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John Amodeo, R-Atlantic, to speak — Pacentrilli said his email list has grown. Even people who can't make it to the meetings are signing up for his news blasts on local and national events, he said.

Northfield resident Susan Lord founded the Tea Party Patriots in 2009 after organizing a bus trip to the 9/12 Taxpayer March on Washington. From that group, she has helped launch active chapters in the Downbeach area, Egg Harbor Township, Hammonton, Lower Township and Wildwood. The eventual goal, she said, is to have a chapter in each town in the 2nd Congressional District, geographically the largest in the state.

"It's a natural thing to do," she said. "You're continually growing, and it doesn't make any sense to not keep dividing (it up), since the people know the lay of the land in their towns."

Following the lead of other groups, Lord is developing a Constitution class that would teach the fundamentals as most tea party adherents believe the nation's founders intended.

The Elmer-based Greenwich Tea Party Patriots started offering Constitution classes in January, attracting 160 students, founder Brenda Roames said.

"People really are interested in getting back to the Constitution as the founders wrote it," she said.

Roames said her group is retooling the class and will offer it to the Hispanic community within the next two months. The class would allow the group to expand its reach into a new demographic, one that has so far gone untapped, she said.

"Once they get a grasp of the Constitution, they'll have much more of an idea of what this country means, and they'll have a little bit more eagerness to maybe follow the rules and become better citizens," she said.

Image and effect

Recent comments by National Public Radio fundraising executive Ron Schiller that tea-partyers are "racist" and "scary" have reignited old animosities and prompted the U.S. House of Representatives to vote to defund the media outlet.

Lord said it's a daily struggle combating the false impression most people have of the tea party. The media, both conservative and liberal, have given groups like hers "a bad rap," she said.

"You're never going to get good press," she said. "You just have to be content knowing you're doing

the right thing."

Larry Butler, chair of Rowan University's Department of Political Science, said one reason for the unflattering portrayal of the tea party is its decentralized and fractured nature. Many factions hold differing positions, he said, from staunch social conservatives to libertarians.

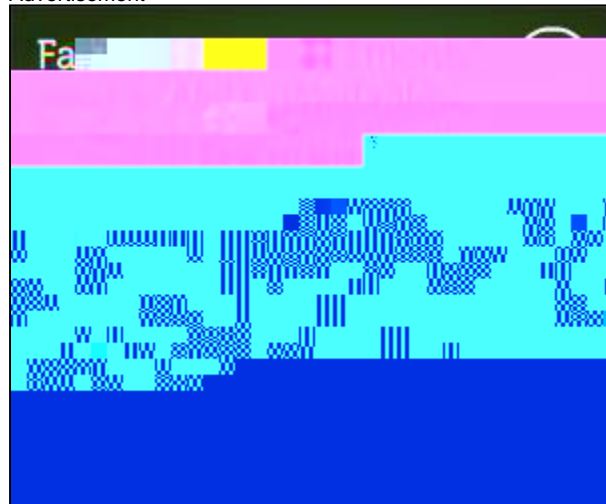
The same decentralization that leads to problems with fundraising and movement-wide support for candidates also leads to image problems, Butler said. "Media simplifies," he said. "Part of media's job is to take complicated things and synthesize them in a way people can understand."

That disconnect between a complex, impassioned movement and its overly simplified portrayal has helped to mobilize at least some groups, Butler said. "There's nothing like a common enemy to unify people to the extent they see the media as misrepresenting them," he said.

Sharon Schulman, executive director of the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy at the Richard Stockton College of New Jersey in Galloway Township, said the tea party thus far has had no substantial effect on local politics. "It's there," she said. "People know about it, but it hasn't been able to gather any steam." The 2010 primaries are an example, she said.

The reasons are twofold, Schulman said. First, the incumbents all have been strong candidates. Second, the candidates who have taken up the tea party mantle have lacked funding and name-recognition. "They don't have a track record with government or anti-government, so they're not doing it," she said.

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In the 2nd District, self-described tea party candidate Linda Biamonte received about 10 percent of the vote in her primary battle against incumbent Republican U. S. Rep. Frank LoBiondo.

Biamonte, 50, of the Cardiff section of Egg Harbor Township, is circumspect about the reasons she lost. They do not include a lack of support from local tea partiers, she said. A former TV media buyer for an advertising agency, Biamonte entered the race four months before the primary and was dividing her time between Manhattan and her hometown.

"It was my campaign to lose, of course, but there were significant issues," she said. "Being newly back to the area, I didn't have the recognition I needed, and it was very hard (to campaign) in seven counties in that four-month period."

But the uphill battle was worth it because it sent a message to the political establishment, she said.

While people don't typically self-identify as "tea party" when calling his office, LoBiondo said, he has seen an increase in constituency calls. "With tea party issues of spending and taxation, I think I'm pretty much in step with them," he said. However, LoBiondo said he doesn't give special attention to any one particular group among the 700,000 people he represents.

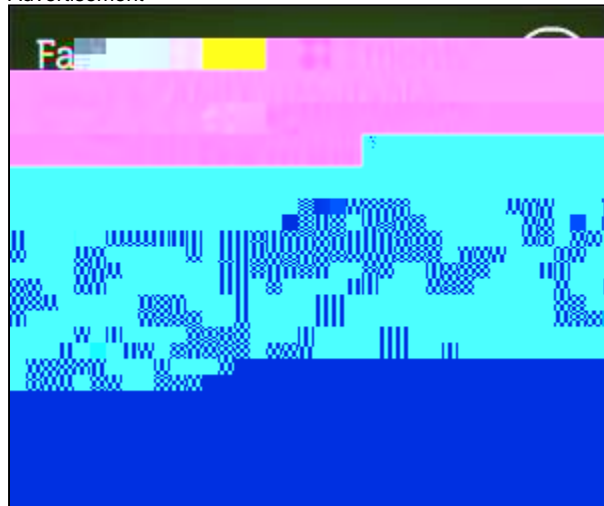
A movement building support



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