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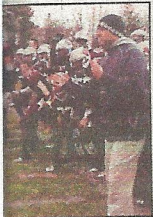
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YEAR IN REVIEW

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For the second time there was a hung jury in a trial relating to the 2009 shooting of a gas station attendant. The Essex County Prosecutor's Office is expected to try the case for a third time.



HILLBILLIES SHUT OUT BECTON TO CLINCH SPOT IN CHAMPIONSHIP - NOV. 22

For the first time since 2008, the Verona football team was heading to the sectional championship after defeating the Becton Wildcats 22-0. See more top sports news on B1.

PAIR OF WINDOW-SMASHING INCIDENTS IN VERONA - JULY 28

A man was charged in connection to two broken windows at a Sunoco gas station and a Scoop ice cream parlor in Verona.

CEDAR GROVE TOWNSHIP COUNCIL ANNOUNCES NEW RECREATION DIRECTOR - OCT. 21

Marisa Landolfi was named Cedar Grove's new recreation director in October. Before her stint in Cedar Grove, the 30-year-old Caldwell resident joined the Verona Recreation Department in 2008. She graduated from Kean University with a degree in recreation administration.

ELMWOOD AND LANNING ROADS

Community supports local crossing guard

BY JOSHUA JONGSMA

Managing Editor

For 14 years, Frank Meletti spent his days looking out for local children as a crossing guard at Laning Avenue Elementary School.

Now, it's time for the community to take its turn watching over Meletti.

The 69-year-old crossing guard suffered a heart attack in early December — the second in his life — which took him out of commission and away from his post at the corner of Elmwood and Laning roads. Once Laning parents heard about Meletti's condition, many of them found a variety of ways to help him.

Robert Frank, whose children attended Laning Elementary, helped organize his neighbors and form a schedule for people to assist Meletti. Some of the ways the nearby parents pitched in include preparing low salt and fat meals for him,

'Not everyone goes about their job the way he did, and obviously he just loves being a crossing guard, and it shows.'

JULIE DIGIACOMO
Laning Avenue principal

volunteering to shovel and plow snow should a storm hit, performing light housework, and providing special diabetic food for one of his dogs.

Frank said he's being "bombed" by emails from people who want to lend a hand to the longtime crossing guard.

"It's truly incredible how car-

SEE CROSSING GUARD, PAGE A2

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CROSSING GUARD

FROM PAGE A1

ing the people are in both Cedar Grove and Verona," Frank said, noting that Meletti is a "very caring" person.

After growing up in East Orange, Meletti moved to his Pompton Avenue home in Verona 42 years ago. He and his wife raised two sons in the township. Meletti worked at a post office until he turned 55, and also spent time employed at a veterinary clinic, where he cultivated his love of dogs. In addition to working with animals, Meletti said the best thing he ever did was become a crossing guard.

"I would go home every day and smile," he said. "One of those little kids would say something and it would stick with you all day."

The warm feelings were often mutual, as Laning Avenue Principal Julie DiGiacomo said Meletti was well liked and the children miss having him there. The crossing guard would always keep chocolate gold coins to give to kids as a treat when they lost a tooth, DiGiacomo said, and he also kept

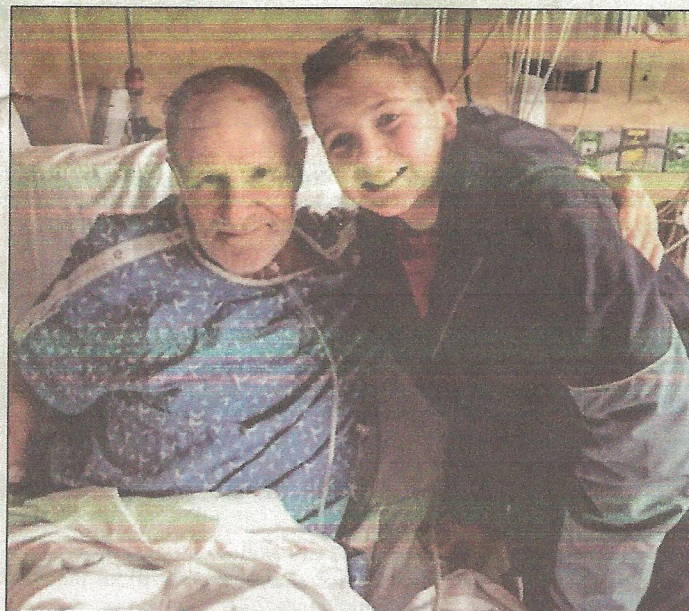


PHOTO COURTESY OF ROBERT FRANK

Austin Frank, 12, visits Laning Avenue School crossing guard Frank Meletti in the hospital Dec. 21.

snacks for dogs passing by his spot.

The admiration led many students to write cards to Meletti while he was in the hospital, the principal said.

"He's just a special man," DiGiacomo told the Times. "Not everyone goes about their job the way he

did, and obviously he just loves being a crossing guard, and it shows."

Meletti said he hopes to return to his post at Laning at some point, but will have to see how his health progresses. He had surgery at Valley Hospital last week to have a

pacemaker and defibrillator installed and will stay with at his son's house in West Caldwell while he recovers.

Life after the heart attack has sometimes proved difficult for Meletti. After marrying at the age of 18, he said he has always been an independent person.

His nature led him to become "perturbed" when Frank tried to help him out, but the Laning parent said he intended to be there for Meletti regardless.

Even if he was reluctant at first, Meletti said he wanted to thank everyone who came to his side, and that he's grateful he moved to Verona.

Frank said parents plan to continue looking for ways to help, while Verona Mayor Bob Manley said he intends to take part in some sort of fundraiser soon.

"Frank is a saint," Manley said. "There's no one more deserving, that I know, of the outpouring that he's getting from the Laning community. It's another reason why I love this town so much. These people just step up."

"He is truly beloved by every one of those parents who walk by that corner."

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