



Raynor Denizlo for The Westfield Leader

MAKING HIS POINT...David Barbosa of East Dudley Avenue delivers testimony during the Westfield Board of Adjustment's March 10 meeting. The board asked Mr. Barbosa to consider alternatives to his request to build a new porch structure on his house.

Live from Iraq

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[to Baghdad] from the south," the colonel said. "There are IED factories, and we have to get the bomb makers. We have a lot of personal equipment, a lot of weaponry. We have what we need."

In a country where "nothing is black and white," Col. Whalen spoke about the need to bring people, of all Islamic denominations, together. The colonel said on a local level, each region's respective sheik has the most influence. In any given area, as many as 90 tribes may coexist.

"We discuss what they need to thrive in their area and [hope to convince them to] choose other means other than violence," the colonel said.

He said the American forces are helping to create a "market economy" in Iraq and work to shore up hospitals (10 now exist in the southern belt) and schools.

"Quite frankly, it was impossible [before]. Al-Qaeda would terrorize [the people] and destroy infrastructure," he said.

In terms of the enemy, Col. Whalen cautioned that it "is still out there. Let's not lose sight of that."

The colonel spoke about "Operation Thank You," an order from Major General Rick Lynch "to tell the story" of the war to three different populations—the American public, the Iraqi public and the insurgency. He said the operation is important in order to highlight the "positive gains" of the American military.

"It truly does have an effect [with the Iraqi audience]," the colonel said.

He said the operation also reaches out to "our loved ones in the States, saying 'thank you' for their support, we simply cannot do what we do without the support from the communities from across the United States."

He said troops both male and female, as well as from "all different walks of life," take part in the war effort. In addition, soldiers under 18 fight for the United States.

"It's pretty amazing that these kids stand up and come over here because

it's that important to them," Col. Whalen said. "It's a tremendous sacrifice. Some have been here two, three or four times. It's truly inspirational to work side-by-side with these kids. They can't even drink legally in the United States but are over here, ready to give their life for their country. It's humbling, humbling to be in their presence."

Col. Whalen said he and those in the southern region started getting cards and letters last year from St. Helen's congregants. He said it is "amazing" that "strangers from halfway around the world would take time to write."

The colonel said he tries to write back, when he can, to the many youngsters who take part in letter-writing campaigns from CCD classes, boy and girl scouts

"I carry cards and letters [to the outposts]; you give them to these kids out there that are working 24/7...the impact that some 10-year-old girl from Westfield, New Jersey, can have on a soldier in Wassit Province, near the Iranian border, is pretty amazing, and it's really important," the colonel said.

Corresponding with the newspaper in e-mail fashion on Saturday night, Baghdad time, the colonel wished to personally thank the following people:

From Westfield: Mary O'Donnell, John Rochford, the Thornburn family, Deirdre Gelline, Angela Donnolo, Rita Riccardi, Richard and Lucille Ragoza, the Polini family (Alice and Emma), Barbara Ugenti and family, Don and Chris Ross (as well as children, Thomas and Ross), Janet Getz, Christina O'Connor and Rita Riccardi (second-grade CCD class, St. Helen's) Helen Fisher and the McSwingle family, as well as Kelly, Bill and Alice.

From Scotch Plains: the Sosinski family, Don McVey, Patricia Wolpert, Russ and Paulette Cicero, as well as E. Hernandez.

Col. Whalen also lauded the work of institutions like the Red Cross (redcross.org) and US AID (usaid.gov). He encouraged those who wanted to support the troops to link up with organizations such as these.

Commenting about the impact of the Presidential debate on troops in Iraq, the colonel said debate is "what's great about democracy...It's wonderful that we debate. It's something the Iraqi's never had."

He remains confident that "the right people, not just the military, are in charge."

Despite the amount of time candidates spend speaking about the war, the gains of the surge and possible exit strategies, Col. Whalen said the troops do not feel like a "political football."

However, the colonel wished to comment on exit strategies predicated on immediate withdrawal.

He warned that pulling troops out too soon would be a "huge step backwards...it would be a disaster."

He said he did not feel that instant and complete withdrawal, as a course of action, would be "viable" and envisioned a U.S. presence in Iraq, in some form, for the foreseeable future. In July 2008, however, he expected to see 20 brigade combat teams reduced to 15.

Ultimately, he said, "this is an Iraqi problem, and the solution must be with security by the Iraqi army and the Iraqi police."

Describing the country of Iraq, he said, "It is not so much about oil as it is about water."

He said the country boasts an "intricate" canal system, and the military is working to get them jobs by establishing fish hatcheries in the region. Roughly 9,000 are underway.

Repeating the old Chinese proverb "Give a man a fish; you have fed him for today. Teach a man to fish, and you have fed him for a lifetime," he said American troops are "teaching Iraqis how to fish," both literally and figuratively.

He noted that the Iraqi people are "warm" and "deeply religious." For Iraqis, recreation exists in the form of sports. "There's soccer everywhere [in Baghdad]," the colonel added.

He said, "It's an amazing culture, not as materialistic [as America's]. It's beautiful in its own way."

He said people survive under "very austere living conditions. They lead agrarian lives."

Most importantly, he said, like Americans, Iraqis are hopeful people. "They want to get back to work. They hope to get their kids to school. They want healthcare, like we do. They want their industries back. They want to worship safely and peacefully. They beg for stability, normalcy."

"They want to go back to living without fear."

For more information, please see goleader.com/video.

The Leader staff contributed to the interview and report.

Cranford Swim Club Cell Tower Hearing Moves On

By STEVEN REILLY
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

CRANFORD — The battle over the placement of a cell tower in a residential neighborhood took a step forward at Monday's Cranford zoning board meeting.

Lawyers for both sides presented arguments on the selection process of the Cranford Swim Club as the site for Verizon Inc.'s cell tower.

Greg Meese, an attorney from the Woodcliff Lake law firm Price, Meese, Shulman and D'Armino, represents Verizon Inc., which seeks to install a 130-foot-tall cellular tower and equipment shed on the grounds of the Cranford Swim Club.

Mr. Meese presented Claire Dinardo as an expert witness for Verizon to testify on the need to place the tower on the swim club property. Ms. Dinardo is the president of Arionda real estate consultants out of Haddonfield. She was hired by Verizon as a "site acquisition expert."

According to testimony from Ms. Dinardo, the search for a property to install the cell tower began in 2003 when "radio frequency engineers" identified a "gap" in service for wireless customers in the area.

Ms. Dinardo testified that Verizon targeted an area in Cranford that included the Union County College Cranford campus, Nomahegan Park, Dreyer's Farm, all in Cranford, and Fairview Cemetery and the Sunrise Assisted Living facility in Westfield, as well as the swim club.

According to Mr. Dinardo, the "search area" identified by the radio engineers consists mostly of one-family homes that do not meet the requirements of the zoning laws to host cell towers. The properties targeted by Verizon "made the spirit of the law."

"I started with Union County College. That was the first choice for the site," Ms. Dinardo said.

According to testimony, letters were sent to the president's office of Union County College seeking to place the tower on the campus. Officials from Verizon met with representatives from the college, however, Ms. Dinardo said that the college "was not interested."

According to Ms. Dinardo, Verizon got the same response from Fairview Cemetery, Sunrise Senior Home and Dreyer's Farm. The swim club was the only site that agreed to the placement of the tower, she said.

Norman Albert, the deputy Union County council, spoke in opposition to Verizon's application to install the cell tower on the swim club property.

Mr. Albert called into question the process Verizon used to seek a suitable site for

the tower and the effectiveness of the letters sent out to property owners by Ms. Dinardo.

According to testimony, Ms. Dinardo's company sent letters of interest to the property owners in 2003 and began discussions with the college, the cemetery and the swim club.

The college was the first choice for the tower, but college officials declined the offer on three occasions, Ms. Dinardo said. The cemetery also considered Verizon's offer but declined, she said.

Sunrise Assisted Living and Dreyer's Farm never responded to Verizon's letter, she said. Ms. Dinardo stated that Verizon did not pursue placing the tower in Nomahegan Park based on the restrictions imposed by the state's Green Acres open space program.

"We send a certified letter to the property owner or the highest ranking official. It is up to them to respond to the letters," Ms. Dinardo said. "We are not going to harass people and knock on doors."

Mr. Albert focused his argument on the letters that were sent out by Dinardo's company. Ms. Dinardo testified that five letters were sent to the college, three to Union County regarding Nomahegan Park, two to the cemetery and one to the senior home.

Mr. Albert argued that Verizon did not make a satisfactory attempt to find an alternative location for the tower that would be less intrusive as the swim club property.

"The county is here to object to the site for the tower based on the negative impact on local residents as well as the proximity to historic lands," Mr. Albert said.

Mr. Albert questioned Ms. Dinardo on the process to find a site for the tower and the use of the letters.

"Did you ever go to a site to discuss a proposal?" Mr. Albert asked.

"We have to be careful on how many letters we send. We do not want to border on becoming telemarketers," Ms. Dinardo said. "The property owners have no legal responsibility to talk to us. Once they say 'no,' we leave it at that."

According to Mr. Albert, Verizon did not seek all the options to find an alternative site before settling on the swim club.

"What would happen if the county said it was interested?" Mr. Albert asked.

"What would happen if the county said 'come with us to apply for a diversion from the DEP (Department of Environmental Protection)'? We don't know because Verizon never applied."

Another meeting on the application to place a cell tower on the Cranford Swim Club property is scheduled for Monday, May 5.



Greg Ryan for The Westfield Leader

BANG UP JOB...A car and van collide last Thursday on Lawrence Avenue and Sinclair Street in Westfield. No injuries were reported.

POLICE BLOTTER

Westfield
Saturday, March 1, Mario Hernandez, 18, of Elizabeth was arrested on a Roselle Park motor vehicle warrant during a motor vehicle stop at North Avenue and Elm Street. He was released after posting \$89 bail.

Saturday, March 1, Victorino Castaneda, 18, of Howell was arrested and charged with driving while intoxicated (DWI) at South Avenue and Sussex Street. He was turned over to a responsible individual.

Saturday, March 1, Edward Foote, 65, of Scotch Plains was arrested at the Plainfield Police Department on a Scotch Plains motor vehicle warrant with bail of \$427 and a Westfield traffic warrant. He was released on his own recognizance on the Scotch Plains warrant with a March 12 court date and held in lieu of \$300 bail on the Westfield warrant.

Monday, March 3, Leonard A. Luizza, 3rd of Avenel was arrested on a Rahway traffic warrant during a motor vehicle stop at East Grove Street and Summit Avenue. The warrant, in the amount of \$500, was satisfied with bail and he was released.

Monday, March 3, Mark Bradley, 39, of Dunellen was arrested on a Long Hill Township traffic warrant during a motor vehicle stop on Pine Street in Garwood. He was released after posting \$333 bail.

Monday, March 3, Jaquelin Snyder, 18, of Westfield was arrested and charged with DWI during a motor vehicle stop on North Avenue, East, and Euclid Avenue. She was released to a responsible individual.

Wednesday, March 5, Ryan J. Grantuskas, 20, of Ringoes and Lee G. Shadwick, 22, and Mary E. Bash, 20, both of Westfield, were arrested following a motor vehicle stop on South Avenue near Center Street in Garwood.

All were charged with possession of a controlled dangerous substance/heroin, possession of less than 50 grams of suspected marijuana and possession of drug paraphernalia. They were released on their own recognizance with summonses pending a March 12 Superior Court date.

Wednesday, March 5, Kenneth Middleton, 29, of Elizabeth was arrested and charged with DWI following a motor vehicle stop on South Avenue in Garwood. He was released on his own recognizance to a responsible individual.

Scotch Plains
Monday, March 3, a resident of Lake Avenue reported that someone smashed his mailbox, which was valued at \$100.

Wednesday, March 5, Luis Medina, 37, of Union City was arrested on an outstanding warrant after a motor vehicle stop.

Wednesday, March 5, a resident of Cecilia Place reported that her neighbor let his dogs run without leashes. According to police, the dogs came on her property and barked and caused damage.

Thursday, March 6, a resident of Raritan Road reported that someone had removed her wedding ring, valued at \$5,000, from her room.

Friday, March 7, Thomas Jovan, 28, of East Orange was arrested on an outstanding warrant after a motor vehicle stop.

Saturday, March 8, David Doby, 28, of South Plainfield was arrested on an outstanding warrant after a motor vehicle stop.

Sunday, March 9, Larry Hill, 29, of Newark was arrested on an outstanding warrant after a motor vehicle stop.

Mountain Side
Tuesday, March 4, a resident of Little Court reported that someone entered her garage sometime overnight and removed a Global Positioning System from her unlocked motor vehicle. According to police, the garage door was inadvertently left open.

Thursday, March 6, an employee working on Upland Road reported that someone entered his van through an open window and removed his boss's cell phone, valued at \$200.

Saturday, March 8, strong winds caused severe damage, as well as power outages, to residences located on Rolling Rock Road, Ledgewood Road, Forest Hill Way, Old Tote Road and the municipal building.

Saturday, March 8, John Darabos, 23, of Edison was arrested and charged with driving while intoxicated (DWI) after a motor vehicle stop for reckless and careless driving. He was transported to police headquarters, where he was processed and released to a responsible individual, police said.

Sunday, March 9, Osei E. Sarabo, 32, of Irvington was arrested for driving with a suspended license after his motor vehicle became disabled in a lane of traffic on Route 22, West.

WF Reports Downed Lines, Trees From Storm
By MICHAEL J. POLLACK
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — Between last Saturday and Sunday, the Westfield fire and police departments responded to 26 and 33 storm-related calls, respectively. Heavy rains and wind led to felled power lines and trees. No injuries were reported.

Fire Chief Dan Kelly told *The Westfield Leader* that 16 of the 26 responses related to downed power lines, which had to be monitored.

Both sides of town experienced isolated power outages, the worst lasting 20 hours.

Oak Avenue was hit the hardest. During the storm, a large "Y-shaped" oak tree split; part of the tree fell through a house, and the other half crashed into the street, according to Westfield Police Sergeant Scott Rodger.

Chief Kelly said no one was injured; the building department declared the dwelling "unsafe," and the family is staying locally with a relative. A personal vehicle was also "crushed" by the falling tree, the chief mentioned.

In a separate incident on Oak Avenue, a falling tree damaged a two-car garage.

Chief Kelly said the fire department worked with local police and public-works personnel to secure areas that had suffered downed wires "for the safety of all pedestrians."

He said the storm caused the closing of some streets, including Oak and Westfield Avenues.

Oak Avenue also experienced the

WF Bd. of Adjustment

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later meeting.

The board also revisited an application from Robert and Lisa Wendel to retain a six-foot high fence at their property on Lenox Avenue. The matter was voted on as a "d" variance in January and failed to receive the five votes necessary to pass such a measure. Mr. and Mrs. Wendel's attorney, William Butler, questioned whether the application was a "d" variance. The board determined that the original variance was not noticed properly and determined that Mr. and Mrs. Wendel must go before the town council to get approval to retain the fence, which is in a town right-of-way.

The board also denied the application of Noelle Koetje of Clarence Street to retain a patio in her side yard and approved a request from James Ward of Prospect Street to allow temporary parking of prohibited vehicles at his property. The Savannah age-restricted development, which is currently under construction.

Westfield Town Council

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Speaking to reporters after the meeting, Mr. Caruana said that the municipal budget's arrival is still a few weeks away.

"We're looking at it a second time," he said. "We have a specific cost savings in mind, and we're trying to figure out how to get there."

Pension payouts for part-time employees, along with "every single line item," Mr. Caruana said, "will be discussed."

Third Ward Councilman and finance committee member David Haas said the town continues to wait on a ruling from the state Department of Community Affairs (DCA), stipulating that future part-time employees would earn "defined contribution" [401(k) plans] instead of "defined benefit."

However, Mr. Haas said the DCA's potential ruling was "ambiguous" about current, continuing part-time employees. Despite the lack of a "firm decision," the issue of part-time employee compensation "may be made for us," according to Mr. Haas.

Mr. Caruana said the finance committee had yet to discuss the effect of communities such as Garwood possibly merging with Westfield and said he did not have "any indication that Garwood is seeking a merger."

Separately, Mr. Caruana said a Rahway Valley Sewerage Authority (RVSA) credit, received partly due to an unexpected fund surplus at the RVSA facility in Rahway, is "saving us from an increase that would be more gargantuan than the extremely large one we're facing now."

Mr. Haas called the RVSA relief "temporary" and said that the rate would ascend next year.

"And we'll have another increase on top of that," Mr. Haas said. "In some sense, it's helping us this year and holding a hammer over us next year."

At the county level, Westfield is bracing for a \$436-million county budget that would cause the county portion of an average Westfield tax bill to increase close to \$170.

When asked, Mr. Caruana said members of the finance committee "are planning to attend all the county budget hearings."

Third Ward Councilman Mark Ciarrocca said a notice would go home to all parents of Jefferson and Washington Elementary students concerning the walking school bus program, in which a group of children walks to school with one or more adults.

While a few routes could be established in the spring, the program should be "in full swing" by the fall, Mr. Ciarrocca said.

At the beginning of the meeting, Mayor Andy Skibitsky made three public service announcements.

Mountainside Fights Merger

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Heights Board of Education. "There are no details because this is just a concept," Mr. Bramnick said. "It's 'efficiency,' as the state puts it."

Mountainside Board of Education Vice President Mary Beth Schaumburg said, "You're going to have the same number of people with different titles; it's all about the money."

Mayor Robert Vigilanti said he feels Berkeley Heights is in a "mess" right now. "It scares me that we are going to put everything in a town that is in political turmoil," he said.

According to Mr. Bramnick, he believes the county superintendent was charged with improving efficiency, which led to the focus on Mountainside, Winfield Park and Garwood being merged.

"He's (Corzine) got a number of

problems, but as soon as he realizes this consolidation is not going to work, he's going to have a bigger problem," Mr. Bramnick said.

Mr. Perrin said the BOE's budget had already been sent to the county superintendent's office, where it was rejected because it was over the state's spending cap. No reason was given to the board of education, but he said, after being sent to the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE), it was still rejected. The board of education is currently waiting for the NJDOE's reason for rejecting the spending plan.

Mayor Vigilanti said he would send a letter to the Governor in regards to the proposed state budget. "Trenton, today, is trying to penalize the small brothers for their mistakes," he said.

Wayne Baker contributed to this story.

Aid Cuts

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Skibitsky. The State Legislature is expected to vote on the budget sometime in late June. "We will try to restore the \$190 million," Mr. Dressel added.

Mr. Corzine is expected to sign the state budget on July 1.

In addition to state municipal aid numbers, local towns have been informed that the proposed \$436.1-million Union County executive budget will raise taxes in all but of one of the county's 21 municipalities. Locally, county taxes are set to increase \$1,767,931 in Westfield, \$531,938 in Scotch Plains, \$151,704 in Fanwood, \$249,720 in Mountainside, and \$189,494 in Garwood.

"At least Corzine is talking about the problem. The county is spending \$1.2 million per day. This shows they are out of touch with the residents of Westfield," Mayor Skibitsky said.

Michael Pollack and Paul Peyton contributed to this story.