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## New Jersey Municipalities Magazine

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# Earn Points Towards Being a Municipal Pioneer



The Local Government Leadership Program (LGLP) is a voluntary recognition program acknowledging Elected Governing Body Members who complete additional training and advocacy.

Elected Governing Body Members can achieve each level by attending webinars and seminars, writing articles for *NJ Municipalities*, and by participating in activities that advocate for municipal interests. Visit the website for details.

## Congratulations to the latest recipient!

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Blaise Scibetta, Committeeman,  
Little Egg Harbor Township

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Saturday, February 21, 2026  
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SEMINAR - JANUARY/FEBRUARY

## Budgeting for the Elected Official

Everything you need to know to create, balance, and approve your municipalities' budget.

Creating and approving a feasible budget is one of the most important tasks of an Elected Official. It is also one of the most complex and time consuming tasks.

Saturday, March 7, 2026  
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SEMINAR - MARCH





**We look forward to celebrating 2026 with you and look forward to sharing your stories of the glorious past, the successful present, and the hopeful future.**



## A Big, Safe Year To Come

**T**here's always something to celebrate in New Jersey, but we are heading into a blockbuster year when two major events combine in a perfect statewide storm.

You may have noticed over the past year, plans have been gearing up for the United States of America's 250th celebration. Many communities around the state have already formed committees to plan local events and promote the sites and stories that form the foundation for their municipalities' backstory.

Still wondering what to do? Read up in this month's article from Revolution NJ for some inspiration on how you can reflect, engage, and reimagine how history can bring us together (see page 22). What can you do right now? Pass a resolution to become an official RevolutionNJ Community.

The second part of the year of massive celebrations is the FIFA 2026 World Cup. Eight games will be held in the area, including the final in East Rutherford. There will also be a massive event held for more than a month in Liberty State Park, attracting visitors from around the world. Take a look at this month's Local Knowledge quiz (page 60) to learn a bit more about what's happening and some of the fun facts about the Garden State's role in the sports super event.

Meanwhile, other events continue throughout the year as each municipality acknowledges milestones with meaning. Even without a national or international support system, deep meaningful celebrations can be held by working together within your own borders. Eatontown illustrated that with its 105 Suffrage Celebration (see page 24). Since we were denied our proper suffrage celebration in the grim face of Covid, the community enjoyed a celebration for 2025, the 105th anniversary of the passage of the 19th Amendment. It goes to show you that there's always a reason to celebrate.

But, as history has taught us, there's more to a party than the actual event. This year will be a challenge to ensure security on a number of levels. Articles this month build awareness of safety measures ranging from fire hazards management (page 18) to emergency preparedness (page 6).

We look forward to celebrating 2026 with you and look forward to sharing your stories of the glorious past, the successful present, and the hopeful future. We hope that you send in your stories and spread the word about the League's magazine to ensure we all enjoy a well-informed 2026. 📖

*Michael Cerra*



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# Closing the Gap

Government and school security preparedness

*Kevin DiPatri, KDNFS CEO, Retired Captain, Regional Commander, NJ State Police  
& James Mullins, KDNFS COO, Retired Lieutenant, NJ State Police*

**I**n today's world, government and school leaders can no longer afford to view security and emergency preparedness as optional or reactionary measures. The frequency and sophistication of threats, ranging from targeted violence in schools and government facilities to risks facing cannabis cultivation and dispensary operations demand a proactive, integrated response.



### Observe, Move, and Engage

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the FBI have long promoted the ‘Run. Hide. Or Fight’ model as a baseline for active shooter survival. While effective, we know municipalities and schools must go further. At KDNFS, we emphasize a complementary model: Observe. Move. and Engage.

- **Observe:** Situational awareness saves lives. Everyone must be trained to notice exits, identify suspicious behavior, and recognize fatal funnels like stairways and doorways where congestion occurs.

- **Move:** Once risk is detected, people must know their routes, refuge areas, and personal capabilities. This is

For leaders, hindsight is always 20/20. The question to ask is if you knew a risk existed and did nothing, what would you say to your community in the aftermath? What would you say to victims, to families, or to taxpayers who believed their leaders were committed to safety? Preparedness is no longer a discretionary cost; it is an obligation of leadership.

Reducing risk can be achieved through professional readiness, continuous improvement, and strategic partnerships. Remain driven by one principle: be committed, be prepared, and close the gap before tragedy forces hindsight upon us.



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## Closing the Gap

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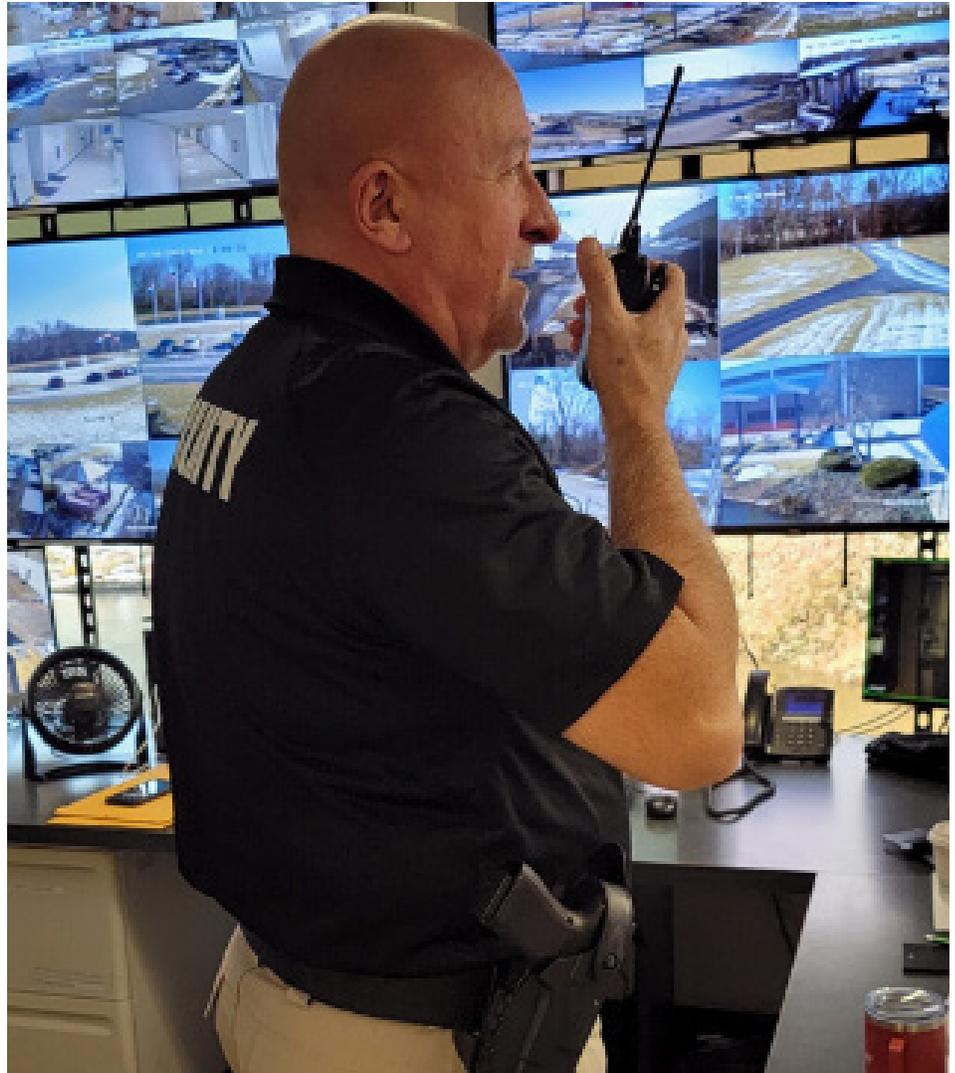
- **Engage:** Preparedness builds confidence. Training ensures that when seconds matter, responses are instinctive and decisive.

This shift from passive survival to proactive observation and faster action is key to safeguard residents, schools, and businesses. Every incident in New Jersey and across the nation teaches us something. When tragedy strikes, whether in a school, a municipal building, or a public gathering, the post-event analysis always reveals missed signals: disturbing behavior that wasn't reported, pre-attack indicators overlooked, or communication gaps that weren't closed.

**Government and school leadership is about accountability, not convenience. When tragedy strikes, communities look to their leaders for answers.**

Government and school leaders must foster a culture of continuous learning and improvement:

- Implement threat assessment teams to evaluate behaviors before they escalate.
- Encourage courageous reporting of disturbing conduct.
- Partner with law enforcement and private security to close manpower gaps. When budgets and staff are stretched, professional private security acts as a force multiplier.



### Reducing the Odds

Government leaders should not be asking whether a tragedy could happen, but rather what they are doing today to reduce the odds.

One reality of modern government leadership is that law enforcement resources are finite. Sheriffs' offices and police departments often have their sworn personnel assigned to street enforcement and investigations. That leaves administrative and protective functions under-resourced.

Qualified private security provides an immediate solution by providing support roles such as facility monitoring, access control, and crowd management. This blended model gives towns more boots on the ground, reduces crime opportunity, and builds public confidence.

Municipalities, counties, and schools today face a wide range of risks:

- **Schools:** Threatening student behavior, online radicalization, and active shooter risks require specialized, armed security professionals who can work alongside educators while fostering trust with students and families.
- **Public gatherings and theaters:** Large, concentrated crowds create 'fatal funnels' in doorways and stairways. Leaders must anticipate and plan for mass-movement scenarios.
- **Domestic extremism:** Techniques once observed overseas are appearing in the United States. From pre-indoctrination to online fantasy



and planning stages, extremists are acting with greater frequency.

• **Cannabis cultivation and dispensaries:** These facilities hold valuable product and are attractive targets. Beyond physical risks, contamination or infiltration could cripple operations and expose municipalities to liability.

Government and school leadership is about accountability, not convenience. When tragedy strikes, communities look to their leaders for answers. Will your response be, “We prepared, we trained, we acted,” or will it be, “We thought it would never happen in our town”?

The cost of preparedness is always less than the cost of recovery. Beyond lawsuits, civil litigation, and facility damage, the human toll—trauma, lost trust, community grief—is immeasurable.

Preparedness is not just about stopping an attacker. It is about empowering your workforce, your schools, and your community to feel capable and confident. A workforce trained in emergency response is more intelligent, more resilient, and better equipped to help themselves and others. Practice builds confidence.

Preparation builds confidence. The threats facing municipalities today are complex, but the path forward is clear. Leaders must commit to advance work, to knowing where their feet are, and to seeing risks sooner. Security is not a luxury—it is leadership in action. 🚔

Since 2013, KDNFS has partnered with New Jersey municipalities, counties, schools, cannabis facilities, and businesses to close the gap, reduce risk, and create safer communities. The KDNFS approach to professional security services has proven to reduce risk while building confidence. Together, through preparation, commitment, and collaboration, we can protect what matters most. Visit [www.KDNFS.com](http://www.KDNFS.com).

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**Recent topics:** Lame Duck 2025, National Opioid Settlement, New Public Notices Law, Land Use Preemption, ETR & Legal Notices, and more.



## League Officers for 2025-2026 Elected

On Thursday, November 20, 2025, New Jersey’s mayors elected their new slate of officers and executive board members at the League’s Annual Business Meeting at the 110th Annual League Conference held in Atlantic City. These public servants will help represent the interests and needs of New Jersey’s local elected officials from the state’s 564 municipal governments to county, state, and federal governments.

Nominating Committee Chair William Chegwiddden, Mayor of Wharton Borough and NJLM Immediate Past President, presented its nominations for the offices of President, 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Vice President and 21 positions on the Executive Board, thereby fulfilling its Constitutional responsibility.

The board must include members from municipalities located in each of New Jersey’s 21 counties. Another consideration is that, because of the diversity of population, growth patterns, and other general factors, the nominating committee must ensure the essential balance of municipalities—urban, suburban, and rural.

Another topic in the development of the recommendations list is balance—even though the League is non-partisan in nature—the committee strives to ensure the maintenance of a balance between the major political parties represented on the Executive Board. Finally, the nominations factor in whether an individual in consideration for nomination has demonstrated an interest in League affairs through active participation on League committees by support of the League policies and programs.

Taking all of those matters into their determination, the committee presented their selections, and the following officers and Executive Board members were elected for service in 2025-2026.

### LEAGUE OFFICERS

**SEAN ELWELL** President;  
Mayor, Elsinboro

**JEFF MARTIN** 1st Vice President;  
Mayor, Hamilton (Mercer)

**GUY PISERCHIA** 2nd Vice President;  
Deputy Mayor, Long Hill

**JACLYN VEASY** 3rd Vice President;  
Mayor, Evesham

### EXECUTIVE BOARD

Ras Baraka, *Mayor, Newark*

Jen Blumenstock, *Mayor, Garwood*

Mary Jane Canose, *Mayor, Bernardsville*

Brad Cohen, *Mayor, East Brunswick*

Sheena Collum, *Mayor, South Orange*

Ruby Cotton, *Council Member, Paterson*

William Curtis, *Mayor, Bay Head*

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Michael Stanzilis, *Mayor, Mount Arlington*

Paul Tomasko, *President, Apline; Immediate Past President, NJLM*

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## Elsinboro Mayor Sean Elwell Elected League President

On Thursday, Nov. 20, Mayor Sean Elwell of Elsinboro was elected to serve as the new President of the New Jersey State League of Municipalities. Mayor Elwell, who previously served as the League's 1st Vice President, was elected at the League of Municipalities' Annual Business Meeting in Atlantic City.

As President of the New Jersey State League of Municipalities, Mayor Elwell will help lead the Association of New Jersey's 564 municipal governments. He will represent the interests and needs of New Jersey's local elected officials to county, state, and federal governments.

Prior to his appointment as Mayor in 2011, he served as Deputy Mayor starting in 2007. He also served as a member of the Executive Board of the League of Municipalities until his election as vice president and has been moderator and panelist for the League.

A registered nurse, Elwell holds many certifications including Emergency Medication Technician, Child Passenger Safety Seat Technician, and Trauma Certified Registered Nurse. He is currently Senior Director of Nursing, Trauma, Critical Care Transport, and Emergency Department for Nemours Children's Hospital Delaware and is also a Clinical Faculty member at Neumann University.

Elwell is a graduate of Cumberland County College with an Associate degree, Drexel University with a Bachelor and Master of Science in Nursing, and he earned his Doctor of Nursing Practice from Wilmington University in 2023.

In his work with the New Jersey State League of Municipalities, Mayor Elwell has participated as a seminar panelist and moderator as well as an author for *NJ Municipalities* magazine. 📖

# NJLM Events

## January

### 31 Newly Elected Orientation

Westin, Mount Laurel

## February

### 21 Newly Elected Orientation

Hilton, Meadowlands

## March

### 7 Budgeting for Elected Officials

Conference Center at Mercer, West Windsor

## June

### 10 One Day Mini Conference

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## Send in Your Stories!

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Whether it's a news item, op-ed, feature, or column, your insights drive this publication.

View the submission guidelines at [www.njlm.org/Magazine](http://www.njlm.org/Magazine) or reach out to Managing Editor Amy Spiezio at [aspiezio@njlm.org](mailto:aspiezio@njlm.org)



## NJ Knowledge Answers:

1. Canada, Mexico, and USA.
2. New York New Jersey Stadium.
3. Eight, including the final match.
4. 48 teams. 5. 1994. 6. New York New Jersey Host Committee.
7. The FIFA Fan Festival NYNJ.
8. Trionda. 9. New Jersey-native artist Rich Tu. 10. 352 Marin Boulevard in Jersey City.



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