

Letters to the Editor

Reader Calls for Residents and Taxpayers to Take Civic Action

I commend your editorial in the February 3 *Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times* entitled "Residents Must Become Involved to Make a Difference in Tax Bills." The points you made are on target and are the identical ones that I, and a number of other residents, have on our minds.

It is well worth briefly mentioning each with a few comments, such that the issues remain in the forefront.

1. Residents should attend budget meetings in the municipal, school boards and county. Ask questions. People are spending your money, know where it is going. One has to admit that the meetings of these organizations are a little intimidating to say the least. Should this be the case, talk to your neighbors and friends and go together. This may provide the moral support for some. When at a meeting, ask questions. If the answers don't ring true, keep asking.

2. Budget information should be readily available. The internet is a great tool for this purpose as you mentioned. I also had requested our municipal officials and the school board to consider this option. I was told that the budget is available, but when and where. We all work long hours, have long commutes and our time is limited. Making it readily available would allow us to review each line item, research each aspect we would like, ask questions and present comments or suggestions. So far, no word was received from either one. Leave it to be said, the question will be re-asked. In addition, all open meetings by both the town council and school board should be televised. The cameras are present, such as at the school board meeting, but don't seem to be broadcast.

3. The county has demanded an increase of \$134 for the average assessed house in Scotch Plains. I have asked for justification from the county. So far I have not received a response. I suppose, why should they respond to some one who is footing the bill? This begs the question, have our municipal officials done the same? It should be noted that this increase is on top of the retroactive raises of numerous county officials. These salaries are all over \$100K a year. How many of us receive that level of compensation for our efforts.

4. Our officials say that certain costs are fixed for such things as "union contracts, insurance, sewage fees, pension fund contributions, utility charges, etc." Well who negotiated the contracts? Why were generous benefits agreed too? Are our negotiators doing us justice in their talks with the unions and other organiza-

tions demanding our money? Who has requested that the Raritan Valley Sewerage Authority prove their number as it relates Scotch Plains and the taxes they want from us.

5. Your question, "Who is steering the ship" if our government can't control the spending of our money is about concise as one could put it. Do you think that the municipal, county, state, and/or school board will respond? I doubt we will hear anything, except perhaps that "it is not my fault." Does this sound like "the dog ate my homework" excuse?

It would appear that our officials are unable or unwilling to take action. Once again, we as residents and taxpayers are going to have to take action ourselves. This leads to the need for private individuals to raise laws by popular vote and petition, term limits for elected officials, campaign spending reform, and audits of all levels of government. I have written the governor and other elected officials in Trenton. So far I have only received "Boiler Plate" meaningless responses. Since these reforms will be difficult to put in affect, we must insert ourselves into the process and demand answers and changes.

6. The school budgets are out of control. In the last five years, the Scotch Plains-Fanwood school system has received budget increases of 6.7, 9.0, 9.1, 5.3 and 7.6 percent. How many of us have received raises of this degree during this period? This year, it appears that we need to increase administrative costs by hiring additional staff, increase the principal and supervisor budgets, fund an additional \$115K for new computers, etc. When will it stop?

7. Scotch Plains Mayor Martin Marks has been vocal in his efforts to push for the Tax Reform Convention. This is commendable, and his recent idea to look at both revenue raising and spending has merit. He has mentioned both to be addressed, but to keep them separate to avoid being bogged down. This sounds like a reasonable approach. However, should we only accomplish revising the tax structure, at least some of us will have a breather for a couple years to look for a new place to live outside of New Jersey! The taxes will surely increase again and the money that we will have to provide our government will resume their upward spiral.

Please keep up the good reporting. We residents need a voice.

Albert Muller
Scotch Plains

Westfield Community TV Announces Feb. Highlights

WESTFIELD - Westfield Community Television will feature several new programs for the next few weeks on WCT-TV36.

Westfield's *Martin Luther King Day Commemoration* ceremonies will air Mondays and Wednesdays at 7 a.m. and 7 p.m. This program includes the dedication of the site for a new monument to Dr. King at the South Avenue traffic circle and the town-wide interfaith service and celebration at Temple Emanu-El.

A new edition of *Hometown* with Mayor Greg McDermott will air the first of a two-part series featuring Retired Fire Chief John Castellano and the newly-installed Fire Chief Dan Kelly. This feature airs on Mondays at 2 and 7 p.m. and Wednesdays at 10 p.m.

A new program featuring the winter concert of the Choral Art Society of New Jersey will include the works

Handel's *Dixit Dominus* and Rutter's *Birthday Madrigals*. This concert airs Mondays and Wednesdays at 11 a.m., 3 p.m., and 11 p.m.

February 17, *Eye on the Y* will feature the Family Hoedown and Nutrition tips from dietician Debby Hall and airs Saturday at 7 a.m., Sunday at 7 a.m. and 11:30 p.m., Tuesdays and Thursdays at 7 a.m.

Other programs include the Historical Society Lecture Series - Old Elizabeth by Jean Rae Turner on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays at 1 and 5 p.m.; and the Historical Society Lecture Series - "Baltic Saga", a history of the area by author Karl Heinze will air Mondays and Wednesdays at 9 a.m. and 9 p.m.

For the complete WCT-TV36 schedule listing, please tune into the WCT-TV36 Community calendar or visit westfieldtoday.com/WestfieldCommunityTelevision.



BEARS VISIT...Bear Cub Scouts from Hehlny School in Clark visited the *Leader/Times* office on February 3 to learn how a newspaper is made.

Editor's Note: Westfield Armory Update 116th Helps Iraq Elections

By Captain Monte C. Hibbert

WARRIOR, IRAQ — Soldiers of the 116th Brigade Combat Team (BCT) worked with the Iraqi Interim Government to provide security for the Iraqi citizens during the country's first free elections in more than 50 years.

Working alongside soldiers from Hawaii's 2nd BCT, the Idaho-based unit conducted security patrols, manned checkpoints and backfilled Iraqi police and army posts during Sunday's historic vote.

Iraqi police and Iraqi army personnel provided the primary security at the polling locations, while coalition soldiers filled in the security gaps left behind and augmented the beefed-up security plan for the occasion.

The soldiers here were well aware that they were part of history. Just days before the election, the area's top Army leaders encouraged the 116th and 2nd BCT soldiers to take

pride in the role they were to play in securing the election for all Iraqis.

The months of preparation on the part of election officials, the Interim Iraqi Government and coalition forces paid off on January 30, when voter turnout was higher and the number of terrorist attacks was lower than some expected.

While the results of the National Assembly election were not expected to be finalized for several days, those elected will establish the Iraqi Transitional Government that will ultimately establish the permanent Iraqi government.

The soldiers of the 116th BCT will continue to support the new Iraqi Transitional Government along this road to democracy by assisting them in maintaining security and stability, as well as by helping train the thousands of new Iraqi recruits to the Iraqi Army and police forces.

Jardim Elected Chairman Of Ceasefire New Jersey

WESTFIELD — Former Westfield Mayor Tom Jardim has been elected Chairman of the Board of Trustees of Ceasefire New Jersey, the statewide coalition of groups and individuals devoted to reducing gun violence.

Mr. Jardim heads up a 25-member board that includes former Acting Governor Donald DiFrancesco and former U.S. Senator Robert Torricelli.

Its goal is to make New Jersey safer by decreasing the proliferation and the misuse of firearms, he said.

Ceasefire cites its leadership behind the enactment of New Jersey's assault weapons ban in 1990, as well as its defense against the gun lobby's effort to overturn it, and the enactment of the nation's first childproof handgun law in 2002.

Some of the organization's current goals include ensuring that there will be no weakening of New Jersey's restrictions against carrying concealed handguns, enactment of laws banning the sale of .50 caliber sniper rifles and handguns and establishing a ballistics fingerprint database to aid law enforcement in its anti-crime efforts.

In addition to his tenure as the first Democrat since 1909 elected mayor of Westfield, Mr. Jardim has an extensive record of civic involvement. He has served as the President of the Union County League of Municipalities, as an officer with the Portuguese-American Congress of New Jersey and an Advisory Board of Trustees Member of Children's Specialized Hospital in Mountainside.

He currently serves as a member of the Board of Trustees of the Westfield

Foundation, the Westfield Interfaith Community Preservation Association, the Westfield Neighborhood Council and the Morristown Community Theatre.



Tom Jardim

He is a founding member and current secretary of the Raritan Valley Line Rail Coalition, a coalition of municipal and county officials, rail advocates and commuters, and he serves as a member of the President's Council of Emerging Leaders of the University of Richmond in Virginia.

Mr. Jardim was a candidate for the New Jersey General Assembly from the 21st Legislative District in 2001.

Professionally, Mr. Jardim is a litigation partner engaged in civil trial practice, concentrating in employment and labor law.

Mr. Jardim is a 1988 graduate of the University of Richmond, where he worked in the policy office of then-Virginia Governor Gerald R. Baliles. He received a law degree and a master's degree in foreign affairs, magna cum laude, from the American University, Washington, D.C., in 1993.

IRS Message For 2001 Tax Refunds

According to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), approximately 3,170 people in Union County that have not filed their 2001 tax returns are due about \$4.93 million in refunds.

For more information, please contact Gregg J. Semanick at irs.gov.

TOWN & COUNTRY

Fine Wines & Spirits Marketplace

WWW.TOWNANDCOUNTRYWINE.COM

WESTFIELD: 908-232-8700

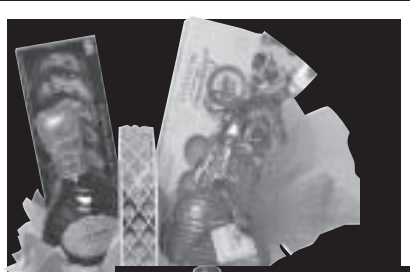
SUMMIT: 908-277-6565



CHAMPAGNE SALE!
20% OFF ANY BOTTLE OF CHAMPAGNE OR SPARKLING WINE!
(EXCLUDING SALE ITEMS. CANNOT BE COMBINED WITH ANY OTHER DISCOUNT OR PROMOTION.)

DID YOU KNOW? Over 1 billion dollars is spent on chocolate for Valentine's Day in the US every year. The estimated number of roses sold on Valentine's Day in the U.S. is 156 million. Valentine's Day is only celebrated the U.S., Canada, Mexico, France, Australia and the U.K.

VALENTINE'S DAY BASKET SALE!



SWEET GODIVA \$41.99
This Valentine's Day, treat your sweet to our enticing Godiva basket. Her heart will melt like chocolate with Godiva Liqueur, Valentine Pretzel Rods, Arancelli Orange Cookies and an oversized Splendid Chocolate Heart. Your sweetheart deserves the sweetest.



BE MINE \$46.99
What says "Be Mine" more than gourmet chocolate in the shape of a heart? A bottle of Cartidge & Browne Zinfandel, Wisecrackers' all natural crackers, Cheese Straws, and Double Chocolate Crisps all wrapped up in a cute gift basket.



LOVE IS IN THE AIR \$79.99
With this basket you won't need to wait around for Cupid to win over your crush. Complete with a bottle of Mumm Cordon Rouge Brut Champagne, Amaretto Almond Cookies, Heart-themed cocktail napkins, Valentine Pretzel Rods, Arancelli Orange Cookies, and an oversized Splendid Chocolate Heart, the only thing missing is dinner reservations for two.

GUARANTEED DELIVERY BY VALENTINE'S DAY 2/14/2005 CALL 908-232-8700!

SIGN-UP TODAY! CLUB CARD HUGE SAVINGS

Get tremendous savings with your club card. No coupons. Buy 6 bottles of wine and receive a 15% discount and 23% off a case. (Excluding sale items.)



WWW.TOWNANDCOUNTRYWINE.COM
SUMMIT - 417 Springfield Ave., Summit NJ 07901 908-277-6565

Hours: Mon. - Sat. 9 a.m. - 9 p.m. Sunday - 12 noon - 5 p.m.

WESTFIELD - 333 South Ave. East, Westfield NJ 07090 908-232-8700

Hours: Mon. - Thurs. 9 a.m. - 9 p.m. Fri. - Sat. 9 a.m. - 10 p.m. Sunday - 12 noon - 7 p.m.

All items are not available at all our locations, please contact individual stores for product availability. We are not responsible for typographical errors. Prices do not include sales tax. All wines are 750ml unless otherwise noted. We reserve the right to limit quantities while supplies last. Ad Valid 2/10/2005 - 2/16/2005 T&C accepts MC, AE, VS, DV. Please visit us at www.townandcountrywine.com for details concerning shipping, promotional codes and specific product inquiries.

Rated ★★★★★ by BauerFinancial, Inc.

Town Super Checking!

You Will Notice the Difference ...

2.02% APY*

on balances of \$5,000 or more.
Rate guaranteed until May 1, 2005.
Applies to new accounts only.



- FREE unlimited checkwriting and transactions
- FREE Visa® Check Card™
- FREE Telephone Banking
- FREE first order of basic checks
- FREE of monthly service charge if daily balance of \$1,000 or higher is maintained

Hurry! Open your account today and receive a \$25 Westfield Gift Coin redeemable at participating businesses in downtown Westfield!**

The Town Bank

You Will Notice the Difference ...

520 South Avenue Westfield, NJ 07090 908.301.0800

44 Elm Street Westfield, NJ 07090 908.518.9333

www.townbank.com



*APY = Annual Percentage Yield. Balances of less than \$5,000 earn .50% APY. Rates subject to change based on market conditions and without notice. Minimum balance to open is \$5,000. If account is closed prior to 1 year, a \$25.00 service fee is assessed. If balance is below \$1,000, there is a \$10 monthly service fee and no interest is earned. Offer applies only to new accounts, new money, and funds may not be transferred from an existing Town Bank account.

**Gift coins available only while supplies last. Offer may be withdrawn without notice. Tax liability is responsibility of the account holder.