

## Public, police relations discussed at Montclair 3rd Ward meeting

How can Montclair avoid the "us versus them" mentality between members of the public and local law enforcement?

The question was posed during 3rd Ward Township Councilman Sean Spiller's 3rd Ward community meeting on Wednesday, April 23. Montclair Police Officer Christopher Barnes of the Montclair Police Department's Community Policing Unit was on hand to answer residents' questions.

Barnes said the unit serves as a liaison between the MPD and the public. Earlier this month, the MPD welcomed five new officers, and Barnes said he was hopeful that the additions could free up other officers to join his unit, which now consists of five officers.

A mother in the audience asked Barnes and Spiller what the MPD was doing to be proactive in police/community relations. Barnes cited the Brother to Brother program that educates local youths on everything from interactions with police to job interviews. Spiller said that school resource officers, such as one at Montclair High School, have interacted with students to establish a positive relationship at a young age.

Barnes conceded that police, in general, are not depicted in a positive light, but said that he hoped that by respecting Montclairites, they will respect the MPD in return.

"'Us versus them' has to stop," Barnes said. "All sides have to be open-minded."

### No Conflict

Spiller fielded several questions regarding his position on the Montclair Board of School Estimate.

A website, Montclair Kids First, a self-described parent group, questioned Spiller's role on the board earlier this year given Spiller's role as secretary-treasurer of the New Jersey Education Association, the statewide teachers union.

Asked whether he felt it was a conflict of interest given that the Board of School Estimate makes decisions that affect the employees belonging to the Montclair Education Association, a branch of the NJEA, Spiller said "no." The councilman pointed out that much of the budget is set before the Board of School Estimate becomes involved. The BOSE has no say on staff salary and benefits, Spiller said.

Spiller said he believed that, since education is a service industry, smaller ratios between students and teachers and staff should be encouraged, meaning that more teachers should be hired.

Two other residents spoke to Spiller on the subject, one in support of Spiller's role on the board and the other asking whether Spiller could see why some people perceive a conflict of interest.

Spiller said that he could not.

### Bang for the Buck

The Montclair Farmers' Market, which has been around since 1993, offers residents farm-fresh produce two days per week. However, the produce is not known for being inexpensive, municipal Sustainability Officer Gray Russell noted.

This year, the market will accept payment via Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program cards, according to Russell. The market has, and will continue to, accept payment via Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children and Seniors Farmers' Market Nutrition Program vouchers, Russell said.

In an effort to put the market on equal footing with local grocery stores, this year's market will feature a "Double Bucks" program, funded through a grant provided by the Montclair-based Partners for Health organization, that will provide people who are paying with food subsidies double the amount of farmers' market items that they pay for.

The Montclair Farmers' Market will open on Saturday, June 6, according to Russell. It will be open on Saturdays near the Walnut Street Train Station and on Tuesdays on South Park Street, noted Russell.