollars to the state for his travel, as well as for amenities like extra Gorgonzola cheese for his staff on these trips."

The press release concluded with a link to dozens of documents provided to the Democrats by the governor's office, showing travel expenses between February and October 2010.

PolitiFact New Jersey started scanning those documents for the suspect cheese and found copies of receipts for it. For two trips in July 2010, Daniel Robles, an aide to the governor, sought reimbursements for a total of two roast beef sandwiches with Gorgonzola cheese.

What did each topping of Gorgonzola cheese cost New Jersey taxpayers? Ninety-nine cents.

Jason Springer, communications director for the New Jersey Democratic State Committee and the author of the press release, acknowledged that Democrats erred in claiming Christie should reimburse the state for Gorgonzola cheese. That reference was meant to illustrate the type of information being disclosed, compared to the redactions, he said.

"I'm apologizing as well. It was my responsibility for the inaccuracy," Springer told us.

State regulations show that Robles could be reimbursed for the roast beef sandwiches.

For the two days when Robles bought the sandwiches, he sought reimbursements for \$28.54 and \$7.57 in meal expenses, respectively. Robles could have sought reimbursement for up to \$71 per day for meals and incidental expenses on those trips, according to data on the U.S. General Services Administration's website.

SEE **TRUTH**, PAGE 16

2 shot, 1 fatally, in Plainfield grocery store

Neighborhood shocked by daytime violence that left store owner dead, employee injured

By Stephen Stirling
 STAR-LEDGER STAFF

A Plainfield man who neighbors said tried to keep the grocery store he owned crime-free was shot to death in his shop yesterday.

Eduardo Leaty, 47, and an unnamed store employee were found suffering from gunshot wounds when members of the Union County Prosecutor's Office arrived at the Leaty Grocery store at 4:10 p.m. yesterday.

Leaty was transported to a local hospital, according to a statement from the prosecutor, and pronounced dead at 5:05 p.m.

The store employee was expected to survive, according to John

Holl, a spokesman for Prosecutor Theodore Romankow. As of last night, no other details about the shooting, including a motive or assailant, were available.

Neighbors milled around the store at 801 E. 6th St. throughout the afternoon, and some broke down in tears when word spread that Leaty had died.

"He was an awesome guy," said Yolanda Belin, 31. "He'd even give you credit if you were short on cash and needed to buy some bread."

The neighbors said Leaty would never stay open late, nor would he allow people to loiter inside or outside his store for long. They said

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ANDREW MILLER/FOR THE STAR-LEDGER

Neighbors said the store has been family-owned for nearly 25 years, and victim Eduardo Leaty inherited it when his father died several years ago.



PATTI SAPONE/THE STAR-LEDGER

Milton Carabello with his American flag on the deck of his condominium at Lake Estates in East Brunswick.

Flagged by the management

Veteran says condo association singled him out by banning his banner

Milton Carabello's faded Old Glory isn't flying today. It's propped up in the corner of his deck, rolled and secured with long garbage-bag ties.

"All I want to do is fly my flag," said Carabello, a Marine Corps veteran. "I don't want any trouble."

But two months ago, Carabello got a letter from his condo association, saying his flag violated property rules.

"Remove or re-situate your flag on the back porch. Nothing should hang from the wood deck railings," read the letter from Lakes Estates Condominium Association Inc., in East Brunswick. It was signed by property manager Teri-Lee Frisone.

Carabello's flag is the 13-star Betsy Ross type. It is not tattered, but the colors are somewhat blanched from years of use.

"The flag's been up for eight years," he said. "Suddenly it's a violation? My neighbors have flags, but I get the letter."



Mark Di Ionno
nj.com/diionno

Sure enough, in the next building, an American flag of the 50-star variety hangs from an upper-deck railing.

"There are flags all over the place," said Axel Schroeder, a member of the condo association board. "I'm surprised by this. I can't imagine why she won't allow him to fly his flag."

And this is where the story gets

complicated. As anyone who has ever lived in condominium or apartment complex can attest, multiple housing causes multiple problems. High density, high drama.

"Absolutely, on a daily basis," said Frisone. And you wonder there's no peace in the world?

Nadine Taranto, a friend of Carabello's, says he is being harassed "for standing up for the rights of people in the complex. He is the hero of this complex."

Taranto said Carabello goes to the board meetings and asks hard questions about the condition of the property and how money is spent. A man of the people, a man for whom Old Glory on Independence Day is more than apropos.

Frisone countered that Taranto and Carabello are rabble-rousers — agitators who will "do anything they can to make the association look bad."

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Errant foul balls have neighbors ducking for cover, suing for change



JOE PROUDMAN/THE STAR-LEDGER

By Alice Speri
 STAR-LEDGER STAFF

This field of dreams has turned into a nightmare.

When she bought a house near Union Catholic Regional High School in Scotch Plains two years ago, Allison Bennett relished the idea of living next to the high school ballfield.

"We love baseball," she said. "We loved the idea of watching baseball from our home."

That was before she realized 10 to 15 foul balls a game — some traveling at the speed of cars on a highway — would sail through her yard.

her daughter's second birthday party.

And that was before she discovered the renovated field would be closer than expected and games would be played at all hours of the day.

Bennett is among the neighbors who are crying foul over the baseballs that sail into their yard each game.

Last month, a Superior Court judge in Union County issued a temporary order prohibiting baseball-related activities on the field. The order followed a lawsuit by the Shah family, who also complained of foul balls landing on their property during games.

"My home is under attack on every angle," said Rajul Shah, whose backyard sits a few feet from the baseball

field's bleachers, which she says the school built in violation of zoning regulations.

"I'm sick and tired of my children not being able to sit in their backyard," she said.

The mother of three filed the lawsuit — her second against the school — when a baseball landed 2 feet from her 2-year-old son.

"Baseballs travel at 40 to 60 miles per hour," Shah said angrily. "Imagine being a child and being hit with that."

Last August, a judge dismissed a lawsuit in which the Shahs contested the legality of the school's permit for the renovation. Now the Shahs are asking

SEE **BASEBALL**, PAGE 16

Marchers protest stricter immigration law

By Julia Terruso
STAR-LEDGER STAFF

A crowd of more than 80 residents carrying signs and waving American flags marched about a half-mile down Broad Street in Elizabethtown yesterday to protest a strict immigration law that took effect in Georgia on Friday.

The crowd of neighbors, pastors and community organizers followed a banner that read, "The Statue of Liberty is an Immigrant."

"We're here today in solidarity with the people of Georgia," said Alejandro Jaramillo, 42, of Elizabethtown. "We don't want the Arizona or the Georgia law to be passed in New Jersey, We want to replace repressive measures with solutions so that people can stop hiding in the shadows."

The Georgia bill, considered one of the country's most stringent anti-immigration laws, allows officers to ask about immigration

status when questioning suspects in some criminal investigations, punishes those convicted of transporting illegal immigrants during a crime and imposes a long prison term for those who use fake documents to get a job.

"Fear of deportation keeps women from being beaten from reporting domestic abuse," according to Alejandro. "It keeps parents from coming to PTA meetings and it can keep valedictorians

out of college."

Activists also denounced the proposed expansion of the immigration detention center in Essex County and of the implementation of E-Verify, a Federal online system that would allow employers to confirm the status of an employee.

"It's a bittersweet thing to love a country so much but to be so frustrated with it at the same time," said Carlos Rojas, 22, co-founder of the N.J. Dream Act Coalition.

2 N.J. men dead after truck, cycle pack collide in Pa.

By Jim Deegan
EXPRESS-TIMES

Keith Michaelson was leading a pack of seven members of the Last Chance Motorcycle Club, on Route 512 in Bangor, Pa., yesterday when a pickup truck headed the opposite way rounded a bend and plowed into the group, according to a pack member. Two Passaic County men were killed.

"(The truck) hit our procession head on," said George Courtis, of Totout, who was riding at the back of the pack. "(It) struck my brother Keith Michaelson so hard he exploded on impact."

Michaelson, 52, of West Milford, and Michael Zadoyko, 47, of Pompton Lakes, died at the scene of the 4:47 p.m. crash, according to Zachary Lysek, coroner for Northampton County, Pa. Lysek said the men died of multiple blunt force trauma and that their deaths were accidental.

Police identified the driver of the pickup truck as another New Jersey man, John P. Heaney III, 49, of Lopatcong Township.

District Attorney John Morganelli of Northampton County, Pa., said preliminary evidence suggests Heaney had been drinking and alcohol played a role in the crash.

"We're looking at it as a potential DUI case," Morganelli said. "Charges are likely."

Morganelli said a lot of work remains to be done on the crash and his office is assisting Bangor and state police in the investigation. Heaney remains free, Morganelli said. Attempts to reach Heaney yesterday were unsuccessful.

Courts said the bikers were riding southbound on Route 512, headed to a funeral home for a viewing.

Courts and police said two of the bikes burst into flames during the wreck. Courtis said two other riders slid into the flaming bikes — one went through the fire, but the



TIM WYNKOOP/THE EXPRESS-TIMES

The wreckage of a motorcycle after Friday night's accident on Route 512 in Bangor, Pa.

other was badly burned.

He added that he was the lone member of the procession unscathed. He said the injured were burned, had broken bones, road rash, a split heel and other injuries.

"It was a gruesome, gruesome scene," Courtis said. "Every time I shut my eyes, my head is in video loop right now."

All of the bikers were members of the Last Chance Motorcycle Club, a group of clean and sober riders who were headed to a fellow member's viewing in Monroe County, Pa., according to a club member.

Courtis said the group was headed from northern New Jersey to Gilbert, Pa., for the viewing of Ronald J. Oswald, a 65-year-old Bangor native who lived in Towamensing Township. One man was flown to an area hospital, the others taken by ambulance. The crash occurred at 4:47 p.m. on Route 512 in Bangor.

Ken Cordes, a member of the club who was at the funeral home, said several people drove from the wake to the

crash scene Friday night. State police and Lysek met with three club members who ignored a road block trying to get to the crash site.

The Last Chance Motorcycle Club has about 60 members with chapters in New Jersey, New York and Pennsylvania, Cordes said. The bikers involved in the crash belonged to the club based in Greenwood Lake, N.Y., which is just over the New Jersey state line.

"We're a clean and sober club," said Cordes, adding that members, or "patch-holders," had battled alcohol or drug addictions prior to their rehabilitations.

According to Cordes, Michaelson was a real estate agent and Zadoyko owned a home construction company. Michaelson is listed as a Century 21 agent on the agency's website. Zadoyko, who was president of the club's Greenwood Lakes chapter, is listed as the owner of Northeast Home-works on his Facebook page.

Courtis said as the funerals rounded the corner, one of the

guys ahead of him screamed, "Look out!" then Heaney's truck struck Michaelson's bike.

"It's very devastating," Courtis said. "Two families, absolutely devastating."

Cordes said Michaelson had two daughters and Zadoyko had two daughters and a son.

Courtis said the Last Chance club is for recovering addicts. Cordes said Michaelson and Zadoyko were the model for Last Chance members.

Michaelson on Wednesday "spontaneously" and spent an hour trying to arrange help for a friend of Cordes' who has a severe alcohol problem, Cordes said.

"These guys are the Last Chance Motorcycle Club," Cordes said. "This is what they're about, helping other addicts and alcoholics to get them on the right track."

Courtis said the club, and Michaelson and Zadoyko, preached about the importance of family.

"We're a family," Courtis said. "We camp together, we laugh together, we cry together."

Truth

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 15

Christie spokesman Michael Drewniak said staff members traveling with the governor are subject to the same per-diem limits as other state employees, and expenses are scrutinized.

"Are you under the impression that staff traveling with the governor can go to swank restaurants and charge drinks and fine dining to the state?" Drewniak wrote in an e-mail. "They cannot and they do not."

Now, let's take a quick look at the Democrats' overall claim that Christie "continues to owe thousands of dollars to the state for his travel."

According to Springer, that claim is based on research

done by Courier-Post columnist Jeremy Rosen. In an April 28 column, Rosen wrote that public records show Christie's administration still owed the state about \$2,488 for personal expenses on trips last fall.

But here's the problem: The Democrats' press release didn't mention Rosen, leaving readers with the impression that the Democrats' own public records show Christie owes money. Springer said those records were provided in the press release to illustrate the redactions made by the governor's office.

In a Nov. 23 letter to the Democratic State Committee — included in the documents linked to in the press release — Raymond Brandes, assistant attorney general,

wrote, "certain records have been withheld or redacted on the basis of the executive privilege and the security risk exception to (the Open Public Records Act)."

Most of the expenses outlined in the documents included in the Democrats' press release show business-related items. According to those documents, the governor and first lady submitted two checks to the state totaling about \$1,800. About \$125 still had to be repaid to the state, according to those documents.

Let's review:

The New Jersey Democratic State Committee said in a press release that Christie owed the state money for "extra Gorgonzola cheese for his staff on these trips." A

Democratic spokesman told us that statement was inaccurate, and state regulations support reimbursement for those meals.

The Democrats' claim that Christie owes money is based on a newspaper column, but that's not cited in the press release. The Democrats' own records prove that information has been withheld by the governor's office, but don't show that Christie owes much money.

PolitiFact New Jersey enjoys a roast beef sandwich just as much as the next person, but to claim that the governor should fork over dough for Gorgonzola cheese is just wrong. We rate this statement False.

To read the full ruling, go to PolitiFactNJ.com.

Baseball

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 15

a court to decide whether the school should have gotten zoning board approval before the town issued a permit.

James Reagan Jr., who is both an assistant principal at Union Catholic and the varsity baseball coach, said the school secured a permit for the work. He dismissed the foul ball accusations as "hyperbole."

"We are confident we'll correct these exaggerations," Reagan said, adding the lawsuit was riddled with inaccuracies and the school will appeal. "We're just looking to play baseball as we have done for the past 50 years."

Union Catholic was built in 1962. The Shahs, who moved next door in 1999, said they had no problems with the old field. But the new field is 25 feet closer to their house, they

said. Reagan denied this, saying the \$1.3 million renovation shifted the field's angle and moved it farther from their property.

Four balls affect five houses on Dutch Lane and Black Birch Road. Residents also complain about noise, strangers peeping into their yards and trespassing by players fetching balls. One Black Birch Road resident collected — and kept — about 100 balls.

"Had I known this, I would have not bought this house," said Bennett, 36, the Shahs' next-door neighbor.

In addition to foul balls, neighbors are concerned about damage to their property.

Reagan said the school proposed to one family a protective net, but the family refused it for aesthetic reasons.

A structure would require zoning approval, the Shahs'

lawyer said, adding that in turn it would require a variance allowing the structure to be built within 100 feet of neighboring properties.

Union Catholic has supporters in town who argue the new field is an asset to the community, as local teams use it at no cost.

Mike Dempsey, former president of the Scotch Plains Fanwood Youth Baseball Association, said the group used the field in the past, but has stopped.

"There was consternation with the neighbors, and we didn't want to be a part of that," Dempsey said.

He said his team also stopped using the field because of the busy schedule of Union Catholic's teams.

"For 25 years, they offered their field to other teams," Scotch Plains Mayor Nancy Malool said. "That's a

generous, community-oriented thing to do."

After heated town hall meetings, the township asked the school to stop playing baseball until a solution was reached. It didn't.

The Superior Court is scheduled to determine July 12 whether the restraining order should become permanent.

Both sides are confident they will win.

"We heard the neighbors' concern," Reagan said. "Clearly, we don't want anyone to get hurt."

"We're not against baseball — we're just against baseball hitting people's homes," said the Shahs' lawyer, Marc Rogoff. "We may say it's 15 balls a day. They may say it's 10. But which one of the 10 balls could have hit somebody? One ball is one too many."

Alice Speri (973) 392-4154 or asperi@starledger.com

Di Ionno

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People versus authority is America's most ancient tradition. A more recent tradition is filing lawsuits. Frisone said both Taranto and Carabello sued the association for harassment and discrimination, but were dismissed by the state for "no probable cause."

"We've spent \$8 million doing renovations to this place in the last four years as we moved from rentals to condos," she said. "We have 300 families here, and most are happy. But some people are just out for themselves."

Lake Estates is 22 buildings situated behind several Route 18 shopping plazas. The buildings are brick, painted a light yellow, and units sell for \$130,000 to \$240,000. Owners seem to do what they want with their back decks. Many have elaborate work and decorative railings. Plants, hanging planters, and decorative pinwheels abound. So do American flags. One lady has a collection of plastic flags she posts around the complex on patriotic holidays. A half-dozen of them were within 50 feet of

Carabello's back deck, in the ground, in planters.

"It's a very nice place to live," Schroeder said. "And we're very patriotic; we're having a big barbecue for the Fourth of July for the whole complex. Everybody gets along."

Most everybody. Carabello has a packet of correspondence with the Frisone and board about 3 inches thick. At a Jan. 24 board meeting, Carabello and Taranto said, Frisone cursed at Carabello.

"She says she's God. 'When it comes to this complex, I'm God,' That's what she says," said Taranto.

The flag issue, said Frisone, is nothing personal. It's simple insurance liability.

"It was hanging over a common walkway," she said. "People should be able to walk through there without the flag flapping at them."

But for eight years it was up, flapping freely.

"I don't know why they're bothering him now. It's been up forever," said a neighbor of Carabello's, who asked not to be identified.

"I don't want any trouble with the property manager."

Mark Di Ionno (973) 392-1728 or mdii@starledger.com

CELEBRATIONS ANNIVERSARIES

Marking Milestones

To view a Celebrations announcement listed in today's Star-Ledger, or one from the past 30 days, go to nj.com/weddings



Phil and Beryl Alfano Wed 65 years

Phil Alfano and the former Beryl Morrison of Culver Lake, N.J., and Boynton Beach, Fla., met while Phil was a sailor in the Navy; they fell in love and married on July 14, 1946, in an intimate garden wedding in Gardens Home, Ore. They will celebrate their 65th wedding anniversary with their children and their spouses on a cruise to Canada. Throughout the years, they were blessed with an abundance of wonderful and close family and friends whom they cherish; an excitement and appreciation for family road trips through the national parks, long before it was popular, and a lifetime of always seeing the glass half full. Their seven children, 23 grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren wish them love on reaching this milestone.

ENGAGEMENTS



Schatz-Giotto

Dennis and Nancy Schmatz of Cranford, N.J., are pleased to announce the engagement of their son, James, to Samantha Giotto, daughter of Frank and Kristine Giotto of New Hartford, N.Y.

Jim graduated from Saint Joseph High School in Metuchen, N.J., and has a B.S. in new media/interactive development from Rochester Institute of Technology. He is employed as a software developer for SITEWORX in Reston, Va.

Sam graduated from New Hartford High School and has a B.A. in political science and adolescent education from Le Moyne College in Syracuse, N.Y. She is employed by Energy Efficient Products, Inc. in Rome, N.Y.

The couple got engaged on Christmas Eve and will be married in September 2011.

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