

## The Westfield Leader

— Established 1890 —

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Legal Newspaper for Union County, New Jersey

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# Jardim Versus Skitbitsky Mayoral Race Is Certain to Generate A Lot of Interest

Who said politics is boring? This year's municipal races for mayor and council seats in Westfield will pit a popular former two-term mayor against an incumbent councilman.

With both Republicans and Democrats expected to spend over \$100,000 each this fall, political insiders throughout Union County, if not the state, will be watching this election closely.

Tom Jardim, who stunned the local political world when in 1996 he became the first Democrat elected mayor of Westfield in 85 years, has opted to return to politics after a five-year absence. He will face current third ward Republican Councilman Andrew Skitbitsky in the race to succeed Mayor Greg McDermott who will be resigning and moving out town after a four-and-one-half-year incumbency.

In a few months, Mr. Skitbitsky is expected to become acting mayor with Danielle Walsh expected to be named to Mr. Skitbitsky's third ward seat as acting councilperson on the town council when Mayor McDermott resigns.

A Jardim-Skitbitsky race should prove to be quite a dynamic race. The victor in this contest will be the first mayor ever elected to a four-year term in Westfield. When Mr. Jardim was elected in 1996

and re-elected in 1998, the terms of the office were two years. The Westfield law for term lengths was subsequently changed in Trenton during Acting Governor Donald DiFrancesco's term in June of 2001. Since that time, the Westfield term lengths have migrated from 2 years, then 3 years — and now four years as the permanent status as a result of the legislative action.

A number of issues will be debated in this year's campaign. The last budget adopted during the Jardim administration was \$24.4 million. That number has jumped to \$32.4 million in just five years. Last year voters overwhelmingly rejected a referendum to build a parking deck on the north side of town. Parking permit fees were raised from about \$300 per year to over \$700 per year to generate additional revenue. Those numbers have yet to be lowered.

The town has a new Parking Enforcement division with a full-time director and six employees. With this have come substantial increases in fines and complex administration details. The town will also be adding a Human Resources director in the coming months.

In addition to the mayor's race, council races include incumbent Sal Caruana vs. Audrey Fisch in the first ward; Vicki Kimmins vs. Frank Fusaro in the second ward;

Ms. Walsh, a former Westfield BOE President, vs. former Councilman David Haas in the third ward, and Eric Leuthold vs. Tom Bigosinski in the fourth ward.

Skyrocketing property taxes, artificially high parking fees, the building of oversized homes, or McMansions, and a lawsuit against a town employee for sexual harassment are just a few issues that come to the surface when looking ahead to this year's campaign.

Recent history has shown that area voters do not just blindly push the buttons for one party or another. In recent years, Clark elected a Republican mayor after many years under a Democratic mayor; Scotch Plains went from a quarter century under GOP rule to a Democratic majority in the late 1990s and back to Republican leadership in recent years. The mayor and council in Fanwood have gone from the Democrats to Republicans and back to the Democrats. Summit jumped to a Democratic mayor last year for the first time in its history.

We expect to see lively campaigns, starting very soon — much sooner than those normally starting in the fall. We enjoy "silly season," where the Republicans do their utmost to "pin the tail on the donkey," while the Dems hope to "pigeonhole the pachyderm."

## Contractors Association Says Leader Editorial Lacks Fundamental Understanding of State Bidding Laws

I am writing on behalf of the Utility and Transportation Contractors Association of New Jersey in response to your editorial of April 14, addressing the issue of value engineering clauses on local public contracts.

Based on your editorial, it would appear that you have a fundamental misunderstanding of the construction industry, and our state's public bidding laws, as well as the "value" of value engineering. I only wish you had provided me the opportunity to discuss this issue with you prior to your impugning an entire industry, as well as disparaging the importance of a contract management tool, used for decades all over the nation.

According to the New Jersey Department of Transportation specifications for value engineering, "the purpose is to encourage the use of contractors ingenuity and experience in arriving at alternative, lower cost or time saving construction methods other than those reflected in the contract documents." The Department of Transportation has used value engineering before and after projects have been awarded, to save millions of taxpayer dollars.

Assembly Bill 2809 simply allows local contracting entities the same option to review this potential savings currently enjoyed by the state and federal government.

Value engineering does not, as your editorial states, mean that "design professionals are not doing their jobs." Projects are designed by designers,

projects are built by contractors, many of whom are also professional engineers. The simple fact is that contractors have field experience and expertise, which may allow them to identify different construction methods, of which a very competent design professional may simply be unaware. Local entities should at least be permitted to review these ideas.

The recently enacted value engineering law includes numerous provisions to protect the taxpayers and the integrity of the project.

The decision to approve a value engineering proposal rests solely with the public entity.

The value engineering proposal must provide a tax savings.

The contracting unit's engineer must review the proposal, at the contractor's cost, to certify the cost savings generated by the proposal.

The public's engineering professional must provide a written report to the entire governing body, which evaluates the merits of the proposal.

The value engineering proposal must achieve the same performance, reliability, quality and safety, and may not impair the essential functions and characteristics of the project.

Value engineering is limited to larger scale, non-building projects valued over \$5 million, such as bridges and treatment plants. Projects such as these typically require significant oversight from multiple levels of government.

As far as your editorial comments regarding pay to play, "handshake and envelope backroom agreements," as you refer to them, are already illegal with or without the option of value engineering. Every project for which a value engineering clause will apply is required to be publicly bid and awarded to the lowest, responsible bidder.

Among the 70 plus public officials recently indicted for public corruption, almost all deal with attempts to award no-bid projects. In addition, the value engineering process as established in Assembly Bill 2809 provides multiple levels of oversight from the professional engineer, and the entire governing body.

Value engineering is a proven, tested, and successful tool, which according to the Federal Highway Administration saves taxpayers over \$1 billion per year. With New Jersey property taxes at sky-high levels, responsible public officials should be thankful for the opportunity to use value engineering to reduce the cost of public projects.

**Kevin Monaco**  
Director of Legislative Affairs,  
Utility and Transportation Contractors Association of New Jersey

*Editor's Note: The author of the editorial in question has 30 years of Professional Engineering and construction experience in New Jersey and throughout the world on some of the largest and most complex projects, with both public and private financing.*

## Republican Assembly Plan Calls For 30 Percent Cut In Property Taxes

After three straight years of dramatic property tax increases, New Jersey citizens have been waiting for real property tax relief. As a member of the Assembly Republican caucus, we are happy to announce that relief may be on the way.

Recently, members of the Assembly Republican caucus unveiled our "Blueprint for Property Tax Reform." This reform plan will permanently cut property taxes for New Jersey homeowners by 30 percent, phased-in over a three-year period.

Unlike other programs the state has tried, homeowners will not have to wait for a rebate check. They will automatically receive a reduction in their property tax bill. This will eliminate the paperwork and bureaucracy inherent in rebate programs.

This plan would constitutionally mandate the 30 percent reduction so it can't be taken away by future administrations or lawmakers. In order to ensure

this property tax cut is not financed by raising taxes, this proposal includes a constitutional amendment to control state spending and requires a super-majority vote of the Legislature in order to raise taxes.

The blueprint also contains a 26-bill package designed to control state spending, cut government waste, and help local governments reduce costs.

This is a realistic, comprehensive, and well thought-out plan. All we need to enact it is the support of the Democratic leadership in the Legislature.

If you want to learn more about the plan or register your support for this plan, please feel free to contact our office at (908) 232-3673. New Jersey homeowners are demanding property tax relief, and that is what this plan will provide.

**Assemblyman Dr. Eric Munoz**  
**Assemblyman Jon Bramnick**  
District 21, Summit and Westfield

## Residents Have Power to Decide Regarding Proposed Cellular Tower

Cingular Wireless, the cellular phone company, wants to erect an 85-foot tall cellular phone tower on the property of Wychwood Gardens Co-ops in Westfield. Cingular Wireless claims their customers in that area have poor cell-phone service.

Cingular Wireless claims that cell-phone towers, which emit a non-ionizing type of radiation, are entirely safe. Safe for our children, safe for the elderly, safe for women of child bearing age; safe for everyone. Cingular Wireless claims that 85-foot cellular phone towers disguised to look like flagpoles are attractive, and people, like Wychwood Gardens Co-op residents, welcome them in their backyards.

Cingular Wireless says the Wychwood Gardens area of Westfield has poor cell phone service. I disagree. I am a Cingular Wireless customer and have great cell phone service. As a matter of fact, I get better service in and around the Wychwood Gardens area than I do from most other areas around town, including downtown.

Cingular Wireless claims this area is a "white-area" — an area receiving the poorest cell-phone reception. They obviously have never made a cellular call from my house (located about a block from the proposed tower site and in a "white-area"). My husband, son, and I use our three Cingular Wireless cell phones daily for business and pleasure. We cannot recall ever having a dropped call or poor reception.

Neighbors we've spoken to, including many who have spoken out at the town-wide meeting regarding this issue, echo our satisfaction with our present Cingular cell-phone service. We do not need this cell-phone tower.

The Wychwood Gardens Co-ops are located in a residential area of Westfield. There are no tall buildings, no stores, and no factories, and we like it that way. An 85-foot cellular phone tower simply does not fit in to a neighborhood like this. Even if disguised as a huge flagpole, people will notice the incongruity. An 85-foot flagpole does not belong in Wychwood Gardens' backyard.

Cell phones and cell phone towers are a relatively new technology. Cell phone towers emit a non-ionizing type of radiation-supposedly safe. Upon surfing the Internet, (try Googling "cell phone tower safety") one finds a plethora of conflict-

ing facts and opinions regarding non-ionizing radiation's safety. There are countless anecdotes pointing to non-ionizing radiation's detrimental effects on humans and animals. These are not conclusive, but let's remember lead paint, asbestos, and Vioxx; all thought to be safe not long ago.

Do we need a new cell phone tower in this area of our town? Is it safe? Is it unsightly? Is it duplication of a service we already have? We have the power to decide. Let's make our voices heard.

**Karen Milrod**  
Westfield

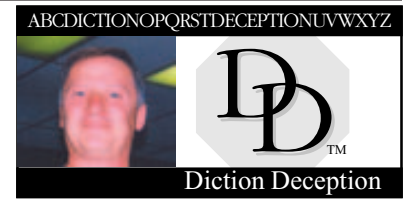
## Serious Accident Proves Need For Guard at Dudley/Lawrence

Last Friday afternoon, there was a near fatal accident involving three cars at 3 p.m. on the corner of Dudley and Lawrence Avenues — yes, right when all the kids from Roosevelt Intermediate School are walking home from school. This is the second and even worse accident that has happened on this corner within the year — same time, same place.

While the town council debates traffic calming measures (and have for years), please get a policeman or crossing guard to monitor this intersection now, before there is a fatality similar to what occurred near Temple Emanu-El. Our children's lives are at stake.

Do people realize that Dudley and Lawrence are single lane roads? They should not be pulling up along the right to make a right turn — this obstructs the vision of the person in the appropriate lane to pull forward or make a left.

Please remember this is the law (and should be better posted or reinforced for



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. Tienda — A booth or shop
2. Sapo — The toadfish
3. Carabao — A Philippine water buffalo
4. Pandit — In India, a scholar or learned man

PARLE

1. A sort of coarse canvas
2. A long handled battle-ax
3. To thrash or beat
4. To converse

PISK

1. A pustule or pimple
2. The common nighthawk of America
3. A stem, stalk or support
4. The rock trout of California

FECDUNATION

1. The act of making fruitful or prolific
2. Revenge; reprisal
3. A process of cleansing the body; fasting
4. Starvation

VACA

1. Round or oval in form
2. Very small amount; a pinch
3. A cow in the Southwest
4. Dark; gloomy

## County Biggest Enemy to Taxpayers, Not Town Government or School Bd.

Once again, Westfield residents are facing a significant tax increase from our favorite money pit, Union County. It is hard to believe that this invisible layer of government spends over \$1 million per day.

I salute the Westfield Board of Education and our municipal leaders for

providing outstanding value for our tax dollars. In 2004, *New Jersey Monthly* magazine rated the Westfield School System no. 5 in the state. We are also fortunate to live in one of the best towns in New Jersey. We have a great downtown area, solid police and fire departments and plenty of things to do for the kids. Visitors are amazed by our town pool.

Our enemy is not the Westfield school system or our town, it is the county. What value are you getting from the \$40,000 that has been allocated to Acting Governor Richard Codey's brother for one year so he can increase his pension \$10,000 per year for life?

**Ronnie Wood**  
Westfield

## Community Thanked For Tsunami Donations

In January 2005, the United Methodist Committee on Relief and the Health and Welfare Ministries of the General Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church sent out an urgent request for local congregations, working together with Interchurch Medical Assistance (IMA), to assemble and contribute medical supplies to assist tsunami victims.

The First United Methodist Church of Westfield (FUMC) responded by collecting money, with \$375 per kit required for IMA to purchase prescription medicines at a discount from pharmaceutical companies as well as donations of a variety of over-the-counter items.

We are pleased to announce that through the generosity of many in Westfield and surrounding communities, we were able to send eight complete medicine box kits to IMA for tsunami relief.

According to IMA Communications manager Vickie Johnson, each complete kit provides supplies to support 1000 people for up to three months.

We at FUMC-Westfield wish to thank each and every one whose generosity made possible this important contribution. Please rest assured that your donations are being put to work to assist those who need help the most at this time.

**Debra Leonard**  
First United Methodist Church of Westfield

## NJ MAKES IT EASIER TO PASS GED EXAMS.



NESEMAN'S  
THE LEADER/TIMES

## The Schiavo Case, Politics at Its Worst

In the last edition of *The Westfield Leader*, Mr. Janek Skutnik of Scotch Plains asserted that polls regarding the Terri Schiavo fiasco were biased with "leading" questions.

Mr. Skutnik went on to quote an "unbiased" poll done by Zogby International as saying that Americans "clearly supported Terri and her parents," and in his conclusion, chided the media to "do their job and report the facts."

The reality is that the Zogby poll was commissioned by the Christian Defense Coalition, an extreme right-wing religious group. If Mr. Skutnik believes that they are unbiased and don't have an agenda, there's a bridge in Brooklyn that I'd like to sell him.

The reality is that most Americans don't want our government intruding in personal, family issues like the Schiavo case. When the Republican Congressional Leadership and President Bush injected themselves into this tragedy, it was politics at its worst. Unbiased? Please, spare me.

**Chris Sdao**  
Westfield

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