A Location for Local News
TAPinto.net has saved money and improved communications

By Al Morgan, Mayor, New Providence

The late House Speaker Tip O’Neill famously remarked that, “All politics is local.” As Mayor of New Providence I know how accurate those words truly are. All issues, politics and news are local. The world, which once was so large, has shrunk as technology has expanded.

One of the biggest technological changes impacting local government has taken place in news. The advent of hyperlocal news is changing how news is reported and how local government news is covered. Hyperlocal news is timely news that is targeted to or consumed by people or entities within a well-defined geographical area, generally on the scale of a community or city. These news sources make it easier and more affordable for local governments to communicate with residents and stakeholders.

I have been fortunate to have a front row seat to this news evolution. New Jersey’s leader in hyperlocal news, TAPinto.net, began right here in New Providence and now includes 30 online newspaper franchises with over 3,300,000 readers in 2014 alone. TAPinto is provided at no charge to readers and is available both on the web as well as via a daily and/or weekly subscription-based e-news service. TAPinto also provides a free subscription-based e-news service for breaking news. Since it began six years ago, TAPinto.net has improved our township’s communication and saved taxpayer money, while promoting good government.

Each TAPinto site is independently owned and operated by residents of the town skilled in journalism/writing and marketing. In New Providence, according to Google Analytics, their site is read by nearly 90 percent of our residents.

Communication is the most important ingredient of good government and is key to successful projects and resolution of issues. Timely and accurate information from our borough is disseminated by TAPinto.net on a regular basis, to keep our residents better informed. It’s quick and easy for township staff to send out information through their news alerts and site.

Whether it’s an emergency, upcoming events at the library, or it’s time to sign up for Rec soccer, TAPinto’s hyperlocal helps us get the word out at no cost to the municipality or the readers. While other towns have to expend significant taxpayer money.
on mailings, websites, messaging systems and other communications; we have saved by using TAPinto.

During Hurricane Sandy, TAPinto.net was critical to New Providence's residents. TAP was able to provide up-to-the-minute news for our residents. This had such a lasting effect on me. As other news outlets attempted to pick and choose whose area of the state got hit the hardest, TAPinto New Providence covered what was most important to New Providence residents—New Providence news.

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Each TAPinto site also has a Facebook page and Twitter feed, which are constantly updated. TAPinto can also send breaking news alerts when warranted to alert the public regarding threats to public safety. TAPinto.net's coverage is so well received that FEMA has partnered with TAPinto.net to provide emergency preparedness information for the residents of all of its towns.

When TAPinto first launched in New Providence six years ago, we had three different newspapers covering our Town Council meetings—TAPinto, the Star-Ledger and the Independent Press. Today, only TAPinto is doing so. If they were not there, our residents would not know what was happening in the local government. With TAPinto.net, all Borough Council and Board of Education meetings are covered by a reporter and our residents are informed and involved with our municipal and school government. If TAPinto was not on the scene, New Providence's "news" would be relegated to the public notices in the classified section of a print newspaper paid for with taxpayer dollars.

TAPinto.net works cooperatively with our police department to provide police and other emergency news accurately and efficiently without sensationalizing the news. For example, during a recent death caused by a motor vehicle crash, TAPinto.net confirmed details of the crash prior to publication while other media outlets rushed to get the story out first and reported the accident's location incorrectly.

Furthermore, when our departments need to get word out to the public quickly, TAPinto.net is there to publish it right away. For example, we recently had a water main break at the high school. TAPinto.net reported it right away and let our residents know that the high school basketball game scheduled for the evening was postponed as a result. This enabled our personnel to fix the water main break more quickly and saved our residents from traveling to the high school only to find out the game had been postponed.

Many times during the last six years, TAPinto.net has promoted and covered fundraisers in town to benefit charities, enabling our local nonprofits to raise significantly more money than they could without the publicity. For example, their coverage of the plight of four-year-old Brooke Healey of New Providence who had an inoperable brain tumor, helped enable her family to raise funds to attempt to save her life. While Brooke sadly is no longer with us, Brooke's family and friends created a foundation, The Brooke Healey Foundation, which has raised significant sums to find a cure for brain tumors, thanks in large part to TAPinto.net's continuing coverage and promotion of their efforts.

At a time when newsrooms are shrinking and many newspapers are going out of business, TAPinto.net has created a sustainable model for local journalism that has greatly benefited our municipality and our residents.

TAPinto currently has sites in Basking Ridge, Berkeley Heights, Bridgewater/Raritan, Clarksburg, Cranford, East Brunswick, East Orange, Edison, Livingston, Madison, Millburn/Short Hills, Milltown/Spotswood, Montclair, Montville, Morris Township, New Providence, North Plainfield/Green Brook, Randolph, Roselle/Roselle Park, Roxbury, Scotch Plains/Fanwood, South Orange/Maplewood, South Plainfield, Sparta, Summit, Warren, West Essex, West Orange, and Westfield.