



NOPE RALLY PUTS THE NAVY ON NOTICE — THE FIGHT HAS JUST BEGUN!

By Tony Senk

Three resounding messages to the Navy from members of Neighbors Opposed to Privatization at Earle — or NOPE — and area residents came through loud and clear at a NOPE rally held at Colts Neck High School late last October. The messages were repeated by a number of passionate speakers and printed on handouts at information tables.

One message was that the Navy's idea to convert military homes on the base to civilian rentals is wrong and unfair to residents of Colts Neck and Tinton Falls on a number of fronts. Another was that the move is patently unsafe from a security standpoint, and is dangerous — not only to residents of Colts Neck, Tinton Falls, and surrounding communities, but to all of Monmouth County, and the state and the country as well. And the final message that was delivered that night was that NOPE and its followers will continue to vigorously oppose the Navy's plan, will stay relentless on this issue — and that they are not going away!

The 300 area residents who came to the rally on a cold and rainy night heard a number of speakers, including NOPE chairman Bill Holobowski; Lieutenant Colonel Jim Sfayer; representatives from the offices of Congressman Chris Smith, Senator Robert Menendez, and Congressman Rush Holt; Freeholders Lillian Burry and John D'Amico; State Senator Jennifer Beck, Assemblywoman Caroline Casagrande, and Assemblyman Declan O'Scanlon; and Colts Neck Mayor Ben Forester and Deputy Mayor Ken Florek.

After the speeches, attendees were encouraged to sign and send postcard size messages opposing the Navy's plan to the governor of New Jersey, the secretary of the Navy, the director of the New Jersey Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness, and the Chief of Strategic Planning for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency — and one more declaring their support of New Jersey State Senate and New Jersey State Assembly bills requiring the state treasurer to issue a cost benefit analysis and security report for the conversion of military housing to civilian housing at Earle, and place a moratorium on the issuance of certain state permits and plan approvals.

The opening statement shown as the first message of the power point presentation — and the one that, no doubt, NOPE officials were hoping all attendees would long remember and be their call to action — read: "Our most valuable assets in opposing unimpeded civilian housing at NWS Earle are informed citizens who are responsible and resolute in opposition to the Department of the Navy's recipe for disaster."

Under the theory of "In Unity, There Is Strength," Mr. Holobowski told the gathering, "We're all in this together," and "It's time to turn up the heat on the Navy." He urged attendees to "tell your friends and neighbors about this issue, write letters to newspapers, and let the Navy know we're not going to sit idly by and let this all go by the boards.

"The Navy," he said, "wants to provide unimpeded access through the base to renters and visitors to — basically — anyone through the year 2040. They are compromising their own mission, our security, and want us to foot the bill — and



Louise Lutkewitte; her son, Will; and Diana Piotrowski, communications director of NOPE, passed out postcards that NOPE rally attendees could send to legislative or Navy contacts to voice their opposition to the Navy's plan to house civilians at NWS Earle.

incredibly, hope no one notices!"

Mr. Holobowski added, "We have no bone to pick with the people working at Earle. This decision is much higher on the Navy food chain. From the time the Navy put on their dog and pony show at Brookdale (in November, 2007), they've been saying, in response to our many questions and concerns, 'We can take care of it!'"

He spoke about the "crippling hidden costs of civilian housing at Earle," including one he called "the 800-pound gorilla in the room" — the tens of millions of dollars it would cost school districts surrounding Earle, from annual service costs to significant outlays to build or expand schools. Mr. Holobowski said these issues "were clearly not considered by the Navy."

Mr. Holobowski noted that it could take at least seven years to develop necessary facilities plans, convey proposals to area voters, receive state approvals, and construct or expand schools, and "that's just another in a myriad of reasons why NOPE encourages the Navy to reconsider the plan."

"The Navy has turned a deaf ear to our questions and concerns on a variety of issues," said the NOPE chairman, "and the result, now, is a ticking time bomb — figuratively speaking — I certainly hope not literally speaking!"

Lieutenant Colonel Jim Sfayer, a decorated and retired Marine who for two years worked as a security guard at Earle, said on this issue, "I just keep asking myself, why are we going through all of this as a result of a bad real estate decision by the Navy years ago? I really thought the Navy would have seen the light by now. They have already compromised what I believe was the best kept secret in the American military by allowing this issue to go this far."

Regarding the Navy building a chain-link fence as security from the access road to the Laurelwood housing at the back of the base, Lieutenant Sfayer said, "A chain-link fence doesn't even stop poachers who were killing deer on the base since I was there in 1976!"

Lieutenant Colonel Sfayer noted that "NWS Earle, by its very nature, is a dangerous place — and it's the very last place you'd want to house civilians.

"And," he reiterated, "it's all to make up for a bad real estate decision by the Navy. It's just incredible!"

Echoing the words of Mr. Holobowski, Lieutenant Colonel Sfayer told rally attendees that "our strength is the strength in this room," and that "we cannot be complacent on this issue."

He urged everyone to tell their friends about this issue, and how "if the Navy gets their way on this, it's going to cost us all — big time!" He added, "If we don't rise up — together — on this issue, you better get your check books out!"

State Senator Jennifer Beck called civilian housing at Earle, "a dangerous idea," and stressed how "we all need to stand side-by-side, determined in our opposition to this plan."

Assemblywoman Casagrande, a Colts Neck resident, called members of NOPE "heroes to our community," and Assemblyman O'Scanlon also praised the organizers of NOPE, saying that "they



Lieutenant Colonel Jim Sfayer gave an impassioned plea to the Navy to "stop the madness" in their plans to house civilians on the ammunition base.



helped bring us all together on this.” He noted that “at one time, Colts Neck and Tinton Falls were at odds on this issue — and now our collective efforts are aimed at the right place: squarely on the Navy and their wrong-headed and one-directional thinking.”

Assemblyman O’Scanlon added, “A tactic the government often uses is to stall and try and confuse — and hope the opposition will go away. We can’t — and we won’t — do that!”

Freeholder Lillian Burry, also a Colts Neck resident, said, “I’m no stranger to what happens at Earle. When I first got word that the Navy was actually considering this crazy plan, my first thought was ‘this is sheer insanity.’ That’s the same reaction I have today.”

Fellow Freeholder John D’Amico added, “Instead of using money to build fences and roads, the Navy should use money to buy out the contract with Laurelwood housing.”

Ken Florek, deputy mayor on the Colts Neck Township Committee, spoke about what the Colts Neck Township Committee is doing to oppose the privatization of housing at NWS Earle.

“Since July 2003, when the Department of the Navy first notified Colts Neck Township that it intended to permit private housing on Earle, we on the Township Committee took measures to oppose this action. By February, 2004, we had retained the law firm of Wilentz, Goldman, and Spitzer as special counsel to ensure that all legal measures would be taken to stop what we saw to be an unacceptable proposition, placing the un-screened public into residential rental units within the gates of an active Naval Weapons Station.

“In spite of strong opposition, the Navy published its final Environmental Impact Statement in April, 2009 and signed off on its Record of Decision for implementation of its plan on May 22, 2009. On May 27, 2009 — less than a week later — Colts Neck Township authorized counsel to proceed with litigation, and on June 26, 2009, Colts Neck filed a lawsuit against the Navy and the developer that would be responsible for the housing on Earle.

“The Colts Neck lawsuit seeks an injunction prohibiting the Navy from implementing the Record of Decision and the developer from renting the housing units on Earle to the public. The lawsuit is based on, among other things, the impropriety of the lease between the Navy and the developer, the impropriety of the Navy’s Environmental Impact Statement and its flawed conclusions, environmental issues relating to wetlands and wildlife, water issues related to wastewater discharge, land use and zoning impacts, and, of course, issues of national and local security.

“Over the past month and a half, Colts Neck has appointed environmental, planning, traffic, and security consultants to begin a study of the issues underlying its allegations in the lawsuit. We have requested that the consultants begin their work shortly, so that we will be able to seek preliminary relief, stopping the Navy from conducting any work to implement the Record of Decision, pending resolution of the lawsuit.

“The Navy and the developer have both answered the complaint and have both moved for dismissal of the action. The Colts Neck Township Committee will vigorously oppose these motions and take all necessary

steps to prevail in this lawsuit.

“In addition to the lawsuit filed, the Colts Neck Township Committee has continued to seek and receive the further support of its legislators.

“The Colts Neck Township Committee is committed to take all available action, and to support all reasonable activities that seek to prohibit the privatization of housing at Earle. We greatly appreciate the actions of our legislators, our residents, and NOPE in supporting and advancing those efforts. United, we will not stop until the ill-conceived plans of the Navy are abandoned or legally enjoined.”

Mr. Holobowski ended the rally by reiterating the importance of “keeping the Navy on the hook on this issue,” and asking everyone to sign up for NOPE’s e-mail list, and donate money, their time, and talent to the organization. He asked all at the rally to contact — or continue to hound — their elected officials, the EPA, and the Navy on this issue, and to stay informed by attending Township Committee and Board of Education meetings, reading the NOPE blog and website, and attending future NOPE events.

For more information on NOPE, see their website at www.orgsites.com/nj/nope.

For real-time updates, see www.nope-nj.blogspot.com.

A prophetic postscript:

The folks at NOPE shared the following information on security issues at military bases in the United States just weeks after the NOPE rally took place:

“Early November has proven to be a tragic time for both the Navy and the Army. Two stories, both involving the infiltration of military bases, only serves to prove the validity of the concerns expressed by NOPE regarding the unimpeded access route planned and chosen by the Navy, making way for the rental of 300 Laurelwood housing units to civilians.

“To safeguard the base and base personnel from civilians — and civilians from the daily operations of a fully-functioning weapons storage facility — a \$5 million, 22,000-foot chain-link fence was deemed by the Navy to offer optimum protection. However, according to an article on November 3, 2009 in the Seattle Times, five protesters associated with an international peace movement were arrested after cutting through three chain-link security fences to reach an area where nuclear missiles are stored at Naval Base Kitsap-Bangor. The ages of the protesters: 83, 81, 64, 60, and 60 years old!

“This is the same type of fencing the Navy claims will keep Naval Weapons Earle safe from intrusion!

“For over a year, NOPE have vehemently opposed the opening of the Laurelwood housing units located on NWS Earle to civilian renters and facilitating that by granting them unimpeded access.

Arrogant disregard and a deaf ear has been the Navy’s response to NOPE’s assertion that allowing civilians unimpeded access to the facility is, by its very nature, inviting actions which could ultimately lead to tragedy.

“Hopefully the Department of the Navy has learned from these recent tragedies.

“If not, foolish pride will go before the fall.”



Bill Holobowski, chairman of NOPE, speaks with Andrea Giannopoulos, president of the Colts Neck Board of Education, after the NOPE rally.



Colts Neck and Tinton Falls residents pick up flyers and handouts at the NOPE information table set up outside the Colts Neck High School auditorium.



Elaine Mann of NOPE grabs some more postcards to be sent to officials with the Navy, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness, and the governor of New Jersey.