



# TIMES

OUR 48TH YEAR - ISSUE NO. 52-2007      USPS 485200      Periodical - Postage Paid at Scotch Plains, N.J.      Thursday, December 27, 2007      Published Every Thursday Since 1959      www.timesnj.com      (908) 232-4407      press@goleader.com      SIXTY CENTS

## 2007 Year In Review: Part 1 - January to June Charlie Brown's Burns, Fanwood Mews Falls, LeStrange Files Lawsuit



**COLLAPSE (May 17)**...The collapse of a concrete firewall at the South Avenue Station Mews redevelopment project brought down the roof of Livingston-Wilbor Corporation, left, on May 15. The collapse trapped three individuals inside the business. Two injured people were Medivac'd to Robert Wood University Hospital in New Brunswick. FULLY ENGULFED (January 25)...A fire broke out in Charlie Brown's restaurant located on North Avenue around 4 a.m. on January 24. The Scotch Plains Fire Department responded along with mutual-aid units from surrounding towns. The restaurant burned to the ground.



Steven Kasich and Benjamin B. Corbin for *The Westfield Leader* and *The Times*

**JANUARY Westfield**  
The year began with multiple area Catholic churches reporting the theft of nativity figures from outdoor displays on the New Year's Eve and New Year's Day. Westfield Councilman Sal Caruana called the incidents "premeditated acts of religious hatred."  
At the first town council meeting of the year, former mayors and council members, along with state politicians, came to town hall to hear Mayor Andy Skibitsky deliver his State of the Town address. The mayor offered four goals for 2007 - spending tax dollars "as efficiently and wisely as possible," improving communication, controlling development and improving pedestrian and traffic safety.  
Councilman Tom Bigosinski voted against the reappointment of labor attorney Rick Danser and Town Attorney Robert Cockren. Fellow Democrat David Haas voted in favor of the appointments, as did the mayor and other council members, all Republicans.  
Westfield Police Detective Sandra Chambers filed a sexual-harassment lawsuit against the town, the Westfield Police Department (WPD) and former

police chief Bernard Tracy. Detective Chambers has been employed by the WPD since 1995.  
The six-count lawsuit alleged that "during a two-year period, Chief Tracy regularly called Detective Chambers at home, during non-working hours and late into the evening" and that Mr. Tracy invited Detective Chambers "to call him on his personal cell phone."  
State elected officials revealed at a board-of-education meeting that Union County would not be picked as part of a proposed bill for a countywide school district pilot program.  
Senator Tom Kean, Jr. and Assemblyman Jon Bramnick, both of Westfield, and Lynne Strickland, executive director of the Garden State

Coalition of Schools, appeared before the BOE to report on the status of this proposed bill. "The bill is not dead yet, but the possibility of the potential for Union County seems to be far removed," Ms. Strickland said.  
Recreation Director Bruce Kaufmann told the town council that architects have rendered drawings of Memorial Pool, complete with upgrades to the kiddie pool and a replacement to the main pool. He said the replacements would take effect in time for the 2008 season.  
Councilman Jim Foerst said that the "bulk" of 2007 pool membership increases were due to the newly expanded state sales tax that grew to include pool memberships.  
With 25-percent turnout, Westfield voters approved a \$9.4-million school bond by 619 votes at a special board-of-education election. The \$6 million-bond will be utilized to renovate Lincoln School at 728 Westfield Avenue for use as an early-childhood learning center. The center will house all of the town's kindergartners and disabled pre-kindergarten students.  
"It is an impressive showing of community support," then-BOE President Anne Riegel said. "We had a lot of residents working to explain what this bond meant for our community. This is a significant move forward for our schools."  
Westfield and Mountainside Postmaster Kenneth Brown retired after 36 years with the U.S. Postal Service.  
**Garwood Borough**  
Mayor Dennis McCarthy was sworn in for a second four-year term; Councilwoman Kathleen Villaggio took the oath for another three-year term and Keith Sluka took the oath for his first term as a councilman.  
Resident Bruce Paterson called the mayor and council "thugs" and "criminals" in regards to the timing of a letter developer James Ward sent to borough residents telling them of his decision not to lease the St. Anne's School, which he had acquired, to the

Union County Educational Services Commission's Hillcrest Academy. The Westfield BOE had ended the school's lease at the town's Lincoln School facility following the arrest of the four students on vandalism and auto-theft charges.  
Mr. Ward said in the letter that he would pursue his original plan to construct age-restricted housing at the site.  
**Mountainside**  
State Senator Tom Kean, Jr. and Assemblyman Jon Bramnick, (both LD-21, Westfield) addressed the borough BOE and nearly 100 residents to discuss legislation proposing a county-run school district.  
The father of a Union Catholic High School student who was arrested for hosting a party for underage drinkers in November 2006 entered a not-guilty plea in Mountainside Municipal Court.  
Chief School Administrator (CSA) Richard O'Malley presented the first phase of 2007-2008 school budget at a BOE meeting. Mr. O'Malley said a main goal for next year is to maintain "current pupil-to-staff ratios and class-size averages."  
He said the biggest jump in enrollment would be in kindergarten, in which there could be more than 100 students enrolled. There were 73 kindergarten students registered in 2006-2007.  
The borough council considered purchasing metal detectors for the municipal court, as recommended by the state Supreme Court.  
**Chantl**  
Mueller, 20, of Fanwood was killed after her Acura went off Route 22 and struck a telephone pole before striking numerous small trees in front of Sheffield Street businesses.  
The borough council appointed Jill Goode chief financial officer (CFO), former CFO Dianne Marus supervisor of accounts and attorney James Foerst, a Westfield councilman, public defender.

part of the agreement, Mr. Mukherji was banned from having any contact with the two women he allegedly stalked - a Rutgers University student and a woman he had attended high school with in Union County.  
**Area**  
A federal judge ruled in favor of Union County in dismissing a lawsuit brought by a former corrections officer who had charged he was terminated in retaliation for his testimony against corrections officers in 1998.  
Juan Espinoza assisted the county prosecutor's office in its investigation of corrections officers involved in the beating and harassing of Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) detainees in 1995 at an Elizabeth detention facility.  
**FEBRUARY Westfield**  
The town council approved an ordinance setting salaries for the Policemen's Benevolent Association (PBA) Local 90. The four-year contract, reached following an eight-hour negotiation session in late December 2006, is retroactive to 2006 and ends in 2009.  
Under the new contract, a grade 1 police officer, who made \$33,277 in 2005, saw an 8-percent spike in pay to \$35,947 in 2007. In 2009, a grade 1 officer will make \$40,031 - a 38-percent increase in seven years.  
A police lieutenant who earned \$90,789 in 2005 made \$95,881 in 2007 - a 5.6-percent jump. A Westfield police captain earned \$103,500 this year and will realize a 13.8-percent hike in the contract's final year to \$117,850.  
In other news, Town Administrator Jim Gildea said the town and Officer Greg Kasko had reached an agree-



Courtesy of Heidi Hylan  
**FLOODING PARKS (April 19)**... Mindowaskin Park in Westfield floods in April from heavy rains of a storm that clobbered the northeast.



Susan M. Dougherty for *The Leader/Times*  
**SAVE THE DATE (April 12)**...Former Governors Brendan Byrne, left, and Richard Codey, center, along with Assemblyman Jon Bramnick of Westfield, gather in the Paper Mill Playhouse courtyard before an April rally to save the theater from closing its doors.



David Samsky for *The Westfield Leader* and *The Times*  
**A LASTING TRIBUTE (May 31)**...Morgan's Rifles, a Revolutionary War reenactment group, fires off a salute in honor of fallen United States war veterans. Members of Lambs Artillery, another reenactment organization, joined them.



Victoria McCabe for *The Leader/Times*  
**ROLL OUT THE GREEN CARPET (May 31)**...Andrew Shue, left, organized a special premiere of "Gracie," parts of which were filmed in Westfield, at the Maplewood Theater on May 29. The film, about a high-schooler chasing her dream of playing soccer, was inspired by the life of Elisabeth Shue. Above, stars Andrew Shue, Carly Schroeder and Elisabeth Shue and director Davis Guggenheim attend the "green carpet" premiere.



Ingrid McKinley for *The Westfield Leader* and *The Times*  
**PARADE O' THE IRISH (March 15)**...Union Township hosted Union County's annual St. Patrick's Day Parade, one of the largest parades in the state on March 10. The parade has been an area institution since 1997. Thousands of marchers and spectators participated and viewed the parade. Students of Union Catholic High School in Scotch Plains carry flags representing the 32 counties of Ireland. Inset, a member of the Union County Police and Fire Pipes and Drums keeps rhythm as he marches.

ment of bipartisanship to the process. Mayor Marks said, "We are not building a government from scratch," adding that those reappointed served the township "remarkably well."  
An early morning three-alarm fire destroyed Charlie Brown's Steakhouse on North Avenue. The fire resulted in the closure of North Avenue. Officials said contract workers smelled smoke in the building and called 911. A company representative at the scene said workers were doing grouting work on bathroom tiles at the time.  
Scotch Plains Fire Chief Jonathan Ellis said the fire call came in at 3:45 a.m. and that the fire began "in a wall behind the bar."  
The cause remained unknown, although Scotch Plains Police Lieutenant Brian Donnelly said, "It appears at this point to be accidental."  
Fire departments from Westfield, Fanwood, Kenilworth, Cranford, Mountainside, Garwood, Plainfield and Elizabeth reported to the scene.  
**Fanwood**  
David Valian was sworn in as a new councilman; Councilwoman Donna Dolce began her second term.  
A five-count indictment by a Middlesex County grand jury against a Fanwood lobbyist, developer, businessman and Marine Corps intelligence specialist was dismissed after Raj Mukherji, 22, pleaded guilty to a trespassing charge following a plea agreement reached with the Middlesex County Prosecutor's Office.  
Mr. Mukherji had initially been indicted on two counts of stalking and one count each of witness tampering, burglary and contempt. Assistant Prosecutor Manuel Sameiro said the burglary charge was reduced to trespassing and "all the other charges were dismissed."  
"I think it is a fair resolution in light of the victims' desires. They approved the plea," Mr. Sameiro said.  
The assistant prosecutor said as

late December 2006, is retroactive to 2006 and ends in 2009.  
Under the new contract, a grade 1 police officer, who made \$33,277 in 2005, saw an 8-percent spike in pay to \$35,947 in 2007. In 2009, a grade 1 officer will make \$40,031 - a 38-percent increase in seven years.  
A police lieutenant who earned \$90,789 in 2005 made \$95,881 in 2007 - a 5.6-percent jump. A Westfield police captain earned \$103,500 this year and will realize a 13.8-percent hike in the contract's final year to \$117,850.  
In other news, Town Administrator Jim Gildea said the town and Officer Greg Kasko had reached an agree-

see local and regional news pages 13-14



Greg Ryan for *The Westfield Leader* and *The Times*  
**WE ARE THE CHAMPIONS (March 1)**...The Westfield High School girls swim team poses outside of the high school after winning the Public A NJSIAA State Championship, beating West Winsor-Plainsboro South, 96-74.

### PAGE INDEX

Year .....	2-3, 8	Sports .....	9-12	Obituary .....	16
Editorial .....	4-5	Real Estate .....	10	Classifieds .....	16
Community ...	6-7	Regional .....	13-14	A&E .....	17-18