

Roundabout opens at Brookdale County hopes intersection will ease traffic woes near college

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FREEHOLD BUREAU

MIDDLETOWN — Monmouth County officials have taken a roundabout way to fix a clogged road near Brookdale Community College.

More precisely, the county on Thursday formally opened a new roundabout — a type of circular intersection more often seen in Europe and Australia — on Newman Springs Road at an entrance to the county college.

Township resident Mary Mahoney navigated the new layout when she entered and left the school.

"It's wonderful," she said. "I think it'll work well, and I'm hoping it's going to alleviate some of the traffic problems we have here."

The success of the college has helped make Newman Springs Road — also known as County Route 520 — a hot spot. Brookdale has a record number of students signed up for classes this fall — 12,626 students, or 5.5 percent more than a year ago, according to figures through last week. College officials said enrollment is continuing.

But Barbara Thorpe, who lives on Swimming River Road in the township, said the area has been under other development pressure as well.

"When I moved here in 1967, the area was rural in character," Thorpe said. "The expectations were that the roads that were here would handle all the development, but that has not been the case."

"Roundabouts work in metropolitan areas. I hope to God it works here," said Thorpe, who said she is a member of Lincroft Village Green Association, a community group that advocated for the change. "I think the biggest obstacle to its success will be in people learning to use it. I think it will succeed if the public gives it a chance, instead of everyone fighting to get through (the roundabout) first."

Mary Ellen Hintz, spokeswoman for the group, said, "The difference for roundabouts compared to New Jersey's traffic circles is that in circles the most aggressive driver gets to go first. People entering roundabouts yield to people already in the roundabout. It's pretty simple, and it's better than waiting four or five light changes at an intersection."

This is the first roundabout — or circular intersection — constructed on one of the county's roadways. A similar design was implemented earlier this year in Wall, at Routes 33 and 34, which are state roads.

County officials said two ramps for right turns have been incorporated into the roundabout to accommodate heavy traffic in and out of the college. They said the decision to build it was the result of a collaboration with the township, the college, the Lincroft Village Green group and the nearby Lincroft Bible Church.

"This is an excellent example of government working with the community to come up with a solution that is satisfactory to all," Freeholder Director William C. Barham said.

"I travel this road at least once a day. I fully expect it will ameliorate the traffic difficulty," Freeholder Lillian G. Burry said. "The test will come shortly, when the school opens for the fall."

County spokesman William Heine said roundabouts are much smaller than traditional traffic circles. Like a circle, modern roundabouts have no traffic signals, and a signal was removed from Newman Springs Road to meet the design.

"Had we not done the roundabout, the county would have had to widen Newman Springs Road and add two left-turn lanes into the college," County Engineer Joseph Ettore said.

"We are pleased that the county was able to address the concerns of local residents in addressing need to keep large volumes of traffic moving in and out of the college using Newman Springs Road," Middletown Mayor Gerard P. Scharfenberger said.

The construction was done by Precise Construction Inc., Freehold, under a \$1.2 million contract.