

## Mayor Delivers 'State of Town'; Council Welcomes Frank Arena

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

WESTFIELD - Mayor Andy Skibitsky anticipated a year in which budgetary issues would represent the town's biggest challenges, especially with the departure of Finance Committee Chairman Peter Echausse. Before a standing-room-only audience at Tuesday's reorganization meeting, the mayor discussed these and other

concerns while welcoming Mr. Echausse's successor to the council. State Superior Court Judge Douglas Fasciale swore in new First Ward Councilman Frank Arena, who defeated Democrat Ross Katz in November. Mr. Arena joined re-elected incumbents JoAnn Neylan, Mark Ciarrocca and James Foerster, all Republicans, on the council.

Mr. Arena, as per the mayoral com-

mittee appointments, will sit on the Public Safety, Transportation and Parking Committee and serve as vice chairman of the Code Review and Town Property Committee.

After describing the "state of the town" as "in a word, excellent," the mayor touted the town's role in "easing the burden of property taxes" by pursuing all available grants in order to upgrade infrastructure. He also listed rebuilding lots 1 and 8, offering TV-36 to Verizon FIOS viewers and "remaining a leader in the area of pursuing and utilizing shared services" as successes of the previous year.

Turning to possible hurdles in the coming year, the mayor acknowledged, "There is no doubt that 2008 will present some very difficult challenges. Nowhere will that be more evident than in the area of the budget."

Despite Mr. Echausse's retirement, the mayor said the town was "fortunate" to have the services of Sal Caruana, first-ward councilman, who will step in as finance committee chairman.

In addition to fiscal initiatives, the mayor highlighted public-safety, infrastructure-maintenance and quality-of-life issues as paramount in 2008.

Under the area of public safety, the mayor said he would like to see the "Safe Routes to School Program" implemented and an "e-alert system," whose costs would be shared with the board of education, enacted.

In 2008, the mayor envisioned completing the pool and police dispatch-center improvements while beginning to address the South Avenue streetscape project.

He also said the council would work to finalize the quiet zone at the Rahway Avenue crossing and implement the recommendations of the land-use taskforce.

Mayor Skibitsky also commented on the revised school-aid formula, which passed in both houses of the State Legislature on Monday night.

"Westfield stands to receive a

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Greg Ryan for The Westfield Leader

INCOMING FRESHMAN...Rayland Van Blake takes the oath of office as the newest member of Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders from attorney Mohammed Jalloh as his mother, Claire, looks on. See story on page 3.

## Napolitano, Sytko Take Seats On Garwood Borough Council

By KATHY MARQUES  
*Specialty Written for The Westfield Leader*

GARWOOD - More than 60 people attended the borough council reorganization meeting Sunday afternoon in Garwood, including New Jersey State Senator Tom Kean, Jr. and Assemblyman Jon Bramnick (both LD-21, Westfield).

Mayor Dennis McCarthy swore in Anthony Sytko, a Republican, and Stephen Napolitano, a Democrat, as council members. Former Republican councilman Victor DeFillippo did not seek re-election, and Democrat Charles Lombardo lost his bid for another term in the November election.

The council elected Councilwoman Kathleen Villaggio its president for the third time, taking over Mr. Lombardo's place. She said she was "honored" to be voted council president.

Mr. Napolitano thanked Mr. Lombardo and Mr. DeFillippo for their more than "20 years of continued service to the town residents. Their hard work will not be forgotten." He thanked his family for their support and said he was "humbled and honored to be chosen to serve the residents of Garwood and be given a chance to give back."

Mr. Sytko congratulated Mr. Lombardo and Mr. DeFillippo as well, wishing them "continued success with all [they] do." Mr. Sytko said he was "transparent," wanting to be available to residents anytime. He also made the audience laugh, saying, "I know my grandparents are smiling down on me, even though none of them was a Republican."

The laughs continued when Councilman Keith Sluka stated he "all of a sudden felt old between these two." When Mayor McCarthy asked if any residents would like to address the council, frequent meeting attendee and life-long resident Anne Leonard chimed in with "no report, mayor," which brought another round of

laughs.

Councilman Charles Schadewald reminded the new councilmen, "Garwood before politics," receiving head nods and smiles from the audience.

Mayor McCarthy asked the audience to remember the men and women from Garwood and neighboring towns who are "protecting our freedoms (on the) homeland and overseas and those that have been called to duty."

The mayor said 2008 "will be a challenging year and, as we look to make improvements to the borough, we are faced with the following questions: How do we make our economy stronger - without affecting our quality of life? How do we continue to offer the kind of quality services we pride ourselves on - without making the borough more expensive for middle class and working families?"

"How do we make room for development that will benefit Garwood - without displacing our fellow residents and families whom have lived in the borough for decades? How do we dare to dream big - while not forgetting to fill the potholes, clean our streets and parks, and address the small, daily concerns that make such a big difference in our quality of life?"

He said the borough would upgrade borough buildings "to make them more eco-friendly."

He also thanked Borough Administrator Christina Ariemma and staff for all "their hard work year round. They do a great job with the website, www.garwood.org and the newsletter *Just the Facts*. Tina is always there to help you with any questions you may have. We feel we offer the best we can since we work with the best."

Catherine "Kitty" Madara, of the Veterans of Foreign War Ladies Auxiliary, told *The Westfield Leader* the VFW will hold a blood drive on Friday, January 18 from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the VFW Post, located at 221 Second Avenue.



Debbie Hoffman for The Westfield Leader

NEW CRANFORD MAYOR...Cranford Committeeman Robert Puhak takes the oath of office as mayor of the township committee for 2008. His wife, Lori, and their family accompany him. State Senator Thomas Kean, Jr. (LD-21, Westfield) administered the oath of office. Please see story on page 2.

see additional photos from municipal-government reorganization meetings  
[goleader.com/photos](http://goleader.com/photos)



David Samsky for The Westfield Leader

ENTERING THE POLITICAL ARENA...State Superior Court Judge Douglas Fasciale, right, swears in newly elected First Ward Councilman Frank Arena, who is joined on the dais by his wife, Lori, son, Christopher, and daughter, Carl.

## Bramnick, Munoz Question New State School-Funding Formula

By WAYNE BAKER  
*Specialty Written for The Westfield Leader*

AREA - Despite the efforts of local state legislators to delay passage of Governor Jon Corzine's new formula for distributing state aid to schools, the Senate and Assembly passed the measure on Monday night.

The Senate approved the proposal 23-13, and the Assembly approved it 41-36, both with the minimum number of votes needed for passage. Eleven senators did not vote.

Among those opposing the bill were Assemblymen Jon Bramnick and Eric Munoz (LD-21, Westfield and Summit, respectively). At a press conference in Long Hill on the Friday before the vote, the men had described their desire to have more time to understand the new school-aid formula.

"My message to the governor is simple," Mr. Bramnick said. "Hold the bill."

Mr. Bramnick, who called the school-funding bill "a moving freight train," acknowledged at the event that it was unlikely that he, Mr. Munoz and Senator Tom Kean (all LD-21, Westfield) would be successful in stalling the bill long enough for "effective evaluation" of the impact of the legislation.

During the conference, Nanette Harrington of Long Hill's board of education described part of the problem the lawmakers faced, showing how similar municipalities appear to encounter different increases in aid. Westfield, like Long Hill, will see the lowest increase in state aid, at 2 percent.

Long Hill Mayor George Vitoreira said the increase works out to about

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## MS Mayor Thanks Volunteers; Lane to be Council President

By EBONY MCQUEEN  
*Specialty Written for The Westfield Leader*

MOUNTAINSIDE - At the borough council's reorganization meeting, held last Wednesday, Mayor Robert Vigilanti and the council showed their appreciation for former council member Werner Schon for his "25 years of unselfish service" to Mountainside.

"Werner, you are leaving council this evening without a pension and without a lifetime healthcare," Mayor Vigilanti said. "You are, however, now joining a very long list of residents who always cared about, and worked for the betterment of, our community."

The borough presented Mr. Schon with a wooden rocking chair, inscribed with his name and "25 years of service" in it.

During his yearly address to the council and borough residents, Mayor Vigilanti, who has served as Mountainside's mayor for more than 20 years and is Union County's longest-serving current mayor, thanked the borough's "many" volunteers.

He began by thanking the rescue

squad and fire company. "Every rescue squad member past and present deserve our thanks," Mayor Vigilanti said.

In regards to the fire company, he said, "Today we have one of the best volunteer companies in the county, who not only provide us with fire protection but also do other community services."

Other thanks went to the Mountainside Lions Club, the Mountainside PAL and all of the volunteers "who have been instrumental in providing recreational sports."

"These programs can only work with the dedication of the men and women who are working with our youth," the mayor said.

He pointed out the amount of borough employees, including police officers who "have chosen Mountainside for their homes."

"No employee is required to live in town, yet we have a high percentage of our police officers who live in Mountainside. Who knows a community better than a police officer?"

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Paul J. Peyton for The Westfield Leader

LEADER OF THE (GOP) PACK...State Senator Tom Kean, Jr. of Westfield sits in his new seat as Senate Minority Leader with his family - from left to right, wife Rhonda and daughters Meredith and Elizabeth. Mr. Kean was sworn in to his new post during swearing-in ceremonies of the 213th State Legislature on Tuesday.

## Mountainside Loses Surplus From 2007 Municipal Budget

By EBONY MCQUEEN  
*Specialty Written for The Westfield Leader*

MOUNTAINSIDE - At Tuesday night's work session, council members discussed budget transfers for 2007. According to Mayor Robert Vigilanti, because the council did not freeze the borough's budget in December, they have lost its surplus.

"This year, almost every budget in town will be reduced," said Mayor Vigilanti. "We did it two years ago and the world did not end."

He said the decrease would not include salaries and wages.

The council also discussed the possibility increasing the current rate for Commercial Driver License (CDL) bus drivers from \$11.60 per hour to \$15 per hour.

"I can't get any other bus drivers to drive for under \$15," said James Debbie, borough administrator.

The borough currently has one

bus driver who has a CDL license and is seeking to employ another one.

In other business, the council has proposed to renew the borough's contract for health services with the Westfield Regional Board of Health. The contract would be in the amount of \$33,414, a \$1,080 increase from last year's contract.

The board of health shares services with Garwood, Westfield, Springfield, Hillside, Roselle Park, New Providence and Summit.

Council members will vote on Tuesday, January 15 to renew the contract for 9-1-1 emergency-medical-telephone-call screening services with Atlantic Ambulance Corporation, a Summit-based organization. The organization has trained personnel who give callers medical advice while they are waiting for the ambulance to arrive.

The meeting ended with council members going into executive session to discuss bids for a borough surplus vehicle and janitorial services. Both bids needed legal advice.

The borough's next regular council meeting will be held on January 15.



Linda Conditto for The Westfield Leader

THANKS FOR THE MEMORIES...Mountainside Councilman Glenn Mortimer, right, thanks Werner Schon, who is retiring, for his 25 years as a borough councilman.



courtesy of Bruce Regenreich

OUR NEW DIGS...Zambian refugees are completely outfitted in the sneakers, shorts and jerseys they received this year through donations from Westfield families, the Westfield Soccer Association and surrounding towns. The Regenreich family - whose son, Andrew, is in Africa working at a refugee camp - started the drive after Andrew sent a letter requesting some equipment.

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