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EDITOR
Michael J. Darcy, CAE

MANAGING EDITOR
Amy Spiezio aspiezio@njslom.org

ADVERTISING MANAGER
Taran B. Samhammer tsamhammer@njslom.org

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS
Lori Buckelew
Michael F. Cerra
Jon R. Moran
Taran B. Samhammer
Frank Marshall

CREATIVE DIRECTOR
Dawn Becan
White Eagle Printing Company

SUBSCRIPTION MANAGER
Thomas Fratticcioli

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Campaigns are One Thing. A Budget is Another.

Later this month, Governor Murphy will propose his first State Budget to the Legislature and the people of New Jersey. It will be much more than a list of programs and long columns of numbers.

A Governor’s first budget reveals how he or she perceives and prioritizes New Jersey’s problems. It demonstrates how he or she plans to approach solutions over the next four years. The budget conveys the political philosophy that will inform the Administration’s policies. And it discloses the psychological predisposition—whether optimistic or pessimistic—that the Governor brings to the job.

Governor Murphy’s budget will also demonstrate how he views local government, and what you as a local official have to look out for, or look forward to, during his term of office.

Municipal officials have no choice but to be the most responsible.

The Federal government can, and does, get through much of a fiscal year with a series of temporary continuing resolutions. State government, when facing a budget crunch, can decide to defer payments that the statutes would, otherwise, require. And State policy makers can divert funding from municipal property tax relief programs whenever the need arises. County governments and school districts do need to balance their budgets with limited resources. But, they can count on municipalities to provide them with 100% of the property tax dollars they need to operate, whether or not the municipality is able to collect 100% of the property taxes that it bills.

Our citizens are always best served when all of their public servants, at all levels of government, work together to serve the common good.

We look forward to working, responsibly, with Governor Murphy to do just that, this year and throughout his tenure in Trenton.

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New Jersey’s roadways are often congested and always busy. That can make for a deadly mix if you have to pull over to the side of the road to address an emergent issue—a flat tire, overheated battery, or any other situation. That’s why in 2009 New Jersey passed a “Slow Down or Move Over” law when it came to emergency vehicles.

Too often law enforcement officers are left in the vulnerable situation of conducting a traffic stop or assisting someone stranded at the roadside, requiring the officer to stand between a stopped vehicle and speeding traffic. There have been several instances of lives lost when an oncoming vehicle crashes into emergency workers and law enforcement in situations just like this.

Move Over laws are designed to protect emergency workers, including tow truck operators and highway maintenance employees, while they are working in high-traffic areas. These workers can be injured or killed by motorists who don’t slow down when passing them. As written, the law requires motor vehicle operators to reduce their speed and change lanes when approaching authorized vehicles displaying emergency lights. Such vehicles include police, fire, and medical services vehicles, as well as highway maintenance, tow trucks, and official motorist aid vehicles displaying amber emergency lights.

Where possible, drivers are required to move over to create an empty lane next to the emergency vehicle. When safely changing lanes is not possible, drivers must slow down below the
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– Mike, 2013 graduate

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posted speed limit prior to passing emergency vehicles. Drivers should also be prepared to stop, if necessary.

Motorists who fail to move over are subject to fines of up to $500. While this law has been on the books for eight years, compliance continues to be a concern.

**Perception vs. reality**

In two recent polls, the AAA Clubs of New Jersey surveyed New Jersey motorists and New Jersey law enforcement officers and AAA roadside assistance technicians to highlight the perception verses the reality of the New Jersey Move Over law (see box, right).

In the survey of New Jersey motorists, 84% of those surveyed said they are aware that in New Jersey it is the law to slow down or move over for emergency vehicles on the side of the road, 15% said they were not aware of the law, and only 1% of respondents were unsure.

Additionally, 61% of New Jersey motorists said that they both slow down and move over when approaching an emergency vehicle or tow truck on the side of the road. Some motorists (25%) said they only move over one lane and 12% said they slow down below the posted speed limit.

Taken at face value, those results paint a very positive picture of both knowledge and compliance with the Move Over law which has been on the books in New Jersey nearly 10 years. However, New Jersey emergency responders have a different point of view.

When New Jersey law enforcement officers and AAA tow truck operators were asked if they feel that New Jersey motorists are aware of the Move Over law, 59% said No, 35% said Yes, and 5% said that they were unsure. More alarming is that 61% of those surveyed do not feel safer on the side of the road because of the Move Over law.

These results reinforce the support for recently signed law which requires the DOT Commissioner to develop public awareness programs and use variable message signs to inform motorists about the state’s Move Over law.

**EMERGENCY RESPONDERS (including tow truck operators):**

Do you feel that New Jersey motorists are aware of the Slow Down/Move Over law?

- 59% No
- 35% Yes
- 5% Unsure

**MOTORISTS:**

Are you aware that New Jersey has a Slow Down/Move Over law requiring motorists to move over one travel lane or slow down below posted speeds when passing an emergency vehicle, tow truck or highway maintenance displaying flashing lights on the side of the highway?

- 84% Yes
- 15% No
- 1% Unsure

Flashing lights on the side of the road should immediately alert drivers to safely merge away from emergency workers in the shoulder, providing an empty lane of protection while they work. Slowing down below the posted speed limit is the next best option if a merge is not possible.
Expanding the law

The law was originally designed to protect emergency workers on the side of the road, but there is also a move to expand the law to include all vulnerable users on the side of the road. This expansion of the Move Over law would protect motorists on the side of the road who are changing their own tire, attending to their own vehicle, or just waiting for help. These motorists are no less vulnerable than emergency workers and should be protected.

Expanding the Move Over law should also include other vulnerable users who may be using the shoulder or side of the roadway—including bicyclists and pedestrians. Bicyclists and pedestrians are consistently some of our most vulnerable road users, accounting for 32% of all traffic fatalities in 2017. Providing space for those using the shoulder or side of the road is important to making the roads safer for all users, but if that’s not possible, slowing down will greatly reduce crash and injury risk.

Sadly, as many bicyclists will tell you, drivers often have the exact opposite reaction and will often speed up as they drive around a bike. This has several impacts—it increases the injury risks, as the faster a vehicle is going the more deadly a crash can be, it increases the likelihood of a crash as the bicyclist is often unsteadied when the vehicle speeds by them and it encourages dangerous driving behavior to other drivers on the roadway.

Making the Move Over law apply to all vulnerable users on the side of the roadway will not only protect those users but will provide for a consistent safety message: if you see someone on the side of the road, try to move over to give them a free lane of traffic and if you cannot do so safely, you must slow down. Having one message will lead to less confusion on motorists’ part and will hopefully lead to better compliance. It will certainly lead to safer roadways.

New Jersey has some of the busiest roadways in the nation. Providing a lane of protection to emergency workers, disabled motorists and vulnerable users is a small, but critical, step in reducing fatalities on New Jersey’s heavily traveled roads.
Public safety is far more than the friendly neighborhood cop having a moment with a schoolboy runaway at the local soda shop as portrayed in Norman Rockwell paintings. But the portrait of public safety officials as friends to the community as depicted by the American artist is the very core of their work.

Their efforts through the years have encompassed new and expanded considerations, as notes Sayreville Police Department Chief John Zabrowski in his feature “Fighting the Opioid Epidemic” in this month’s issue (see page 30). “Police are shepherding a fundamental shift in philosophy and practice,” he wrote. Drugs have been an issue in many incarnations over many years, demanding increasingly cooperative responses from law enforcement, local government, and citizens. And other public safety issues are ongoing as well, offering a road littered with challenges. Programs such as the Move Over law discussed in Lawrence (Mercer) Committeeewoman Cathleen Lewis’ article “A Lane of Protection” (see page 6) are to safeguard those on the roads, especially those risking their lives to help members of the community in situations from everyday road maintenance to disabled vehicle recovery. In years past, road safety was spotlighted time and time again in the Garden State as it transitioned from horses to automobiles and country lanes to superhighways. These public safety issues have been approached thoughtfully, and, again, cooperatively.

In March issue, we’re also considering topics including where millennials are settling, in and out of New Jersey, and we’re unveiling the inspirational theme for the 2018 League Conference: “Municipalities Leading the Way.”

Time Capsule: Public Safety

1932 In February 1932, a New Jersey Bell Telephone Company advertisement shared a letter from Philip T. Bell, Chief of Kearny Police and Past President of the New Jersey State Association of Chiefs of Police regarding its success as one of 115 police stations linked into State Wide Police Teletype-writer Alarm Service.

1991 The November 1991 issue of NJ Municipality covered the toll that public safety work takes on uniformed services and how Newark’s Critical Incident Stress Program taught these departments to help their own. Noted Capt. Joseph DeMasi of the Newark Fire Department, “I had a serious injury and would like to help other firefighters who are injured with their problems in coping with their job related injuries.”

1966 In June 1966, the magazine delved into the benefits to firefighters and residents alike in regards to the Bergen County Fire Training Center in Mahwah, discussing how the center, “inaugurated in 1956-57, started its first classes in May of 1965, and has since become one of the most modern and thorough schools of its kind in the nation.”
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Groundbreaking Affordable Housing Projects in New Jersey

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For more information, contact Bakari Lee at blee@msbnj.com.
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