

**The Westfield Leader**  
— Established 1890 —  
The Official Newspaper of the Town of Westfield

Member of:  
New Jersey Press Association  
National Newspaper Association  
Westfield Area Chamber of Commerce

Periodicals — Postage Paid at Westfield, New Jersey  
P.O. Box 250 • 251 North Avenue, West  
Westfield, N.J. 07091

Tele: (908) 232-4407 • E-mail: [press@goleader.com](mailto:press@goleader.com) • Web: [www.goleader.com](http://www.goleader.com) • Fax: (908) 232-0473

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to the offices of the newspapers at  
P. O. Box 250, Westfield, New Jersey 07091

**PUBLISHED EVERY THURSDAY BY WATCHUNG COMMUNICATIONS, INC.**

**The Scotch Plains - Fanwood TIMES**  
— Established 1959 —  
Official Newspaper of the Borough of Fanwood and the Township of Scotch Plains

Member of:  
New Jersey Press Association • National Newspaper Association  
Scotch Plains Business & Professional Association  
Fanwood Business & Professional Association

Periodicals — Postage Paid at Scotch Plains, New Jersey  
P. O. Box 368  
Scotch Plains, N.J. 07076

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SUBSCRIPTION PRICE  
One-year — \$28 • Two-year — \$52 • Three-year — \$76 • One-year college (September to May) — \$20

## Scotch Plains Talk

### Reagan's Send-off Was a Joyful Celebration, Only in America

by Fred Rossi, *Leader/Times*

Perhaps the country needed something like this. After several years of war and terrorism and orange alerts and other uncertainties, Ronald Reagan again came to the rescue and gave us a week to push our worries into the background for a moment and, instead, hold a coast-to-coast Irish wake to celebrate a quintessentially American life.

While his death, though not unexpected, was sad, it also gave America an opportunity to look back on Reagan's improbable rise from his impoverished small town beginnings — to his days broadcasting baseball games on the radio, to his movie star and television host days and to his years as a corporate pitchman. Then, he became a political activist and served two terms as governor of the country's biggest state — and, then, eight momentous years on the world's biggest stage in Washington, D.C.

His two terms in the White House were by no means an easy era. The Cold War was reaching its apex, the economy was struggling at the start. Terrorism and hijackings were not uncommon. Reagan was nearly assassinated. There were numerous battles with Congress and some heavy whiffs of scandal. Yet those complex times, from the vantage point of today's uncertain world, somehow seem a lot simpler and more ordered in a way. They were complicated times presided over by a president who, whether through his policies, his rhetoric or the sheer force of his optimistic personality, gave us the reassurance that everything would somehow turn out all right.

Reagan dominated the world stage like no president since FDR, and he did it with grace, style, humor, firmness of his convictions, a seeming lack of ego and a little bit of theater. He entered the White House espousing a handful of long-held principles and goals and, for the most part, kept to them for eight years. As a result, things on balance turned out all right. The Soviet bloc was vanquished, the economy rebounded, it was okay to show a little patriotism and the institution of the presidency was restored to its proper status. Rather than being consumed or destroyed by the office, Reagan filled it with ease.

Perhaps that was why tens of thousands of ordinary Americans stood in long lines in California and at the Capitol to view his casket and why thousands more crowded the streets and highways in Washington and Ventura County to watch last week's funeral processions. Perhaps that was why television, again, served as a national gathering place for the rest of us to watch the week's ceremonies, from the simple ceremonies at

Reagan's library to the chilling horse-drawn procession to the Capitol to the majestic funeral service at the National Cathedral to the stunningly picturesque and moving burial last Friday night, and to listen to old Reagan hands happily reminisce about their days with the Gipper.

In his day, Reagan made Washington the center of the action and I was fortunate to live there during much of his presidency. Back in a time when security concerns were not so paramount, I saw him up close several times, including Inauguration Day 1981, when I was inexplicably allowed onto the fenced-in Capitol grounds at 6 a.m., three hours before the other 100,000 spectators were let in. The previous day, I had stood several yards away as he entered the government guesthouse where he was staying. I lived around the corner from the hospital he was taken to after the March 1981 shooting and can still remember standing a few feet away from his bullet-pocked limousine and listening to a press aide inform the world that the President had indeed been shot.

Great presidents, like Washington, Lincoln and the two Roosevelts, are those who are the right men for the times. Who else but a Ronald Reagan could have inherited a broken and stagnant economy, diminished U.S. influence and status overseas, an expansive Soviet threat and a deflated national spirit and successfully righted things through a combination of some radical and untried policies, tough talk and unbridled optimism?

Throughout the week's events, a number of commentators expressed the hope that maybe Reagan's parting legacy would be to contribute to a lessening of the present nastiness in our politics. After recalling how Reagan conducted himself more as a happy warrior than a slashing partisan, it was hard to look at today's politicians and their media acolytes without feeling embarrassed. Despite the rush last week by some current leaders to wrap themselves in the Reagan legacy, a few days of civil conduct does not undo months and years of decidedly un-Reagan-like behavior by those on both sides of the political aisle.

Ronald Reagan was a unique personality and he won't be replicated for a long time. His life was straight out of a storybook, embodying the notion that in America, dreams can come true and anyone can grow up to be president. His presidency was one of the rare ones that truly changed the country and shook the world. And his grand send-off last week was a joyful celebration of an "only in America" life.



Below are four arcane words, each with four definitions — only one is correct. The others are made up. Are you sharp enough to discern this deception of diction?

If you can guess one correctly — good guess. If you get two — well-read individual. If you get three — word expert. If you get all four — You must have a lot of free time!

**All words and correct definitions come from the board game Diction Deception.**

Answers to last week's arcane words.

1. Thews — Muscular power
2. Sclaff — In golf, to scrape a club along the ground before hitting it
3. Scrimmer — A fencing master
4. Grobian — A person of rude or clownish manners

- DESUETE**
1. Excessive grief; very sad
  2. Withered or emaciated
  3. Refined; reserved
  4. Out of use

- KISMET**
1. Doom; fate
  2. Grief; sorrow
  3. Bizarre; strange
  4. Unspoken; unthinkable

- USQUEBAUGH**
1. A wigmaker or hairdresser
  2. Whiskey in Scotland or Ireland
  3. Substantial; a large number
  4. An expert; specifically, a skilled theologian used as a consultant

- ESCHEW**
1. To escape or avoid
  2. To banish or ostracize
  3. To disregard or consider unimportant
  4. To berate; ridicule

### PD Chief Encourages WHS Bash Attendance

Since 1990, the Optimist Club of Westfield, the Westfield Recreation Department and the High School PTO have sponsored, managed and staffed Project Graduation (BASH). This is the alcohol- and drug-free celebration held on graduation night for all graduating Westfield High School seniors. This event has hosted nearly 5,000 of our students, thereby keeping them safe and secure on this memorable night.

I am encouraging that all parents of graduates encourage their children to sign up and attend. We need to be reminded that underage drinking and serving of alcohol to underage persons is a violation of the law. Let's keep our graduates safe and know that they are having a great time at a great event. Congratulations to the Westfield High School Class of 2004!

Bernard Tracy  
Westfield Police Chief

### Parking Decks Need Referendum

I have been following the situation regarding the proposed new parking deck with ever-increasing alarm and concern. It has gotten to the point of me writing this e-mail, a big step for me. To me, it is an absolute no-brainer to stop any further efforts on the redevelopment projects until the waiting list has been fully and completely verified. Everyone on the list should be called. This is very easy to do; I'd be happy to volunteer to do it myself, if needed.

In addition, the whole incident of "the arrest" makes me fearful of what could happen to anyone who speaks out against this issue, including me for writing this e-mail. I am appalled at what is going on. In general, I am appalled at the insistence of you, Mr. Mayor, and the board to move forward with this project without a town-wide referendum. I can't believe you are moving forward under these circumstances. I think it is totally irresponsible of you and the board, as elected officials of the town. Please let me know if there is anything I can do to help turn this situation around.

Brian Mulvey  
Westfield

### Resident Wonders Who Will Use Parking Decks

As further evidence of our overblown commuter-parking problem, Lot #6 at Watterson Street is about one-third out of commission at present, occupied by construction vehicles working on the traffic circle. Last week, I was late going to work and was concerned there would be no spaces left at 9:30 a.m. — I needn't have worried. There were at least a dozen empty spaces. I therefore wonder who will use the two parking decks we are considering building — certainly not commuters to any great degree, and certainly not shoppers, given the distances to the center of town. The only way these decks will ever make sense is if somehow the town employees are forced to use them. That will free up the town for the shoppers, which presumably is what the shop owners and the shoppers most desire.

Telly Zachariades  
Westfield

### WF Resident Cites Unused Available Parking Locations

I have recently taken note of the fact that on Elm Street close to Video Video, Trader Joe's and Stop and Shop there are many, many parking meters not used during the day.

If people are complaining about not finding a spot to park when they go shopping in town and have to ride around and around, why wouldn't they park there? Is it too far away from the stores (2 blocks)?

If this is true, what makes those pushing for this parking deck think that anyone will park on the South Side of town to shop on the North Side? I know the issue is more for commuter parking, but wasn't there concern for the shoppers and employees also?

I also took note that the metered parking lot behind Bovella's on Prospect is not filled during weekdays either.

Linda Avena  
Westfield

## Loosening Grip on Cell Phones Isn't the Worst Thing For Drivers

One would be hard-pressed to find a pedestrian who has not, at some point, felt a bit wary crossing a street as a cell-phone-using driver approached the corner. The pedestrian struggles to make eye contact with the driver, only to see a distant stare.

Complicated intersections, such as Westfield's East Broad Street-Central Avenue corner, pose additional challenges, especially for drivers who are not familiar with the intersection. While watching a driver struggle to make a turn one-handed while holding and talking on a phone, one cannot help but wonder how mentally alert and physically ready that driver would be if a difficult situation suddenly presented itself.

Similarly, anyone who has been that driver, trying to negotiate corners while negotiating a conversation that occupies both mind and hand, cannot pretend that handheld cell phones do not impede driving skills.

On July 1, New Jersey will begin to enforce a ban on the use of handheld cell phones while driving, as per legislation signed by Governor James McGreevey on January 20 of this year.

It is important to note that the law does not completely ban cell-phone usage. Drivers can opt to use hands-free cellular technology, and the State waives the ban on handheld phones during emergency situations.

In an official press release, McGreevey stressed that the law would not seek to quell the growing prevalence of cell phones, but that it would promote safer driving habits.

One could argue that the law, which will make New Jersey the second state in the nation to enact a handheld cell-phone ban (New York implemented a similar law in 2001), infringes upon one's ability to communicate. However, the law is lenient enough to allow for emergency calls, and it allows hands-free technology. Those who wish to use a cell phone while driving can use built-in loudspeakers or headsets.

Indeed, New Jersey needs this law to advance responsible driver habits (one can only guess the number of lives saved by seatbelts). This law does not eclipse drivers' freedom, and it has great promise

to reduce auto accidents.

Of course, the government could never pass enough laws to ensure optimal driving environments. A driver is as alert as he chooses to be; be it a fantastic song on the radio or a passenger's engaging story, distractions will always present themselves. However, those opposed to this law must recognize that ambient noise is one kind of distraction, but occupied hands are another matter entirely. If the law completely prohibited one's ability to communicate while in cars, drivers might have a just reason to complain.

Most citizens overwhelmingly acknowledge their responsibility to keep roads safe. In a 2003 Quinnipiac University poll, 85 percent of New Jersey voters, including cell-phone users, expressed their support for a ban on handheld cell phones while driving.

Some dissenters question the motivation behind the law, citing the revenue from tickets that New York has generated from its version of the cell-phone ban. The New York penalty for violating the law is a maximum fine of \$100 in addition to a mandatory surcharge of \$50. They wonder if New Jersey is acting with revenue generation as the primary motive. New Jersey fines will range from \$100 to \$250. Many are weary about the explosive growth in governments' use of fines for revenue generation and for policy enforcement.

Concerns over ticketing revenue motives may be valid. However, we believe that government's concern for road safety is genuine with regard to the new cell phone law.

As our world becomes more obsessed with gadgets, and as those gadgets become more sophisticated, the challenges on habits and behavior will increase. Undoubtedly, new laws will be required, such as those being contemplated by the federal government involving privacy when using cell phones equipped with digital cameras that connect directly for posting on the Internet.

Happily, New Jersey residents appear cognizant of the dangers posed by using handheld cell phones while driving. As conscientious citizens, we acknowledge the responsibility to make our driving habits as safe as possible.

### Caruana Referendum Position Supported

I would like to thank Westfield Councilman Sal Caruana for his article in last week's *Westfield Leader* calling for a non-binding referendum on any final parking-deck plan formulated by the Town Council.

As Mr. Caruana points out, the general obligation bonds used to finance such a project would put each Westfield taxpayer at risk. The character of our town almost certainly would change.

There are valid arguments on each side. Mr. Caruana trusts that the people of Westfield — presented with a clear plan — are capable of considering the pros and cons and then making an intelligent decision.

Could the mayor and the remaining members of our council tell us whether they agree?

Greg Ryan Jr.  
Westfield

## Letters to the Editor

### SP Women's Club Thanks All For Townwide Garage Sale Success

Scotch Plains Junior Woman's Club "Annual Townwide Garage Sale" was a huge success. More than 140 homes participated, raising an estimated \$2,000 that will be distributed to local charities.

Last year's proceeds were donated to the Interfaith Council for the Homeless, Tiny Tim, ECLF, the Education and Enrichment Foundation of Scotch Plains and the Scotch Plains Library.

The club is excited to have even more resources to distribute to the community this year. The Juniors would like to thank everyone who participated. We hope your sales were successful. Also, we would like to thank Palmer Video, Nunzio's Pizza, Fanwood Bagel, Quick Check and the Scotch Plains Library for allowing us to distribute the maps. Additionally, we would like to thank the UPS store for generously assisting us in copying all of the maps.

We look forward to another successful year in 2004.

The GFWC Scotch Plains Junior Woman's Club is a nonprofit community service group. It is a member of the General Federation of Women's Clubs, which is the oldest and largest nonprofit women's organization in the world.

The Junior Woman's club meets the third Wednesday of almost every month at the Scotch Hills County Club at 7:30 p.m. For information about the club and membership, please contact Ann Stratton at 889-1749.

Coleen McSherry  
SP Jr. Woman's Club

### Referendum Call by Councilman Caruana Should Be Considered

Sal Caruana's call for a referendum (June 10 Letter to the Editor) on the Westfield Redevelopment project (aka The Deck) should be seriously considered.

As Sal points out, there are pros and cons to this project going to referendum. Also, this particular referendum, by law, would be non-binding. However, it is clear that the referendum process will create an even higher level of public awareness and disclosure on a project that will have substantial impact upon our town.

I (as well as many other people) have been following the project closely, but I know little about the current status. The recent rounds of negotiations with the developer remain clandestine and there has been little disclosure. As a result, questions surrounding the major areas of concern remain.

Financial: Is the town taking on too much risk in building and operating a parking facility? Are the constituents that benefit from the facility making financial commitments? The recent disclosure that the parking list may be overstating demand further illustrates a potential risk of oversupply and potentially lower revenue. A proposed "stop loss" remedy of opening the facility to other towns is not acceptable and undermines the original reasons to build.

Traffic: As I have written many times, any facility on either side of town will exacerbate an already bad traffic situation. The town has contacted the county in an effort to remedy the current situation, but have these remedies been modeled to predict their impact? Can the streets and intersections handle any form of development without substantial redesign and reconstruction? What will be done to prevent our neighborhood streets from becoming access roads to the facilities?

Aesthetics: What does the modified proposal look like? Do we want building of this scale at all?

One ramification of a referendum is to delay the development. Since I believe it is prudent to delay any development until the current attempts to improve parking are exhausted and the existing traffic problems are addressed, this is not a bad outcome. Development should be done only as a last resort.

Nick Karter  
Westfield

### Independent People Must Confirm Parking Wait List

The articles in last week's *Westfield Leader* make it clear that there may be a serious question about the reliability of the information being used regarding the size of the waiting list.

I say that there "may be" a question because, at this point, it seems that no one really knows how reliable the list is. Given the importance of the list in supporting the financial projections for the South Avenue deck, not to mention the assessment of the need itself, it seems to me that some kind of independent review of the list would be very helpful.

I suggest an independent review because it would help to support the credibility of the mayor and council in deciding to move ahead. Further review by the Town Administrator and/or the Parking Director will only be seen by many as an attempt at a cover-up. Further, the state-

