

Mtsd., Garwood Districts to Receive \$2.6 Mil. Relating to Breakup of Regional District

By DEBORAH MADISON
Specialty Writer for The Westfield Leader and The Times

MOUNTAINSIDE—The New Jersey State Supreme Court handed down a decision on January 29 requiring four Union County school districts to return \$2.6 million to the municipalities of Garwood and Mountainside.

According to the decision written by Justice Gary S. Stein, the municipalities of Garwood and Mountainside were shortchanged by an inequitable distribution of money and facilities among six school districts after the 1997 breakup of the Union County Regional High School District No. 1.

The Regional District included the six municipalities of Berkeley Heights, Clark, Garwood, Kenilworth, Mountainside and Springfield. The money that will be paid back to Garwood and Mountainside will come from the other districts.

The original plan, devised by then-County Superintendent Dr. Leonard Fitts, called for \$3.3 million to go to Garwood and Mountainside, while the other four districts would acquire the district's physical school buildings.

That early decision was then later amended by the Department of Education re-distributing the monies more equitably among the six districts. A variety of reasons, including facility upkeep and appraisal of the facilities were deciding factors in reversing the original decision.

Mountainside Chief School Administrator Dr. Gerard A. Schaller, said that an appeal of that reversal was filed approximately four years ago by the borough.

At the time of the break-up, and after the reversal, Mountainside received approximately \$484,000 but should have gotten nearly \$2.5 million, while Garwood received approximately \$152,000, but was entitled to \$784,000, according to the Supreme Court's review of the case.

The court decision stated that the most recent distribution of funds and facilities resulted in a "wind-fall" for the other four districts, while Mountainside and Garwood were shortchanged.

Kenilworth Superintendent Dr. Lloyd M. Leschuk told *The Westfield*

Leader and The Times of Scotch Plains-Fanwood that he does not yet know the full extent of the ramifications this decision will have on the school district or if the decision can be appealed.

"Until our attorneys review and interpret the decision, I am not sure what effect this decision will have on our District," Dr. Leschuk stated.

Berkeley Heights School Business Administrator, William Van Tassel said that he is very disappointed.

"We followed the procedures, guided by the State Board and the Commissioner at that time," Mr. Van Tassel commented.

Garwood Superintendent of Schools, Bill Murphy said, "this is a tremendous boost to Garwood. It is just vindication to the municipality and to the taxpayers who were previously shortchanged."

Dr. Schaller said that the funds will be applied to tax relief or school renovations to Deerfield School. In addition, the district is considering reinstating Beechwood School, which has been leased to private

schools for years, most recently the Morris-Union Jointure Commission, as a second public school to handle an increase in student population.

"One way or another, the money will go back to the taxpayers," he said.

He also said that the six superintendents met on Tuesday with the attorney for the State Board of Education to discuss the ramifications of the most recent ruling.

Jeff Lieberman, Staff Attorney with the State Board of Education, said that the case has been remanded by the state Supreme Court to the state Board of Education. The State Board's legal review committee will be meeting on February 21 to review a timetable as to how this order will be carried out.

Mr. Lieberman said that the districts have little recourse to appeal the decision by the state's highest court.

"The case could possibly be appealed to the federal courts, but that is unlikely," Mr. Lieberman said.

After the Regional School District was dissolved in 1997, each municipality re-opened their own schools; however, Mountainside and Garwood continued to pay tuition to Berkeley Heights and Clark, respectively, to send their high school students to high schools in those municipalities.



Recreation Events

Editor's Note: The following is a weekly column prepared and submitted by the Westfield Recreation Commission.

Massage Therapy Class, Monday evenings, 7 to 8:30 p.m., beginning February 12.

This five-week class costs \$32 per person.

Yoga Classes, Monday evenings, 5:15 to 6:45 p.m., beginning February 12.

The class runs for five weeks. The cost is \$20 per person.

Taekwondo Class - (Tae-Bomovements with strength training), Tuesday and Friday mornings, 9:30 to 10:30 a.m.

Classes will begin Tuesday, February 20, and run for five weeks. The cost is \$40 per person.

Family Chemical Wizardry Workshop, Sunday, February 25, 2 to 4 p.m.

There is still space in the program which costs \$10 per person. The program is for children in grades one through six. All children must be accompanied by an adult. The pro-

gram features exciting hands-on experiments.

All of the above programs are held in the Community Room of the Westfield Municipal Building, 425 East Broad Street.

Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus, Sunday, March 18, at the Meadowlands.

Circus tickets cost \$30 per person. The bus will leave the Municipal Building at 2 p.m. and return around 6:45 p.m.

11th Annual Road Race, Saturday, April 28, Tamaques Park.

Registration has begun for the race. Those runners who wish to enter should come to the Recreation Office, located on the first floor of the Municipal Building to register.

Street Hockey, Saturdays, March 3, 10 and 24, Memorial Pool Parking Lot.

Kids, aged 6 to 17, are encouraged to bring their own stick and helmet and join the fun. Please call the Recreation Office at (908) 789-4080 for more information and to register.



DWC Names Officer Slate, Assumes Control of Promotions From Chamber

WESTFIELD—The Downtown Westfield Corporation (DWC) held its annual reorganization meeting Monday, January 22, as the officer slate for 2001 was selected.

Elected for another one-year term of office were: Doug Schwarz, Chairman; Joseph Spector, Vice Chairman; and Sherry Cronin, Secretary. David Martone was nominated and elected to replace Sal

Caruana as Treasurer for a one-year term.

In addition, the DWC has decided to restructure and reassume management of the DWC promotions. Promotions were most recently administered, under contract, with the Westfield Area Chamber of Commerce (WACC).

"Promotions in downtown Westfield are a significant part of the

DWC budget and as with any municipal relationship, we want to ensure that we provide services which render the highest impact and cost effectiveness to the taxpayers of the special improvement district in Westfield," said Mr. Schwarz.

Mr. Schwarz expressed his appreciation for the role that the WACC has played in recent years. "It has been a pleasure working with the WACC over the past three years and we look forward to a smooth transition and continued involvement with the WACC." The DWC promotions are currently planned for 2001; the WACC will continue to handle all promotional duties through Saturday, May 26.

The DWC, located at 105 Elm Street, is dedicated to promoting Downtown Westfield as a preferred commercial destination and to strengthening the downtown special improvement district as the center of community life.

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