



NEVER SAY GOODBYE... Holding on to their years at Westfield High School, Rachel Patterson, Stefanie Crosta, Bethany Verdone, Christine Kandigian, Michelle Zaffuto, Stephanie Pinheiro, Ariel Mone, Emily Fusco, Ashley Freudenheim, Katie Lee and Taylor Carlson prepare themselves for graduation.

County \$438 Mil. Budget

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Deputy County Manager Elizabeth Genievich said the county manager's office was not redecorated but reconfigured due to a lack of suitable work space for employees.

Roselle Park Councilman Michael Yakubov, a Republican candidate for freeholder, said he does not feel elected officials should get into shouting exchanges with residents.

"I hope in the future there will be professionalism on both sides of the [dais]," he said. His running mates, John Russitano of Westfield and Joseph Franchino of Berkeley Heights, attended the meeting but did not speak.

Also opposing the budget was Garwood resident Bruce Paterson. He described the budget as a "monster."

"You have now created the monster with mad scientist names like Sullivanstein, Froehlichstein, DeFilippostein," he said, referring to Freeholder Sullivan, Sheriff Ralph Froehlich and County Democratic Chairman Charlotte DeFilippo.

"This sucking beast is now stealing huge amounts of tax dollars from the communities of Union County, communities that are struggling with their budgets because you are taking their money and not giving anything in return but a pittance," Mr. Paterson said.

Meanwhile, Freeholder Vice Chairman Al Mirabella said the board's finance committee, of which he chaired, "cut \$2.37 million from the 2008 tax levy" from Mr. Devaney's executive budget.

"Mandated costs, such as salaries, health insurance and pensions had largely contributed to a \$26-million deficit, which was subsequently cut in half to \$13.074 million through this review," Mr. Mirabella said.

Finance Director Larry Caroselli, upon questioning from *The Westfield Leader* and *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times*, said the executive budget had increased by \$4 million upon receipt of additional grants.

The board also approved a \$1.9-million bond ordinance, which includes \$1.3 million towards the construction of a new county fire academy in Linden and \$650,000 to purchase the Hungarian Citizens Club property in Clark.

Mr. Mirabella told *The Leader* and *The Times* that an architect hired by the county would unveil the design of the fire academy before the freeholders in the next few months. In addition to new classrooms and an amphitheater, the facility will include a new burn building for firefighters' on-site training.

In discussing approval of a resolution by the Summit Common Council favoring the election of county freeholders by district, instead of at-large, Mr. Sullivan said the all-Democratic board is "diverse" and "reflects the county's population."

All members of the Summit council are Republicans. The Summit mayor is a Democrat, but is a non-voting member of the governing body.

"I wish the people on the Summit council would get over it," said Mr. Sullivan, adding that 18 of New Jersey's 21 counties elect freeholder at-large.

He said GOP-controlled freeholder boards are likely happy with their at-large boards.

WF Council

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chief is the lowest paid of the surrounding four or five towns.

Due to budgetary considerations, four positions were either cut or changed to part-time. Two positions — one belonging to Maureen Power, a part-time administrative secretary, and that of a public works employee — were removed. In addition, two full-time Communication Workers of America (CWA) employees' jobs were reduced to part-time.

Mr. Gildea anticipated that the council would have to reduce headcount in future years or "come up with creative ways to funding positions without tax support."

The council, according to Mr. Gildea, does use "outside-the-box" thinking to offset some costs. For instance, the Westfield Memorial Pool assumes the \$64,000 salary of Assistant Recreation Director Dolores MacKay.

In addition, the Westfield Memorial Library, which experienced a state-mandated 7.5 percent budget increase in 2008, has taken on 25 percent (\$25,000) of the recreation department's budget.

Mr. Gildea said the cost-saving method is possible because "the library has the money and ability to help us...It's the first time we've had operating budgets shared with other departments...but I see that growing in the future."

The library's board of trustees approved salaries of \$89,900 for Phil Israel, library director, and \$70,500 for Katherine Muhm, assistant library director, among others. Both represent 4 percent increases from 2007.

Mayor and council members will continue to earn \$1 salaries.

Recent legislation raised the annual salary threshold for pension eligibility for all future employees to \$7,500. PERS (Public Employees Retirement System) members earning less than that amount, but more than \$1,500, will be eligible for the state's defined contribution pension plan.

Westfield faces more than \$2.1 million in pension obligations this year. Of that figure, \$1.75 million is earmarked for police and fire officials. PERS members, including all non-union, CWA, Teamsters and library employees, account for more than \$420,000.

For employees such as the judge and part-time attorneys, 4 percent of their salary is put toward a pension, with the town matching that figure.

Police and fire members contribute 8 percent of their paychecks, with the town also matching that number.

Muhlenberg Medical Center

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perceived failure to come up with a viable alternative to closure. "This fight does not end today," said Deborah Dow, vice-chairman of the Plainfield Republican Party.

"We will boycott JFK and initiate lawsuits," added Sarah Colvin, pastor at the United Church of Christ in Plainfield, who referred to the closure as a product of "institutional racism."

Plainfield resident Jesus Delvisi stated that, "we are building hospitals in Iraq, building hospitals in Afghanistan — but closing hospitals here. We are ready to take this struggle to the end."

Bennett Zurofsky, an attorney representing the Peoples Organization for Progress, attempted to file a brief with the board. He said the board must reject the application. In referring to a "special duty" the state has to protect and preserve urban hospitals, he argued that the board had failed to meet that standard.

As Mr. McGee came to the podium to formally present the application, the doors of the ballroom swung open and two protesters attempted to carry a large coffin into the room. Judy Donlen, board chairwoman, objected immediately and the protesters were escorted out by police.

Mr. McGee went on to say that "our healthcare system is broken." He cited the lack of state and federal funding to reimburse hospitals for charity care as a key reason for the decision to close

Dick Samuel Quits Race; No Replacement Named

By FRED T. ROSSI
Specialty Written For The Westfield Leader

SCOTCH PLAINS — Less than three months after declaring his candidacy and three weeks after formally gaining his party's nomination, Democrat Richard Samuel last week dropped out of the fall campaign for township council.



Richard Samuel

Mr. Samuel, who has been party chairman since the 2006 municipal elections, was set to oppose Republican Mary DePaola for the council seat presently held by two-term Republican Councilwoman Paulette Coronato, who is not seeking re-election.

The Scotch Plains Township Clerk's office confirmed receipt of a copy of a letter sent to the Union County Clerk's office from Mr. Samuel announcing that he was dropping his candidacy.

Although Mr. Samuel told other news outlets last week that he was leaving the race due to personal time constraints and a desire to be involved with the presidential and congressional campaigns, he did not confirm those reasons when contacted by *The Westfield Leader* earlier this week. "I have no interest in talking to you," he told this reporter during a brief telephone call. "You've had no interest in talking to me during the year, and I have no interest in talking to you."

Councilman Kevin Glover, who is the Democratic candidate for mayor this year, did not return a telephone call this week seeking comment. Councilman Jeffrey Strauss, the other Democrat on the council, told *The Leader* he had no information on a candidate to replace Mr. Samuel.

The Democrats have not yet named a replacement for Mr. Samuel for the fall election.

According to a publication of the county clerk's office, the township Democratic Party has until Wednesday, September 17 to file a replacement candidate.

Mrs. DePaola told *The Leader* she was "disappointed" that Mr. Samuel was exiting the race, saying she was "looking forward to seeing how the election was going to turn out." She said she and Mr. Samuel had agreed in the spring to run a campaign focused on issues and not personalities.

Deputy Mayor Nancy Malool, who is opposing Mr. Glover in the mayoral race, told *The Leader* that "I wish [Mr. Samuel] well in his endeavors."

the hospital. Muhlenberg is heavily dependent on Medicare and Medicaid, with charity care making up 70 to 80 percent of its business. He said that the past 10 years have been a challenge, with Solaris having to regularly transfer money from JFK to keep Muhlenberg afloat.

"The easy way out would have been taking this hospital to bankruptcy," he said. He stated that he respected the passion of those opposed to the closure "totally." "I've seen this happen throughout the state. This system is broken so bad. Our last alternative was to file a certificate of need."

According to Mr. McGee, the decision was finalized after Solaris' debt rating was downgraded to below investment grade by Moodys and underwriters told management that they could no longer receive financing if they continued to prop up Muhlenberg.

At that point, Mr. McGee said, finding a buyer for the hospital was explored. Representatives of the consulting firm Accenture, along with Cain Brothers, an investment bank specializing in the health care industry, addressed the board and described how Solaris conducted alternative use studies for Muhlenberg and looked at 20 different options.

"We could not construct a model that got them to break even," said Joseph Lemaire of Accenture. Muhlenberg had ended 2007 with a \$16 million loss and was "burning cash," he added. Solaris' bankers reached out to potential buyers but the effort was not successful.

In the end, Mr. McGee said, closing the hospital or declaring bankruptcy were the only two remaining options.

Before voting on whether to recommend approval, the board questioned Solaris' management about its plan to ensure that resources were in place to meet the needs of the community if the application was approved. They will likely recommend that the satellite emergency room be kept open for five years and that the license be kept open for three, with the hope that a buyer can be found who can run the hospital as an acute care facility.

The board praised the work of Assemblyman Green's task force, which brokered an agreement with Trinitas Hospital to provide obstetrics and gynecological care for Muhlenberg's female patients. Board members also stressed to Solaris that they expect it to follow through on its promises to the community, which include providing imaging and lab services at Muhlenberg as well as continuing to operate the dialysis center and provide home care services to the public.

"I would not want to be here in six to eight months with Solaris declaring bankruptcy," said Judy Donlen, board chairman, before bringing the application to a vote. "Reluctantly, I will be voting for approval of the application."

"Rather than lose all services, this is a plan that maintains necessary services" and secures the "viability of the Solaris system," she noted.

Dr. Sharol Lewis, another member of the board, said that the "health care system in New Jersey is in dire straits." She voted to approve the application because "there is no way this hospital can stay open in its current form." She asked that the license be kept open for three years and called for Solaris to have a communication plan for informing the public about the transportation options to local hospitals that are called for in the department's recommendations.

The Plainfield Health Center (PHC), a federally qualified community health center, is preparing for an increase in patients as a result of the Muhlenberg closure. Rudine Smith, PHC's president, said she had been in talks with Solaris about the PHC establishing a site at the Muhlenberg satellite emergency room to deal with inappropriate self-referrals and non-emergency health issues. Trinitas also will have personnel at the PHC to provide treatment and advice for expectant mothers.

After the vote was conducted and the meeting called to a close, Muhlenberg supporters broke out in song and said they would continue their fight to save the hospital.

The ball is now in Commissioner Howard's court. She will have 120 days to act on the board's recommendations.

Area Fourth of July Celebrations

Clark: Rides, novelties and food vendors will be available in front of town hall from 4 to 8 p.m. After, fireworks will be held at ALJ High School.

Cranford: Fireworks at 9:15 p.m. at Nomahegan Park, Springfield Avenue.

Mountainside: Fireworks behind Our Lady of Lourdes Roman Catholic Church, Central Avenue, at dusk.



Courtesy of the Westfield Fire Department

EARLY MORNING FIRE... A house fire occurred in Westfield at 14 Byron Court on the morning of July 1 around 1 a.m. The Westfield Fire Department responded to find the bedroom on the second floor fully involved. The fire department was able to keep the fire from spreading, although extensive damage to the bedroom and smoke damage to the rest of the house was reported. No injuries were reported, and the fire remains under investigation. Cranford and Scotch Plains fire departments assisted on scene, while Mountainside, Garwood and Fanwood fire departments covered Westfield Fire Headquarters.



POLICE BLOTTER

Westfield

Monday, June 23, after being stopped for motor vehicle violations, Wilmer Castillo, 37, of Bound Brook was arrested on the 500 block of North Avenue, East, on an outstanding Westfield warrant with bail of \$91. He was released after posting bail.

Monday, June 23, Mice Lawson, 20, of Linden was arrested on two outstanding Newark warrants at the intersection of Windsor Avenue and Ripley Place after police responded to a report of fireworks. Lawson, who was not charged in connection with any fireworks incidents, was released after posting a total \$225 bail on the warrants.

Wednesday, June 25, Vernon Douglas, 42, of Elizabeth was arrested on a no-bail warrant for civil contempt and on an outstanding Hillside warrant with bail of \$750, after a motor vehicle stop at South Avenue and Boulevard. He was turned over to the Union County Sheriff's Department.

Thursday, June 26, Gary D. Lewis, 27, of Newark was arrested on two outstanding Newark warrants, with total bail of \$570, after a motor vehicle stop at Windsor Avenue and Ripley Place. He was released after posting bail.

Friday, June 27, Gennaro Franzese, 37, of Old Bridge was arrested at Central Avenue and Cacciola Place on an outstanding Elizabeth warrant with \$133 bail. He was processed and released per the Elizabeth Municipal Court.

Friday, June 27, John Polo, Jr., 38, of Cranford was arrested on an outstanding Elizabeth warrant after a motor vehicle stop at South Avenue and Crossway Place. He was released after posting \$250 bail.

Saturday, June 28, Peter Rucinsky, 19, of Westfield was arrested and charged with possession of less than 50 grams of suspected marijuana and possession of drug paraphernalia following an investigation on the 300 block of Jefferson Avenue. He was released on his own recognizance with summonses.

Saturday, June 28, Lorne Grierel, 20, of Newark was arrested on an outstanding Newark warrant after a motor vehicle stop at Clark Street and Ferris Place. He posted \$200 bail and was released.

Sunday, June 29, police arrested four people after a motor vehicle stop in the area of Elizabeth and Grandview Avenues. Derek Rich, 18, of Cranford and Jonathan Thompson, 19, of Piscataway were each charged with possession of less than 50 grams of suspected marijuana. Emmanuel Baldwin, 19, of Newark and Lynde Jules, 19, of Westfield were each charged with underage possession of alcohol. All were released with summonses.

Fanwood

Tuesday, June 24, Luther P. Lopez, 36, of Woodbridge was arrested and charged with theft by deception, forgery, wrongful impersonation for using false identification for an incident that occurred on August 21, 2006 at a local bank. He is being held at Bayside State Prison for unrelated charges with an additional warrant out of Fanwood for \$80,000.

Wednesday, June 25, Joseph M. Barone, 51, of South Plainfield was arrested on a Union Township warrant after a motor vehicle stop on Terrill Road. According to police, he posted bail and was released.

Wednesday, June 25, Sean M. Raymond, 35, of South Plainfield was arrested on an Ocean County Sheriff's warrant. According to police, he was turned over to the Ocean County Sheriff's Department.

Thursday, June 26, Wesley J. Douglas, 53, of Plainfield was arrested on a Long Hill Township warrant after a motor vehicle stop. According to police, he posted bail and was released. Hector J. Lopez, 42, of Plainfield a passenger in the vehicle was also arrested on warrants out of

Scotch Plains

Tuesday, June 24, a resident of Grand Street reported that someone removed his unlocked bicycle valued at \$200 from his front yard.

Wednesday, June 25, Anthony Henderson, 27, of Plainfield was arrested for an outstanding warrant after a motor vehicle stop. According to police, he posted bail and was released.

Thursday, June 26, a resident of Elm Court reported that someone removed his unlocked bicycle valued at \$230 from the front of a Park Avenue store.

Friday, June 27, a business on Jerusalem road reported that someone removed 200 gallons of diesel fuel valued at \$1000 from the tank of one of their trucks.

Friday, June 27, James Joyner, 61, of Newark was arrested for an outstanding warrant after a motor vehicle stop. He was transported to headquarters where he was processed and released.

Saturday, June 28, Julio Sanchez, 30, of Elizabeth was arrested for an outstanding warrant after a motor vehicle stop. He was transported to headquarters where he was processed and released.

Saturday, June 28, Kyle Weltman, 22, of Berkeley was arrested for DWI after a motor vehicle violation. He was transported to headquarters where he was processed and released.

Saturday, June 28, Joseph McLaughlin, 41, of Plainfield was arrested for an outstanding warrant after a motor vehicle stop. He was transported to headquarters where he was processed and released.

Mountainside

Tuesday, June 24, a resident reported that someone opened up a CitiBank line of credit in his name and transferred \$22,500 into an unknown account without his authorization. CitiBank has been notified of the fraudulent charges and an investigation is pending.

Saturday, June 28, Ikimah V. Drew, 30, of Irvington was arrested for driving while suspended, several outstanding warrants out of Orange and one out of Irvington.

Sunday, June 29, officers responded to an armed robbery at a gas station on Route 22. According to police, as the attendant was processing a sale, a black male approximately 5 feet 10 inches wearing grey pants and an unknown colored shirt approximately 30-years old entered the office and demanded the attendant give him "all his money." The actor then stabbed the attendant in the leg again demanding money. The attendant then gave the actor all the cash he had in his pockets and the register totaling approximately \$160, police said. The actor then took several packs of cigarettes and fled the scene on foot. The incident is under investigation.

THIS SUMMER IS IN GOOD HANDS.



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