

Trust fund targets \$11M in spending

By Joshua Zaitz
Staff Writer

Although freeholders allocated slightly more than \$11 million from the Open Space, Historic and Recreation Trust Fund last year, the county spent a little less than \$9 million.

In 2003, freeholders approved the encumbrance of \$11,030,648 in trust fund dollars. However, the county only spent \$8,997,954, leaving a remaining \$2,032,694 that was encumbered from the Open Space Trust Fund last year but not spent.

The trust fund was approved by voters in a 2000 referendum, setting a tax of \$0.15 per \$100 of assessed value directly for the trust fund. The fund generates approximately \$7 million each year.

The two biggest portions of the unspent trust fund money come from encumbrances to the Children's Museum of Central Jersey, which will be located on Morris Avenue in Union, and renovations at the Trailside Nature Museum in Mountainside.

Freeholders encumbered \$1 million from the Open Space Trust Fund last year to support the children's museum. However, the county only paid \$250,000 toward the children's museum in 2003.

Representatives of the children's museum report to the county on a quarterly basis. They must provide reports of what they spent so the county can see if the money is being spent in a way that is consistent with the Open Space Trust Fund.

"If they haven't totally spent the \$250,000 yet, they're not permitted to come back to us for the next round of funding," said Open Space Trust Fund Administrator Angela Devanney.

Devanney said \$1 million for the Trailside project was encumbered in 2001. The county's finance department carries the encumbrance over each year.

"We know that \$1 million is dedicated from the trust fund for X, Y, and Z projects but we may not have drawn down upon it," said Devanney.

The parks department, Devanney said, will be responsible for providing over \$3 million for the Trailside project and the last payment will come from the Open Space Trust Fund.

Last year, the county set aside money from the trust fund to pay T&M Associates \$124,750 for architectural designs at Esposito Park in Clark. However, the county only paid

T&M \$8,732 in 2003. The county has not begun any type of construction at Esposito yet.

"We need to prepare bid documents before money is put against the construction of Esposito Park," said Devanney, explaining that the county anticipates construction on the park could begin as soon as the fall.

The county allocated paying PMK Group \$75,000 last year, yet only paid the firm \$37,117.

Devanney said the county has a blanket contract with PMK. When the county is looking to acquire a piece of property, the state's Green Acres program requires several things, including having the property appraised by two Green Acres-approved appraisers, having environmental assessment completed and survey work.

"When we're in the process of negotiating for a parcel, we obviously can't put our professional consultants on and say that we're doing this analysis to determine a price," said Devanney.

The blanket contract with PMK allows the county to complete some of the state-mandated requirements without jeopardizing negotiations for the piece of property.

"This allows us to meet Green Acre requirements as we're in negotiations for a parcel," said Devanney.

For its Field of Dreams program, the county encumbered \$514,300 last year. However, it only distributed \$411,800 last year. Cranford did not receive its \$52,500 last year, while Roselle Park did not receive its \$50,000. Devanney said Cranford and Roselle Park probably did not fulfill all of the county's requirements to receive the Field of Dreams funding.

"It would seem to me that they have not completed their projects for one reason or another," she said. The funding will be given to the municipalities once all the requirements are met.

Devanney said the \$11 million encumbered last year is a fairly typical amount of money to come from the Open Space Trust Fund during the course of one year.

"It's fairly typical but it's hard to say from year-to-year because you have years when you can have significant acquisitions," she said.

The most significant acquisition by the Open Space Trust Fund last year was \$5,460,000 to acquire the Esposito



Photo By Barbara Kokkalis

piece of paper to show how the first commencement cer-

graduation

ver like graduating from drug court. lives for being strong enough to succeed at insanity is doing the same thing over and nothing changes," she told graduates. "I was going to die but drug court helped me get on a path — to sobriety," said Rita V., a gradu-

ate said that drug court gave him a sense

g a tight rope without a net before this pro- H. "Drug court gave me a network of peo- and help me through the chaos."

tes stated that drug court "saw something I did not see in themselves."

icated that working within the judicial sys- ing with case process, not human beings. "It we deal with people and we deal with the five years," he said.

ntioned that state officials are constantly program for lack of funding or saying it is in other counties that do not have this prison. "I've had to reduce this program to t politicians can understand," she said.

h, the state's statistics show that more than ave enrolled in this program and 259 have duated from all phases and of 124 gradu- are rearrested after the first year of gradua-

ram began in 1999, 94 percent of partici- ed arrest-free as of March 1 and 52 of the e gained custody of their children.

ork by supporting personal change in ome to the attention of the court system ven crimes," wrote Venditto in an arti- es. "The courts ask defendants to look begin a path toward change that will ad law-abiding, drug-free lives."

over

Millions allocated

(Continued from Page B1)
to farm. Other trust fund expenditures last year included \$197,149 for various professional service contracts, \$106,000 to refurbish Shane Walsh Field in Cranford and \$411,000 to pay off some of the debt service on the American Water property in Summit.

Almost \$844,000 in trust fund money was spent as part of the Green

the Streets program. Elizabeth, Hillside, Rahway, Roselle, Plainfield and Linden each received \$125,000, while Union received \$93,500. Green the Streets, initiated in 2002, aims to add green space to urban areas, by allowing towns to apply for up to \$250,000. A \$500,000 down payment was also paid on the Ponderosa Farm in Scotch Plains.

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Pincus has provided psychoeducational programs throughout New Jersey and lectures extensively, nationally on such topics as stress reduction, parenting, domestic violence, assertiveness training, sexual assault, anxiety and elder abuse. She has



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