



Westfield Council Finalizes E-Alert System Purchase

By MICHAEL J. POLLACK
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — In addition to finalizing the purchase of an emergency-alert system, Westfield officials, Tuesday, passed a resolution stating the municipality's concern over the potential closing of Muhlenberg Regional Medical Center, and asked the state to take a closer look at the matter.

The Plainfield medical center, a 396-bed acute-care facility that boasts schools of radiology, nursing and nuclear medicine technology, serves the central New Jersey region and many Westfield citizens. Originally

called Muhlenberg Hospital, the facility's origins date back to the 1870's.

With losses this year in excess of \$11 million, and a projected \$19 million shortfall in 2009, Solaris Health Care System, which owns Muhlenberg, filed the required "certificate of need" with the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services pursuant to its intent to close the facility.

Solaris Chief Executive Officer John McGee has stated that a "satellite emergency department" will remain open, and the facility will be able to handle issues such as broken

bones and burns, not life-threatening matters, such as heart attacks and strokes.

Effectively, the town's resolution asks the state's health planning board, responsible for conducting a full review of the "certificate of need," to assure that the decision will not be "harmful to the public interest."

Second Ward Councilwoman Vicki Kimmins has attended various Muhlenberg-related meetings recently. She told the council, last week, that Muhlenberg serves a vital function to area residents, and its closing would cause hospitals such as Overlook, in Summit, to "feel a crunch."

She said, "Our residents use [Muhlenberg]. [If it is closed], we are concerned that they would see more waiting times at other hospitals. It's going to be a disaster."

Under the Public Safety, Transportation and Parking report, the town awarded a contract to establish an e-alert system to Honeywell.

Jointly purchased with the Westfield Board of Education, there will be two separate, but connected, systems.

This year, the town will pay \$27,000, and the BOE will be charged \$17,000. A three-year arrangement, the cost drops \$4,000 for both entities next year.

The e-alert system will enable the town to send important notices more effectively. Residents will have the ability to stay informed via an "unlimited" number of devices, including home phone, pager, cell phone, e-mail and more.

Last week, Third Ward Councilman Mark Ciarrocca said the town would work with the school system to encourage those on the school's network to "opt in" to Westfield's service.

Mr. Ciarrocca said he hopes, eventually, enough people take part in the alert system and that it eliminates the need to disseminate information via paper mailings, which are more costly and environmentally unfriendly.

Separately, at Tuesday's meeting, Mr. Ciarrocca took a moment to thank Bruce Kaufman, recreation director; Paul Checchio, pool technician; William Palatucci, recreation commission chairman; and all volunteers involved with the opening of the renovated and expanded Westfield Memorial Pool.

Mr. Ciarrocca said the "first-rate complex" experienced a new record

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Garwood BOE Hires Resnick For Interim Bus. Admin.

By RAYNOR DENITZIO
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

GARWOOD — The board of education (BOE) on Monday appointed the appointment of Mark Resnick to act as the school business administrator (SBA) on an interim basis. Mr. Resnick will replace current administrator Julia DePinto-Perez, who is resigning effective June 30.

Superintendent of Schools Teresa Quigley said Mr. Resnick is a retired business administrator and will work part-time in conjunction with Ernie Turner, who was retained as a consultant on financial matters for the district.

Ms. Quigley said the district decided to hire an interim SBA since there are a number of staffing matters to address related to the district's new



A DAY AT THE CIRCUS...The circus came to Westfield Friday, June 13, thanks to the voracious readers at McKinley Elementary School. Students were rewarded with a performance by the Zerbin Family Circus after meeting their goal of reading 16,000 books. They went the extra step by reading 16,913 books. Word spread of this accomplishment and reporter Pat Battle from WNBC-TV came to report on the day. Later, the kids saw themselves on TV on the 6 p.m. news.

WF Board of Ed. Gives Updates on Database and Teacher Mentoring

By CHRISTINA M. HINKE
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — Superintendent of Schools Margaret Dolan updated the board of education during its regular Tuesday meeting on the school district's implementation of the student database provided by Simple.

The database allows teachers to input their report cards online, transcripts and state reports. These state reports have "grown exponentially in the last few years," said Ms. Dolan. "For every student taking the test, there are 30 fields [to fill in]."

She elaborated on some of the issues users are facing with the new system. Printing and formatting problems exist, as does the lack of an option for a "print preview," which is "cumbersome and time consuming" for the teachers, Ms. Dolan said. She said the district is talking to the company to forge a solution. Also low bandwidth has caused systems to "freeze," she added.

Although glitches with Simple exist, Ms. Dolan said the number of users have doubled to over 600.

Going forward, the new director of

guidance at Westfield High School, Scott White, will coordinate the efforts to integrate the system.

She also noted that because of the setback with the database, high school class schedules would not be out in June, but at a later date not yet determined.

Board member Beth Cassie said, as a parent, the elementary report card via Simple is "far superior" and "much clearer" than the old method of retrieving report cards.

Board president Ginny Leiz requested a study measuring the suc-

cess of scheduling through Simple.

Following the update, Barbara Ball, human resources supervisor for the district, presented the teacher-mentoring plan for 2008 to 2010. "Teacher quality is most important" in the success of students," said Ms. Ball, and mentoring is a path to improving the quality of teachers. She said, "A teacher can affect 3,000 students in a lifetime."

Her presentation showed that the district has 32 novice, i.e. brand new in his/her profession, teachers for the

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Legislators Wrangle Over State Budget in Trenton

By BETH BUDNICK
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

TRENTON — Governor Jon Corzine and the State Legislature agreed on \$32.8-billion budget for the 2008-2009 fiscal year on Monday. This budget includes cuts in state aid to municipalities, such as Fanwood's loss of funds "that we don't have any control over" according to Mayor Colleen Mahr (see Ted Ritter's article on page 10).

Such measures are a part of Governor Corzine's "Financial Restructuring and Debt Reduction Plan." Mr. Corzine said measures, such as the budget cuts, were to account for the "\$30-billion in debt and staggering unfunded pension and healthcare liabilities" that New Jersey has "amassed," according to his website.

Particularly important to Fanwood, the budget cuts include \$170 million from state aid to municipalities. This year's state aid appropriations reduce funds to municipalities below 10,000 in population by 25 percent, and the amount by municipalities with populations over 10,000 by 2.42 percent.

"It's a tight budget and a strong budget that reflects tough economic times," said State Senator Nicholas Scutari (D-22, Linden). One result of a tighter budget is that "municipal-

ties must tighten their belts," he said.

Mr. Scutari also said this year's budget was "almost historical" in its reductions of spending by a Democratic majority.

Officials stated that that aid reduction itself should not result in more than a \$100 increase over 2007 average residential property taxes as calculated by the Division of Local Government Services. However, this preventative measure does little to counteract that "this budget directly increases people's property tax and increases people's utility bills" while "not going far enough in more efficiently spending people's money," said Senator Tom Kean, Jr. (R-21, Westfield).

"The budget is reneging on a promise to start phasing out a high utility tax," Mr. Kean said. Moreover, the 2008-2009 budget calls for tax increases "at a time when people are hurting the most."

"This budget, unlike the one proposed by the Republicans, is not making New Jersey more affordable," said Mr. Kean, noting the budget fails to focus on transportation or the state's infrastructure needs. Moreover, "nobody really knows what's in [the budget]," he said.

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DRAWING THE LINE... Union County Police Officer Frank Catena rides his horse, Justice, during Substance Abuse Awareness Day in Garwood on Saturday. Hosted by Garwood Parents Draw the Line, the event enabled residents to enjoy rides, games and demonstrations from local police agencies. Sue Baron, one of the organizers of the event, said that the purpose of the day was "to show what a fun family day you can have without drugs."

Mountainside Board Denies Arirang's Expansion Plan

By CAROLYN D. FREUNDLICH
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

MOUNTAINSIDE — The planning board, last Thursday, unanimously denied Arirang Hibachi Steakhouse and Sushi Bar's submission for a use variance, after a two-year-long debate. The restaurant wanted to expand its business by turning the 12,000 square feet of unused space in the basement into a banquet hall. The banquet hall would accommodate an additional 207 patrons.

The board has lingered on the controversial topic for about two years, holding numerous meetings to discuss the possibilities.

Arirang is a restaurant located at 1230 Route 22, West. Behind Arirang, parallel to Route 22, lies Beech Avenue, a heavily populated, residential district. Many residents of Beech Avenue and the surrounding area opposing the application have regularly attended the meetings.

In order to get a full understanding of Arirang's legal capacity for expansion, experts were called to testify in front of the planning board throughout the last two years. During last Thursday's meeting, John Chadwick and Harold K. Maltz testified and provided their opinions.

Mr. Chadwick is a licensed professional planner, who has previously overseen hundreds of planning boards. Taking spatial and traffic regulations into consideration, he said he believes the restaurant needs to implement several changes in order to expand. If Arirang had strictly valet parking, it would be able to expand parking from 184 to 205 spaces. If the restaurant voted against valet park-

ing, another option to accommodate the additional patronage, and use all 205 spaces, would be to hire people to direct traffic through the parking lot. This would change the previous clockwise traffic flow into a counter clockwise direction, thus filtering traffic out of the back exit onto Beech Avenue.

This traffic flow and exit strategy would safely allow for emergency vehicles to enter and exit the premises.

Mr. Maltz, traffic and transportation consulting expert, agreed with Mr. Chadwick's proposals of valet parking or regulated traffic within the parking lot.

Mr. Chadwick also suggested incorporating a buffer to accommodate the nearby residents, because of the increased business the banquet hall would potentially generate, and the traffic that would increase in the residential streets. He said he believes taking away parking lot spaces and adding shrubbery to the outskirts of the parking lot can accomplish this. Mr. Chadwick said basically anything that gives "a hint of something other than a big parking lot" would be desirable. He said this would give back to the community by offering "a dramatically different effect of the roadside view of this property."

Numerous Beech Avenue residents were in strong opposition to Arirang's expansion, and said they did not feel the buffer suggested by Mr. Chadwick was a fair proposal. Currently, the residents are frustrated with the amount of problems the restaurant generates due to its popularity, and

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FUN IN THE SUN...After last week's heat wave, a grandfather and grandson enjoy a day in Tamaques park.

MS Taxes Increase \$800 K in 2008 \$10.5 Mil. Budget

By EBONY McQUEEN
Specially Written for the Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

MOUNTAINSIDE — The Mountainside Borough Council Tuesday adopted its \$10.5 million municipal budget in unanimous fashion.

Of the \$10.5 million budget, roughly \$6.59 million will be raised through local property taxes, an increase of roughly \$800,000 from 2007.

The levy's \$44,000 reduction was caused due to an increase in state aid and an increase in the surplus.

In a separate matter, a PODS (Portable On Demand Storage) representative, Orlando Silva, addressed the borough council concerning an ordinance that would restrict the use and placement of PODS.

Mr. Silva said, "At times, we do struggle with placing the PODS where

the resident asks for it. We understand and we would not want a PODS (unit) causing an accident."

The ordinance, which passed on Tuesday, stipulates that residents must apply for a permit and pay a \$50 fee prior to placing the storage container on property. The unit may not sit on a property longer than 30 days.

Borough resident, Ed LaTourette, of Dunn Parkway, spoke of concerns regarding a borough-owned easement for storm water runoff.

He said over the last 15 years the easement has increased by 15 feet in width and is destroying his deck.

Mayor Robert Vigilanti advised Mr. LaTourette to contact borough engineer Mike Disko.

The council concluded the meeting by going into executive session to discuss an employee benefit program.



OPENING DAY...Westfield Acting Mayor Mark Ciarrocca cuts the ribbon last Saturday to officially open the newly expanded and improved Westfield Memorial Pool. He is joined by recreation commission members, recreation department staff, town administration and council members.

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