

## Letters to the Editor

### Westfielders Call for Mayoral Recall In Order to Stop Deck Construction

The mayor and town council are moving ahead with the plan to build two of the largest structures this town has ever seen, namely, the parking garages. Despite continued protests from the townspeople, they refuse to acknowledge their positions as representatives of the citizens of this town. They go so far as to hold closed door sessions before the public portions of town meetings in an apparent attempt to discourage people from remaining. Every action by the mayor and the members of the town council twists the meaning of the redevelopment act.

To highlight the path the mayor and the town council are forcing upon us, let's look at a similar fiasco in the Borough of Princeton. This locale is nearing completion of a structured parking facility. The 500-car garage is scheduled to open in April, despite a long fight in the form of a suit brought by Concerned Citizens of Princeton. This story was news not just of local importance, but it was also carried by the *New York Times*.

The Westfield Town Council has proposed to use the same developer, Nassau HKT Associates, as Princeton. The following information was gleaned from the websites of The Princeton Packet and Town Topics:

Costs of a structured parking facility are high: Princeton is spending \$13.7 million for a 500-space garage (we are in the stratospheric range at \$40 million).

Projected costs for a project such as this are rarely, if ever, within budget: Princeton's project has gone from an initial change order of \$297,788 to a current figure for total additional capital expenditures of \$1,014,435; this total is since September and they aren't done yet.

The parking equipment is also costly: Parking would be paid for by a Smart Card system. The cards, at values up to \$50, would, at first, only be purchased at the Princeton Borough Hall. The Borough Administrator is "trying to avoid a lot of cash at the garage." This was later

changed to allow machines in the garage, but the Administrator added, "The initial cost of [the machines] is staggering."

The construction itself has been a logistical nightmare: The Princeton garage was assembled from 439 pre-cast pieces. This required between 400 and 420 individual trips to the site. A 280-foot crane has also been kept on site for a considerable period of time due to weather delays.

Esthetics comes last: The foundations for the two residential and retail buildings which were to screen the garage are just now being poured.

Initially we face construction nightmares and cost overruns. Ultimately we face unstopable traffic and congestion. With over 1,000 parking spaces, Westfield is destined to become a mini-transit hub.

Once the process starts in our beautiful town, it will not stop and the results will be something we and our children will all have to live with. Do the citizens of Westfield want a permanent symbol of our public officials' shortsightedness?

We cannot stop the development with petitions merely stating we don't approve of the project - this has been tried and failed. Recently, there have been letters to the editor calling for the recall of our elected officials, specifically the mayor. The time has come to start the process. To get the job done, we need to stop talking and move to action. The information to create a petition (and any ordinary citizen has the right to do this) is available at *The Westfield Leader* website. Article 6 of the town charter is very specific about the petition(s) and all criteria must be met or they are invalid. Create the petitions according to the Town Charter to recall the mayor. Time is running out; we need signatures from no less than 25 percent of registered voters in order for the petition to be filed with the Town Clerk.

Jeffrey Messing, Grace Braverman  
Westfield

### Westfield Resident Addresses Robert Ratner's Inaccuracies

I write to address the vitriolic tone and some of the many inaccuracies found in letters from Robert Ratner. In his most recent letter, Mr. Ratner stated that the Bush administration resorted to a "litany of lies" to gain support for regime change in Iraq instead of basing its position on "the moral imperative to rid the world of psychotic monsters." If President Bush lied about Iraq's WMD programs, then so did Bill Clinton and many others. On December 16, 1998, President Clinton stated: "Other countries possess weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles. With Saddam, there is one big difference: He has used them. Not once, but repeatedly...I have no doubt today, that left unchecked, Saddam Hussein will use these terrible weapons again." Similar statements from John Kerry, Al Gore, and Tony Blair are available upon request.

Additionally, contrary to Mr. Ratner's assertions, President Bush did speak about his desire to instill liberty and democracy in Iraq on numerous occasions. Either Mr. Ratner wasn't listening or his "righteous anger" has affected his hearing.

Mr. Ratner also has condemned John Ashcroft's "relentless assault on the Bill of Rights" but has not provided one credible example to substantiate these claims. Mr. Ratner, no doubt, fails to appreciate the irony of condemning this purported assault on civil liberties in letters that are printed in a free press for his fellow citizens to read and comment upon. When compared to President Lincoln's declaration of martial law, suspension of *habeas corpus*, and closing of opposition newspapers during the Civil War and President Roosevelt's internment of the Japanese during World War II, any infringement on civil liberties since September 11th has been mild. John Ashcroft must have had Mr. Ratner in mind when he said "[t]o those who scare peace-loving people with phantoms of lost liberty, my message is this: Your tactics only aid terrorists for they erode our national unity and diminish

### Parking Deck Would Ruin WF's Chances At Main Street Award

Just read an article touting Westfield as a semifinalist (selected from a nationwide pool of applicants!) in the 2004 Great American Main Street Awards. Kudos to us!!!

It's surely a good thing we won't have a parking deck up by May 10, the date of the award presentation by the National Trust for Historic Preservation at the National Main Streets Conference in Albuquerque. We'd surely be able to kiss that award good-bye! Nothing like a parking deck to disqualify a town in its effort to revitalize while preserving its historic heritage!

Ralph and Carol Miller  
Westfield



From the Archives May 3, 2001  
POLITICAL VISIT...Democratic politicians stopped by the office of *The Westfield Leader* and *The Times of Scotch Plains-Fanwood* during Sunday's Spring Fling festivities. Pictured, left to right, are: Union County Freeholder Lewis Mingo, Jr., former Westfield Mayor Thomas C. Jardim, Woodbridge Mayor and candidate for New Jersey Governor Jim McGreevey, Union County Freeholders Mary P. Ruotolo and Daniel Sullivan, and former Seventh District Congressional candidate J. Brooke Hern. Mr. Jardim and Mr. Hern are both running for Assembly in the redrawn 21st legislative district.

### Mary Ruotolo Will Not Seek Third Term as Freeholder

WESTFIELD - Union County Freeholder Mary Ruotolo, who has served on the Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders since 1998, will not run for a third term on the governing body.

"There are a number of personal and professional considerations that brought me to this decision," said Freeholder Ruotolo. "My responsibilities as a single parent of three and demands of my position at the New Jersey Turnpike Authority were the most influential in deciding not to be a candidate again."

Freeholder Ruotolo was appointed to the board in 1998, elected that November to a three-year term and re-elected in 2001. In both elections, Freeholder Ruotolo was the leading vote recipient among Freeholder candidates.

As liaison to the Division of Cultural and Heritage Affairs, Freeholder Ruotolo helped plan the HEART (History, Education, Arts - Reaching Thousands) Grant program that distributes grants to artists, musicians, actors and historians around the county. Under her direction, the annual Jersey Jazz by the Lake Festival and Four Centuries in a Weekend program attracted thousands of visitors to Union County locations.

Freeholder Ruotolo also took the lead on Access 2000, a program that provides matching grants to public schools in Union County to ensure that every pupil has access to computers and that teachers receive the necessary training to use the new technology. In addition, she developed a link between Union County's Division on Aging and the Center for Hope Hospice, which provides services for people who are homebound and terminally ill.

As Chairwoman of the Open Space,



Mary Ruotolo

Recreation and Historic Preservation Trust Fund in 2002, Freeholder Ruotolo led the board in acquiring over 60 acres of open space. In addition, she initiated projects for expansion and improvements to Union County playing fields, requested a feasibility study for improvements to the Union County Arts Center and opened discussion for consideration of a children's museum.

Freeholder Ruotolo held the line on taxes as the Finance Chairwoman in 2000, overseeing a budget with no tax increase to Union County families while ensuring that county government ran effectively and efficiently.

Freeholder Ruotolo was chosen as a Leadership New Jersey (LNJ) Fellow, class of 2004. LNJ's goal is to create a network of informed leaders from all sectors who can collaborate to make New Jersey a better place to live and work. Additionally, Freeholder Ruotolo is expected to complete requirements for a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science at Kean University in 2004. Her educational plans include enrolling in graduate school.

"At the end of my term, I will have served seven years," said Freeholder Ruotolo. "I am proud of what the Freeholder Board accomplished during that span and will leave knowing that I had a role in Union County's progress. I thank the voters of Union County for the opportunity to serve them and appreciate the support I've received from family and friends over the years."

## UNITED FUND OF WESTFIELD

### Needs of Today's Society: Central Jersey Legal Services, Inc.

Submitted by Lorre Korecky  
Board Trustee

This continues a series of articles featuring the 22 community service agencies that are part of the United Fund of Westfield. The 22 agencies reflect the needs of today's society. Those who seek help are provided with people-oriented services that are partially funded through contributions to the United Fund of Westfield.

Central Jersey Legal Services, Inc. is a law firm providing free representation in civil cases to low-income people who could live in Westfield and other parts of Central New Jersey. Legal advice and representation is most often provided in cases dealing with bankruptcy, consumer issues, disability, domestic violence, family crises, food stamps, housing, Medicaid/Medicare, unemployment and welfare.

Case handlers include 30 attorneys and 15 paralegals, as well as 300 private attorneys who volunteer their time and expertise to provide legal services to eligible clients free of charge. Central Jersey Legal Services depends on funding from sources such as the United Fund of Westfield to continue to provide services to a caseload that now numbers more than 4,000 a year.

Actual Case History - Central Jersey Legal Services, Inc.

"Helen," a senior citizen supported solely by a small Social Security

check, has provided a home for her grandchild since the child was an infant. One of the child's parents has a checkered history of drug use and was in and out of drug treatment programs over the years. The other parent had lived out of state for most of the child's life and had very minimal contact with the child.

After receiving court papers from the out-of-state parent seeking custody of the child, "Helen" turned to Central Jersey Legal Services for help. The organization was able to secure services of a specialist to testify to the bond between "Helen" and her grandchild. Resources from the United Fund helped provide these services.

Following a lengthy trial and ruling by the court, "Helen" was awarded full custody of her grandchild, who, upon learning of the decision the same week as her birthday, said, "This is my best present ever!"

Central Jersey Legal Services, Inc. is one of 22 agencies supported by the United Fund of Westfield. For more information about how to support these local service organizations, please contact Linda Maggio, Executive Director of the United Fund of Westfield, at (908) 233-2113. For information about the services provided by the Central Jersey Legal Services, Inc., please call (908) 354-4340.



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