

Letters to the Editor

Reviewing Attorney's Compensation Is Reasonable, not Political Ploy

Regarding Mayor Skibitsky's letter to the editor of June 15 in *The Westfield Leader* entitled "Westfield will not bargain hunt for legal representation," there are three important points made by the mayor:

First: Since I was the only citizen to speak before the town council on June 6, I must be the "citizen" Mayor Skibitsky referred to in his letter last week, and I am very pleased that he agreed with my presentation at the June 6 town council meeting. At that meeting, I prefaced my suggestion that we as a town look at competitive bidding for the position of town attorney with the statement, "The town absolutely wants to have top quality legal representation. I don't mean to suggest at all that we look for another firm to do our legal service regardless of their quality, but we need someone who would give us top quality service." These quotes are from the TV36 rebroadcast of that meeting. I then added, "In a competitive bid process, perhaps we could find another national firm that could do an excellent job at a lower rate." I can't imagine that the mayor would have misconstrued this to be a call for "bargain hunting for legal representation."

Second: I do not doubt that Mr. Cockren is probably doing a good job as the town attorney, even though I questioned the results of two of the town's litigations. But the point is the rate we are paying him and his firm. As Councilman Bigosinski stated, in the last year, approximately 70 percent or \$115,000 worth of the town's extraordinary hourly work was done, not by Mr. Cockren, but by members of his firm, a large national firm. Many times these are novice lawyers that may not even live in New Jersey, let alone Westfield. Some of the work was done by lawyers in New York and California who are not admitted to do work in New Jersey. These lawyers from this national firm are making \$150 an hour. Perhaps Mr. Cockren should be making \$150 an hour but there should certainly be a lower rate for these associates' work. Third, and most importantly, is the method by which the town attorney's and his national law firm's hourly compensation arrived at \$150 an hour. From the early 1990's until 2004, the town of Westfield paid the town attorneys and by extension their firms a rate of \$100 an hour. Mr. Cockren and by extension his firm accepted this rate at the time of his appointment in 2001.

During the budget process in 2004, it was noted that the rate of \$100 an hour was "low for what an attorney would make." I would think that the town attorney would have come forward if that amount of compensation were a rate that would not generate excellent service for the town. But neither he nor his firm came forward.

When I asked Councilman Echausse at the June 6 meeting if the town attorney or his firm had requested an hourly rate increase from the \$100 he had been making, his response was "Unsolicited is the answer!" and then he added for emphasis "It was an unsolicited request."

According to Councilman Echausse, the town council's finance committee then, in closed session, voluntarily decided to raise the rate at which we pay the town attorney and his national law firm to \$125 for 2004 and to \$150 for 2005 and for the future as well.

This increase was part of the budgets of those years. This is a 50 percent increase in hourly compensation in a 12-month period. This was all without even a request for an increase in compensation or a scheduled increase in compensation. These increases cost the town an additional \$54,450 last year and will probably cost the taxpayers of Westfield an additional \$40,000 annually going forward.

Why would the town council voluntarily increase the town's expenses and by extension the taxes for the citizens of Westfield for legal representation, when we examine all other expenses to determine if we could lower them? In 2004, the council and former mayor Greg McDermott did this in closed session and without a competitive bidding process.

Why do some members of the council consider any suggestion that we review the town attorney's compensation a political ploy? How can requesting a fair review of how the citizen's tax dollars are spent be political? If the town attorney position were to be part of a competitive bidding process, the town would not be required to accept the lowest bid, but could use qualitative judgments in its decision-making process. The mayor and council should not confuse competitive bidding for this position with a "bargain hunt."

Jim Baker
Westfield

Parent Thanks Petix for Editorial And Raising Important Issues

I read Dr. Petix's editorial in *The Westfield Leader* concerning freedom of speech and the elimination of high school level departmental supervisors with great interest and sadness. Thank you for taking these issues on at a time that should be a celebration of a lifetime's work in dedication to the youth of our community.

The school board has recently demonstrated its ability to use excellent judgment and planning in communicating its message to have their budget passed. I believe their pre-voting campaign generated necessary information as well as community interest and goodwill.

However, communication demands real listening. On many levels, it is horrifying to think that the board cut your input short. Censorship is always frightening. Censorship of an experienced, educated perspective that clearly brings first-hand information to the table that is not available to the board, destroys all confidence in the board's vision of their mission and their role in setting important educational standards in our community.

As a parent of two high school students, our family has experienced the difference in educational quality as the result of the changes in departmental leadership. The accessibility factor travels down the educational chain at a frighteningly quick pace.

Law Would Reduce Pedestrian Fatalities

Motor vehicles continue to ignore pedestrians in our state and a tougher pedestrian safety law is a necessity to save lives.

Recently my proposal, Assembly Bill 175, passed the Assembly Transportation Committee and will hopefully become law. This law would require motor vehicles to stop for pedestrians in crosswalks. Presently the law only requires vehicles to yield. The present law is difficult to interpret because cars can normally "beat the pedestrian" to the crossing, therefore drivers often feel there is no reason to slow down. It may even cause drivers to accelerate.

The new law would require drivers to be on the "lookout" for pedestrians. Drivers, aware that they may need to stop at any time, would likely reduce their speed as they approach intersections.

This law would reduce the number of pedestrian fatalities and work to keep school children safer as they enter the crosswalks on our state's roads.

I am hopeful that the legislature will pass this new law and make New Jersey a safer state for pedestrians.

Asm. Jon Bramnick
Westfield

Not only are the teachers left with less direction and input from their supervisor, the students have reported receiving less time and input from their teachers in the exact departments that have had supervisor positions eliminated. It appears that the teachers' feelings of isolation and lack of community within their own building, becomes reflected down the line to the students. There may be hours posted, but I hear from students (beyond my own), especially in the math department, that their queries are not really welcomed. I am sure this is true from an overworked supervisor with queries from teachers as well.

As cutbacks are proposed, it seems ironic that as the language program is fed on one end the board chooses to cripple it on the other—and most immediately to students who never had the benefit of foreign language training at younger ages.

I hope you will not be deterred in your pursuit and leadership in restoring this important level of guidance and experience in our educational system. As so many enthusiastic, young, inexperienced teachers are hired, the need for building- and grade-level specific supervisors is quite poignant. The quality and "community" that fosters excellent education is at stake.

And then there is the haunting fact of censorship. On every level, censorship is abhorrent. To focus on our high school, the role of our school's newspaper, *Hi's Eye* cannot be overstated. For members of the journalism staff and classes, the importance is fairly obvious. But as with all newspapers, the key spot it holds in the eyes of our entire student body is a microcosm of the place of newspapers in our society as a whole.

Students and parents look to the paper to know what is really in the hearts and minds of our young people—the word in the hall that few in the adult community would ever know. Information is power. Uncensored views and articles provide a window into the corridors and classrooms for the entire student body, for our teachers and administrators, for our parents, to all be able to have conversations that are timely in our children's peer development and our ability to guide them as issues arise. And what an overwhelmingly sad message do we send if we live in a town with a censored high school newspaper and censored public meetings - in our democratic society?

As we move forward in our hiring of new staff to guide our educational system, I trust that our town's focus on striving for excellence at each individual level of education, and the vital freedoms we enjoy as a nation, will both remain intact.

Susan Devaney
Westfield

Linda Cherkassky
Voorhees



MOTHER'S SUPPORT...Asm. Jon Bramnick (R-21) receives support from his mother, Babette Bramnick visiting from Florida, at a reception for the assemblyman Tuesday night at the Northside Trattoria Tavern & Restaurant in Westfield.

Decision-Making Process Explained By Westfield Board of Ed President

I'd like to address some comments we've heard recently about the board of education's decision-making process, particularly regarding the role of public opinion and the difference between responsibilities of the board and superintendent.

Board members put considerable time into making decisions and take their role on the board very seriously. As representatives of the community, we want to make well-reasoned decisions that benefit the district as a whole. When large numbers of parents do communicate to the administration and the board, whether via e-mail or in person, the board listens carefully to the messages being shared. We do use this input as one of the factors in considering our decision, even if we do not always agree.

A school superintendent is charged with making the hiring and personnel decisions for the district. For an important decision such as changing the leadership at Wilson and Washington Schools, Dr. Foley did explain his rationale to us in private. Some elements of his decision are based on the strengths and weaknesses of the various administrators involved, which cannot be discussed in public. The board did consider parent concerns about disrupting both schools. On balance, we felt the change would strengthen both schools and that Dr. Foley's decision was reasonable and justified.

Personnel changes are especially sensitive because they are governed by complex laws and require privacy. As board members, we have access to information that is both public and private. We know how frustrating it is for parents and members of the community to understand the

rationale without having access to all the information behind a decision. However, it is just not possible to consult with parents and seek their approval before personnel changes are made.

When appropriate, we seek input from the public on our decisions. Just recently we created a Citizens Advisory Committee on Enrollment and sought reaction to its recommendations through multiple meetings and a survey. As we embarked on hiring a new high school principal after 26 years, we sought public input on desired criteria through a public meeting and survey.

A community elects a board and hires a superintendent with the tacit acknowledgement that somebody has to make the tough decisions and be accountable for them. The board's role is a policy-setting one; we do not run the day-to-day aspects of the district. Specific personnel decisions remain the jurisdiction of superintendents, even though laws require boards of education to vote on every recommendation.

Making decisions that benefit the district as a whole are not always easy, and it is impossible to make everyone happy with every decision. The Westfield schools are fortunate to have an extremely supportive parent community, dedicated staff and numerous resources that positively impact the education our students receive. Hopefully these factors will enable the district to successfully handle change and move forward once decisions have been made.

On behalf of the board of education, we hope the community has a wonderful summer. Congratulations to the graduating class of 2006.

Anne Riegel
President, Board of Education
Westfield

Feral Cat Article Is Not The Whole Story

Ms. Davis' article on feral cats only presented one side of this controversial issue. As a wildlife rehabilitator for Woodford Cedar Run Wildlife Refuge, I see first hand the devastation feral and free-roaming cats have on wildlife.

Trap-Neuter-Return (also known as Trap-Neuter-Release or TNR) has not been proven to be effective at reducing the number of feral cats or eventually eliminating cat colonies through natural attrition. In fact, colonies often grow in size because the cat food attracts neighborhood cats and irresponsible owners abandon their pets in colonies. TNR is based on perpetual colony maintenance. These colonies do not die off as many TNR proponents claim. TNR enables abandonment and undermines efforts to educate owners about responsible pet ownership. To properly evaluate any TNR program, specific questions must be answered from reliable and available data.

Many find TNR to be inhumane since these cats are exposed to extreme weather conditions and are subject to outdoor hazards like vehicles, abuse, dogs, wildlife, theft and disease. Given only the choice between life and death in a cat colony or euthanasia, many find that euthanasia is far more compassionate and less self-indulgent than the crush of a car, the teeth of a dog or the ravages of disease.

Cats are an introduced, non-native predator species. True, they are not wild animals and the outdoors is not their natural environment. Domestic cats are dependent upon humans for survival and do not belong outside.

There is a public health risk from any free-roaming cat. Cats can transmit various illnesses and diseases through bites, scratches and fecal contamination.

Habitat loss is the primary reason for wildlife decline. However, predation is also a significant cause and should not be ignored. The domestic cat is a human artifact, and therefore its impact on nature is a human-caused impact.

The feral cat problem can be helped by instituting cat licensing and anti-roaming ordinances, enforcing anti-abandonment laws, providing low-cost spay/neuter and educating the public about responsible pet ownership. Those who wish to practice TNR should do so on private property in a closed system so these cats and wildlife can truly be protected. For more information visit www.abcbirds.org/cats and www.TNRrealitycheck.com.

Students Appear to Lack An Understanding of Social Etiquette

As an alumnus of Westfield High School, I understand the importance of allowing the high school seniors to go out to lunch and drive their cars to school. Having this insight has allowed me to be fairly tolerant of the parking situation on Coddling Road: I have only called the police once; I have only called Dr. Petix once.

Despite this leniency, I am disturbed by the disrespect that students show toward both public property and local residents.

Since I moved onto Coddling Road, I have cleaned up garbage strewn on my lawn, and thrown away beer cans and used condoms. I have ignored boys who spit on the street and swear as I walk home from McKinley School, where I teach, to have my lunch. I have even overlooked being yelled at by a student when I asked him to drive more slowly.

While the danger of students speeding has been addressed to the town council and the police department numerous times, what disturbs me most is the fact that I have also witnessed — on more than one occasion — students engaged in lewd or inappropriate behavior while in and around their cars. The recent acts of vandalism on May 25th and June 12th are yet another manifestation of this problem.

These "drawings," photographed at 12:15 p.m., were on display at a time when several kindergartners were being escorted to school, and were left to sit for the afternoon on a block that is home to 29 children ages 11 and under, my own daughter included. Not only that, these cars were parked a mere block from McKinley Elementary School, left in plain view for dozens of young children and their parents.

The students who committed this vandalism have displayed both poor citizenship and extremely faulty judgment, qualities that I do not believe reflect the atti-

tude at Westfield High School. These students will not be the ones left to explain to young children what this graffiti means, just as they are not the ones who clean up the messes they leave behind on the street. We, as the adults involved in this conflict, must ensure that the students learn from their mistakes and accept responsibility (and the consequences) for their inappropriate behavior.

Although this school year is drawing to a close, I expect that the members of our community will come together to resolve this problem before students return in September. I offer one possible solution here: all high school students of age who wish to have a car at school should pay a fee for a school-issued parking permit. In registering for this permit, students would provide their license plate numbers to the school and sign a code of conduct that outlines proper behavior. The money collected from the parking fees can be used by the school to fund a local or independent maintenance crew to clean up the streets.

The adults in our community must stop enabling students who appear to lack an understanding of basic social etiquette. While the students are directly to blame, the high school, the Town Council, the Westfield Police Department and the local residents, myself included, are also at fault for not taking more decisive action in this conflict. Students who commit illegal acts deserve fines and tickets for their behavior, not scolding from their principal.

If these individuals wish to be treated as mature adults, they need to see that their needs are not more important than those of adults in the greater community.

April Krihak
Westfield

Resident Joins Cranford Pool After Placed on Wait List for Westfield

I'm fairly new to Westfield, so perhaps someone can explain the Memorial Pool situation to me. I was a member of the pool for the past two years, but this year I sent in my renewal two days too late. I completely accept the consequences of sending in the renewal late and being placed on a wait list, of which, I was told by the Recreation Dept. that I was number 300.

The thing that baffles me is that when I questioned why other towns are allowed to join the pool or renew their memberships before it is filled with Westfield residents I was told by a staff member of the recreation department that it's not my tax dollars that pays for it, its Green Acres property. That response just doesn't seem right to me.

Part of the benefit of living in this wonderful town is the pool. If the capacity of the pool is a certain number why don't we do what other surrounding towns do and allow the residents to fill it first, then open it up to the surrounding towns. It's bad enough that you have to get on line between 4 a.m. and 5 a.m. just to get into the pool. Is it revenue that drives this since out-of-towners fees are higher than resident fees?

Perhaps it's time to change the policy if Westfield residents can't join their own pool. Well we ended up doing what I was instructed to do by the department staff, who told me to find another pool, so we joined the Cranford pool.

Maria Mancheno
Westfield

PETERSON'S Wines Unlimited

Smart Wines

From Everywhere, At Every Price

LEITZ RUDESHEIMER KLOSTERLAY		
Riesling Kabinett	\$17.99	
Everyone should have a favorite German wine village. It should be a question on dates. "I'm a Libra and Rudesheim." This wine says summer. Hyacinth and wisteria, lime and fennel and mineral. Clean and pure with a wonderful acid grip. This will go with almost anything you might serve.		
JUAN GIL MONASTRELL	\$15.99	
A deep thick wine that will make you want to roast a pig. Filled with blackberry and blueberry fruit and lots of smoky earth tones, it manages to be lush without being too dense. The vivid background of mineral comes from the old vines that have deep roots in limestone.		
PRIMO ESTATE "LA BIONDINA"	\$19.99	
Colombard is a grape that has too often been misused and so has developed a poor reputation. This is clean and bright and filled with pineapple, melon, banana and herb. The little lemon zing on the finish suggests a match with shellfish. Perfect for the back porch too.		

Your Favorite Wines

Blackstone Merlot	\$8.99	750ml
J Lohr Chardonnay	\$10.99	750ml
Simi Chardonnay	\$12.99	750ml
BV Coastal Cab/Merlot/Chardonnay/Pinot Noir	\$7.99	750ml
Hess Select Chardonnay	\$9.99	750ml
Toasted Head Chardonnay	\$10.99	750ml

Your Favorite Vodka

Absolut 80	\$32.99	1.75L
Ketel One	\$34.99	1.75L
Grey Goose	\$25.99	750ml
Smirnoff	\$18.99	1.75L
Stolichnaya	\$30.99	1.75L
Skyv	\$24.99	1.75L
Wolfschmidt	\$13.99	1.75L
Gordons	\$14.99	1.75L

Your Favorite Gin

Bombay Sapphire	\$34.99	1.75L
Tanqueray	\$30.99	1.75L
Hendricks	\$27.99	750ml
Beefeater	\$28.99	1.75L
Gordons	\$14.99	1.75L
Seagrams	\$15.99	1.75L

Wine Of The Week

Hillinger Small Hill Red

\$16.99

A wonderful blend of Merlot, Pinot Noir, and St. Laurent. Complex cherry and earth tones, with minerals and something like lilacs on the nose. From far eastern Austria above the huge lake that moderates there and preserves the acidity needed to balance the lush fruit. A unique blend from a unique location, that suggests a tangy roast pork. Come in and we will show you the soil.

Your Favorite Whiskey

Jack Daniels	\$35.99	1.75L
Jim Beam	\$24.99	1.75L
Seagrams 7	\$15.99	1.75L

Your Favorite Rum

Captain Morgan	\$24.99	1.75L
Bacardi Silver	\$19.99	1.75L
Bacardi Gold	\$19.99	1.75L
Malibu	\$23.99	1.75L

Your Favorite Value Wines

Mondavi Coastal Cab/Merlot/Chardonnay	\$16.99	1.5L
Beringer Founders Cab/Merlot/Chardonnay	\$15.99	1.5L
Woodbridge Cab/Merlot/Chardonnay	\$10.99	1.5L
Vendange Cab/Merlot/Chardonnay	\$6.99	1.5L
Fetzer Cabernet/Chardonnay	\$12.99	1.5L
Cavit Pinot Grigio	\$11.99	1.5L
Walnut Crest Cabernet	\$8.99	1.5L
Cesar Pinot Grigio	\$10.99	1.5L
Bolla Soave	\$10.99	1.5L
Beringer White Zinfandel	\$8.99	1.5L
Franzia Burgundy/Chablis/Chianti	\$10.99	5L
Carlos Rossi Burgundy/Chablis/Paisano/Sangria	\$8.99	4L
Opici Homemade Barbarone	\$11.99	4L

Your Favorite Scotch

Dewars White Label	\$29.99	1.75L
Chivas Regal	\$53.99	1.75L
Johnnie Walker Black	\$56.99	1.75L
Johnnie Walker Red	\$29.99	1.75L
Clan MacGregor	\$16.99	1.75L

Your Favorite Cordials

Baileys	\$17.99	750ml
Romana Sambuca	\$17.99	750ml
Kahlua	\$15.99	750ml
Southern Comfort	\$13.99	750ml
Amaretto Di Saronno	\$18.99	750ml

SUMMER SPECIAL!

10% OFF

Any 2 bottles of wine with this coupon

Mix & Match is O.K. Sale items are excluded. 750ml only. Expires 06/28/06

20% OFF

Any 12 bottles or more of wine

10% OFF

Any 6 bottles or more of wine

We reserve the right to limit quantities while quantities last. Not responsible for typographical errors. All prices do not include state sales tax.

HOURS: Monday - Saturday: 9am to 9:30pm • Sunday: 12pm to 8pm
1120 South Avenue West, Westfield NJ • 908-232-5341

Step up to the Extraordinary

Make Our Mansion Your Mansion

Weddings

Sweet 16 Birthdays

Anniversaries

Funeral Luncheons

Communion Parties

Confirmation Parties

Family Reunions

Team Building

Fund Raisers

and All Celebrations

"The James Ward Mansion"

Catering Facility

Josie Ward - Gallagher: 908-413-0040 (Cell) or 908-389-0014
169 East Broad Street, Westfield, NJ 07090
Visit our website www.Jameswardmansion.com