



REMEMBERING...Reverend Robert Taylor, newly appointed pastor of St. Luke's AME Church, leads the procession gathered at the Martin Luther King Memorial on South Avenue, near the traffic circle, on Monday, January 21, which celebrated Dr. King's holiday.



ICE TIME...Members of the Westfield High School (WHS) Hockey Team hold the annual SKATE-A THON on the Union Sports Arena Sunday, January 19. About 150 participants enjoyed open skating and taking shots on the goalies. The fundraising event supports the WHS Team.

Westfield Town Council

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the once-in-a-while parking associated with the use of Memorial Park and the foot traffic that it might generate. While I do understand that some in that neighborhood might feel that this is not an appropriate measure for the council to take, I think this is a situation where we need to defer to the town professionals' expertise."

The council unanimously endorsed the plan on first reading.

Finance Committee Chairman and First Ward Councilman Sal Caruana announced that the town's pool-membership fees would be unchanged from 2007, "with the added benefit that no

[state] sales tax will be charged."

Acting Mayor Mark Ciarrocca, who filled in for Mayor Andy Skibitsky, encouraged town residents to attend Governor Jon Corzine's Union County Town-Hall-style meeting on his financial-restructuring and debt-reduction plan. The event will take place on Wednesday, January 30, at the Cranford campus of Union County College in the Roy W. Smith Theater. To RSVP, call (609) 777-2212 or e-mail union.rsvp@gov.state.nj.us.

Mr. Ciarrocca said the issue of state finances is "critical to the Town of Westfield and towns like Westfield."

SP Township Budget Process Delayed by State Cap Regs

By FRED T. ROSSI
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

SCOTCH PLAINS — With state officials still finalizing the details of the new tax-levy-cap regulations for municipal governments, the township-budget process this year is expected to be pushed back a number of weeks, according to Township Manager Thomas Atkins.

He told the township council at its conference meeting on Tuesday that "there is a lot of mixed opinion from Trenton" regarding the interpretation of new regulations limiting municipal property-tax increases to about 4 percent.

As a result, the state is recommending that local governments delay introducing their annual budgets by a month. Presently, municipalities with calendar-year budgets are supposed to adopt their budgets by March 21; although, as Mr. Atkins said, few actually do so. The new deadline will be April 21.

In recent years, the township has introduced its annual budget in late March or early April and then formally adopted the spending plan a month later. Mr. Atkins has usually presented his budget recommendations to council members in late January. He said on Tuesday that he would present his appropriations proposals on February 15, along with "a very basic guideline" of the township's interpretation of the tax-levy-cap regulations while waiting for formal guidance from state officials.

The cap regulations also apply to local expenditures, which are generally not allowed to increase by more than about 3.5 percent.

"This is going to be a tough budget process," Mr. Atkins said, adding that the next two years "are going to be worse." Mr. Atkins told the council he

anticipates holding budget meetings taking place in March into early April, with the budget being introduced some time in April.

In advance of the budget deliberations, Mr. Atkins told the council that the state-mandated increase in funding for the Scotch Plains Library this year would be 5.3 percent — instead of the 12.4-percent increase last year.

In addition, representatives from the Rahway Valley Sewage Authority (RVSA) met with the council, Tuesday, to discuss the \$372,000 credit the township is receiving from RVSA this year. The credit, which is partly the result of an unexpected fund surplus due to certain construction contracts not being completed, is being distributed to the utility's 11 member towns.

Joan Papen, the township's representative to RVSA, said she and other commissioners had favored spreading the credit over many years in an effort to lessen the annual fee increases being paid by member towns but that a majority of commissioners advocated a one-year payout.

RVSA is nearing completion of a court-ordered \$200-million facilities upgrade that was financed by steep annual fee increases for its member towns over the past years.

The \$372,000 credit will reduce this year's initially expected fee increase of about \$450,000 to roughly \$108,000.

Michael Brinker, RVSA's executive director, warned the council that with Scotch Plains' fee this year being about \$1.22 million — instead of \$1.6 million, thanks to the credit — next year's fee increase will be more than 50 percent higher, or about \$700,000, to reach the \$1.9-million level that was set forth by the RVSA years ago.

County Employee Cited In Hit-and-Run Incident

By FRED T. ROSSI
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

SCOTCH PLAINS — Township police last week cited a Union County employee for a hit-and-run incident at the corner of Park and Westfield Avenues that injured a female pedestrian.

Donald Picciaro of Roselle Park, who works for the Union County Department of Public Works, was charged with two motor-vehicle violations, according to Police Lieutenant Brian Donnelly, for the incident which, occurred at 12:50 p.m. on January 17.

Lt. Donnelly told *The Westfield Leader* that the unnamed woman was crossing Westfield Avenue at the corner of Park Avenue when Mr. Picciaro, driving a county truck, turned left from Park Avenue and struck the woman. Witnesses reported that a yellow truck with red lettering on its side had left the accident scene, and Lt. Donnelly said "a combination of witnesses and good police work" led law-enforcement personnel last Friday to Front Street, where

the county was doing roadwork.

Mr. Picciaro, according to Lt. Donnelly, told police he wasn't sure if he had hit something when turning from Park Avenue. Lt. Donnelly said there was no evidence of alcohol or drugs or a deliberate attempt to injure the woman, who was transported to Robert Wood Johnson Hospital with "non-life-threatening" injuries.

"We're treating it as a mere accident," Lieutenant Donnelly said. "Nothing indicates that he willingly hit her."

Township police charged Mr. Picciaro with leaving the scene of an accident involving bodily injury and with failure to report a motor-vehicle accident.

Township police have placed an electronic sign near the accident scene (pictured at right) seeking witnesses and further information, and Lieutenant Donnelly said the sign would remain in place "in case we get other witnesses who will bolster our case."



ANY MORE INFORMATION?... Township police continue to seek witnesses to last Thursday's hit-and-run of a pedestrian at the corner of Park and Westfield Avenues. A Union County worker has been cited for the incident, but police hope additional witnesses will bolster their case.

Scotch Plains Police Arrest Two Car Burglary Suspects

By MARTIN SWEENEY
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

SCOTCH PLAINS — Township police arrested two Passaic County women last week after they admitted to burglarizing 20 motor vehicles during a four-day crime spree on the north side of Scotch Plains.

According to police, Michelle Jackson, 27, of Prospect Park, was charged with multiple counts of burglary and theft. She was transferred to the Essex County jail on a pre-existing no-bail warrant.

The other suspect, a 17-year-old juvenile from Paterson, faces pending theft and burglary charges.

Both suspects confessed to being members of the Bloods street gang, and told police that they were directed to carry out the burglaries by the gang, police said.

On Tuesday, January 15, at 2:30 a.m., a Victor Street resident observed two people entering an unlocked car.

Mountainside BOE Presents Preliminary 2008-09 Budget

By MARIA WOHR
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

MOUNTAINSIDE — The Mountainside Board of Education, on Tuesday, presented a preliminary version of the 2008-2009 school budget at a level of roughly \$14 to \$15 million, with increases over current-year expenditures.

The budget calls for four additional staff members to support state average class sizes. These positions include two language-arts teachers, a special-education teacher and a teacher assistant. The total number of employees would rise to 120.

With the four additional staff positions, the employee budget would be \$6,676,104, an increase of \$423,588 over the current year. This includes substitutes, summer school, athletic stipends and co-curricular stipends.

Other additions to the budget include \$37,000 in tuition reimbursement, \$23,000 in staff training and \$14,000 in curriculum writing. "We had employees take advantage of 181 workshops last year," Board President John Perrin said.

Increases in special education also are included in the proposed budget. One hundred and four students receive special education, and with tuition, transportation, out-of-district placement and services, the total for special education is projected to be \$3.1 million.

"Twenty-two percent of our annual budget is spent on special education, so with that and salaries, we are already at \$9 million in our budget," Mr. Perrin said.

The BOE is proposing funding additional initiatives such as an extra bus for kindergarten to grade 8 children, an enhanced robotics program

FW Recreation Commission Discusses Budget Cuts

By RAYNOR DENITZIO
Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

FANWOOD — With rising pension and health-care costs affecting borough residents, the Fanwood Borough Council is asking departments to consider cutbacks in the coming year.

"We're looking for reductions throughout," said Councilman David Valian. "We want to see what everyone can give back before we see where we are at."

Mr. Valian spoke at Tuesday evening's meeting of the Fanwood Recreation Commission, where members of the commission considered two budgets — both of which would have the commission spending less than it did last year.

Bob Budiansky, the borough's recreation director, presented two potential versions of the 2008 recreation-commission budget at the commission's first meeting of the new year.

The proposals cut the recreation budget between 5 and 10 percent, respectively. The recreation commission came in just under its \$36,925 budget in 2007, he said. Under the two proposals, the commission would operate with a budget of either \$35,080 or \$33,230 in the coming year.

One potential casualty of the budget crunch would be the borough's assistant recreation director. The position has been vacant since the previous assistant director resigned in August. Eliminating the position would free up \$4,000, and Mr. Budiansky said that, given the cost, maintaining the position would not be prudent.

"I could delegate some duties to an assistant," Mr. Budiansky said. "Given our budget constraints, I don't think it's a wise move."

The borough council will discuss the budget in February. For now, the borough will gauge where cuts can be made to combat rising costs, officials said.

The commission also discussed expanding its summer-camp program from six to eight weeks. With the popularity of the current program, commission members felt there was a need to accommodate additional campers. The commission would raise rates for the program from \$20 to \$35 per week to meet additional staffing needs for the expanded program.

"People wanted us to expand to eight weeks," Commission Chairwoman Pamela Sayles said. "There was such an overwhelming response."

POLICE BLOTTER

Westfield

Monday, January 14, Remigiusz Toronczak, 31, of New Brunswick was arrested at South and Central Avenues on a Piscataway motor-vehicle warrant. He was released after posting \$750 bail.

Tuesday, January 15, a resident of the 1500 block of Boulevard reported a burglary to her home. It was undetermined what was missing. Entry was gained through an open basement door.

Tuesday, January 15, Robert Carter, 51, of Westfield was arrested during a motor-vehicle stop at South Avenue and Crossway Place on an outstanding motor-vehicle warrant from Union. He was released after posting \$120 bail.

Wednesday, January 16, Jasmine Rios, 19, of Atlantic City was arrested during a motor-vehicle stop at Windsor and Ripley Avenues on an outstanding Newark warrant for a municipal offense. She was released after posting \$120 bail.

Thursday, January 17, Kia N. Ayers, 20, of Westfield was arrested on an outstanding traffic warrant from Watchung after a motor-vehicle stop at South Avenue and Cacciola Place. She was unable to post the \$1,000 bail and was turned over to Watchung police.

Friday, January 18, Mahari Tyndale, 31, of Plainfield and Jeffrey Spector, 28, of Scotch Plains were arrested and charged with possession of cocaine after a motor-vehicle stop at South and Central Avenues. Both men were released on their own recognizance after being served with summonses.

Mountainside

Tuesday, January 15, Jeremiah A. Carter, 25, of Newark was arrested at the Essex County jail and charged with an outstanding Mountainside warrant in the amount of \$800. He was transported to the Union County jail pending a court date, police said.

Thursday, January 17, a resident of Darby Lane reported that someone knocked over her mailbox, valued at \$500.

Thursday, January 17, an assistant manager of a Route 22 storage facility reported that an individual who rents a storage unit from the facility had set up residence in the unit. According to police, a ladder was placed in the rear of the unit so the individual could gain access without using the padlocked entrance.

Located in the unit were a bed, coffee maker, water cooler, laptop and a television, which are powered by an extension cord that was run to a nearby outlet, police said. Entrance to the unit was gained during normal operating hours, and the individual remained in the unit after the facility was closed, authorities said.

Monday, January 21, a Route 22 restaurant reported that two patrons left the establishment without paying the bill. According to police, the suspects attempted to pay with a credit card that was declined, at which time they fled the restaurant.

The first suspect was described as a black male with shoulder-length dreadlocks, wearing a white jacket and black pants. The second suspect was described as a black female with long black hair, wearing a long black coat and a black and white dress, police said. According to police, the suspects fled in a small, white, four-door vehicle with front-end damage and a partial plate identification of KZ-31.

Scotch Plains

Friday, January 18, Aaron Quade, 22, of Hammonsport, N.Y. was arrested on an outstanding warrant after a motor-vehicle stop.

Sunday, January 20, Jeffrey Anness, 19, of Fanwood was arrested and charged with possession of marijuana after a motor-vehicle stop.

Sunday, January 20, a Route 22 gas station employee reported the theft of \$5 worth of gas after the operator of a vehicle left the pump without paying.

Fanwood

Tuesday, January 15, Michael W. Mason, 45, of Staten Island, N.Y. was arrested on an outstanding Jersey City warrant after a motor-vehicle stop on the 200 block of South Avenue.

Tuesday, January 15, Kelvin M. Cabrera-Zapata, 29, of Elizabeth was arrested during a motor-vehicle stop on South Avenue on an outstanding warrant out of Carteret. He was released after posting bail.

Johany Lazu-Feliciano, 30, of Hoboken, a passenger in the vehicle, also was arrested and charged with possession of a controlled dangerous substance (CDS). According to police, he was transported to the Union County jail, where he is being held on \$12,500 bail.

Thursday, January 17, Cynthia A. Dotoli, 46, of Lavallette was arrested on a Union County Sheriff's Department no-bail warrant after a motor-vehicle stop on Martine Avenue. She was processed and transported to the Union County jail, police said.

Friday, January 18, Michael S. Haskell, 34, of Bridgewater was arrested on an outstanding Somerville warrant after a motor-vehicle stop on Martine Avenue.

Friday, January 18, two 17-year-old juveniles from Fanwood were arrested after a motor-vehicle stop on Martine Avenue and charged with possession of marijuana. Both individuals were processed and released to their parents pending a court date in Elizabeth.

Friday, January 18, sometime between 5:45 and 7 p.m., someone smashed the rear window of a Westfield resident's motor-vehicle while it was parked at a South Avenue restaurant and removed a satellite radio valued at \$200.

While authorities were searching the area, they noticed another vehicle was ransacked. After locating the owner of the vehicle in the restaurant, it was determined that a pair of \$200 sunglasses was removed from the unlocked vehicle, police said.

Saturday, January 19, a South Avenue restaurant reported that a patron of the restaurant left the establishment without paying his bill. According to police, the suspect has been identified as a Scotch Plains resident and charges are pending.

A King Street resident reported that sometime between Monday, January 21, at 5 p.m. and Tuesday, January 22, at 6 a.m., someone entered his two unlocked motor vehicles while they were parked in the driveway and rummaged through them. According to police, nothing is reported missing at this time.

Erratum

The date for a forum of Republican 7th District Congressional candidates was incorrect as published in last week's Peyton's Peek at the Week column. The correct date is today, Thursday, January 24. The forum will be held at 7:30 p.m. at the Gran Centurions, 440 Madison Hill Road, Clark.



DAY OF HOPE...Members of the community gather January 9 for the grand opening of the Center For Hope Hospice and Palliative Care's new facility, Peggy Coloney's House at Hope Village, at 1900 Raritan Road in Scotch Plains. Pictured, from left to right, are: Scotch Plains Mayor Martin Marks, Union County Freeholder Chairman Angel Estrada, Dr. Robert Wegyn, the center's medical director; Jack Coloney, husband of the late Peggy Coloney; Robert Coloney, center president and CEO, and Al Sauer, the center's board chairman.



GIANTS FRENZY...Inflatable football players line the storefront of Alfredo's Deli on Second Street in Scotch Plains as area fans await the Giants' trip to the Super Bowl to face New England in two Sundays.