



Everyone Has a Story

Scott Cronick

A.C. resident savors life as metal rocker

Justin Daniels lives the life of a rock star. Between recording music, touring around the world and performing in front of moshing crowds of metal heads, the 35-year-old Atlantic City native and resident admits he probably won't get rich with his band Solace, but he can sure have fun doing it.

Daniels joined the central New Jersey-based band in 2003 after Solace members Tom Southard and Rob Hultz, both from Ashbury Park, were looking for a guitar player who was not only talented, but had a positive attitude.



'We're trying to get noticed in a sea of a million other bands, but we're not looking to become major superstars.'

Justin Daniels, of Atlantic City

After a jam and discussions about music, Daniels fit the bill.

Since joining the band, Daniels has toured Europe four times, performed at the recent South by Southwest Festival in Austin, Texas, and recorded two EPs.

The band, however, is particularly excited about the future. It recently released its first full-length CD, "A.D.," on Detroit's Small Stone Recordings, which contacted the band, financed the album and is distributing it.

This month, Solace will travel to Clisson, France, to perform at Hellfest, a metal festival that will feature KISS, Slayer, Alice Cooper and others.

"I think Small Stone likes us because we add diversity to the label because we are the heaviest band they have," said Daniels, who describes Solace as a mix of Black Sabbath and Soundgarden. "We put every ounce of our beings in this album. We're trying to get noticed in a sea of a million other bands, but we're not looking to become major superstars. We just want to be able to tour with bigger bands and put out quality records. We know we're going to have to work day jobs the rest of our lives, and that's OK."

"A.D." is currently exclusively available on iTunes. It will be released on CD and vinyl June 1.

Short Stories

Alisa Cooper and her husband, Douglas Little, were surprised recently when they realized birds were building a nest on a pinecone wreath on the front door of their Linwood home. A few days later, they noticed four eggs were in the nest, which have since hatched. Now, the couple and their son, David Cooper Little, have been tip-toeing around their house and using the back door until the birds can fly away. ... The At The Shore/Press of Atlantic City Concierge Challenge was recently held at the Hard Rock Cafe in Atlantic City by the Greater Atlantic City Concierge Association. More than 50 people participated and answered a series of 33 questions about southern New Jersey to compete for nearly \$10,000 in prizes. Top 10 winners, in order, were

Jury seated in Van Pelt bribe trial

Opening arguments will begin today on extortion and bribery charges against the former assemblyman.

trial of former Ocean County state Assemblyman Daniel Van Pelt.

A jury of nine women and seven men has been chosen to hear the case.

By DONNA WEAVER
Staff Writer

TRENTON — Opening arguments will begin this morning before U.S. District Court Judge Joel Pisano in the corruption

Van Pelt is charged with one count of extortion by a public official and one count of bribery. Authorities allege he accepted \$10,000 cash in an envelope from Solomon Dwek,

an undercover FBI informant who was posing as a developer seeking help getting environmental approvals for a construction project in Waretown Town Center. The alleged crime took place Feb. 21, 2009, while Van Pelt was serving as an Ocean Township committee-

man. Attorney Robert Fuggi contends Van Pelt was paid a con-

sulting fee and was planning on starting a consulting business when he met with Dwek. Last week, Fuggi said his client contacted an attorney for the state's Office of Legislative Services about his plans to set up a consulting business. The attorney provided Van Pelt with legal advice on operating as a consul-

□ See Van Pelt, C3



Accused of taking \$10,000 in exchange for help with permits

Preschool programs start to feel squeeze



Staff photos by Edward Lea

Preschool teacher Karen Sauerbrey instructs her class Tuesday at the George L. Hess Educational Complex in Hamilton Township. The township's preschool program will be cut back next year from more than 200 students to just 160.

N.J. still funding leader, but future unclear

By DIANE D'AMICO
Education Writer

Public preschool expansion in New Jersey and the nation appears to have peaked in 2009 and will likely remain stable, or even decline, as long as the recession continues, a report released Tuesday says.

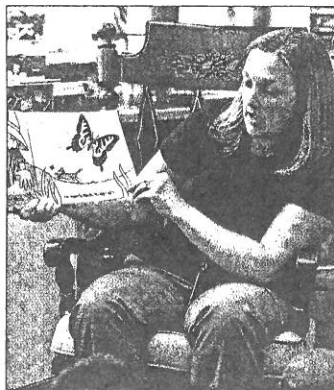
Local preschool programs are already feeling the effects.

"What we know about 2010 and 2011 shows we are on a downward trend," said W. Steven Barnett, director of the National Institute for Early Education Research at Rutgers University, or NIEER, and author of "The State of Preschool 2009." "Even in 2009 most states spent less."

New Jersey continues to rank No. 1 in spending on preschool education, the report states. But the \$11,025 cost per student is a decrease of 3.5 percent from 2007, when the amount was \$11,428. Barnett said that may be because suburban programs, which get less funding, grew more than urban programs.

Nationally the average cost was \$4,143 per student in 2009, which reflects that many programs operate on a half-day schedule. New Jersey spent \$12,530 per student in full-day urban programs, but between \$4,116 and \$5,076 per student in half-day programs.

Barnett credited Gov. Chris Christie for maintaining state aid for preschool next year, while 11 states plan to cut funding. Christie had been criti-



Sauerbrey reads a story to her preschool students Tuesday. There is no doubt that it (the preschool program) makes a difference in kindergarten, Hamilton Township schools Superintendent Michelle Cappelluti says.

In The Schools

We want to hear about what's going on in your school. E-mail intheschools@pressofac.com

But local programs are feeling the pinch, espe-

Stafford Twp. Budget increases tax rate 2.9 cents

The \$38 million spending plan is up \$420,452 from the previous budget.

By ROB SPAHR
Staff Writer

STAFFORD TOWNSHIP — Stafford Township Council introduced a \$38 million budget Tuesday night that calls for a 4.5 percent increase in the tax rate.

The \$38,160,540 budget is up \$420,452 from the 2009 budget, and will raise taxes 2.9 cents per \$100 of assessed value. For the average Stafford Township home assessed at \$301,000, it would mean a \$90 increase in the municipal portion of the tax bill.

Township Administrator James A. Moran said the tax increase was necessary due to a drop in revenue of about \$1 million from last year, which was due in large part to a \$700,000 loss of state aid. In March, the township laid off five police officers in a move to help close the budget gap.

The tax increase would have been about 0.6 cents if revenue had stayed flat, he said.

The proposed budget calls for cuts in expenditures to every area of the budget that could possibly be slashed, Moran said.

"This budget, quite honestly, is as tight as I think would be prudent," he said, adding the township had to use the same amount of surplus (\$3.3 million) as it did last year, which he said wasn't "dangerous" but could be a "cause for concern" if the township

□ See Budget, C5

Dems vow to ignore Christie's court pick

By ANGELA DELLI SANTI
Associated Press

TRENTON — New Jersey Democrats, furious with Gov. Chris Christie over his decision to replace a moderate black judge on the state Supreme Court, vowed Tues- **Can critics**