

# The Westfield Leader

— Established 1890 —

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## Union County Freeholder News Top Five Initiatives for 2005 Are Important and Varied

Freholder Chairman Rick Proctor

Recently, I was honored to have been chosen as Chairman of the Board of Chosen Freeholders. As this is my first column as Chairman, I would like to tell you a little bit about myself, about the board and about my plans for the coming year. I am a lifelong resident of the City of Rahway and am health official for the municipalities of Hillside, Rahway, Scotch Plains and Winfield. I have a master of science degree from the New Jersey Institute of Technology and a bachelor of arts from Washington and Lee University. I have more than 35 years of government and public service experience.

Before I was elected to the freeholder board in 1999, I served four terms on the Rahway Board of Education, and I bring this focus on education to the freeholder board. Last year I served as vice chairman of the freeholder board.

When I was sworn in as chairman on January 2, I set out a direction for the board to take in 2005. I specified five initiatives I would like to implement in the coming year:

The first initiative is for senior citizens, specifically older homeowners who need minor repairs to their homes. The senior citizen home improvement initiative will provide grants of up to \$5,000 to fix a roof, upgrade plumbing or electrical systems and more for income-eligible seniors.

Union County will allocate \$500,000 toward this initiative through our Community Development Block Grant program. The funds will be allocated as forgivable loans to seniors, as long they remain on the property for three years or more.

To keep Union County communities safer, the freeholder board will develop two corps of volunteers to help respond to large-scale emergencies and natural disasters.

Volunteers from the health care field will help us develop and staff a Reserve Medical Corps that could be used to help and supplement existing emergency workers.

Medical Corps volunteers will be provided with advanced training and support. The county will also develop a Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) utilizing county personnel. Since County facilities are spread throughout

the 21 towns, volunteers will provide an extra layer of emergency preparedness and response, and hopefully provide the nucleus of CERT teams in their hometowns.

Two of the initiatives are geared toward children, particularly towards recreation programs for young people. For children with disabilities - and those without - Union County will make a \$500,000 investment in boundless playgrounds. We will provide matching funds to support boundless playgrounds for children with disabilities in any interested municipality.

These playgrounds will have equipment and activities that both children with and without disabilities can use. The county opened New Jersey's first such playground in 2004 at Phil Rizzuto Park in Union. The initiative would also fund a boundless playground at the 13-acre Esposito Farm property in Clark.

Union County will continue the success of last year's Kids Recreation Trust initiative, which helped young people take part in recreational activities. This year we will add two new elements: a Kids in Motion initiative which will provide vehicles to municipalities to transport kids to recreation venues; and \$500,000 in matching funds for lighting for athletic fields.

Later this year, Union County hopes to reopen Trailside Nature and Science Center, after major renovations will expand the center by more than 30 percent. When it is reopened, the center will have more classroom space and more room for expanded exhibits.

But this year, sometime, we will take that a step further. "Mobile Eco Labs" will bring the displays, exhibits and natural history background of Trailside Nature and Science Center to the county's schools and community centers. The vehicle will contain computers, microscopes, and audio-visual aids to educate children about the world around them.

The Union County Open Space, Recreation and Historic Preservation Trust Fund will provide funding for these initiatives.

These are my top initiatives for the county and I look forward to working toward them, and a variety of other projects as the year progresses.



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 dictation?

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 Dictation Deception.

Answers to last week's arcane words.

1. Zeekoe - The hippopotamus
2. Krang - The body of a whale stripped of its blubber
3. Philauty - A selfish regard for oneself
4. Stoit - To stagger or stumble

### PLAGUY

1. Troublesome; annoying
2. Like or consisting of flesh
3. Ignoring; neglecting
4. Discolored or blackened

### IMPENNAE

1. Motionless; inert
2. Having a notched, indented or scalloped edge as certain leaves.
3. Without feathers or wings
4. Twining about; twisting

### HEGEMONIC

1. Ruling; predominant
2. Marshy; covered with water
3. Prophetic; oracular; mysterious
4. Living the life of a hermit

### HEBETATION

1. Temporary loss of memory of one's surroundings
2. In a relaxed state; resting
3. Humiliation; shame; falling from grace
4. The act of making dull or stupid

## Letters to the Editor

### Commissioner Lauds Schmiede Tree Articles That Protect, Preserve

Martin Schmiede's column "Tree Tips" in the February 3, edition of *The Westfield Leader* made some very good points about caring for trees during construction. This issue may not affect many Westfield residents but it is of considerable importance to the Westfield Tree Preservation Commission (TPC). We go to great efforts to protect and preserve the trees on teardowns and new construction.

Each tree removal application is reviewed by the TPC, the site is inspected and negotiations conducted with the developer when appropriate. Many times we are able to save a tree by flipping the house footprint to move the driveway to the other side, change the location on the lot or simply question why a certain tree is being removed.

We have discovered that virtually all developers readily accept our suggestions because they do believe in saving trees - they just don't always recognize how to do it. And if the tree can't be saved they willingly put in replacement trees.

Mr. Schmiede should be congratulated for his long and untiring devotion to tree preservation. His column is a true service to the community.

Ronald Burkett, Chairman  
WF Tree Preservation Commission

### Fanwoodian Notes Youth Examples With Hope For the Future

I wanted to share two experiences that I had recently.

In January, my family had the opportunity to attend the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Service at St. John's Baptist Church. The service was inspiring as well as very moving.

During the service, there was much singing and dancing and remembrances of Dr. King's life and his work. Of particular note was a piano musical tribute performed by Gil Scott Chapman. He has a world of talent and played with so much passion.

I thank Pastor Porter for the invitation and the hospitality and Lew Mingo for his ongoing friendship. My Wife, Phyllis and I brought our children to the service so we could learn more about the teachings of Dr. King. They also had a good time and learned something in the process.

Another experience I had recently was the Bat Mitzvah of Valerie Hoffman. The ceremony was both inspiring and beautiful. I listened intently to the words spoken and to what the Rabbi was saying.

You could see the pride in Valerie's parents face as they watched their daughter lead the service. To see a young woman read and sing from the Torah was quite an experience for me. Obviously she worked hard for many years to prepare for her day.

I've been inspired by the actions of both Gil and Valerie. It is very heart warming to see such young people in our community with so much potential. In this world we live in, where people don't want to watch the news because of all the problems, it is nice to see these examples of bright hope for our future.

Al Mirabella  
Fanwood

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## Downtown Westfield Corporation Should Allow Public to be Heard

The Downtown Westfield Corporation (DWC), the management entity of the town's special improvement district, asserts in its mission statement that it is "dedicated to promoting Downtown Westfield as a preferred destination." The DWC sets out to enhance the appearance and image of the downtown. Entering and exiting the downtown and from the hub of downtown activity, we believe the DWC is meeting those objectives.

However, the DWC seems to be becoming more of a closed, corporate board these days when it comes to its meetings, which are held the last Monday of the month in the DWC boardroom located at 105 Elm Street. Councilman Peter Echausse was recently gaveled and prevented from expressing his views at a meeting. A representative of WE CARE (Westfielders Concerned About Responsible Redevelopment) has asked the town to look into the by-laws of the DWC to see whether it is legal to prevent residents from speaking at their meetings.

In our judgment, an open dialogue is not only a good idea, but is a constitutional right for citizens - especially regarding government entities that collect taxes and spend public money. We don't think it's an issue of what an attorney believes is an interpretation of by-laws. It goes much further than that.

Therefore, we believe Westfield citizens - all citizens, in fact - should have the opportunity to speak and be heard on the record by the DWC board, which incidentally includes a town councilman as

well as the mayor's representative. Larry Goldman is the Westfield Town Council Liaison and Frank Arena is the Mayors Representative.

Mayor Greg McDermott has directed Town Attorney Robert Cockren to look into the legality of whether the DWC is permitted to not allow the public to speak at its meetings. We would hope that the DWC opts to simply allow the public to speak on topics of interest to them, i.e. downtown redevelopment, parking, etc. in the future. We feel these comments would benefit the DWC. Not listening to residents can be disastrous - remember the 80 to 20 percent defeat of the proposed parking deck/redevelopment project last November?

The DWC was founded through enactment of an ordinance adopted by former Mayor Bud Boothe and the town council in 1996 in response to the increasing number of downtown vacancies. The ordinance created the special improvement district and its independent management entity whose sole purpose was the vitality of the downtown.

Listening to the public will not cause the DWC to lose its independence. But if this entity begins to distance itself from the rest of the town, there could be pressure placed on the council to take another look at the ordinance that created this entity in the first place.

This year's new board chairman, David Martone, has the perfect opportunity to set the proper tone for the DWC. We encourage and support him in this regard.

## Sen. Scutari Seeks Federal Funding to Eradicate Beetles

TRENTON — Legislation sponsored by Senator Nicholas P. Scutari (D-22nd), which would provide \$1.3 million in federal funding to remove thousands of trees that have been infested by Asian Longhorn Beetles, has been approved by the State Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee.

"The counties of Middlesex and Union have been the hardest hit areas in the State," said Senator Scutari.

"The infestation of the Asian Longhorn Beetle is a serious matter because if not controlled, the insects could have devastating effects on the trees throughout New Jersey, and the problem could easily spread to other states," said Senator Scutari, whose district includes Scotch Plains and Fanwood.



Asian Longhorn Beetle

"Late last year the first cases of Asian Longhorn Beetle infestation were detected in Northern New Jersey and if this problem is not handled effectively and immediately, the lumber industry throughout the nation could be decimated."

The bill, S-2314, would appropriate the \$1.3 million to expand and support the Asian Longhorn Beetle program. The funding was awarded to New Jersey by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), to assist in eradicating the Asian Longhorn Beetle.

The beetles attack and kill maples and other hardwood trees, and in order to stop the spread of the beetles, the infested trees must be cut down, according to Senator Scutari.

"You cannot contain the Asian Longhorn Beetle, the only way to get a hold of the problem is to remove the trees that are infested," Senator Scutari said.

"The beetles bring a serious threat to our trees and forests because there is no known predator for them in the United States, nor is there a pesticide that has proven effective against the beetles. So far, the most effective way to ensure that we eradicate this pest is to check areas where they have been spotted and cut down and chip any trees that are infested before they have the chance to spread their destruction," Senator Scutari said.

The Senator stated that, "After this, the trees are hauled away and used as fuel at a local trash-to-steam plant. All infested trees that are taken away and destroyed are to be replaced with varieties of trees the beetles do not like, through the state's Community Forestry Program."

USDA officials believe that the Asian Longhorn Beetle entered the United States inside wood packing material that came from China. They were first discovered in the U.S. in Brooklyn in 1996.

Senator Scutari noted that in Middlesex and Union counties, workers must remove about four or five thousand trees before June 1. It is necessary to get the work completed before the re-emergence of the beetles in the spring.

The bill now heads to the full Senate for consideration.

## State Gubernatorial Candidate Forrester Blasts Tax Proposals

WEST WINDSOR — Republican candidate for governor, Doug Forrester, blasted Democrats for proposing to raise taxes on gas, the Internet and 401(k) retirement contributions to balance the state budget, while failing to consider cutting spending.

Mr. Forrester referenced articles in Tuesday newspapers that reported the Administration's consideration of new taxing initiatives.

"The Democrats continue to recommend that we raise taxes to fix the budget deficit, but not one of them suggests cutting the excessive \$4 billion dollars in spending increases that they voted for last year," said Mr. Forrester. "New Jersey does not have a revenue problem; our government has a spending addiction."

"Hard working New Jersey families should not suffer because the Democrats cannot keep their spending under control," added Mr. Forrester. "It takes hard work and ethical, principled leadership to cut wasteful spending and restore fiscal responsibility to our state finances. As governor, I will stand with New Jersey families and put an end to the Democrats wasteful spending that cost New Jersey billions."

## Guns Sought

To receive a \$50 gift certificate, county residents can turn in their handguns and rifles from 1 to 4 p.m. on Saturday at the Union County Police Headquarters at 300 North Avenue East in Westfield.

For more information, please contact Captain Chris Hansen at (908) 654-9800.

## Letters to the Editor

### Why Are Freeholders Pursuing Freight Rail In Today's Economy?

The dean of the Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy at Rutgers University states in a recent news article that we are headed toward a service-based economy in New Jersey. If that is the case, why are we still moving ahead with the freight line re-activation in Union County?

The freight lines were abandoned 15 years ago, as there were no customers to support it. That customer base isn't getting any larger. Why is it the freeholders do not understand that freight service in Union County is simply a waste of tax-

payers dollars?

Money spent on converting rail lines into park space would actually bring some benefit to the people of Union County. Restoring rail service serves no obvious purpose; please correct me if I'm wrong.

I would ask the board to reconsider freight line re-activation, bring it to an immediate end, and find some better use for our hard earned money.

James Neville  
Springfield

### Catholic Schools Offer Quality Education As Well As Athletics

Bruce Johnson's column entitled "Time To Put Parochial Schools In A League of Their Own" shows a disregard for the multiple reasons parents choose Catholic schools. Catholic schools provide children with an academically sound and safe environment that gives, in particular, economically disadvantaged students the opportunity to succeed.

Catholic schools also offer students of all faiths the freedom to develop spiritually and to examine issues of morality and personal responsibility. Mr. Johnson says: "Now, I'm sure that a catholic school education isn't a bad thing....". No, Mr. Johnson, it's a good thing as is demonstrated by the 97 percent high school graduation rate.

Parents have the right to make the best choice for their children and athletics may be for some families one consideration; however, you disparage these schools if you assert that sport is what it's all about. Rather, it's about schools that have faith in every student.

In addition, tuition is set at a reasonable level, offering those in our inner cities an excellent educational option. I'm sure any of our Catholic schools would happily give Mr. Johnson a tour to show him all the good works they do on a daily basis, not just during basketball or football season.

Trish Fitzpatrick  
Westfield

### NJ Chamber Says Government Reform Should Be State's Top Priority

I recently traveled out of state for business and ate breakfast in a hotel where I overheard salespeople discussing their itinerary. No comments were made about Los Angeles, Chicago, or Boise, Idaho; but plenty was said about New Jersey's Turnpike exits and political scandals.

It could take years to change the misconceptions held about New Jersey, but there have been developments in Trenton that the employer community fully supports - that will help our image and business attraction efforts.

Let's start with the proposal to create a lieutenant governor. It's been said that New Jersey's office of the governor is the most powerful in the country. Illogically, the acting governor in our state is awarded even more power by also serving as senate president. We should create a clear line of succession that allows voters to choose a replacement if the governor can't serve. Our lieutenant governor could be a

business ambassador; responsible for bringing out-of-state companies to New Jersey and making sure those here have the tools to succeed.

Another office deserving support is that of inspector general. We applaud Acting Governor Codey for proposing a position to help eliminate waste, fraud, and government mismanagement. Let's make this a permanent position, instead of one subject to the whims of the administration.

In the aftermath of the McGreevey resignation, government reform should be the state's top priority. These initiatives may never stop the Turnpike jokes, but can improve the way New Jersey's government and business practices are viewed in the future.

Peter Cocozziello  
Chair, NJ Chamber of Commerce  
Government Reform Initiative

