

John List, Westfield Murderer, Dies at 82 After 18 Yrs. In Prison

By DEBBIE HOFFMAN
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

TRENTON — John List, the Westfield man who murdered his wife, three children and mother in 1971 in their Hillside Avenue home, died on Friday, March 21, at St. Francis Medical Center in Trenton, at the age of 82. He served 18 years of a life prison at New Jersey State Prison in Trenton.

"The Mercer County Medical Examiner's Office determined in an autopsy that the cause of death was a massive blood clot obstructing blood flow to both lungs," said spokesman Pete Daly. "He had been hospitalized for severe pneumonia."

"It's an ending to a terrible tragedy," Union County Prosecutor Ted Romankow said. "This is truly closure to that case."

List murdered his wife Helen, 46, his mother Alma, 84, and his three children, Patty, 16, John, 15, and Fred, 13, on November 9, 1971.

Charlie Haller, the Westfield patrolman who found the bodies on December 7, 1971, after getting a report from Patty's drama coaches, said, "I figured sooner or later he was going to die. Even at the trial he didn't look good." Mr. Haller added that he was surprised List was not killed in prison.

Mr. Haller said he would never forget the day he walked into the ballroom of the home and saw the sleeping bags with the bodies lined up. "I thought it was kids sleeping," he said. "I grabbed her arm (Helen List) to check for a pulse and immediately realized she was dead."

List was a fugitive for 18 years when he was featured on the Fox television show "America's Most

Wanted" (AMW) in 1989. The show featured a bust of what it was assumed that List had looked like in 1989 which eventually led to his capture and arrest in Richmond, Va.

John Walsh, the host of AMW, told *The Westfield Leader*, "John List died



John E. List

exactly where he should have - in prison. His arbitrary death sentences on members of his own family, and his subsequent life of freedom for the 18 years between his committing the crime and his capture, shows that evil walks amongst us every day. I pray that John List's innocent victims, are now able to forever rest in peace."

Current Westfield Police Chief John Parizeau was in ninth grade when the murders happened, but the case was something that always captured his attention. "It was such a horrible crime," he said. "His death doesn't add anything to it."

The Devlin family lived next door to the Lists. David Devlin recalls that List was a "cold guy."

"My dad and I went over to welcome them to the neighborhood. We had an apple pie," David Devlin said. "List peered through the door and said, 'thank you, but we like to keep to ourselves.'"

"I feel so bad about everything," David Devlin continued. "I don't think my initial reaction [to his death] should be 'I'm glad' because that would bring me to his level. I can say he was a monster."

"I was living in the city at the time, and my mother used to call me and tell me to move home because the city was so dangerous," Wendie Devlin Gates said. "Then a horrific murder happened next door to my childhood home. My parents were horrified."

Nick Devlin's wife, Libby, grew up down the street on Highland Avenue. "My friend and I were delivering political flyers around the time the murders happened. Nobody answered the door at the big house on Hillside. The house was spooky, and my friend looked in the window of what probably the ballroom and said, 'It looks like dead bodies in there,'" she said. "We brushed it off until we heard about the murders weeks later. I couldn't sleep in my own room for three months."

"I think of that family buried at Fairview Cemetery," Libby Devlin added. "I'm glad he's gone. Now



SPRING IS HERE...A large crowd turns out for the Lions Club Annual Easter Egg Hunt with favorable weather at Mindowaskin Park in Westfield last Saturday.

WFBOE Approves Final Budget of \$86.6 Mil.; Staff Cuts Announced

By CHRISTINA M. HINKE
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — The Westfield Board of Education (BOE) announced last week it had to cut staff to meet the state-approved budget for 2008-2009, totaling \$86,585,234, which includes debt service amounting to \$2,900,048 and special revenue of \$1,945,967. The general fund tax levy totals \$75,086,661, with debt service amounting to \$2,231,527, for a total of \$77,318,188 to be raised in taxes.

The public will vote on the general fund tax levy on Tuesday, April 15. The tax rate increase is above the 4 percent state cap at 4.59 percent, which translates to a tax increase on the average assessed home of \$324 in school tax.

Union County Superintendent of Schools Carmen Centuolo, a state official, informed the BOE that it had to reduce its proposed budget by \$840,000 from the spending plan submitted in February. In the past month, the BOE had made suggested cuts of \$654,000 to its initial budget. With the state's mandated reductions, the BOE had to go back to the drawing board and find other items to cut to make up for the \$186,000 balance.

Anne Riegel, BOE finance committee chairman, said, "We tried to not cut teaching positions. That's where our priorities were."

However, the board said it is cutting four to five of the consolidated teaching positions for gifted and talented and basic skills classes. Some of the other positions include the intermediate school student assistant counselor, maintenance and custodial staff, about three library paraprofessionals, six paraprofessionals district-wide, five paraprofessionals for the summer program and the Wilson Elementary School assistant principal - a position board officials said is "relatively new and no longer required."

Ms. Riegel said that the board made some cuts at Wilson School because enrollment has dropped. These cuts total a cost savings of \$394,718 and health insurance savings of \$146,000.

The board included no new teaching positions for this upcoming school year, so these are all existing jobs.

Dolan to Hold Meetings To Discuss Budget

WESTFIELD — Margaret Dolan, superintendent of the Westfield Public Schools, will hold nine public meetings at each of the district's schools in April to discuss the 2008-2009 budget that was approved by the board of education on March 19.

The public is invited to attend any of the following meetings:

- McKinley, 500 First Street, Wednesday, April 2, 7 p.m.;
- Tamaques, 641 Willow Grove Road, Friday, April 4, 2:30 p.m.;
- Jefferson, 1200 Boulevard, Monday, April 7, 7 p.m.;
- Washington, 900 St. Marks Avenue, Tuesday, April 8, 7 p.m.;
- Franklin, 700 Prospect Street, Wednesday, April 9, 7 p.m.;
- Westfield High School, 550 Dorian Road, Wednesday, April 9, 8:15 p.m.;
- Wilson, 301 Linden Avenue, Thursday, April 10, 7 p.m.;
- Roosevelt, 301 Clark Street, Thursday, April 10, 8:15 p.m.;
- Edison, 800 Rahway Avenue, Monday, April 14, 7 p.m.

It also condensed the amount of technology upgrades, reducing the budget by \$99,035. The spending limits include 50 new laptops for teachers, instead of the requested 125.

"Technology replacements have been delayed continuously for three to four years," Board Chairman Ginny Leiz said. "We are at a point now when we are trying to keep our equipment alive."

Board Business Administrator Robert Berman said in a comparative study of other towns in the state for the 2006-2007 school year, the latest year for which information is available, Westfield's per pupil spending is below average at \$11,030 per student, where the state's average is

\$12,150.

Part of the board's spending increases includes the introduction of the Early Childhood Learning Center at Lincoln School. The board stated that funding for state employee pensions was a struggle. For the last five years the board was mandated by the state to pay into the under-funded state pensions, and going forward the board will only have to pay a much smaller amount, in comparison.

"Any large increase should go away," Mr. Berman said. "We should be in a much better position a year from now."

The next board meeting will be held at 8 p.m. on Tuesday, April 1, at the board's offices at 302 Elm Street.

GW BOE Sets 2008-2009 School Budget at \$8.3 Mil.

By RAYNOR DENITZIO
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

GARWOOD — The Garwood Board of Education unveiled its 2008-2009 school budget, totaling \$8,256,284, during a special meeting at Washington School last Thursday night.

The school tax levy of \$6,074,104 will be presented to voters on April 15.

The board unanimously approved the budget, which is awaiting authorization from the county superintendent. After that, it goes to the voters for approval during the April 15 election.

On April 15, the polls will be open from 2 to 9 p.m.

The budget appropriates \$7.6 million for the 2008-2009 spending plan.

The \$8.3-million budget breaks down into \$7.6 million in spending, \$523,089 for debt service associated with the bond for school construction and \$143,095 in special spending, funded by federal grants.

The Garwood school spending will be paid for largely by local property taxes, supplemented with state aid and federal grants. The total property tax levy in the proposed budget is \$6,588,420 - 80 percent of the bill.

The property tax proposed by the board is an increase of approximately

4 percent over last year - the maximum permitted by state directive. This will result in a school tax increase of 12.6 points per \$100,000 of assessment (\$126 increase per \$100,000).

In preparing the budget, board members stressed that their main goal was to ensure that no services were cut.

"It's important to us that we didn't have to sacrifice anything this year," said Adele Lewis, president of the Garwood Board of Education.

The budget presentation included a slideshow of pictures that acting superintendent Teresa Quigley said was meant to show taxpayers the programs they help to fund.

"We have to thank the taxpayers of this community because you have given us so much," said Ms. Quigley.

One of the major increases in spending for the district this year is associated to special education.

Federal law requires that districts provide education for special-needs children from the age of 3 until 21. Since Garwood lacks a program to address those with special needs, it must send children out of district at a cost of \$25,000 per pupil, plus transportation costs.

According to the presentation, the borough spends \$874,791 annually

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MURDERED LIST FAMILY...John List murdered his wife, Helen, 46, (right); his mother, Alma, 84, (not shown); and his three children, (left to right), Patty, 16; John, 15; and Fred, 13, on November 9, 1971 in Westfield.

Council OKs Equipment Purchase for FD and PD

By RAYNOR DENITZIO
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

GARWOOD — The Garwood Borough Council approved an ordinance on Tuesday authorizing the use of \$75,000 from the borough's capital improvement fund for the purchase of new equipment for the borough's fire and police departments.

The money will go towards the purchase of a new Dictaphone to replace the one currently in use at the police department, a new fire alarm to bring the fire department up to code, an exhaust system for the fire department to prevent soot build up and to protect the health of firefighters and a digital fingerprint scanner, which is required by the Union County Prosecutor's office for the borough to transport prisoners to the county jail.

Council members stressed that the funds used to purchase the equipment will not result in any tax increase for borough residents since funding will come from the capital improvement fund.

"The money in this ordinance is money that was there, that is specifically for this type of equipment," Borough Council President Kathleen Villaggio said. "We are not bonding additional money for this ordinance."

Councilman Keith Sluka said it is in the best interest of the borough to update this equipment since waiting too long to do so can result in higher costs down the road.

"Sometimes good money spent is better than no money spent," Mr. Sluka said.

The council also approved three

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PLENTY OF ROOM...The newly renovated Union County Performing Arts Center in Rahway is spacious and luxurious as evidenced while the Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School Jazz Band practices there on March 19.

hopefully that family can rest now."

Alma List is buried in her native Michigan. Speculation is that List will be buried with his mother, though the Mercer County spokesman said in a Tuesday interview, "No one has stepped forward to claim the body as of today and we have not had any contact from any family members."

"He was a sick, sick religious zealot," said Timothy Benford, a Mountainside resident who co-wrote the 1991 book "Righteous Carnage" about the case. "He was truly Westfield's boogeyman and Frankenstein." He added that there is "no sorrow" with his death.

List was a devout Lutheran and belonged to Redeemer Lutheran Church in Westfield and wrote a letter of confession to the church's pastor Eugene A. Rehwinkel that was found shortly after the discovery of the bodies. The church would not comment when informed of List's death.

"I don't think he'll be missed," said Joe Spector, owner of the Leader Store in Westfield. "This guy was obviously in his own little world - and a dangerous one at that."

"If it weren't for the artist's rendering, he might never have been caught," Mr. Spector added. "The family didn't have a chance to live full lives."

"It was very exciting to work at *The Westfield Leader* when he was captured," former reporter Ellen Brandt said. "I went to the trial. It really doesn't matter that he died."

"You can imagine being a kid in the town when that happened," Ms. Brandt continued. "My sister and I were scared. Imagine a father killing his kids because he had financial problems." List had lost his job and couldn't make payments on his mortgage. A fire at the house in 1972 revealed, what *The Westfield Leader* called, the biggest irony of all: The glass ceiling in the ball room was a signed Tiffany original. That alone would have taken care of List's debts.

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CLOSE ATTENTION...Garwood Board of Education members pay close attention to budget discussions last Thursday. Pictured, left to right, are board members: Sandro Villaraut, Gary Maher and Monty Brown.

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