

Memorial Day events

Branchville — The Private Peter S. Hotalen Post 157 of the American Legion Memorial Day parade Monday, May 28, at 10 a.m. Organizations wishing to participate should call 973-948-4550 or 973-729-5831.

Byram — Memorial Day ceremony led by the Byram VFW will be held at the Byram Veterans Memorial in front of the Roseville School House on Mansfield Drive on Memorial Day, May 28, at 10 a.m. Following the ceremony, the crowd moves on to join the Byram Township Fire Department parade. The parade begins at the Byram Township Firehouse and travels north on Route 206, ending at the Adam Todd Restaurant.

Franklin — Will host a Memorial Day parade Monday, May 28, at 10:30 a.m. The parade will start on Rutherford Avenue and end at the memorial near Franklin Borough Hall.

Hamburg — Will host a Memorial Day Ceremony Monday, May 28, at 9:15 a.m. for the firemen at North Church Street; at 9:45 a.m., there will be a small ceremony outside of the Borough of Hamburg Hall.

Hardyston — The old Monroe stone school will be open to the public on Memorial Day and Sunday, June from 1 to 4 p.m. The school is located on Route 94 near the Hardyston/ Sparta border-line. Parking is available in the field (picnic area) marked by cones along the road.

There will be a Memorial Day service at 1 p.m. on Memorial Day in the picnic area, weather permitting. A short meeting of the Hardyston Heritage Society will be held at noon before the service.

The school opening is free to the public on Memorial Day, but donations will be accepted. The one room stone school served the families of the Monroe area from 1819 to 1926, educating students in grades 1 to 8. Group visits for other times this summer may be made by calling 973-663-0075.

Hopatcong — Will host a Memorial Day parade Saturday, May 26, at 10 a.m. The parade will start at the municipal building and end at Veteran's Field.

Montague — Will host a Memorial Day celebration at 10 a.m. Monday, May 28, in front of the municipal building.

Newton — The Newton Memorial Day Parade will be Monday, May 28, at 10 a.m. at Spring Street and Memory Park.

Ogdensburg — Memorial Day Ceremony will be held 9:15 a.m. at Heater's Pond on Monday.

Stillwater — Will host a Memorial Day ceremony Monday, May 28, at 10 a.m. at the Stillwater Presbyterian Church, Main Street. It will be followed by a wreath placing ceremony at Veterans Memorial Park on Pond Brook Road. For information, call 579 6402.

Sparta — Will host a Memorial Day parade Monday, May 28, at 10 a.m. The parade will start on East Shore Trail and end by the library.

Sussex Borough — American Legion Post 213, Route 23, Sussex Borough, and Sussex Fire Department are hosting Memorial Day services Monday. Services start at noon at the post. The guest speaker is Bertha Fiore, of Wantage, a veteran World War II nurse. Members of the post will visit local cemeteries earlier in the day for wreath-laying ceremonies before the service at the post.

Vernon — Parade Monday, May 28. To participate, contact the Vernon VFW Post 8441 at 973-764-9380.

Man ticketed after hitting tree, sign

HACKETTSTOWN — A town resident was ticketed after smacking a tree and metal signs along Main Street on Tuesday.

According to police, Isabel De Jesus Villeda-Berganza was "staggering along Main Street" where police officers observed him "smack trees, a metal sign and a banner."

When police stopped him, officers allegedly smelled the "odor of an alcoholic beverage" and issued him a summons for disorderly conduct. Villeda-Berganza was released pending a municipal court date.

Survey tracks health of workplaces

By **ERIC OBERNAUER**
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The Pioneering Healthier Community Team is looking to determine how well workplaces are in Sussex County. Or, more specifically, what workplace wellness programs and practices are in place and what health initiatives employers would be willing to support.

A survey to gather the relevant data has been created and can be accessed online at www.surveymonkey.com/s/R59W2XV. It includes easy to follow instructions.

"We realize these are very difficult economic times, so we're not looking for businesses to provide financial benefits that are going to cost the employer," said David Carciari, executive director of the Sussex County YMCA and leader of the local PHC Team. "This is essentially a needs

assessment where we're trying to find out what's taking place now and whether there's an interest in incorporating a wellness program into the organizational culture. We're looking to support employers. We're not in any way trying to mandate anything."

Carciari said in addition to the intrinsic benefits of good health, there were also financial benefits to be realized by employers through health promotion. Among these, he said, were decreased absenteeism stemming from illness and injury, lower insurance premiums, and a more productive workforce.

As of last week, about 100 employers in Sussex County had responded to the survey, which consists mostly of multiple-choice questions as well as a few questions that allow for written comments. A few of the

questions are aimed at finding out what programs currently are being offered by employers such as healthy lunch choices, flexible work schedules, on- or off-site health screening programs, gym membership reimbursements, and educational programs centered around healthy lifestyles. The survey also includes questions aimed at assessing what other health promotion efforts employers would be willing to consider.

The survey responses will be reviewed by the PHC Team to assist local businesses in developing their own worksite wellness programs. Additional information may be gleaned from respondents who agree to follow-up interviews.

The Sussex County PHC Team, formed in 2008, is a public-private partnership aimed at promoting sustainability and healthy communities.

The partnership is the product of a collaboration launched in 2004 between the YMCA and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Called "Pioneering Healthier Communities" (PHC), the effort is aimed at promoting collaborative engagement with community leaders, studying how environments influence public health and well-being, and enhancing the role public policy plays in sustaining change, according to the YMCA. The national effort constitutes one of the components of the YMCA's "Activate America" initiative, which was formed in 2004 in response to what officials said was a growing health crisis that had seen obesity rates soar by 60 percent over the prior 10-year period.

In 2008, the initiative was expanded to include an addi-

tional 18 communities nationwide including Sussex County. The initiative seeks, among other things, to transform the environment in Sussex County by making communities more pedestrian-friendly and workplaces more supportive for people who need help adopting and maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

While the effort is mostly concerned with measures directly impacting public health, Carciari said the effort also was aimed at promoting sustainability through such concepts as rethinking the way communities are designed to make them more conducive to walking, biking and using public transportation to get around, as opposed to relying on automobiles.

In New Jersey, the state

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Marine has big responsibility in Afghanistan

By **BRUCE A. SCRUTON**
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FORWARD OPERATING BASE WHITEHOUSE — When it comes to things that go bang in the night, or in the day, or during a dust storm, Sgt. Waylon Sliker is the man who makes it happen for the Marines guarding Route 611 in Helmand Province, Afghanistan.

"I'm the one who makes sure the other Marines get what type of ammunition they need for the situation they are in," said Sliker, who is now officially from Sparta, where his parents, David and Alameda live. He grew up in Franklin and graduated from Wallkill Valley Regional High School in 2004.

Now on his third deployment to Afghanistan, Sliker is assigned to what's known as Forward Operating Base Whitehouse, sort of a fort along a main supply route built by American forces.

From this base, helicopters can resupply the remote outposts that overlook much more rustic trails and routes in the area, many of which lead into the mountainous border with Pakistan.

And, because of its strategic position, FOB Whitehouse is also a prime objective of the Taliban fighters in the area.

A quiet, unassuming man, Sliker stressed that "I didn't do anything more than anyone else" during a satellite telephone interview earlier this week.

But as the conversation with him, and the Marine unit's public affairs specialist, Sgt. James Mercure, continued, some interesting facts about Sliker's unique job came out.

Sliker is the only ammunition specialist at the base and as such is responsible for millions of dollars worth of ammunition, from the typical rounds fired through a regular service weapon to specialized grenade rounds to rockets and mortar rounds. In fact, anything that a regular Marine infantry unit would have for both offensive and defensive use, falls to Sliker.

Quite a responsibility for someone who celebrated his



U.S. Marine Corps photo by Sgt. James Mecure

Sgt. Waylon Sliker, of Sparta, an ammunition technician, 1st Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment, searches through his weapon's telescopic sight for insurgents during an indirect fire attack at Forward Operating Base Whitehouse in Afghanistan.

26th birthday Thursday.

But even with those duties, Sliker is still counted among the Marine fighting force at the base.

With a little prodding, based on hints from Mercure, the story of March 19 started to come out.

"It was 'red air' and there was a firefight," Sliker said. "It happens."

Through further questions-and-answers, it was learned the term means the remains of a dust storm has made the air thick with dust and cut visibility to 100 feet or less, the perfect cover for the Taliban, "armed to the teeth," as Sliker explained, to move into the surrounding area and begin shooting at Whitehouse.

On that day, the base took fire for 40-45 minutes but, because of the dusty air, could

not pinpoint the source of the fire.

"We had to go out in teams. We knew the area and about where they were shooting from," the sergeant explained. "We grabbed five."

He declined to go into details about how his team, one of several that went out "in a show of force" and captured the Taliban fighters.

He said the captured group included an 80-year-old man "who's been fighting most of his life here. Fought the Russians and those before."

He said the Taliban raids are part of the cat-and-mouse tactics used in the area.

"They test what we do, how we react so they can try to plan around it," Sliker said. "We know that so we do things differently."

"The day after that attack,

the weather cleared, so they fired recoilless rifles and rockets at us," he said.

As an ammunition specialist, he is also called upon to look at what the Taliban has been using and the types of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) they set up along the road.

The sergeant said the troops have been very successful in using frequency jammers to counteract the radio-controlled IEDs by the roadside so the Taliban are "using more pressure plates."

There are several ways to defeat the pressure plates, he noted, but stressed, "Our best sensors are our eyes. When we're on foot, it's us."

Coming up on his eighth year in the Marines, Sliker faces the decision whether to make the Corps a career.

"I'm rotating out in about three weeks," he said, and will be assigned to Camp Lejeune in North Carolina, where he hopes to be an instructor.

Sliker joined the Marines just two months after graduating from Wallkill, at the urging of his father.

"He always said, 'You need to do it. Every young man owes it to this country,'" he recalled.

As to re-enlisting, Sliker said, "I'm pretty sure I'll do it. It's very secure. A good paycheck and benefits."

As to the chances of rotating again to the Middle East, Sliker said, "I'm going into a three-year stint where I can't be transferred."

He also said of the combat instructor position, "That's what I was taught and that's what I want to pass on."

Montague boy heads to national spelling bee

By **ERIC OBERNAUER**
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MONTAGUE — A 12-year-old homeschooler is blazing a trail to the nation's capital next week for what promises to be the mother of all spelling bees.

As a result of winning the 34th annual Tri-State Spelling Bee competition held at Port Jervis High School on March 11, Carson Monks has earned the right to go head-to-head with 277 other spellers at next week's Scripps National Spelling Bee, which will be televised nationally by ESPN.

"I'm really pumped," Carson said. "I've been studying a little bit and trying to learn how to spell different sounds. It's definitely helpful, especially for any words I don't already know."

Only six other students from

New Jersey will be on stage at next week's spelling bee, which will include contestants from all 50 states as well as American Samoa, Guam, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands and U.S. Department of Defense schools in Europe. The competition also will include students from the Bahamas, Canada, China, Ghana, Jamaica, Japan, New Zealand and South Korea.

For Carson and 92 other spellers, this will also be their first trip to Washington, D.C., according to the Scripps Spelling Bee website.

Carson's journey began in January when he entered a written spelling contest administered by Montague Elementary School for students in grades four through six. His performance in that contest,

combined with his score in an oral spelling bee held at the school in February, enabled him to advance to the Tri-State Spelling Bee in March. Students from five other school districts in New York and Pennsylvania, covering grades six through eight, competed in that event, which Carson won despite being among the youngest contestants.

The Montague Township Committee issued a proclamation March 27 honoring Carson's achievement, which earned him and his parents an all-expenses-paid trip to the Gaylord National Resort and Convention Center just outside Washington, D.C., for next week's competition, compliments of the Tri-State Chamber of Commerce and other spon-

sors of the Tri-State Spelling Bee.

To Carson's parents, David and Bonnie Monks, it comes as no surprise that Carson's favorite subject is spelling. Carson, who hopes someday to become a video game designer or private detective, said his brother Ethan, 8, a second-grader at Montague Elementary School, has similar aspirations of following in his footsteps and someday putting his spelling prowess to the test on the national stage.

The Scripps Spelling Bee is sponsored annually by the E.W. Scripps publishing company and is the nation's largest and longest-running educational promotion.

The competition next week will open with three rounds,

beginning with a preliminary written test Tuesday morning. The preliminaries will continue Wednesday with Rounds Two and Three, both of which will be broadcast live on ESPN3. Round Two will take place from 8 a.m. to 11:45 a.m., and Round Three will take place from 1:15 p.m. to 5:15 p.m.

All 278 spellers will be on stage for the first three rounds, and nobody will be eliminated from those portions of the bee.

Immediately at the conclusion of Round Three, Bee officials will determine the semifinals.

The semifinals will be broadcast live on ESPN2 Thursday from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. The championship finals will be broadcast live on ESPN Thursday from 8 to 10 p.m.