

May Election, Swim Pool, Carl Orechio - Top Stories

By Phil White



TOP NEWSMAKERS OF YEAR — Members of the Board of Commissioners figured into most major local news developments in 1968, including their own election to the municipal board in May. From left are John H. Lucy, director of Public Works; Hank Ludwig, director of Parks & Public Property; Carmen Orechio, director of Public Affairs; Mayor Harry W. Chenoweth, director of Public Safety, and William J. Jernick, director of Revenue & Finance.

The May 5 election to the board of Commissioners topped the list of Nutley's 15 biggest news stories of 1968. The selections were made by The Sun staff after reviewing nearly 200 nominations from reporters and editors.

The list which is printed below with a summary under each heading, marks the first time in several years that a compilation of the year's news has been made by The Sun. In making the top story selections, items were grouped into categories. The Commission election, therefore, includes not only the results from the polls, but also the ensuing political hassle among the newly elected board which determined department assignments and the inevitable 3-2 split on the municipal board.

The top 15 stories of 1968 follow:

(1) Commission Election

A new town board was elected on May 5 with two new faces: Carmen Orechio and Hank Ludwig. But the campaign was anything but quiet.

The first issue of the Sun in 1968 already reflected the major upcoming event in May. William Callahan, who was to run for a seat and be narrowly defeated, was appointed to the vacant seat on the Commission treated by the death of Roy Gundersdorff a year ago this month.

Callahan's appointment upset W. Michael Fahmie who later became a candidate. Fahmie had run sixth in the 1964 race and felt the appointment to the board, which offered a political advantage in the coming May election, should have gone to himself.

Then, in mid-February, other candidates began to announce their intentions. Carmen Orechio became a contestant when his brother, Commissioner Carl Orechio said he would not seek another term (a top story of the year in itself.) Then came Ludwig's announcement and by early March, there were 13 Candidates in the race. August Cundari had announced but on March 28 withdrew and urged his friends to support Orechio.

The campaign began. Major issues included taxes, the administration of the Public Safety Department, the proposal for a community swimming pool, suggestions to hire a professional fire chief rather than maintaining volunteer chief, and plans to develop DeMuro Park.

The returns came on May 5 and were interesting in themselves. Harry W. Chenoweth was high man, significant because he was bucking a majority of Public Safety employees - police and firemen - had been frequently criticized for his administration of the Public Safety Department by editorials in the Sun. Chenoweth also failed to take a sufficiently positive stand on the pool to muster support from those interested in such a project. Additional significance to Chenoweth's high balloting also is credited because unlike Carmen Orechio's brothers, this Orechio was and is a Democrat who distrusted to some degree Chenoweth's influence on that party's political structure in Nutley.

William J. Jernick finished a close second. This too was significant even though Jernick had been a veteran of the board and knowing that Nutley voters have a history of usually returning incumbents to office. But Jernick ran alone and this is what made his high showing interesting. Jernick is a Republican yet the GOP structure, in a state of flux at the time, was more solidly behind Ludwig and Orechio. And Jernick had no political allies on the present board. He also was considered anti-swimming pools, anti 'DeMuro Park, anti-the high school referendum, anti- any change in the fire chief status but very pro on keeping the taxes at a minimum. He once said he didn't want to be considered a "penny-pincher" but in fact, it was such a reputation plus his experience in municipal finance that saw Jernick finish second high man at the polls.

Carmen Orechio finished third. As the campaign progressed, it became more and more obvious that Orechio would finish in the running, but as his friends frequently observed, "Carmen is not Carl" - an obvious reference to the popularity of retiring Commissioner Carl Orechio. Carmen Orechio also spoke his mind, often against the advice of his advisors. He not only came out for a swimming pool, but did so strongly. He too favored a paid, professional fire chief and the development of DeMuro Park. He campaigned hard, had a large campaign staff backing him all the way and surprised many by coming in third.

Veteran John Lucy - who had been a Commissioner since the late 1930's, finished fourth. Lucy drew much support from Chenoweth's staff and the Democrats. But if any of the major contenders had to buck organized opposition, it was Lucy who was most clearly identified as against the swimming pool. The pool group almost developed what could be termed an intense hate for the Public Works Commissioner. Yet, despite this organized opposition John Lucy came in fourth.

And finally, Ludwig squeaked in the fifth spot, just ahead of Callahan who enjoyed the advantage of having the prefix "Commissioner" attached to his name. Ludwig also spoke up on major issues, drew much support from Public Safety employees (police and firemen) and from the pool group.

But this top story of the year wasn't finished at the polls. There was also a rough week of political maneuvers behind closed doors after the election. Orechio, who everyone assumed would be the Parks & Recreation director, was given the Public Affairs post. Ludwig took over Recreation and despite an "agreement" between Ludwig and Orechio to swap responsibilities, the three-vote majority (Chenoweth, Jernick and Lucy) wouldn't go along, a 3-2 split developed immediately and has been in evidence several times since the election.

All these events, the campaign, the election returns, and the subsequent departmental assignments, constitute the top Nutley story of 1968.

(2) Swimming Pool

If it hadn't been for the fact that the loose ends of the pool proposal were finally packaged earlier this month, this story would be further down the list of the year's top 15 stories. But the pool is a completed story today with only the results of a referendum vote next March needed to write the final chapter one way or the other.

No issue has been in the news as frequently during 1968 as the proposal to build a self-sustaining swimming pool. There was really only one major development early in the year and that came in January when Town Attorney Robert J. Citrino ruled the facility would have to be built by the town rather than a private group. But after a lull in developments during the Commission campaign, the pool story came back to capture headline after headline on front pages of The Sun.

Despite the fact the pool proponents were dormant during the Campaign, the question of such a recreational facility easily was the most debated subject by the political hopefuls seeking seats on the Nutley Commission.

Some of the major developments regarding the pool in 1968 came in mid-January when participating families said, in a mail questionnaire they had no objection to the town's building the facility. "All we care about is having a pool." And soon thereafter, the plan was developed to build a pool as a public utility, operated by the town but financed through membership fees.

After Ludwig was assigned the Parks Department job, he was given the responsibility of firming up the pool question. In early July, he worked out details to permit the pool group to make test boring at Msgr. Owens Park. Then in September, a 3-2 vote defeated Ludwigs' recommendation that the pool be listed in the capital improvement budget for 1969. Ludwig was told to get more details and come back later. There was a December 31 deadline for amending the 1969 budget which Ludwig considered mandatory to turn the facility into a reality.

From September to December, the headlines all reflected Ludwig's attempt to finalize the pool proposal into an organized package. In early November, the preliminary reports on sub-surface conditions came in. On November 14, a professional engineer and the firm of Recreational Consultants, Inc. was hired for \$1,000 to finalize plans.

By early this month, plans for a show-down on the board were made for the Commission's December 17 meeting. There was to have been a caucus session December 16 - but Chenoweth and Jernick developed the flu. This angered the pool people and on the next evening, Chenoweth showed up but Jernick did not. The meeting lasted for hours. The professional engineers outlined a plan. They said that not only was it feasible to develop a pool at the site with membership fees, but said that the park itself could be turned into a full-scale recreational complex.

Ludwig's motion to proceed with the project failed with a 2-2 vote (Ludwig and Orechio in favor; Chenoweth and Lucy opposed. Jernick was absent.)

And then came the clincher. Ludwig proposed a March 11 referendum that would be binding upon the Commissioners. In other words, if the referendum were passed, the Commissioners would be forced to proceed with the project. Chenoweth thought the referendum idea was a good one because he said it was the only method which would permit Ludwig to gain a needed fourth vote to float the bond issue. But Lucy, who had been preaching a referendum ever since the pool question was first raised, surprised everyone by voting against the March 11 town balloting. The referendum plan carried. 3-1,

To be sure, much more will be said about the pool complex between now and March 11. The story rates second among those of 1968 primarily because the issue has been "packaged" for a referendum vote, and because the final proposal

includes a total recreational complex including the development of Msgr. Owens Park for the general public at no cost to taxpayers. The \$825.000 project would, in fact, be a gift to Nutley by those 1,200 or - so families who want a pool and are willing to pay \$75 yearly for such.

(3) Carl Orechio Quits

Because of the shock resulting throughout Nutley with the announcement that Carl Orechio would not be a candidate for reelection, this story was not only rated third on our list, but nearly ended up as the year's top news item. Certainly, no single headline appearing in The Nutley Sun during 1968 came as such a surprise as Carl Orechio's decision not to seek another term.

The announcement came in the February 15 issue. No one had even an inkling that such a decision was forthcoming, and the fact that Carl Orechio had literally "campaigned" for reelection ever since the 1964 returns were counted, made his announcement even more spectacular.

The former Commissioner acted on the advice of his physicians. He was told to pursue, a more leisurely pace. This came after a close 1964 election which saw him seriously challenge Mayor Chenoweth as top man.

Although Orechio himself says to this day he wouldn't have beat Chenoweth at the polls this year, there are many who disagree. Many had already, concluded that Carl Orechio would be the next Mayor of Nutley. He had wide support, was extremely well-liked (and still is) and was easily the most public-appearing Commissioner - showing up at virtually every civic function. People use to say if three people were meeting on a corner, Carl Orechio would be among them.

But he decided not to run. He told his family and closest friends only a day before the headline appeared He said he was stepping down and asked that those who would have liked to see him reelected, support his younger brother Carmen instead.

What has happened since is history. But that single headline on February 15 still is being discussed in Nutley and probably will continue to be the topic of speculation for many years to come.

(4) Civil Rights

In selecting "Civil Rights" as the year's fourth top news story of 1968, the staff took several related incidents into account. Prior to this year, the cooperation among divergent groups had already been in evidence The Knights of Columbus and Masons, for example, this year held their second annual "Brotherhood Dance" in February. And the Ecumenical Thanksgiving Service last month is still a relatively new innovation here

Bui the year 1968, The Sun felt, saw a significant awakening in the effort to better race relations. It was a year that saw the Nutley Neighborhood Civic Association come into its own as a positive influence, not only on the Negro community. But the town as a whole there was open discussion for the first time on such subjects as discrimination in housing, the unique problems facing Negro youth here and the place Negro history ought to occupy the school curriculum.

The year 1968 also was the year that saw the Rev Dr. Martin Luther King assassinated and a spontaneous tribute result with 400 persona crowding into Town Hall. A Martin Luther King Memorial Committee was organized as the meeting broke up with the townspeople joining hands and singing. "We Shall Overcome." The Rev. Lawrence Roberts released a record as a tribute to Dr. King. The recording, in a pop Gospel idiom, was released nationally by Atlantic Records

The Civil Rights story in 1968 also saw militant Anthony Imperiale come to Nutley to attract hundreds of people to a rally first at the Rivera Tavern Parking lot in May, and then later to the Belleville Elks Lodge. A Nutley-Belleville group splintered off of Imperiale's North Ward Citizens Committee and from time to time appeared at town meetings to suggest that police patrols be beefed up, and that the town provide a canine force.

Nutley reacted to the vigilante groups. Mayor Chenoweth said they weren't needed and then in September suggested "if you really want to be of service, join our police reserves." The vigilantes did not. Imperiale in fact countered by predicting that the "riots will come to Nutley next" and publicly called Mayor Chenoweth "a bum."

The vigilantes instituted their own auto patrols of Nutley neighborhoods with 20 radio-equipped cars. The patrols are still being made. A member of the vigilante group. Irritated by an dispute within the organization, shot-up Imperial's rented headquarters here on-Passaic Avenue.

But despite these groups and their numbers, the town of Nutley proceeded to improve relationships among races. The Neighborhood Civic Association was the subject of three-part series in The Sun outlining the problems of Negros in Nutley. An interracial Labor Day picnic replaced Annie Oakley Day as the focal point of the early September holiday. Paul Goldberger, now a student at Yale, had been covering much of the Civil Rights story for The Sun. He went to The N.Y. Times and sold them the idea of a Sunday magazine story telling of Nutley's story and progress in Civil Rights. The article was published by The Times Sunday Magazine on September 29.

Meanwhile, the work of the Martin Luther King Memorial Committee continued. Programs were and still are being presented to civic groups. The national headquarters of the Heritage Foundation, a group dedicated to developing cultural pride in Negro youth, located in Nutley. A "Let My People Go" concert packed Nutley High School in October.

The year was a significant one in the development of the Civil Rights story Nutley was made aware that this small

community has Us problems/ and for the first time, the problems were publicly recognized, discussed and efforts made to improve racial relationships This all came about without riots or disturbances. Like to many other important Nutley issues, the Civil Rights story is a continuing story. But 1968 will be remembered as a year that real progress was begun.

(5) Vietnam

Three young men from Nutley lost their lives in the Vietnam War during 1968, bringing to a total of six the number of local residents killed in the conflict

Michael P. Halpin was killed in early January in combat. He was a 1965 graduate of Nutley High School and would have celebrated his 22nd birthday last February 28.

Marine Lance Corporal Matthew W. Dwyer was killed in a helicopter crash near Khe Sahn, South Vietnam, on March 1.

And on November 10, Marine Private First Class Richard Greenspan, another former Nutley High student was killed was killed in Vietnam. He was 21 years old and had been scheduled for discharge from the Marines this month.

(6) NHS Addition

When plans for an addition to Nutley High School were announced on May 2, it was assumed the referendum scheduled for late June would pass'. Today, most Board of education members say that the assumption of a favorable vote was taken too much for granted because the project was turned down by a 39-vote margin.

The defeat of the school project was not typical of Nutley's history of support for quality education. No one knew for sure why the referendum was defeated. Some blamed the lackadaisical attitude of educations in working for passage of the proposal. "Don't worry about it, the referendum will pass," was a typical comment before June 25. Others blamed the date. It was a poor time of the year, and followed on the heels of the Commission and Primary Elections which had occupied the political minds of Nutley for so long.

No one is sure what the reason was, but the referendum was scheduled for a vote and this time, passed by nearly 1,000 voles. The turnout of 3,816 voters on October 8 was the largest for a school issue in 10 years. But for the October 8 vote, much preliminary work had been done. Enrollment projections were confirmed by actual attendance figures when schools opened in September

The high school was forced to use four rented rooms in the nearby Vincent Methodist Church. Civic groups got in the act too and publicly supported a favorable vote. The Board of Education chopped \$45,000 from the total figure as an expression of good faith. And finally, the voters said yes, 2,321 to 1,425.

(7) Baby Saved

In the early morning hours of December 11, a fire broke out in a home at 28 Cleveland Avenue. When firemen arrived, the first floor of the house was in flames. The owner, John Fellers, had managed to evacuate three of his children, but when Fireman Fred Kingston arrived at the scene, he heard Fellers shouting, "The baby's upstairs." Risking his own life, Kingston climbed into the intense heat and smoke through a second floor window. He couldn't see but Fellers had told him where the baby's crib was located. Kingston felt his way through the smoke. The heat was so intense it singed his hair. Feeling his way, he found the crib and the baby inside. He carried one-year-old Kathleen Fellers to the window and handed the unconscious child to Detective Ed Guerino who carried the baby to safety and administered mouth to mouth resuscitation. The baby lived. The rescue was a miracle and the story is remembered as one of the great moments of personal history in 1968.

(8) The Wood Brothers

Throughout most of 1967, two men had successfully committed a series of armed robberies throughout New Jersey. In January of this year, they made their third trip to Nutley and were apprehended on the spot by Detectives Sgt. William Dietz and Al Ciccone. The capture was not all luck The Nutley Detective Bureau had maintained a detailed accounting of the robber's activities. Anyone visiting the Bureau would have found maps on the wall, lists, of the types of stores hit, the days of the week the men operated and a detailed analysis of their methods of operation.

Without publicity, detectives and policemen quietly had been hiding in back rooms of various local stores in Nutley on nights the bandits were thought most likely to visit. One cold night in January, the police efforts paid off. James and Delbert Wood were caught at Kessler's Drugs. They have since been tried and are spending this New Year's Eve in the state penitentiary

(9) Killed in Fire

Another fire had a more tragic ending. In the early hours of February 10, a Mapes Avenue home caught fire. When firemen arrived, the house was in flames. Firemen entered the house and found George V. Laukatis, 64, and his wife, Doris, 63, huddled in a first floor bathroom. They were both dead. Firemen believe a faulty electrical connection caused the blaze.

(10) Reform GOP

For years, Nutley's Republican organization wasn't much of an organization at all. The group had been relatively dormant. A rival group, known as Reform Republicans, became active in 1967 but this year made an all-out effort to capture the strings of the town and county leadership. The Reform movement came close but failed on the county level. Here in Nutley, however, the Reformers met with success. The group, primarily an inexperienced grass roots type operation, carried the primary and then the general election by 3-1 majorities. A new town leader was named. William Searle, and Republican activities were rejuvenated. A September Hawaiian Luau planned for 250 persons attracted more than 500. Town Attorney Robert Citrino ran for Congress. He earned Nutley by 3-1 majorities but lost narrowly on the county level.

The Democratic Club and its related organizations in recent years had enjoyed the distinction of being the only active political group in Nutley. The Reform Movement's success in 1968 gave the Republican Party a shot in the arm.

(11) Loitering

Shortly after 10 a.m. on March 22, about 300 Nutley High School students left school in a demonstration, protesting at the time a misinterpreted incident with police, but yet serving to highlight the increasing conflict between police and the youth of Nutley.

The March 22 demonstration set some wheels into motion. Students were and still are bitter about the way police enforce a town loitering ordinance, considered a model by Public Safety Director Chenoweth and other police officers.

Throughout the past year, hundreds of dollars have been collected in fines from youth caught loitering on Franklin Avenue. Amendments to the loitering law were considered but never passed. The issue was debated during the election campaign by Commission candidates.

The problem has not been solved but a dialogue was begun between students, school officials and police officers on the loitering subject. The Park Oval was opened during evening hours last summer in an effort to alleviate the problem and a teacher, Thomas Parciak, was named in November to a newly created post of liaison between the school and community.

But difficulties still remain. In retrospect, most agree the problem lies not so much with the loitering ordinance itself, but the way in which it is enforced and the frequent lack of respect shown by policemen toward the town's young people. In the effort to keep Nutley's main streets clear of punks and hoodlums, youth in general is being penalized and harassed. Flare-ups occurred in 1968 and are likely to continue in 1969 until a more meaningful solution is finally reached.

(12) Police Suspended

Rated 12th among 1968's top stories is the incident involving two patrolmen caught drinking while on duty, and the subsequent attempt to hush up a hearing that resulted in their suspension from the force.

The patrolmen were caught after they stopped a motorist who had skipped some red traffic lights in the early hours of June 14. Ptl. Joseph Samples, who was found guilty of six of seven charges, picked a fight with the motorist. His partner, Ptl. Jay Wetherill, was also found to be drinking and both were suspended from the force for 100 days.

There were other incidents highlighting what editorials in the Sun call poor administration in the Public Safety Department. The August 15 story about the department's failure to pick up a police revolver and badge which had been on the loose several months is one example.

The result of these incidents in 1968 has been the adoption of new police regulation. Off-duty patrolmen, for one thing, are no longer permitted to visit taverns while in uniform.

(13) Paid Fire Chief

Nutley still has a volunteer fire chief today but during 1968, the campaign to persuade town fathers to hire a full-time professional chief reached a peak. The movement found support from newly elected Commissioners Hank Ludwig and Carmen Orechio but was blocked by Mayor Chenoweth who heads the Public Safety Department.

On April 4, a committee formed by the paid portion of the Fire Department (Headquarters Co. No. One) initiated a public campaign for a paid chief. They said they had made similar requests to Chenoweth, had failed and were now taking their plea to townspeople.

The issue became one of the most debated questions in the Commission campaign. More than 50 members of the volunteer department said they would quit if a paid chief were brought in. When the names of the 50 men were published by The Sun, some 'backed down, but leaders of the volunteer department continued to lead the opposition.

A "fact sheet," loaded with misstatements, was distributed a few days before the election. Chenoweth said he knew of the flyers' contents before it was distributed, the paid firemen demanded an apology but to this day have never received one.

In September, a citizens' committee for a paid chief was organized but has been virtually ineffective. Not much in an organized way has been done since. The issue isn't dead but it's dormant and there's no telling when the debate will break out in public again.

(14) School Election

When the January 4 issue of The Sun went to press, it looked as if there would be no contest for the February election. Candidates included incumbent Frank Tangorra; The Women's Campaign Committee's selection, Mrs. Edward Popadick. And businessman Waller Kolakowski. But just hours before the deadline, Israel L. Sonenshein filed petitions and the race was on. Sonenshein, general manager of Atlantic Chemical in Nutley, was more popularly known through his work as chairman of the local Assistance Board.

The February 13 election has come and gone. Tangorra, Mrs. Popadick and Sonenshein were elected, in fact, late-candidate Sonenshein was high man at the polls. In the previous year's election. Headlines reaching Nutley from Wayne Township where religion had become a school issue and the subsequent defeat that same year of Avrom Gold resulted then in some discussion of a Jew's chances at polls in Nutley. Sonenshein's victory dispelled any validity to such considerations and discussions on the subject were ended.

(15) Roche Expansion

And finally on the Sun's top 15 list is the continuing industrial expansion of Hoffman-LaRoche, the town's largest taxpayer.

The large pharmaceutical firm has had its difficulty at times especially in 1967, in convincing local officials that its expansion plans were in the best interest of all concerned. But relations between Town Hall and Roche have been cemented as evidenced by the firm's decision in 1968 to continue building in Nutley.

August of this year saw Roche file specifications and plans at Town Hall to build a \$6 million institute of Molecular Biology. The structure, now in progress, will eventually rise five stories and contain some 170,000 [sq. ft.] of laboratory space.

The Nutley Sun, Dec. 30, 1968

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