

## Two Incumbents, WHS Senior Among Five Seeking BOE Seats

By GINA LEVINE-LEVY  
*Specially Written for The Westfield Leader*

WESTFIELD — Five candidates filed Monday for three open seats on the board of education including two incumbents and an 18-year-old Westfield High School (WHS) student. Incumbents Anne Riegel, board president the past two years, and Beth Cassie are vying to win back their seats for three more years. Board member Kimberly Rhodes has opted not to seek reelection. Newcomers to the race are Jesse Garfinkel, who will graduate this year from WHS, Jane Clancy, 42, a mother

of seven and Douglas Stokes, 36, a father of four. Mr. Stokes, whose three school-age children attend McKinley Elementary School, is a curriculum resource teacher in Edison. He also holds a masters degree in education from Rutgers University. "Since I am a teacher by trade, and since I am involved with the day to day operations of schools...I feel that I have a view of how schools work from the inside," A resident of Westfield since 2002, Mr. Stokes said last year's failed school budget raised his level of concern. As both an educator and a

taxpayer, he said he understands the pressures on both the schools and the citizens and hopes to bridge that gap. He said he wants to use his expertise to "help make Westfield schools as great as they can be." He said he would like to tackle class size, overall academics with an emphasis on technology and "community engagement." He wants to enhance communication with senior citizens and the town council and join forces with the department of recreation to offer summer enrichment programs. Mrs. Clancy, a 21-year resident, has two children who graduated from the Westfield school system, one child currently at the high school, two at Edison Intermediate School and two at Tamaques Elementary school. "I've been involved with the Westfield school system the whole time we've lived here, and I'm very impressed," she said. "I'd like to be part of it and see what I can do to enhance what we have." She added, "I consider myself an average concerned citizen."

Mrs. Clancy, whose husband, Bob, grew up in Westfield, is an assistant kindergarten teacher at Presbyterian Nursery School, religious school teacher, girl scout leader, member of the district's citizen advisory committee and has served on the PTO board at Tamaques. "I'm always involved so I know what time commitment entails," she said.

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## BOE Discusses Budget Increases, Program Cuts

By MEGHAN GILL  
*Specially Written for The Westfield Leader*

WESTFIELD — A regular meeting of the board of education on Tuesday included discussion of general education, personnel and budget request items. The board held a special meeting Tuesday night with the town council at the high-school library to discuss the budget process and shared services.

District spokesman Lorre Korrecky described the meeting as a social dinner meeting, which "is intended for two local bodies of government to meet and discuss the proposed school budget and potential shared services." The public could attend, as the "informal" meeting was sunshined according to the state Open Public Meetings law.

She said in the past liaison committees of the council and board met to discuss issues but that this was the first time both bodies have been invited to gather and meet each other. During Tuesday's meeting the board discussed the pending departure of Westfield High School Principal Dr. Robert Petix and possible procedures for the selection process of his replacement. General Education consumable supplies will total \$711,786 for the 2006-07 budget cycle. Consumables, explained Dr. Margaret Dolan, assistant superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction, include "not only workbooks, but any instructional material less than \$1,999. Crayons, pencils and furniture are included in there."

There is also a proposal to increase teaching staff from 500 to 503.4 under the general education section of the budget. Total special education staff members will increase from 143.6 to 151.1, and non-instructional staff will remain the same, at 128.8. The district number for other instructional staff, such as principals, librarians, nurses, guidance, child study team members, supervisors, superintendent and athletic director will remain the same, at 92.5.

The district staff totals will increase from 864.5 to 875.8. Some of the increases have already gone into effect due to enrollment projections. Elementary salaries will increase by 6.99 percent, due in part to a proposal to hire four new teachers. Intermediate school salaries will increase at .55 percent, and high school salaries have a projected increase of .91 percent. Other instructional salaries such as home instruction, basic skills and ESL teachers will increase by 8.13 percent.

"This increase is due to a \$50,000 staff member being replaced by a \$70,000 staff member," Superintendent of Schools Dr. William Foley said. Some possible budget reductions presented to the board as "Superintendent's Recommendations" are Saturday Science, one eighth-grade field hockey coach, intermediate and high-school

intramurals stipend positions, a high-school elective, special area teacher, Jefferson School trailer, virtual high school and others.

"These reductions put board members in a very uncomfortable position. It seems very random to me, I don't feel comfortable supporting these," board member Beth Cassie commented.

In other business, the board briefly discussed the challenges of finding a new high-school principal.

The next board of education meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, March 7 at 8 p.m. at 302 Elm Street.

## DWC Seeks To 'Redefine Partnership' With Town

By MICHAEL J. POLLACK  
*Specially Written for The Westfield Leader*

WESTFIELD — At Tuesday's meeting of the Downtown Westfield Corporation (DWC), Chairman David Martone sought to "redefine" the DWC's commitment and partnership with the town.

Mr. Martone, who owns the Classic Thyme establishment, said he wants people to "understand what comes out of this organization." He spoke of changing "how we're perceived and removing the uncertainties of the perception." Using the words of President John F. Kennedy as a model, he said, "We're all striving for the same thing. We need to change and renew our relationship with the town."

Mr. Martone gave an overall budget review after the meeting with the town council's Finance Policy Committee, headed by First Ward Councilman Peter Echausse. He said the DWC presented its operating budget and made its capital requests. Last year, Mr. Martone said, the council awarded the DWC \$75,000 to create a streetscape plan with "some hard numbers guaranteed by an engineering firm." Mr. Martone said the DWC at the budget meetings presented a six-year plan for streetscapes to be phased in.

"We gave some creative financing ideas to make this more palatable at a time when money is tight," Mr. Martone said. "We wanted to keep the budget flat, but we felt there were some areas where we needed more emphasis, and one was the façade grant program."

Some of the façade programs on tap include "high visibility, high impact projects" on South Avenue at the Tudor Building, which used to house a coffee shop and bicycle business.

Mr. Martone noted that the town requested that the DWC pay back some items appropriated to them over the last year pertaining to their website and "partner up with the \$75,000 plan."

"Initially, when someone asks you for money, you resist, but we looked at this as trying to redefine this partnership. Rather than talking about why

we should or shouldn't, we said, 'let's look at this positively. Let's see how we can help better lay the groundwork to partnering more with the town.'"

Representatives from the town council reported that the finance committee "unanimously recommended moving forward with phase one," said Town administrator Jim Gildea. He said the plan is contingent upon the firm of Christopher Statile meeting with the council and going through "all of the elements of what phase one incorporates."

The downtown improvement plan includes work on the South Avenue station square, Central Avenue corridor, integration of parking lot improvements, pedestrian walkways, new street lighting fixtures, brick pavers, new trees protected by iron fencing and a downtown sidewalk replacement plan.

Representing the town council, First Ward Councilman Sal Caruana said that at this stage, "the finance committee is going to recommend that the council adopt the first phase of the improvement plan on a 50/50 basis. The financing goal for phase two should be a three-way partnership between the town, the DWC and the grants."

In other matters, Executive Director Sherry Cronin said so far, the DWC has spent most of its money on organizational expenses, which is expected because most promotions haven't started yet. Thus far, the group has spent \$15,487.49 of an allotted \$390,970.

In terms of promotions, Ms. Cronin announced that this month represents March for the Arts, an effort to appreciate the arts in Westfield, as artwork is displayed in local stores. The Newark Museum will offer Westfield Community Day on Sunday, March 26, where the museum is offering free admission.

In addition, to "promote commerce during a slow period," from March 15 to April 15, the DWC is holding a "W dollar" promotion similar to the WAM

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## 4 File For 2 MS BOE Seats; Pat Knodel Will Not Run

By GINA LEVY  
*Specially Written for The Westfield Leader*

MOUNTAINSIDE — Four residents, including one incumbent filed Monday for two seats on the borough's board of education.

Incumbent MaryBeth Schaumburg will defend her seat on the board although veteran board member Patricia Knodel, will not seek reelection. Also seeking seats are Cathy Jakositz, Geraldene Duswalt and Joseph Tinnirella.

Mr. Tinnirella, 43, has two children, both at Deerfield School.

"I really have a strong commitment to youth," said the resident of nine years. "I am a fervent believer that you have to have a solid educational foundation."

"I think we have a good educa-



ASSISTING MOTORIST...Westfield firefighters work to free a trapped motorist from a Jeep Cherokee after the vehicle overturned following a Monday morning accident at Westfield Avenue and Washington Street. The driver was taken to University Hospital in Newark.

## Councilman Echausse Addresses Five 'Budget Busters' in 2006

By MICHAEL J. POLLACK  
*Specially Written for The Westfield Leader*

WESTFIELD — During Tuesday's council meeting, committee chairs gave updates to the council on complications operating during a statewide "fiscal imbalance," traffic hot spots, combating McMansions and the new roads to be repaired in 2006, respectively. For the second straight week, Third Ward Councilman Mark Ciarrocca led the council as acting mayor.

First Ward Councilman and Finance Policy Committee Chairman Peter Echausse directed attention to the "fiscal imbalance in Trenton," combining a \$1 billion operating budget and under-funded pensions. He said that state aid equates to 12 or 13 percent of the town's municipal budget, but it has been flat since 2002 and can't significantly pare down the budget. He cited five "budget busters" to property taxes, including the police and fire employees' retirement system, assessment of the Rahway Valley Sewerage Authority, library expenditures mandated by

the state and health insurance.

To further clarify, Councilman Echausse told *The Westfield Leader*, "the state has not under-funded the pension system. It's really that the investment performance of the pension systems (i.e. investment losses) over the past three years, coupled with increasing benefits, has resulted in the pension systems being under funded by billions of dollars. During the late 1990s, the pension systems were over-funded, which provided budgetary relief to local municipalities. Local governments now need to contribute to these municipal pension plans in order to make up the multi-billion pension deficits."

Public Safety, Transportation and Parking Committee Chairman and First Ward Councilman Sal Caruana spoke of the eight traffic hot spots, particularly Franklin and McKinley Elementary Schools, where he said improvements are on schedule for Saturday, April 1. In addition, McKinley School will see the addi-

tion of a temporary crossing guard by April 1.

The councilman mentioned that he had met with Police Chief John Parizeau before the meeting and said the position of parking director, previously held by John Morgan, will be "divided in responsibility and centralized, with three or four officers pooling their strengths together."

Acting Mayor Ciarrocca noted that Detective Sergeant John Rowe would take over many of the responsibilities of Captain Morgan.

Code Review and Town Property Committee Chairman and Fourth Ward Councilman Jim Foerst said his committee would introduce three initiatives to "restrict McMansions." He mentioned legislation to change the floor-to-area ratio, which pertains to home's volume, addressing aesthetic and safety issues, including fencing, Porto Johns and other quality of life concerns, and assisting the tree preservation and building departments.

Public Works Committee Chairman and Second Ward Councilwoman Jo Ann Neylan said the 2006 road list is being finalized. Because of the impending budget crunch, the committee is taking a "less aggressive approach" as compared to last year's \$2 million investment in road upkeep. This year's list of roads to be repaired includes: Prospect Street, Ferris Place, Karen Terrace, Mountain View Terrace, Boulevard, Coddling Road, Lynwood Place and Hyslip Avenue. Holdovers include: North Chestnut Street, Scotch Plains, Hillside, Kimball and Highland Av-

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## Overdose Kills Westfield Man

By SUZETTE F. STALKER  
*Specially Written for The Westfield Leader*

WESTFIELD — A 30-year-old man was found dead last week at his residence at an apartment complex in the 1000 block of Central Avenue from what authorities confirmed was a drug overdose.

Police discovered the man, identified as Erik Graber, after receiving a report at 7:30 a.m. on February 22 regarding an unconscious man at the Duncan Hill Apartments, according to Sergeant Scott Rodger of the Westfield Police Department.

Sergeant Rodger told *The Westfield Leader* Tuesday that police were called by a neighbor of the deceased who had been alerted to the situation by Mr. Graber's four-year-old daughter, who lived with him. Mr. Graber was found dead by police who arrived at the scene, Sergeant Rodger said.

Although the cause of death was determined to be a drug overdose, Sergeant Rodger said it had not yet been confirmed exactly what type of substance was involved.

The sergeant said he did not know how long Mr. Graber had lived in Westfield. He stated that the child's grandmother flew in from Minnesota and had taken custody of her.



BRINGING IN BIG GUNS...Senator John McCain of Arizona, left, campaigns for State Senator and U.S. Senate candidate Tom Kean, Jr. at a fundraiser Sunday at the Short Hills Hilton.

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