



### Community Commentary The State Scene Viewed A Decade Later

By Garland C. "Bud" Boothe, Jr.  
Former Westfield Mayor, 1992-1996

Following and influencing what goes on in Trenton is an essential part of the job as mayor. I retired from mayor a decade ago, but I continue to follow and try to influence what goes on. I have lived here 60 years, attended high school and college and raised a family. Every time I think things cannot get worse in the state, it does. Some of my thoughts are:

The definition of property taxes is wrong today. Let's get real about where the actual property value is. Unlike medieval or colonial times or even a century ago, it is not land. Real estate was what counted in those days. Intangibles, the big stuff that has to be reported on tax reports, not cars and artwork, should be defined and included in property tax. Our Governor, who I admire and sometimes agree with, owns a condo worth \$8 million. He has enough intangibles to finance a senate and a gubernatorial run. Only his condo is taxed; most of his real property value and his ability to pay escape taxation. My house, your house and his condo do not escape.

This is wrong. Fairness dictates a fairer approach such as an 'ad valorem' intangible property tax. The Mecca of retired wealth, Florida, abolished same. Legislators quake and regard it as a new tax. Nobody has mentioned it that I know of.

Our legislature has botched the tax reform project although hearings on benefits, consolidation, dual office holding, etc. have been enlightening and long overdue. I wrote in *The Westfield Leader* and *The Times* several years ago urging a constitutional convention. It is now imperative to have a convention, and it should not be limited by excluding spending issues. It must be focused on issues affecting local taxes and costs. It must exclude social issues such as, abortion, same sex marriage, Mt. Laurel housing, etc. Otherwise, nothing will get done. Delegates must be elected, such as four for each of the 40 legislative districts. But three of every four delegates must be individuals who have never held elective office - otherwise, we get the legislators again.

Where do "property" taxes go? In Westfield, 67 percent of it pays for 86 percent of the public school cost. Where does that go? Eleven percent pays for benefits [disclosure: I get benefits via my wife's 27 year career as a Westfield teacher]. A like percentage pays for Special Ed. I do not disagree with these costs, but both programs are dictated by the legislature. They include benefit bump-ups with no apparent regard for the costs. The State should assume the total cost of these programs. Among other things, this will obviate the need to move into high-cost Westfield simply to get a child into Special Ed. Shift the expense to the state, and a quarter of the local tax bill is gone. We can get rid of that messy, paper-driven, expensive, benefit the postal system, patchwork and arguably unfair "take our money

and give a part back a year later" rebate program.

On mergers, just whom is it acceptable to merge with? Mergers, unlike corporate America, will not immediately reduce work forces. Most of the work is still there. Vested employment rights must be recognized or bought off. Do you do it on seniority - keeping the highest paid and letting go that terrific clerk or teacher who came last year? The Westfield School Board considered being a contract 'student-receiving-district' some decades ago; having to take teachers from another high school was a big factor in killing the proposal.

A merger study by the state a decade ago in effect recreated Westfield boundaries as of 1794 [western Cranford to eastern Dunellen, Mountainside to Rahway]. I looked for a municipality to compare it to (population, budget, staffing, etc.) and found Edison, which lacks the downtown and other ambience we have. It is not Westfield or any of our neighbors. The savings were minimal. I will take what we have.

As for shared services, Westfield and others have this for decades. We do not need uninformed muscle from Trenton. Hopefully the County Super Superintendent idea scooped by *The Leader/Times* on December 13 is dead.

The biggest detriment to good government in our state is multiple job holding: dual (or more) elective and/or appointed and/or salaried school, local or county jobs office-holding. I know. I was one once (the Town of Westfield and the Union County Utilities Authority in Rahway). Particularly bad are salaried municipal, county or school "day jobs" held by part-time elected municipal, school board, fireholder or legislator office-holders. You cannot serve two masters. The former mayor and state senator of our largest city held legislation hostage until he got concessions on the ice hockey rink and other stuff. "Dual Must Go." As for the "but the people elected me" argument, take the Bible over BS.

I, and others, continue to be appalled at corruption disclosures involving municipal and officials at all levels. This reflects unfairly on the hundreds statewide, including here, who labor mightily, whether for \$1 or \$4,000 or even more, to do right by their residents. People of ability and good will are deprecated because of the acts and criminal convictions of others, in New Jersey and elsewhere. This is darn unhelpful and unhealthy in finding good candidates in both parties for local offices.

All the hearings and attention have brought these issues to the fore as never before. If you care, follow and think about these problems. Get involved. Tell your friends and your legislators. If you don't, you deserve what we all get - and the rest do not. May we all live to see reform.



Katie Newingham for *The Westfield Leader* and *The Times*  
GUIDING THE WAY... Westfield High School (WHS) students Raisa Rubin, left, and Hallie James have been raising two seeing eye dogs, Paris, left, and Napa since the dogs were seven-weeks-old. The girls got involved through the 4H Puppy Group. The girls are socializing the two dogs through day trips, such as taking the dogs to WHS last Thursday, December 21. The dogs will remain with the Rubin and James families until they are between 14 and 18 months old, when they will begin extensive training.

## Union County Incinerator Operates at Full Capacity

By STEVEN REILLY  
Specialty Written for *The Westfield Leader* and *The Times*

RAHWAY —The Union County Utilities Authority held its year-end meeting on December 20 at the Rahway Resource Recovery Facility. Authority members were joined by officials from Covanta Energy, a private company contracted to operate the facility.

Alan Harleston, facility manager, said he was pleased with the performance of the facility. "This is a great performing facility," Mr. Harleston said. "We have been operating at full capacity for the past several years now. This is a very, very good operation."

Commonly known as the Rahway incinerator, the Route 1&9 facility takes in more than 500,000 tons of household trash each year and converts it to clean energy for 30,000 homes.

"Most of us do not want to think about where our trash goes," Mr. Harleston said. "This facility provides a safe and environmentally sound option for waste disposal. This is a win-win for Union County residents and a great example of a private-public infrastructure partnership." Once the site of an uncontrolled dump more than 20 years ago, the recovery facility employs 88 workers and provides its own energy for day-to-day operations. Besides providing a clean energy source, the facility also promotes alternative energy sources. "A facility such as the UCUA Resource Recovery Facility replaces a significant amount of oil imports used for energy production," Mr. Harleston said. "We can all understand in this day and age how important it is to offset our needs for oil imports."

"We see ourselves as providing important services to the community

and providing a safe, environmentally sound energy source."

James Kennedy, UCUA chairman and Rahway mayor, said he was pleased with the operation. "This is an extremely positive operation for our residents," Mr. Kennedy said. "We are right where we want to be to serve the county's needs."

Mr. Kennedy praised the facility and its employees who recently received an award from OSHA for their commitment to safety.

Board member Richmond Lapolla added the award highlights the facility's performance and management.

"This is a great facility for the county. The quality of the service is self evident and it keeps reaching milestones along the way," Mr. Lapolla said.

The Resource Recovery Facility is one of five such facilities in New Jersey. According to Mr. Harleston, Covanta runs three of the five, including the Essex County facility in Newark.

The energy produced by the facility is added into the Penn-Maryland-Metro power grid, which supplies energy to utility providers such as PSE&G. Besides generating clean energy, the facility also recovers more than 1,000 tons of recyclable metals that are sold for use in manufacturing operations.

"The UCUA facility is a clean running recovery operation. Residents do not see the large plumes of smoke many people associate with this type of facility," Mr. Harleston said. "The only emission from our facility is vapor release, since trash is mostly water."

Mr. Harleston added that the location of the facility on Rt. 1&9 provides access for the nearly 20 communities that participate in the facility's waste disposal operations.

## Officials Press for Release Of Kidnapped Israelis

By CASSIE LO  
Specialty Written for *The Westfield Leader* and *The Times*

SCOTCH PLAINS —Local elected officials, student advocates and area residents gathered at the Jewish Federation of Central New Jersey on December 20 for a state-wide press conference designed to shed light on the plight of three kidnapped Israeli soldiers: Gilad Shalit, Ehud "Udi" Goldwasser and Eldad Regev.

Rep. Mike Ferguson (R-7th, Union County), Rep. Rush Holt (D-12th, Mercer), Rep. Frank Pallone (D-6th, Monmouth), State Senator Tom Kean, Jr. (LD-21, Westfield), Rep. Albio Sires (D-13th, Hudson) and Assemblyman Jon Bramnick (LD-21, Westfield) attended the event. Benjamin Krasna, Deputy Counsel General of Israel, was also present.

Islamic terrorist groups Hamas and Hezbollah kidnapped Mr. Shalit, Mr. Goldwasser and Mr. Regev in June and July of 2006. According to UN Security Council Resolution 1701, the three soldiers should be released "immediately and unconditionally."

Because no contact has been established with the three men, the seriousness of this situation caused the speakers at the conference to send out a plea: "It is unacceptable to keep these men in the black hole of captivity," said Gordon Haas, chairman of the Community Relations Council in the Jewish Federation of Central New Jersey.

Mr. Haas phoned Mr. Goldwasser's wife Kamit, who addressed the conference from her home in Israel. "I had to celebrate our first anniversary alone, and it was very, very hard," said Mrs. Goldwasser. "Do not forget that three young men are not at home."

Mr. Ferguson called the treatment of the three soldiers "outrageous and barbaric."

"It is my hope that we will continue to raise awareness and attention about

this issue," he said.

Mr. Holt, who represents Middlesex, Monmouth and Mercer Counties, agreed with Mr. Ferguson. "We are reminded about what a sacrifice citizens of Israel are making every day to preserve a collection of ideals... we must stand with them," he said.

Four student activists addressed the audience about various projects they are working on. Shayna Schor and Adi Segal of the Solomon Schechter Day School have combined efforts to raise awareness of the soldiers in area schools. Shayna designed a powerpoint presentation to educate students, and Ari started a petition to the American Red Cross and President George W. Bush that he said "appeals to the compassion and mercy the Red Cross has instilled."

The other two students encouraged attendees to stand by the soldiers and pray for them in their time of need. "Sadly, war is a common occurrence in Israel," said Pauline Barkin of the JCC Teen Council, who traveled to Israel last summer as the violence began to increase.

Eliezer Weinbach spoke for the Jewish Educational Center (JEC) in Elizabeth and urged everyone to embrace the true meaning of Chanukah: "Be a Maccabee, stand up for what you believe," he said.

After the speakers, multiple Rabbis in the audience were invited to light candles and join in a prayer on behalf of the captured soldiers.

The Jewish Federation of Central New Jersey provided blue awareness bands and postcards to send to American government officials including President Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice at the end of the press conference. A petition is available to sign at [freethesoldiers.org](http://freethesoldiers.org). The goal is for one million people to sign it before sending it to the incoming Secretary General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon.



BIRTHDAY DUO...Dr. Earl Chamberlin and his granddaughter Erin Hamer celebrate their birthdays December 2 at the Westfield home of Dr. Chamberlin and his wife, Mary Helen. Dr. Chamberlin turned 92 on December 4, while Erin turned 13 on December 3. Fifteen family members joined Dr. and Mrs. Chamberlin for the celebration, including their children and their spouses and the couple's grandchildren, plus Mrs. Chamberlin's sister, Sister Carol Coenen of Denver, Colo.

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