

# NEWS BRIEFS

## Bill aids family of first responders

Legislation to help ensure the continuation of family medical coverage for spouses and children of deceased first responders gained approval from the General Assembly.

The measure was inspired by the death of a Cinnaminson firefighter.

Cinnaminson Fire Lt. Chris Hunter was found unresponsive at his home in mid-November of 2014, just hours after his last shift ended. The cause of death was attributed to a cardiac event. However, because it was ruled that he did not die in the line of duty, his family was not eligible for a continuation of medical coverage under his plan.

The bill seeks to address the burdensome cost of health insurance, as provided through federal COBRA continuation coverage, by allowing the dependents of certain recently-deceased public safety employees to apply to the state treasurer for a reimbursement of the cost of the first six months of COBRA continuation coverage. Under current law, if a first responder's death does not occur in the line of duty, his or her family members can be dropped from the state insurance plan and face unexpected health care expenses during their time of mourning.

The COBRA reimbursement outlined in the bill applies to the spouse and unmarried children of state and local public safety employees, including state and local police, full-time, part-time and volunteer firefighters, state and county correctional officers and members of first aid, emergency, ambulance or rescue squads, if the public safety employee died while on duty, or within 24 hours of going off duty. The COBRA reimbursement is only available so long as the dependents were covered by health insurance through the State Health Benefits Program, or otherwise through the public safety employee's employer, until the time of death.

"Our public safety officers devote themselves to the safety of others," said Assemblywoman Marlene Caride (D-Bergen/Passaic). "This bill will provide peace of mind to them and to their loved ones by eliminating the fear of a sudden cancellation of medical coverage. This is a well-deserved safety net for the families of those who serve our state."

"This is the right thing to do for the families of public safety workers who have sacrificed so much," said Assemblywoman Shavonda Sumter (D-Passaic/Bergen). "This is much-deserved security during their time of need."

"We must always be looking for ways to help the families of those lost," said Assemblyman Benjie Wimberly (D-Passaic/Bergen). "This is the appropriate response."

The bill, which the Assembly passed 70-1-1, now awaits Senate consideration.

## Dangers of leaving children in vehicle

Legislation to create a public awareness campaign on the dangers of leaving children unattended in vehicles cleared the full Assembly.

The bill would require the state Division of Highway Traffic Safety, in consultation with the Department of Children and Families, to establish a public awareness campaign to provide information to the general public concerning the dangers of leaving children unattended in and around motor vehicles, and preventative measures that may be taken by parents or guardians to promote child safety and protect against unintended injury or death.

The division is required to provide printed and electronic educational materials concerning child safety in and around motor vehicles and to disseminate the materials to licensed child care centers and public venues throughout the state, as well as any means determined appropriate by the departments.

"Sometimes even the most well-intentioned parents don't realize how quickly the situation can become dangerous when a child is left alone in a car," said Assemblyman Thomas Giblin (D-Essex/Passaic). "With the proper public awareness, we can make sure no one underestimates the risks involved when leaving a child alone in a vehicle."

"Leaving a child alone in a vehicle 'just for a minute' can lead to a horrible, unnecessary tragic death," said Assemblywoman Angelica Jimenez (D-Bergen, Hudson). "Anyone with a child should understand the danger and be encouraged to think carefully before deciding to 'run inside just

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PHOTO COURTESY OF MARIUSZ KAPTURSKI

Dr. Donna Koch-Kapturski served as the Pulaski Day Parade grand marshal on Oct. 2 in New York City where hundreds of residents from the Garfield community came out to show support.

## GARFIELD

# Local resident serves as parade's grand marshal

BY KRISTIE CATTAFI  
Staff Writer

Garfield resident Dr. Donna Koch-Kapturski served as the 2016 grand marshal of the Pulaski Day Parade on Oct. 2 in New York City where hundreds of Garfield residents marched along 5th Avenue.

In the 79-year-history of the parade, Koch-Kapturski said she is only the ninth female to be named grand marshal and the first in 13 years.

"It's one of the greatest honors bestowed on me," Koch-Kapturski said. "It was the most memorable experience of my life. Being able to march with my children and husband alongside of me made it that more special."

Koch-Kapturski said this year's parade was a record-breaker with the largest amount of Polish dignitaries participating in the parade. Dignitaries included Honorary Grand Marshal Polish Sen. Anna Maria Anders, who is also the daughter of WWII General Wladyslaw Anders, Honorary Grand Marshal Polish Sen. Stanislaw Karczewski, other senators from Poland and representatives from several organizations and companies from Poland.

There were also a record num-

ber of representatives from Garfield. More than 700 residents attended the parade in 13 buses along with Garfield fire trucks and police cars and the Garfield High School marching band. Koch-Kapturski said that Garfield had the biggest contingent in the parade.

Mayor Tana Raymond, Deputy Mayor Glenn Mati, Councilman Joseph Delaney, City Manager Tom Duch, and President of the Pulaski Association Frank Puzio also marched in the parade with the hundreds of other representatives from the city.

"The Garfield community supported me in such a grand way," Koch-Kapturski said. "I was very moved and touched to see them all come out and support me. It was truly a magnificent event for myself and family."

Koch-Kapturski is the daughter of Polish immigrants. A proclamation from the city said she is a worthy role model for all citizens of Polish heritage as demonstrated by her graduation from the Adam Mickiewicz Polish Supplementary School in Passaic as valedictorian.

She has participated in all of the Pulaski Day Parades, was designated as Miss Polonia by the Central of Polish Organizations,

has taken part in the Polish festivals at the PNC Arts Center and continues to be committed to the General Pulaski Memorial Parade Committee in New York City.

Koch-Kapturski has previously served as a member of the Garfield Board of Education, has been on the Garfield Planning Board and has recently been elected to serve on the board of directors of the Polish Cultural Home in Passaic.

She has a medical practice in Garfield, specializing in family and internal medicine. Koch-Kapturski and her husband, Mariusz, have three children.

Leading up to the parade, Koch-Kapturski had the opportunity to meet the President of Poland Andrzej Duda on Sept. 18. On Sept. 24 there was also a huge banquet held in the city with more than 600 guests in attendance that honored Koch-Kapturski, local marshals and Miss Polonias from the Tri-State area.

Before the parade on Oct. 2, Koch-Kapturski said her and her family participated in a special Mass held at St. Patrick's Cathedral followed by breakfast at the West Club where other Polish

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