life remembered for bringing beauty to Plainfield and nation’s highways

By Richard Khvokin
STAR-LEDGER STAFF

She fought against billboards and for reproductive rights, advocated for hospitals and churches, taught Sunday school and played the violin.

But for the greater part of 94 years, Barbara Sandford of Plainfield preferred to get her hands dirty. Whether weeding and watering in public gardens, advocating at city hall or raising six children, Mrs. Sandford had passions and interests, and passionate interest to spare. And she highlighted them all, said her daughter, Cindy Landreth.

Mrs. Sandford died at her summer home in Wolfeboro, N.H., on Sept. 21, a few weeks after hosting her extended family for a granddaughter’s wedding. “She lived a full life,” Landreth said. “And maybe more importantly, she did important stuff with it.”

Mrs. Sandford served as president of the Plainfield Garden Club, sat on the Plainfield Beautification Committee and was chairwoman of the Plainfield Shade Tree Commission. She was recognized for her efforts with several honors and awards, including from the Garden Club of America.

A good part of Mrs. Sandford’s legacy, though, is invisible — exactly as she wanted it.

In the late 1970s, Mrs. Sandford co-founded Scenic America, a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit dedicated to organize and campaign against billboards — “litter on stick,” she called them — along the nation’s highways and byways. The organization, of which there are now dozens of state

SEE SANDFORD, PAGE 18
Plainfield ranks last in solving nonfatal shootings

City’s police director blames witnesses’ fear of retribution

By Richard Khawkine
STAR-LEDGER STAFF

City police arrested exactly one person in connection with the city’s 24 nonfatal shootings last year, placing the Union County municipality last among the state’s nine largest cities with regard to solving those crimes.

The city’s outgoing police director, Martin Hellwig, attributed the low solve rate to a lack of cooperation by witnesses and victims fearful of retribution by the shooters.

“We have a problem getting information,” he said. “That seems to be the norm. ... It’s not surprising when I look at it in context with regard to victims and shooters.”

Statewide, gun violence has increased, and resource-strapped police departments are failing to solve hundreds of nonfatal shootings each year in the state’s eight other largest cities: Newark, Camden, Atlantic City, Paterson, Jersey City, Elizabeth, Irvington and Orange.

Last year, police failed to solve more than 80 percent of nonfatal shootings in those cities and in Plainfield, continuing a trend that has left thousands of potential killers on New Jersey’s streets. From 2008 to last year, roughly 2,600 out of 3,400 nonfatal shootings went unsolved in those cities.

In contrast, police and prosecutors solved 65 percent of homicides statewide from 2008 to 2011.

Plainfield has long been plagued by gun violence, the vast majority of it attributable to the presence of rival gangs within the city.

But a public truce between two of the city’s most high-profile gangs, announced just over two years ago, has, if not decreased violence, at least kept it steady, according to statistics compiled by public records requests and those kept by the Union County Prosecutor’s Office.

In 2011, three people were arrested in connection with 19 nonfatal shootings. Six were killed in the city that year.

In 2010, two were arrested in connection with 32 nonfatal shootings, when 11 were killed.

Overall, crime in the city of 50,000 is down about 50 percent so far this year, with the number of violent incidents having dipped 35 percent, according to State Police statistics.

Sandford
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13

and local affiliates, continues to affect the sort of change Mrs. Sanford envisioned across the country.

“If you were passionate about things, and she was passionate about a lot of things, you could make a difference,” Landreth said. “She led by example, rather than by fiat.”

HYBRID OF INTERESTS

After graduating from junior college in New London, Barbara Tracy set off for a Wyoming dude ranch, where she met Webster Sandford, a partner at the New York City law firm of White & Case.

They married in 1938, settling in Plainfield. Although Mrs. Sandford would tend to

a wife’s responsibilities, including raising six children, she began to cultivate a hybrid of interests, chief among them politics and gardening.

A registered Republican, she also was an ardent environmentalist and preservationist.

“She was fiscally conservative but socially liberal,” said Landreth, who lives in Philadelphia. “She was more interested in getting something done than being labeled.”

She would march on Washington to rally for women’s right to birth control and play the violin with the Plainfield Symphony. And as the city succumbed to the strife that engulfed the nation’s urban core during the late 1960s, she remained an enthusiastic promoter for Plainfield, steadfastly encouraging, for example, the planting of vegetable gardens in the city’s vacant lots, particularly by schoolchildren.

CARED FOR PLAINFIELD

“She really cared about Plainfield,” Landreth said. “She held court there.”

Webster Sandford, who was born and raised in Plainfield and served on the city school board and city council, died in 1979.

In addition to Landreth, Mrs. Sanford is survived by a brother, three daughters, nine grandchildren and 10 great-grandchildren. A son, Joseph Sandford, died in 2005 and a daughter, Priscilla Sandford, in 2008.

A memorial service will be held at 1 p.m. on Nov. 10 at Crescent Avenue Presbyterian Church in Plainfield.

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Rankings
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13

add up to an outstanding educational experience and value students across the country.”

In addition to the national university list, U.S. News also released separate lists for different categories of colleges and regions.

LIBERAL ARTS RANKING

This year’s list of top liberal arts colleges was led by Williams College in Massachusetts, Amherst College in Massachusetts and Wesleyan University in Connecticut.

Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania.

The list of top Regional Universities in the North, which includes New Jersey, ranked Villanova University in Pennsylvania as the top school, followed by Providence College in Rhode Island, Fairfield University in Connecticut, Bentley University in Massachusetts and the College of New Jersey in Ewing.

New Jersey’s Rider University in Lawrenceville and Rowan University in Glassboro tied for 19th on the regional list.

a popular measure of an institution’s reputation, ultimately, one of the best ways to evaluate the quality and fit of a university is a personal visit to meet the faculty and students and experience the student-centered character of the learning community,” Rider President Mordechai Rozanski said. “This is where we excel.”

NEW JERSEY SPOTS

Other local colleges and universities on the regional list included: Rutgers-Camden (24th); Monmouth Montclair State (54th).

At Richard Stockton College, a public college in Galloway Township, Atlantic County, campus officials were celebrating ranking 60th among regional universities in the North after landing near the bottom of U.S. News’ rankings a decade ago.

“We’ve had a meteoric rise from low tiers to the highest,” Stockton President Herman Saatkamp said.

The rankings can be viewed online at usnews.com/education.

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