



David Samsky for The Westfield Leader

PAL BOWL...Irvington Raiders PAL football players take the field at Giants Stadium during Sunday's halftime to play in front of nearly 70,000 football fans. Westfield PAL coach John Dugan and members of the Giants administration arranged the special event for the Irvington Raiders as a Christmas gift.

Something Special this Christmas

Westfield Helps Irvington PAL Play in Giants Halftime Show

EAST RUTHERFORD – Sunday evening at Giants Stadium in East Rutherford was cold and windy for some who attended the Giants-Redskins game. But for the kids from the Irvington Raiders PAL football team, the weather was perfect. It was their chance of a lifetime to play in front of nearly 70,000 fans at halftime.

A few weeks ago, the Giants contacted Westfield PAL Coach John Dugan about fielding a team for halftime. Beth Roche, director of marketing services and youth program development for the Giants, said, "The Westfield PAL has always been a great partner with the Giants over the years, and we knew that we could count on them for a solution to the halftime show."

From there, the Giants and the Westfield PAL determined that the Irvington Raiders, another team in the Suburban Youth Football League (SYFL), would be the best choice for the halftime show.

"As the bus pulled into the parking lot of the Meadowlands on Sunday evening, the players' faces just lit up; they were really excited," Coach Dugan said. "We had the opportunity to do this a few times before with our players, and we remember the impact that this had on the players, as well as the community."

"As an organization, the PAL felt that the players from Irvington really deserved to have something special this Christmas season. These kids have a lot to deal with on a daily basis, and we thought that an opportunity like this – to play football in front of a Giants Stadium crowd – would be a great idea and let the people in Irvington know that the Westfield PAL cared about them. This is what our PAL program is all about – when

another PAL program needs us, we are there for them," he said.

"Excited cannot describe how these kids reacted when we told them," said Ken West, the Irvington Raiders coach. "The coaches were just as excited, too. We all had a great time out on the field Sunday night and we cannot thank the Westfield PAL enough for this wonderful gift to our kids."

"Westfield has been very good to our program over the years, donating shirts, cleats [and] trophies, among other items," Coach West said.

Coach Dugan said, "The Westfield Leader also got involved as did some people who assist with photography for the PAL. Once Horace and Dave Corbin (Leader publisher and assistant publisher, respectively) learned of this event, they immediately asked how they could help and provide one of their top photographers, Dave Samsky, who accompanied PAL photographer Karen O'Leary to Giants Stadium."

"We got some really great shots of these boys; I can't wait to see the looks on their faces when they get these photos," Ms. O'Leary said.

The Leader provided glossy prints for each of the 44 players as a holiday gift that they will receive this week.

The Giants videotaped the halftime program and will give the video to the Irvington PAL as a gift.

As the bus pulled away from Giants Stadium after the halftime show, Coach West remarked how quiet and tired the kids were because it was such a late game.

"I heard one of our players say, 'That was the best thing that I have ever done in my life. I will never, ever forget this day for as long as I live,'" Coach West said.

WF BOE Discusses State Aid

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sults of the proposed formula.

The legislator also said that Governor Corzine has said a "hold-harmless" clause in the proposed legislation would guarantee all districts a 2-percent increase for the next three years.

"This means that, at the end of those three years, we could lose state aid," Mr. Bramnick said.

"It sends a terrible message. This is a town where the board of education does a great job, the superintendent is working hard, and this is the result," he said.

Board member Gary McCready asked whether legislators would have all the details of the funding formula before voting.

"There is nothing yet to vote on – this bill has not yet been drafted," Mr. Bramnick said. He said the bill would not necessarily contain the details of the formula but might be left for the state Department of Education to sort out.

"So, what you are saying is that legislators could be passing something on which they do not know the details?" Mr. McCready asked.

"This is not uncommon," Mr. Bramnick responded.

Board member Alice Hunnicutt expressed concern about the negative impact this minimal state-aid increase would have on Westfield's special-education program.

"I think the special-education funding is discriminatory, just as Abbott

funding was found to be discriminatory," Ms. Hunnicutt said.

She said the need for special-education services crosses all socio-economic lines. She also said statistics have shown higher instances of autism in more affluent communities.

"And, according to this funding formula, we are losing money for special-education," Ms. Dolan said.

See more on the proposed school-aid formula in a report on page 1.

Board member Beth Cassie expressed concern about how the minimal aid increase could affect the town as a whole. She said while statistics show a 62-percent increase in wealth, not all residents have experienced that increase.

Ms. Cassie said the effect of holding back state funding could be that "we change the composition of the town. What is part of the appeal of Westfield is the diversity in income levels. What this will create is a real separation between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots,'" she said.

Mr. Bramnick said her point is a "good example" of what should be voiced to Governor Corzine and State Education Commissioner Lucille Davy, a former Westfield resident. He encouraged the public to act on this quickly by writing letters in opposition of the proposal.

"I know I will not be on the Governor's Christmas list this year," Mr. Bramnick said.

State Education Aid Formula

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tion aid will increase by \$470 million statewide in 2008-2009.

"For each district, one-third of this special education component will be funded on a categorical basis and two-thirds will be funded on a wealth-equalized basis," according to the press release.

In addition, the state would now fund 75 percent of special-education per-pupil costs that exceed \$40,000 for an in-district program or \$55,000 for out-of-district programs.

Scotch Plains-Fanwood Superintendent of Schools Margaret Hayes said that, while she was happy to receive a 10-percent increase in aid while other towns received 2 percent, the district's special-education per-pupil funding from the state has decreased over the past six years.

She said special-education funding in the district was \$2,922,326 in 2001-2002, which equates to \$4,887 per student, compared to aid of \$3,202,000 and a per-pupil state aid of \$4,191 in 2007-2008.

There were 598 district pupils classified as special-education students in 2001, compared to 764 in 2007-2008. Special-education aid projections are \$3,668,000 for 2008-2009, which would result in state aid of \$4,649 per special-education student for the projected 789 special-education students for 2008-2009.

She said some categories have been eliminated while others have been added. Ms. Hayes said school officials are seeking more information on the aid categories and how the formula was calculated "so we can

build a budget logically."

"Once we know, it will help us with our long-range planning," Ms. Hayes said. Despite the increase in aid, she said the district is "concerned" that the district's school budget would still mainly be funded through property taxes.

Assemblyman Jon Bramnick (LD-21, Westfield) said he is mobilizing an e-mail campaign to oppose the new formula, saying the state did not take into account that "many" districts, including Westfield, have been flat-funded for years.

"District 21 is behind the curve [in education funding]. We need to be on equal [footing] with other districts," Mr. Bramnick told *The Leader*. "I think it is fundamentally unfair that [flat finding of districts] has not been part of this formula."

"I intend to fight on the floor of the Legislature against a formula that is not fair to all districts," he said. "I am extremely disappointed and not happy that the formula is unfair, but the fight is not over."

Assemblyman Eric Munoz (LD-21, Summit) said the 21st Legislative District, which includes Cranford, Summit, Millburn, Mountainside and Westfield, pays "\$800 to \$850 million" in state income taxes annually but receives around \$27 million in education funding, which, he said, breaks down to 3 cents on the tax dollar in education funding. "So really it is an abomination," he said.

"We're the cash cows and they (Democrats) control the state government," Mr. Munoz said.

He said legislation to make the new formula state law should be introduced in the "next two weeks" in the lame-duck session, which he expects will be passed by the Democrat-controlled Legislature.

The *Westfield Leader* also placed calls for comment to Senator Nick Scutari (LD-22, Linden), Assemblywoman Linda Stender (LD-22, Fanwood) and Union County Superintendent of Schools Carmen Centuolo.

Proposed State Education Aid For Local School Districts

School District	Increase (%)	Increase (\$)
Westfield	2	99,000
Cranford	20	604,000
Scotch Plains-Fanwood	10	451,000
Mountainside	20	148,000
Garwood	20	112,000
Union County Vo-Tech	20	745,000
Millburn	10	361,000
Bernards	20	826,000
New Providence	10	156,000
Watchung Hills Regional	10	158,000
Glen Ridge	10	114,000

GW Recognizes Officers Who Saved Man's Life

By KATHY MARQUES
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

GARWOOD – Nearly 30 residents came out to Tuesday's council meeting to recognize the courage of three Garwood police officers and one dispatcher in saving a Mountainside resident's life.

On August 31, dispatcher Thomas Gesior received a 911-distress call from Gold Medal Fitness, saying Michael Sheehy, a senior citizen from Mountainside, was unconscious.

When patrolmen Samuel Rocco, Jr. and David Perrotta arrived at the scene, Mr. Sheehy had stopped breathing and ceased to have a pulse.

The patrolmen began administering CPR until Lieutenant Bruce Underhill arrived with an automatic defibrillator, which was used to regain the man's heartbeat.

Mayor Dennis McCarthy honored Mr. Gesior, Patrolmen Rocco and Perrotta and Lt. Underhill with a certificate, thanking them for their courage.

"On behalf of the residents of Garwood, I would like to thank you for your brave work in saving this man's life," the mayor said. "I know Police Chief [William] Legg is proud to have you on the force, and Garwood is a safer and better town having you all here. Mr. Sheehy, we are happy that you are doing well and that our police officers were able to assist you in your time of need," Mayor McCarthy said.

Mr. Sheehy said he was grateful to the Garwood police department for saving his life.

"And during the Christmas season," Mr. Sheehy said, "this is the best gift anyone could get – the gift of life."

Under committee reports, Charles Lombardo, council president, reminded residents to bag their leaves

for trash removal.

Borough residents can pick up biodegradable bags at the department of public works building from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. More information is available at garwood.org.

Councilwoman Kathleen Villaggio, the school-board liaison, said the board of education might be in line for \$112,000 in additional school-aid funding.

She said, "I urged the legislature to adopt the new school-funding plan to assist the taxpayers."

See additional school-aid information in a report on page 1.

Mayor McCarthy congratulated Mr. Lombardo, who did not win reelection this year, for his more than 20 years as councilman.

"You have won seven consecutive elections, happily serving the residents of Garwood. You will be missed. We wish your family lots of luck and happiness for the future," the mayor said. Mr. Lombardo thanked his family for allowing him "to be on the council for as long as I have been," he said, holding back tears.

"I have made many friends and thank the residents of Garwood for their faithful support."

After its reorganization meeting on January 6 at 3 p.m., the first council meeting of the year will be held on January 8 at 7 p.m.

Garwood Reorg. Set For Jan. 6 at 3 p.m.

GARWOOD – The borough council's annual reorganization meeting will be held on Sunday, January 6, at 3 p.m., in the council chambers located in the municipal building at 403 South Avenue. Public attendance is encouraged and welcomed. Those seeking more information can call (908) 789-0710.



courtesy of the Union County Prosecutor's Office

ON THE LOOSE... Prisoners Jose Espinosa, 20, of Elizabeth and Otis Blunt, 32, of Toms River escaped from the Union County jail Saturday night by removing one cement cinderblock between their cells and one along the back wall of Espinosa's cell (at right) before jumping to a rooftop below. They then leaped over a 25-foot-high barbed-wire fence, as shown above. Multiple law-enforcement agencies are searching for the two men.

Union County Prison Break

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The Union County Police Department, Union County Sheriff's Warrant Squad and Canine Unit and all local police departments are conducting a search for the inmates. A statewide alert has also been issued.

According to County Sheriff Ralph Froehlich, the canine unit was able to follow the scent from the point of impact, where the inmates are believed to have landed on the ground outside the fence, to the spot where they split up.

"The dogs have the scent. We'll be able to use that to our advantage," Sheriff Froehlich said.

Authorities have said the two men are considered dangerous. Union County Police Chief Daniel Vaniska, whose agency is heading up the search, has asked anyone with information on the case to contact Detective Scott Pence of the Union County Police at (908) 654-9800 or call Crimestoppers at (908) 654-TIPS.

Crimestoppers is offering a reward of up to \$5,000 for the arrest and conviction of Espinosa and Blunt. All calls to Crimestoppers are strictly confidential and anonymous, the prosecutor's office said.



POLICE BLOTTER

Westfield

Wednesday, December 12, three juveniles, all of Plainfield, were arrested and charged with possession of stolen property after they were stopped at North and Lenox Avenues in an automobile that had been stolen out of South Plainfield.

The driver of the vehicle, a 17-year-old male, also was wanted on an outstanding detention warrant from the Union County Sheriff's Department. He was turned over to the Juvenile Detention Center in Elizabeth.

One of his passengers, a 16-year-old male from Plainfield, was wanted on a state warrant and was turned over to state authorities. A second passenger, a 15-year-old female, was released to a responsible adult.

Thursday, December 13, Paul Flores, 26, of North Plainfield was arrested during a motor-vehicle stop at South and Windsor Avenues on a contempt-of-court warrant out of Piscataway. He posted \$90 bail and was released.

Saturday, December 15, David Rudnicki, 30, of Westfield was arrested at Westfield police headquarters on a contempt-of-court warrant from Westfield. He was processed and released after posting \$500 bail.

Sunday, December 16, Leonard Cusumano, 26, of Laurence Harbor was arrested at Central and Ayliffe Avenues for allegedly driving while intoxicated. He was held pending release to a responsible individual.

Monday, December 17, three people were arrested on drug charges after police responded to a report of a suspicious motor vehicle at an apartment building on Central Avenue. Officers located the vehicle and conducted an investigation, after which the arrests were made.

Cristal Core, 23, of Cranford was charged with possession of ecstasy, possession of heroin and possession of drug paraphernalia. William Fedirko, 19, of Cranford and Robert Scherer, 20, of Garwood, each were charged with possession of ecstasy. All were released on their own recognizance pending a grand-jury action.

Mountainside

Wednesday, December 12, Lynwood T. Johnson, 36, of East Orange was arrested at the Essex County jail on an outstanding warrant in the amount of \$2,183.

Scotch Plains

Friday, December 14, a student at the Union County Vocational Technical School reported that someone stole his iPod, valued at \$300, from his locker.

Friday, December 14, a resident of Rolling Knolls reported that someone obtained his credit-card information without authorization and made several hundred dollars worth of purchases.

Friday, December 14, a resident of Raritan Road reported that someone broke the window on the side of his house.

Saturday, December 15, a resident of Morse Avenue reported that he did work for a homeowner and the check he was given for payment came back for insufficient funds. According to police, the homeowner now refuses to pay for the contracted work.

Sunday, December 16, Raheem Byrd, 28, of Las Vegas, Nev., was arrested for an outstanding warrant after a motor-vehicle stop. According to police, Byrd was transported to headquarters, processed and released.

Sunday, December 16, Anthony Perdigao, of Newark was arrested and charged with unlawful taking of a motor vehicle and possession of a controlled dangerous substance. According to police, a report was taken from a woman who said she lent her car to Perdigao, who failed to return it. The suspect was apprehended with the vehicle at which time crack cocaine was found in his possession, police said.

Sunday, December 16, a resident of Harwich Court reported that he received several packages along with bills for orders he did not place. According to police, the victim does not know how his credit-card information was obtained.

Fanwood

Friday, December 14, a resident of Park Avenue reported that sometime between December 13 and December 14, someone removed her wallet from her unlocked vehicle while it was parked in the 500 block of North Avenue.

Saturday, December 15, a resident in the 100 block of Farley Avenue reported that sometime between December 14 at 11:30 p.m. and December 15 at noon, someone entered his unlocked vehicle and removed a camera bag containing a camera, lens and a flash card.

The victim also reported that a similar incident occurred sometime between Friday, December 7, after 11 p.m. and Saturday, December 8, before 10 a.m., when someone entered another unlocked vehicle and removed expensive sunglasses and sterling silver earrings. Police are investigating both incidents.

Saturday, December 15, Kathleen D. Filippone, 59, of Roselle was arrested on an outstanding Cranford warrant after a motor-vehicle stop in the 100 block of Martine Avenue.

Monday, December 17, John W. Moshal, 40, of Scotch Plains was arrested on an outstanding Garwood warrant after a motor-vehicle stop on Midway Avenue.

Tuesday, December 18, Stacy L. Theofilos, 24, of South Plainfield was arrested for DWI and refusal to submit to a breathalyzer after a motor-vehicle stop on Terrill Road.

Tuesday, December 18, Michael R. Ross, 26, of Scotch Plains was arrested and charged with an outstanding warrant out of Irvington after a motor-vehicle stop on La Grande Avenue.



THANK YOU...Tuesday night Garwood Mayor Dennis McCarthy congratulates Councilman Charles Lombardo, who did not win re-election this year, for his more than 20 years as councilman. "You have won seven consecutive elections, happily serving the residents of Garwood. You will be missed," the mayor said.

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