

## County Taxes to Rise 5.5 Percent In \$438 Million Spending Plan

By PAUL J. PEYTON  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

**ELIZABETH** — County taxes will rise in all but two of Union County's 21 municipalities under a \$437.7 million budget introduced by the Board of Chosen Freeholders last Thursday night.

To support the plan, taxes would be raised \$13.1 million or 5.48 percent over last year with the average increase per household calculated at \$68, according to county officials.

While the spending plan is \$2.3 million over last year, officials said the tax levy was reduced by \$2.37 million from the \$254 million in taxes proposed in the \$436.2 executive bud-

get released by County Manager George Devaney in February.

"I am very pleased with the outcome [of the budget]," said Al Mirabella, chairman of the board's fiscal affairs committee. He said while "no one likes to raise taxes" the reductions from the executive budget resulted in "a job well done" by county officials. "It's a hard process and these are challenging times," he said.

Mr. Devaney said taxes account for 54 percent of the total spending in the 2008 budget, down from 58 percent last year.

Locally, county taxes in Westfield will increase \$1.5 million to \$25.1 million, a reduction of \$234,693 from

the executive budget. The average assessed home in Westfield will see an average increase of \$147 to \$2,445.

In Scotch Plains, taxes will jump to \$14.2 million, an increase of \$429,816 over 2007, and \$132,121 lower than the executive budget.

Fanwood's county tax portion will jump \$115,320 to \$3.9 million, a \$36,384 drop from Mr. Devaney's budget. The average home in the borough will pay \$1,456 in county taxes, which is \$43 over last year.

Meanwhile, Garwood's share of county taxes will rise \$169,115 to \$2.2 million, a slight decline of \$20,379 from the executive budget.

Mountainside residents will pay \$6.4 million, up \$189,486 over last year. Only Summit and Winfield will see tax decreases this year. Winfield, with just 1,500 residents, will pay \$60,739, down \$816 from last year. While Summit's county portion will drop \$21,036 from last year, its share of \$23.7 million is the fourth highest in the county behind Elizabeth, Union and Westfield.

Westfield taxes have the second highest, per-home total, trailing only Summit, which is just over \$3,000 per property owner. Mountainside is third at \$2,165, up \$71 over 2007.

Freeholder Angel Estrada said the tax levy was lowered from the executive budget in the areas of health insurance, Social Security and sick leave combined, and the Union County Vocational-Technical Schools, where savings of \$1.3 million, \$750,000 and \$322,740, respectively, were found. The Vo-Tech was able to obtain additional state funding. Another \$13 million reduction in the executive budget came by reducing the proposed capital budget, which had been \$53.7 million.

Under questioning from John Bury of Kenilworth, Mr. Estrada said there were no layoffs in this year's spending plan although some vacant positions have been kept open.

As announced earlier this year by Mr. Devaney, the county faced a \$26 million budget hole due to deficits at its three county golf operations and at Runnells Specialized Hospital. Officials said in a press release that they expect an expansion at the hospital to

## School Board Appoints New WHS Guidance Director

By CHRISTINA M. HINKE  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

**WESTFIELD** — The Westfield Board of Education on Tuesday announced the appointment of Scott White to fill the director of guidance position at Westfield High School (WHS) at a salary of \$129,667, beginning August 11. He will replace Steven Maczynski who is moving out of state.

Mr. White held the same title at Montclair High School for the last three years and has a combined 17 years of experience in high school counseling.

He holds a Master of Education degree in Counseling and Human Development from Harvard Graduate School of Education and a Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology from Swarthmore College.

He was selected by a special committee involved in the hiring process.

"He has a good background in the area and is passionate about it," Superintendent of Schools Margaret Dolan said.

The public portion of the board meeting began at 9 p.m., starting an hour late due to a private session held beforehand and an earlier reception that was held over later than planned.

Interim Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Anita O'Neal gave a presentation on guiding parents through the host of assessment testing given to their children. The state department of education mandates a series of assessment tests to all students in all grades as part of the No Child Left Behind Act. The school district also conducts separate testing, such as final exams and Learnia literacy assessments, as well as optional testing, such as the PSAT and SAT.

Ms. O'Neal said that this is the first year that the state offered a Spanish version of the language assessment. Formerly, if a student spoke limited English they were exempt from taking the language part of the test.

After a large number of students came out to a board meeting a month



LET'S GET THE PARTY STARTED...Westfield students, all dressed up for the Senior Prom, fill a bus Saturday evening at the pre-Prom party on Massachusetts Avenue in Westfield and head to the dance at Pines Manor in Edison. For more Prom photos, see goleader.com/photos.

## Lance Wins Nomination, Will Face Stender for Congressional Seat

By FRED ROSSI, RAYNOR DENITZIO  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

**AREA** — State Senator Leonard Lance of Hunterdon County won Tuesday's Republican Primary and will face off against Democratic State Assemblywoman Linda Stender of Fanwood in the 7th District congressional race to succeed Republican Rep. Mike Ferguson.

Mr. Lance won in Hunterdon County, with 63 percent of the vote, followed by Ms. Whitman's 18 percent. Mr. Lance also won in Somerset County with 3,793 votes ahead of Ms. Whitman's 1,944 tallies. Ms. Whitman won in Middlesex County with 24 votes to Mr. Marks' 13 votes.

Ms. Hatfield won in Union County, with 43 percent, to Mr. Marks' 17 percent. She also received the most votes in Westfield, Garwood and Mountainside, while Mr. Marks easily won in Scotch Plains and won Fanwood by 22 tallies over Ms. Hatfield.

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VICTORY AT LAST...State Senator Leonard Lance receives the Primary election results Tuesday night at his campaign headquarters in Flemington as Senator Tom Kean, Jr. of Westfield listens at right.

## Doctors Receive WF Civic Award; Pool to Open June 14

By KATHERINE VOWELL  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

**WESTFIELD** — Four months ago, Dr. Thomas Streko, and Dr. Malcolm Schwartz came to the aid of 13-year-old Michael Fitzhenry after he was struck by a car on Mountain Avenue. At Tuesday night's town council meeting, these two men were honored for their service with Westfield's first civic award.

"The civic award recognizes a private citizen who performs an act of heroism and demonstrates exceptional decisiveness and presence of mind, as well as extraordinary surface of action, responding to the needs of his fellow citizen," said Mayor Andy Skibitsky prior to presenting the two doctors with their awards.

After hearing a car crash outside of their offices on February 18, the two doctors rushed to the scene. A motorist who had lost control of her car had hit Michael, and the doctors cleared his airway before the paramedics arrived. "Because of their schooling, brilliance and experience, they were able to go out there and save Michael's life," Mr. Skibitsky said.

"We didn't hesitate to do what needed to be done at the time," said Dr. Schwartz. "The people who should be credited are those who took over Michael's care."

The families of both doctors and Michael's parents were present at the awards ceremony. The Fitzhenry's and Mayor Skibitsky collaborated to find an appropriate method of recog-

nizing these men, which resulted in establishing the Westfield Civic Award. Following the presentation of the awards, Michael's mother thanked the doctors and the community for its support.

Also on the Tuesday night agenda, five of Westfield's police officers received promotions. Chief of Police John Parizeau introduced the officers and their families. Officers Jason Rodger, Frank Padovano, Leonard Lugo, Scott Rodger, and Christopher Battiloro all were given promotions.

Bruce Kaufmann, president of the New Jersey Parks and Recreation Association, was present at the meeting to announce the postponement of the opening of the Westfield Memorial Pool Complex due to extreme weather conditions over the past few months. The pool completion is postponed one week, with the pool set to open on Saturday, June 14.

"I do not see any reason at this stage why we will not be able to open on June 14," said Mr. Kaufmann. "We do not want to sacrifice the quality of the pool for a one-week delay."

Two ordinances were up for discussion at Tuesday's meeting. In regards to the ordinance that would establish a historic preservation commission, Westfield residents Pat Velderman, Wally Parker and Patricia Volini all spoke in favor of the ordinance. "I think that it is very well constructed, and a step forward in terms of protecting and securing the

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THE HEROES AMONG US...Mrs. Fitzhenry gives a heart-filled thank you to Dr. Thomas Streko and Dr. Malcolm Schwartz for saving the life of her son Michael. The two doctors were presented with Westfield Civic Awards at Tuesday night's town council meeting. Mrs. Fitzhenry also took this opportunity to thank the community for its support throughout the past four months.

## Xocolatz Approved to Open Restaurant on Elmer St.

By CHRISTINA M. HINKE  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

**WESTFIELD** — The Westfield Planning Board, on Monday night, unanimously approved the parking variance for Xocolatz's new location at 235 Elmer Street, an approval that initiated applause by the audience.

This was continued from the case initially heard on May 5. The variance consent was given with the conditions that the restaurant have a maximum seating of 60, instead of 68 as proposed, valet parking available at peak times to alleviate confusion and difficulty parking in the small spaces, a solution owner Jaime Chaves proposed, widening of the driveway from 14 to 18 feet for safe two-way traffic, deliveries made before 10 a.m., the additional purchase of two parking permits, and signage that state directions for restaurant parking.

Demitrios Elenis, co-owner of the Westfield Diner, which is next door and whose parking lot abuts that of the 235 Elmer Street lot, opposed the variance because of the lack of parking. The 1,742-square-foot building requires 23 parking spots for an eatery that is not primarily a full-service restaurant, according to the town's zoning law. Eleven parking spaces are available on-site.

Mr. Chaves told *The Westfield Leader* that he tried to have a "friendly discussion" with the owner of the Westfield Diner but "he refused to speak to me."

"This whole thing could have been avoided with a phone call. I would have gladly complied" with a parking solution, Mr. Chaves said.

Board members James Foerst, Francis Smith and Lori Duffy each agreed that the benefits of having Mr. Chaves open a second restaurant outweighed the detriment of a lack of parking. They thought his current lo-

cation on Elm Street is successful and would lead to a thriving business in the new spot.

"The site has not housed a successful business in 10 years," said Ms. Duffy about the Elmer Street locale, which presently is occupied by Annie's Gourmet Kitchen.

"I think that area needs an uplift," Mr. Foerst said.

Mr. Chaves told *The Leader* that he and his wife have not decided yet if they would close the current restaurant to open the one. "That's under discussion with my wife," he said. He said he thought there could be "one Xocolatz on Elmer Street" and he could change the business on Elm Street. "There are a lot of possibilities with the [new] space," he said.

During the planning board's discussion, Mr. Foerst also said the Westfield Diner is "52 spaces short." He also said since Mr. Chaves' eight employees will not park in the lot that the site is "only four short."

He also said, "I give little weight" to the memo written by planner Paul Grygiel, hired by the opposition. He called it "boiler plate" and something out of a "textbook of a planning class."

Board member Robert Newell said Mr. Grygiel had some valid points, but voted to approve the application.

Mr. Grygiel stated in his testimony that because the current property contains new, "state-of-the-art" kitchen equipment, he does not deem it a hardship. He said in his response to a memo, written on May 22, by town planning consultant Judy Thornton. He argued that the kitchen equipment could be moved off-site.

He also said a business containing 60 some seats should be considered a full-service restaurant, a term the board considers sit-down dining.

Mr. Chaves claims his business is

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A SPECIAL GUEST...Governor Jon Corzine is Westfield Mayor Andrew Skibitsky's guest on the mayor's TV-36 program. The interview, now airing on TV-36, was taped last week at Drumthwacket, the New Jersey Governor's residence in Princeton. See story on page 3.

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