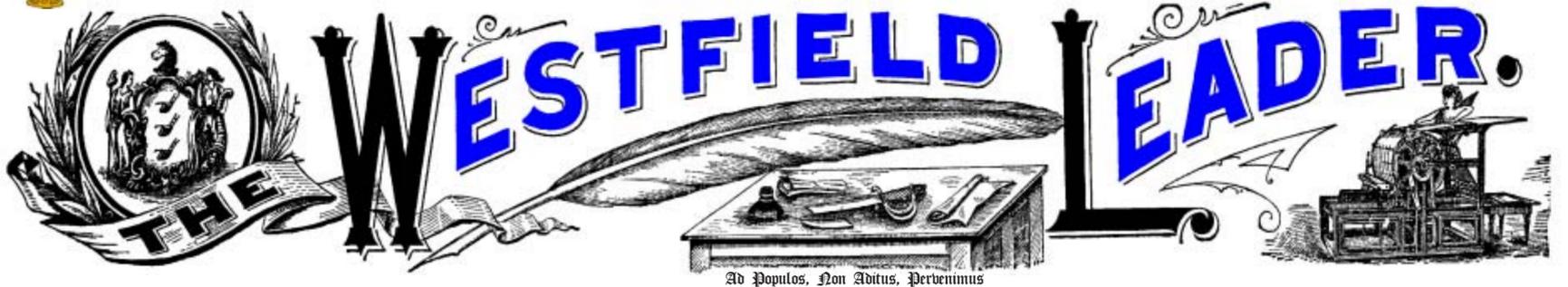




HAPPY CHANUKAH!
CHANUKAH STARTS TOMORROW, DECEMBER 15



Ad Populos, Non Aditus, Perbenimus

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SIXTY CENTS

Union County 'At Top of List' For Pilot County Administrative District

By MEGHAN GILL
Specialty Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — Superintendent of Schools William Foley announced Tuesday night that Union County is under consideration for a pilot county administrative school district.

The bill to establish the program, A-8/S-49, passed in the New Jersey State Assembly Monday by a tally of 46-33-1. The bill will be up for a vote in the State Senate today, Thursday, December 14.

"This afternoon I received word from the Garden State Coalition (of Schools) that the pilot program (A-8/S-49) to establish a county school district had passed last night (Monday) in the Assembly," Mr. Foley said. "The legislation was changed in the middle of the night during a Democratic caucus and an Assembly vote. Union County will now be the pilot site for a county school district."

"We have no idea what this ultimately means for Westfield, but that the fact is that there was no public discussion in our county, that the decision was largely partisan and hidden from the public view," he stated.

Mr. Foley asked every "resident of Westfield who cares about our schools and our community to e-mail Governor Corzine telling him that we are opposed to a county school system, that we are angry about a legislative process closed to public view and that we are entitled to know the details of any proposal to change school governance in our community before it is signed into law."

Board member Julia Walker, who arrived from a meeting with Senator Tom Kean, Jr. regarding the bill, confirmed that the bill would go before the state Senate today.

If signed into law, the bill, sponsored by Assemblymen John Wisniewski (D-Middlesex) and Robert Gordon (D-Bergen) allows the board of chosen freeholders of an eligible county to apply for participation in the pilot program.

"People in the statehouse who should know are talking about this as a real possibility," said Lynne Strickland, Coalition executive director, when contacted yesterday. "Sources are saying that Union County is at the top of the list," she said.

Ms. Strickland said based on the legislation, A-8/S-49, Union County would not be eligible because it contains two or more Abbott Districts - Elizabeth and Plainfield. She said 10 or 11 of New Jersey's 21 counties would be eligible under this provision.

The bill states, "Upon the establishment of the county administrative school district, the boards of education of the public school districts, the board of education of any county vocational school district and the board of education of any county special services school district may continue to exist in an advisory role."

Those boards may pass a resolution to dissolve themselves pursuant to regulations promulgated by the State Board of Education. If passed, the legislation "would abolish local district-level administrative or supervisory personnel positions, including the district superintendent of schools."

"The county administrative board of education would instead appoint a district supervisor for each municipality in the county to oversee operations of the public schools located in the municipality and perform such other duties as the board may prescribe. The district supervisor would work under the supervision of the chief school administrator," the bill states.

In other business, the board voted unanimously to pass language for the ballot question for a proposed \$9.4-million bond referendum to be held Tuesday, January 23. The proposal includes converting Lincoln School into an early childhood center/central kindergarten school at \$6 million, as well as renovations to Roosevelt Intermediate School and expansion of its cafeteria and library and new windows at Edison Intermediate School.

BOE President Anne Riegel said, "I can not believe or forget the great amount of due diligence (the board undertook) compared to what the state is doing. It is mind boggling." Regarding the bond, she said, "All the kindergarteners will start together and end up together at Westfield High School." She also said she hoped this could eliminate some of the "north side-south side" rivalry within the district.

Anthony Solimine, legal counsel to the board with regard to bond referendum compliance, addressed the board, saying that there is no need to provide an interpretive statement to the bond question.



GIVING CHEER... Westfield firefighters, through their Firemen's Mutual Benevolent Association and help from the public provided more than a hundred turkeys with all the dinner trimmings last Saturday for families throughout the region. This annual event by the firefighters spread holiday cheer to those most in need. Many helped throughout the day. Pictured above, from left to right, are: Lieutenant John Peterson, Firefighter Michael Skubish, Captain Robert Buccino and Firefighters Robert Sawicki and Aldo Tamarro.

Leaders Discuss State Funding, Property Tax Implications

By MICHAEL J. POLLACK
Specialty Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD - A school leaders' meeting hosted by the Westfield Board of Education last Friday featured a discussion on potential state funding decisions that could affect Westfield schools.

Assemblyman Jon Bramnick (LD-21) and Lynne Strickland, executive director of the Garden State Coalition of Schools facilitated the discussion, which was followed by a presentation from Jefferson School Principal Jeanette Munoz about the rationale behind the proposed Westfield BOE \$9.4-million bond referendum.

Anne Riegel, BOE president, gave the introduction and was joined by

Guinny Leiz, BOE vice-president, and members Ann Cary, Jane Clancy, Alice Hunnicutt and Julia Walker. Third Ward Councilman Mark Ciarrocca attended as council liaison.

Mr. Bramnick, who resides in and represents Westfield, spoke to the crowd at the Westfield Memorial Library. He said, "Government reacts to crises. It's reached the point that even in Trenton, they realize there's a crisis in property taxes. So they have no real system in effect. In the General Assembly, in my four years, we have never had an open discussion on property taxes or school funding or anything that would reduce property taxes."

He said the property tax committees set up by Governor Jon Corzine have met eight or nine times since July. "They discussed every possible issue that would affect property taxes - school funding, local funding, the county and state process," he said.

He said the property tax problem has existed for 10 to 20 years and, "in the last four months, in eight committee

meetings, they're talking about every possible solution. So, when you read the paper and you have no idea what's going on, that's exactly correct."

One bill passed Monday in the Assembly by a 46-33-1 count concerned monitoring a pilot county school district for a limited period of time. New Jersey currently has 516 municipalities and 616 school districts.

Mr. Bramnick then focused on Assembly Speaker Joe Roberts' CORE (Clearing hurdles to shared services, Overriding waste in schools, Reining in pension abuses and Empowering citizens) Reform Plan.

Calling it "probably the most complicated bill," Mr. Bramnick said the CORE Reform proposal changes school elections to November.

He said the bill would examine issues of shared and consolidated services. "Historically," he said, "if you wanted to join communities and share services, you needed a vote by the taxpayer. This will allow consolidation

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14



Victoria McCabe for The Westfield Leader
FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS...The Chanukah Menorah adorns the grounds of the North Avenue plaza. The eight-day Festival of Lights begins tomorrow night, Friday, December 15 when the first candle is lit.

Town Board of Adjustment Denies Cacciola Place Plan

By WAYNE BAKER
Specialty Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — At its December 11 meeting, the board of adjustment rejected a plan submitted by Joe Penyak, Sr. for the duplex home at 121 Cacciola Place. Mr. Penyak's plan was to demolish the existing duplex home and construct a new, three-story duplex with a two-car garage on the first level and a three-bedroom apartment on the second and third levels. The house was to have been located further back from the street to permit a car to be parked in the driveway.

The property involved is a non-complying lot of 2,546 square feet, less than a third of the 8,000 square feet required. The property is 25 feet wide and just under 102 feet deep, versus a required minimum width of 60 feet and 120-foot depth.

Much of the applicant's case was based on the inability to comply with zoning requirements due to lot size. The benefit to the applicant would be three off-street parking spaces, two "stacked" spaces in the garage and another in the driveway. He claimed that the market demands three-bed-

room apartments.

Neighborhood residents attended the meeting to respond to the plan. Ralph Rapuano, the owner of several rental properties in the area, said the claim that the market demands three-bedroom apartments is invalid, noting that many of his properties are two-bedroom dwellings and he has no vacancies. He described the proposed new building as "way out of scale."

Arlene Green, who lives next door to the property, said that the home has been vacant for over a year, is raccoon-infested and "needs to come down."

She drew a laugh from those in attendance when she said in jest, "I could take a match, walk in there, the house'd go boom."

Mary Withers, speaking as vice president of the Westfield Neighborhood Council, the other next-door neighbor, objected to the footprint of the house being moved away from Cacciola Place and the upstairs being enlarged. She cited that the Neighborhood Council uses the yard adjacent to the proposed new home for



DENIED...The board of adjustment denied Joe Penyak, Sr.'s plan to demolish the duplex home at 121 Cacciola Place, shown above, and construct a new three-story duplex in its place.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14



Victoria McCabe for The Westfield Leader
WESTFIELD LANDMARK...The Wychwood South Gatehouse, pictured above, on Canterbury Lane has become a subject of concern for multiple neighborhood residents, as the property is proposed for subdivision and development by the owner. The application is to be heard at next month's Westfield Planning Board meeting. See related letter on page 4.

MS BOE Seeks Resident Input On Contract Negotiations

By GINA LEVINE-LEVY
Specialty Written for The Westfield Leader

MOUNTAINSIDE — The borough's board of education on Tuesday night said it is preparing to meet with the Mountainside Education Association (MEA) to negotiate its three-year successor contract and is asking for public input.

The current contract with the MEA expires June 30, 2007.

"We really plea to our supporters, our public, for whatever it is you need to address," said Board President John Perrin.

The MEA negotiates contract terms and conditions on behalf of most district employees, including both certified and non-certified personnel.

Mr. Perrin said the BOE notified the MEA in November that negotiations should commence but has not heard back.

Residents can contact Chief School Administrator Richard O'Malley at (908) 232-3232 or e-mail romalley@mountainsideschools.org, the board said.

In other news, the BOE heard a presentation from school policy and regulations consultant Strauss Esmay Associates (SEA).

If hired, the company would help the district revise and maintain its existing policy manual, a process which would take about one year or

less, the board said.

The company, which has "relationships" with more than 280 school districts, according to partner Philip W. Nicasastro, would take two months to review current policies and ensure that they comply with New Jersey law.

"It's really an audit of everything the district has in place," said SEA consultant Sandy Nicasastro.

The process includes developing a policy checklist to review what is in place, reviewing policies "unique" to the district, reviewing existing handbooks and reviewing negotiated agreements to make sure they comply with policy.

Consultants would then spend a day in the district and draft recommendations.

The company has online resources to help maintain and update policy, such as a Policy Alert and Support System (PASS), which informs districts of changes in state law and updates "policies and regulations" based on the changes. What is available depends upon the price plan selected by the district.

Mr. Nicasastro called his database and resources "comprehensive" and suggested that Mr. O'Malley contact any participating districts to reference its services.

Current SEA clients include mul-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14



Ingrid McKinley for The Westfield Leader
HANDS OFF OUR BENEFITS...A bus full of teachers left Clark to join thousands in Trenton to protest proposed changes to their benefits on December 11. Many schools were closed throughout New Jersey this past Monday since thousands of teachers were at the rally.

Space Heater Causes Blaze On Mohawk Trail on Sunday

By PAUL J. PEYTON
Specialty Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD - Fire officials said a portable kerosene heater was the cause of an early morning blaze Sunday that destroyed a single-family ranch on Mohawk Trail.

Westfield Fire Chief Dan Kelly said 17 firefighters from Westfield, Roselle and Springfield battled the blaze, which was brought under control in 50 minutes. The Mountainside, Scotch Plains and Fanwood departments provided mutual aid to Westfield while firefighters were engaged in the Mohawk fire.

Fire officials aid a displaced couple who resided at the home has been assisted with temporary housing by the Westfield/Mountainside Chapter of the American Red Cross. Chief Kelly said the couple was awoken by one of their pets, a cat.

Chief Kelly said the fire started at 4:51 a.m. in the kitchen and quickly spread. "The first floor dwelling was fully engulfed" when the WFD arrived on the scene, he said.

"The structure has been declared structurally unsound (by the Westfield Building Department) and will more than likely have to be razed," Chief Kelly said.

"It spread to the first floor of the house at a rapid rate," he said.

A vehicle in front of an attached garage was destroyed and another was damaged.

The couple, Michael and Elizabeth Perdek, were treated at the scene by the Westfield Rescue Squad. Two firefighters sustained injuries and were transported to Overlook Hospital in Summit where they were treated and released.

The WFD also responded to a three-alarm fire in downtown Cranford that destroyed three commercial businesses on North Union Avenue on Saturday night.

Town firefighters, including Chief Kelly, were also at the scene of Tuesday's five-alarm fire at Rex Bedding Plainfield, which also damaged the Plainfield Fire Department building next door.



Michael Pollack for The Westfield Leader
RESPONSIVE...The Union County Emergency Response Team conduct a drill last Friday at 772 Prospect Street, near the corner of Effingham Place around 1 p.m.

PAGE INDEX

Regional	2-3	Obituary	10	Real Estate	15-21
Editorial	4-5, 22	Education	11-13	Classifieds	22
Community	6-9	Sports	15-21	A&E	23-25