

The Westfield Leader

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Two School Systems in Our County Couldn't be More Different

Governor Jon Corzine has hardly had time to find the key to the executive washroom. He's put trusted aids in his cabinet and is ready to attack the state's problems from the top down with technical, legal and financial experts.

The public is bracing for the bad news as it's time to 'pay the piper.' The county has already provided a preview of its intended property-tax increases. State government has overspent in nearly every category in the last few years while delaying more than \$6 billion of the bill for the taxpayers until this year, which is after the elections. And regardless of how many officials have been arrested, the leaks are still there.

It will be a while yet before the governor finds time to lead us in looking at our problems from the bottom up, which is essential for correcting New Jersey's culture of corruption. We, as citizens, must deal with the problems ourselves from the bottom up - it's time to say 'hell no' to corruption that stares us in the face.

But how does one do this? Perhaps write letters to Governor Corzine, U.S. Attorney Chris Christie, state senators and assemblymen. Attend meetings of the county, municipalities, boards of education, public utilities and authorities.

Let them know you're here and that you mean it. You can influence their positions and they need support to do the right things since they face considerable pressure from inside influence to do otherwise.

When you see an outrage, be outraged. Isn't it an outrage when officials give themselves retroactive pay raises? A case in point is the Elizabeth Board of Education (BOE).

The newly appointed Elizabeth Superintendent of Schools, Pablo Munoz, was just given a chunk of your money. The Elizabeth BOE gave him a retroactive pay raise of over \$30,000. His salary is now \$209,279. Ousted Superintendent Thomas Dunn, Jr. is still on the books for this year. The Elizabeth school system is now paying over \$400,000 a year in superintendents' salaries - add about 25 percent more for the cost of the benefits and others, which go with the salaries. The cost of this alone to the taxpayers tops a \$500,000.

Two public school systems in our county couldn't be taking more dissimilar paths, nor are their levels of achievement and destinies more divergent - Westfield and Elizabeth. Regrettably, the Elizabeth system is in dismal shape - the kids aren't learning and the leadership of the board of education has demonstrated outrageous defiance and disregard for the public's money.

Yes, we hope that the kids in Elizabeth can be educated and we regret that they are not achieving.

Regarding the money being squandered (or more aptly described as "extracted from the system"), well, isn't that a problem for the Elizabeth property taxpayers? It's not a concern for property taxpayers in towns such as Westfield, Scotch Plains or Summit - or is it? Think again.

Elizabeth and Plainfield in Union County are Abbott school districts, which means that the state pays for the school system, not the property owners and residents of those towns. And where does the state get the money to pay for the Abbott districts? It comes from you.

So, when the Elizabeth BOE (or any agency for that matter) squanders money and rewards political buddies, it's your money they're doing it with - not theirs. Be outraged.

Someone must oversee the Abbott school districts; otherwise, the funds will continue to be drained and the kids won't be educated. As this situation has worsened, there has been less money available for the school systems that do work, such as those in our area.

Last year, Westfield voters rejected the school budget request by the board of education as they took the moment to express their frustration over the continual rise in property taxes. Although worrisome to the school administration, the rejection was largely symbolic. The town council lowered the school budget request by less than one percent and the resultant school budget continued its rise.

This year, the Westfield BOE is taking a bold approach to this difficult problem. They seek to expand public involvement in the budget process. Public meetings are being held weekly on Tuesday nights at 8 p.m. in the administrative building at 302 Elm Street to discuss the budget options and to seek public input.

In an even more daring move, the Westfield BOE is taking a wide-open approach to the voting process by extending the hours for voting on the budget and for selecting board members. On Tuesday, April 18, the polls will be open from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m. In past years, the polls in Westfield were open from 2 to 9 p.m. Other towns have similarly limited hours for voting on school budgets. The State of New Jersey requires only that the polls be open from 5 to 9 p.m. and few people vote. "This is in response to many requests the school board and administration received following last year's election suggesting that the district open polls earlier," the school district said, explaining the extended hours.

We highly recommend that Westfielders (or others for that matter) attend the Monday, January 30 meeting at the WHS auditorium at 7:30 p.m. where Superintendent of Schools Dr. William Foley will describe the decision-making process and constraints that the district faces in developing a budget. He will answer questions from the audience.

We understand it is not meant to be a "selling" of the 2006-2007 budget, but it is to provide an understanding of the budget process. Several members of the community requested this last year. The numbers for 2006-2007 are not known yet. Dr. Foley will use current budget numbers in his examples during the presentation.

Our local school systems are to be commended for their open actions, good intentions and superior performance.

Equally, you should be outraged over action in Elizabeth and at other places such as with the corruption at the UMDNJ (University of Medicine And Dentistry of New Jersey). It's time to stop hiring big egos for big bucks when all we get is big corruption.

State senators and assemblymen seek ideas on what bills to sponsor. We suggest that they pass one that makes it illegal in all fashions for government entities, authorities and utilities that use public money in any way to issue retroactive pay raises or benefits in any form.



The Mayor's Column Westfield United Way Is Having Its Efforts Diluted

By Andrew Skibitsky
Mayor of Westfield

To: Mr. Brian Gallagher, President,
United Way of America, 701 North
Fairfax Street, Alexandria, Virginia

As Mayor of the Town of Westfield, New Jersey, I take great interest in all organizations that insure the well-being of the citizens of Westfield. It has recently come to my attention that an organization, Westfield United Way (WUW), which is the largest fund-raising organization in our town, is having its efforts diluted by action from a competing organization under the same brand label, namely "United Way."

I cannot emphasize enough how critical the WUW and its board members and volunteers are to the functioning of Westfield, not only in the support they provide for programs within agencies that by their existence insure quality of life for Westfielders, but also in their ongoing ability to address both emergency situations and community action initiatives.

For example, in response to a survey of our senior citizens, they initiated efforts to secure a daily van servicing the transportation needs of seniors for medical, food and other necessary items. When 9/11 occurred, it was the WUW that stepped up to form the support arm for the 14 families in our town who lost spouses.

This ongoing support included providing a liaison to steer the families through the early critical period as well

as providing counselors for their long-term emotional needs and raising considerable funds to meet the resulting financial difficulties.

When this year's hurricanes occurred, it was the WUW that met with town leaders to organize efforts for Gulf Coast residents and to conduct a targeted fund-raiser. When a local boy scout decided to raise funds to erect a monument honoring Korean War vets, the WUW managed the funds and rallied the town to the cause.

Our WUW lives its motto - it is "Westfield's Resource for Human Caring." The Westfield United Way helps two out of every three people in Westfield through the money they raise to insure the survival of many agencies that provide services in town and the various programs they support.

In consideration of their efforts, successes and value to the community, I hope that the national organization under whose banner they stand would make every effort to support this great Westfield institution. I encourage you to learn about their story and do all you can to insure that they will continue to be able to cultivate the resources of this town in support of the many good causes they address.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Andrew Skibitsky
Mayor of Westfield



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. Vibex - Discolored spot or blotch of the skin due to a subcutaneous effusion of blood
2. Giallolino - Naples yellow pigment
3. Trigo - Wheat
4. Geniculate - To form joints or bend like a joint

CRYSTALGIA

1. Painful swelling of the mammary glands
2. Pain in the bladder
3. Bunyons
4. Pain and swelling of the lymph nodes

RONDACHE

1. A small circular shield carried by medieval foot soldiers
2. Any large stage prop in the theater which depicts the background
3. Moving in a hopping or skipping manner
4. Envy; resentment

CYNEGETICS

1. Hunting with dogs
2. The study of the Brythonic Celtic languages that includes Welsh, Breton and Cornish
3. Pertaining to swans or the study of swans
4. Study of diseases or inflammations of the throat or windpipe

ANGEKOK

1. A fencing master
2. A chiropractor
3. An Eskimo medicine man
4. An interpreter; translator

Letters to the Editor

Danger Ahead, Warning, Property Tax! Keep Your Money Away from Trenton

The speaker of the General Assembly, Joe Roberts, during the swearing in of our new legislature, citing Casey Stengel, said the issue is "property taxes," "property taxes," "property taxes." Many discuss the procedural avenues to discuss the problem, such as a special session of the legislature or the constitutional convention, but few in power will discuss the alternative solutions to reduce the property-tax burden.

I am extremely concerned about what I believe will be the eventual solution by the democratically controlled New Jersey state government.

Initially, during the special session or the convention, many alternatives will be discussed, including the sales tax, rebates and/or complicated tax formulas and finally raising the income tax.

I submit that eventually the Democrats will conclude that the only viable solution will be to increase the income tax. The concern that most of us should share with an increase in the income tax is who should collect the revenue.

We should never allow the State of New Jersey to collect the additional income tax and hope they will fairly and equitably redistribute the wealth. When the Democrats announce the solution of increasing the income tax to lower the property tax, we must demand that this new income tax be collected by the municipal clerk. The local city or town councils should decide how to spend our money, not the leaders in Trenton.

A citizen is permitted to stand before his or her local governing board and scrutinize, in a public fashion, its expenditures. Citizens are not permitted to speak before the legislature. The farther money travels from our pockets, the more we should be concerned about abuse.

Please note that I do not favor an increase in the income tax but I do recognize reality in Trenton and we must prepare for what I believe is an inevitable outcome. In addition, we should never allow an increase in taxes without sending economic "swat" teams into state, county and local governments to root out waste.

The teams should perform unannounced performance audits and report their findings to the public and then the state legislature. We should never allow the state to raise income taxes without reducing abuses in the pension system.

If we consider ourselves a family and we had a financial crisis, we would cut spending first and watch every penny. The state must follow the same simple rules.

Danger ahead! Warning! Keep your money close to home!

Assemblyman Jon Bramnick
Westfield

Second Westfielder Reports Damage To Christmas Lights By Vandals

I just got finished reading Marie Sadowski's recent letter regarding the theft of, or damage done to Christmas decorations at her home. Now I realize that similar damage done to, Christmas lights at our home was not an isolated incident. It was only upon taking down several sets of decorative lights recently that we realized that the wires had been cut by wire cutters or a similar tool. We had thought that as so often happens, that some had just stopped working - well I was mistaken.

As a long time Westfield resident this is a first - especially during the Christmas season. As Ms. Sadowski mentioned we should all be able to put out holiday displays around our homes without being concerned about theft or damage. As juveniles are most likely responsible for this type of activity, perhaps they need to be taught that the Christmas spirit does

not include the theft and destruction of their neighbor's property. I would venture to guess that other homes in our community were also the victim of similar mischief, but perhaps like myself they thought it was an isolated event.

Pranks are one thing, but theft and damage to property are entirely different. I find it personally disappointing that this type of vandalism occurred over the Christmas holidays; surely for most of our young people there is no shortage of positive holiday or family activities to take part in.

Hopefully when the Christmas holidays roll around again our homeowners won't need to include surveillance cameras along with their decorative displays. Respect for private property is a right we should all enjoy - all through the year.

Michael C. Ince
Westfield

Letter Writer Missed Point Regarding Pregnant Women Parking at Store

Based on Patricia Leonard's most recent response to my letter of January 12, it is obvious that she completely missed the point of my letter. She also used her response as a personal attack towards me and all other pregnant women.

Simply put, if Shop Rite or any merchant choose to create preferred parking for pregnant women or any others they feel the need to offer parking to and you don't fit the category, don't park there! However, if you don't like the fact that these parking spots are available, you need to redirect your hostility towards the merchant.

In addition, letters to the editor in our local paper are an important forum for our community, no matter how big or small the topic. They provide an outlet for opinion that shows we care as well as provide an outlet to learn from our neighbors. I

commend those who take the time to write, it gives us a sense of what our community is all about. So let's be careful when assuming that one has "too much" time on their hands when choosing to write.

Whether you agree with someone's opinion or not, they care enough to write and take the chance to put their opinions out there in the community. Sometimes those opinions and the assumptions we make about the writer cause one to personally attack the opinion writer in our letters and these are the type of letters that aren't so welcomed by many.

Thank you to all that continue to contribute to *The Westfield Leader*. Writers and readers alike!

Jacquie Urbano
Westfield

Reader Recalls Dr. Graff's Murder After Reading Mrs. Graff's Obituary

The edition of January 19 held the obituary of Mrs. Elizabeth Graff of Westfield. It recalled her faith and service to this community over the decades. It also recalled that her husband, Dr. John J. Graff, predeceased her in 1973.

It struck my memory. Anyone who grew up around here remembers the List Murders. However, few remember that a Dr. Graff was murdered on the Boulevard just blocks from the train station a year or so after the Lists.

I believe this was her husband. I don't believe anyone was ever arrested and remains unsolved. I always thought his case was overwhelmed by the List murders. If it is the same man, I think it would be appropriate to acknowledge his murder as still unsolved 32 years

later. Anyway, just thought I'd bring it to your attention.

Sean T. Murphy
Scotch Plains



You are invited to enter the newspaper's creative writing contest. Detailed rules and prizes are posted on goleader.com. It is open to anyone and there is no entry fee. Entries (700 to 1200 words) must be received by February 15 will receive an editor's review and will have the opportunity to submit an update.

Winning entries will be published this spring in the 34th annual edition of *This Is Westfield*. In the spirit of creative writing, entries may be of past, present or future; history, commentary, sports, art, humor, science fiction, essay, mystery, instructive, illustrative or novelette. In some fashion, there must be a tie to Westfield or surrounding community. Judging criteria will include format (spelling and grammar), creativity (ideas, impact and approach), tightness (clarity, structure) and depth. Have fun.

Editor's Note: The Westfield Police Department confirmed that the Dr. John J. Graff case remains unsolved. As reported in December 28, 1973 issue of *The Westfield Leader*, Dr. Graff was found at 7 p.m. by a teenager outside of 620 Boulevard in Westfield after being mugged and hit in the head with a pipe. A medical doctor at the Department of Health, Education and Welfare in New York City, he was on his way home from the Westfield train station.