



**DARE...Supporters line up at the "DARE to Dine" cook-off on May 20. Pictured, left to right, are: Mayor Andy Skibitsky, Stacy Weinman, Officer Gary Moore, John Moretti, Naomi McElynn, Elise Wilkins, Lori Vaughan and Audrey Hodapp.**

## DWC Proposes Grace Period Prior to Issuance of Tickets

By WAYNE BAKER  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — The Downtown Westfield Corporation (DWC) revealed Monday that the town is looking into establishing a 15-minute grace period that would be honored before parking tickets are issued.

Business owners had appeared at a town council meeting last month and were critical of the council's proposed decision to increase parking fines from \$20 to \$32. Owners said that the amount of parking tickets given and the level of enforcement were driving customers out of town.

DWC Executive Director Sherry Cronin said if the grace period concept were pursued, courtesy cards that feature the date and time would be issued to overtime parkers; once the additional 15 minutes had expired, a ticket would be issued. If approved by the town council, the town's parking-enforcement staff would administer the program.

Ms. Cronin said the town would be asked to better monitor pay station lots so that people are not being ticketed upon arrival. In some instances, it is not apparent to the parking-enforcement officers whether a person is first arriving at a space or not. Incidents have been reported in which people first entering empty spaces and paying have been ticketed.

She said efforts are being made to encourage longer-term downtown parkers to park on the outskirts of the business district in order to make more space available to patrons of both stores and service businesses within the downtown. Ideas discussed at Monday's meeting included remote parking with jitney service, renting underutilized private space for this use and discounted permits for employers to purchase for employees.

Joe Spector, owner of the Leader Store on East Broad Street, suggested that the town look into legal arrangements with private-property owners to add more parking in the downtown. He said a "stacked" parking deck at a "less visible" location in Westfield could help add capacity.

## WF DARE to Dine Holds Cook-Off

By KATHERINE VOWELL  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — DARE to Dine held its second cook-off, Monday, at the Top Line Appliance Center at 576 North Avenue in Westfield.

This was the second of three "Iron Chef" type cook-offs to raise money for the Westfield DARE program.

The public is the judge at these events, and chefs are rated based on the taste and appearance of the food. Monday night's winner, Limani Seafood Grill, will challenge Top Line's "top chef" John Cucollo, on Monday, June 2.

This past Monday's event was sold out, with close to 250 tickets purchased. All proceeds go to the Westfield DARE program, which will use the funds to purchase a new vehicle.

"The cook-off supports the Westfield DARE program and pushes support for local businesses," said Officer Gary Moore, instructor and mentor for the Westfield DARE program.

Other restaurants that participated in the cook-off included, Chez Catherine, 16 Prospect, Feast Catering, Mama Lou's, Mojave Grill and The Brick Oven.

DARE helps give students the skills they need to avoid involvement with drugs, gangs and violence.

Tickets for the final cook-off on June 2 are \$30 per person. For more information, contact Naomi McElynn at (908) 233-3021 or the Top Line Appliance Center at (908) 232-5200.

## MS Council Introduces \$10.5-Million Budget

By EBONY MCQUEEN  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

MOUNTAINSIDE — During Tuesday night's borough council meeting, members introduced an ordinance for 2008 municipal budget of \$10,451,831. A public hearing will held Tuesday, June 17 meeting for residents to comment on the borough's budget.

No officials commented on the budget at Tuesday's meeting. Mayor Robert Vigilanti, who was absent, said a recent agenda sessions, "I've worked on the budget for 30 years, and this is the most miserable one, with the highest increase."

Local taxes will be raised by \$797,213. This is a 13.64 percent increase from last year. At a 4-percent cap on property taxes, the borough will also increase property taxes, which for the average assessed home will be \$164,633.

Some budget increases for 2008 are police salaries by \$215,000, the public library by \$26,000 and Rahway Valley Sewerage Authority (RVSA) by \$293,000. With other increases, Mayor Vigilanti has estimated the total increases to be \$705,000. Other areas increasing are gasoline, natural gas and electricity.

Due to state cuts, the borough expects to lose \$250,000 in state aid and \$151,751 in revenue. Last year the borough received \$1,216,540 in state aid.

Governor Jon Corzine has announced, as part of the restoration of state aid from previous announced cuts, that the borough's total state aid would be \$1,003,708, after \$37,105 is restored to the previously announced figure.

The council presented the 7th- and 8th-

The DWC discussed the predominance of downtown vacancies and the recurrence of graffiti on town property. The DWC suggested community service as a suitable punishment for those defacing buildings.

On another issue, Ms. Cronin said retail vacancies are increasing in the downtown, including spaces previously occupied by Tarpley Jewelers, the Christian Science Reading Room and the South Avenue Merrill Lynch location. She said occupants are being found for some vacant spaces, with Verizon taking over the former Blockbuster Video space on North Avenue, Staples moving into the Kay-Bee Toys vacancy and, pending approval by the planning board, Xocolatz moving into the former Annie's Gourmet Kitchen on North Avenue next to the Westfield Diner.

When asked for a number of vacancies, Ms. Cronin said, "I suspect the occupancy rate is in the low 90s [percent]," noting that the number was based on retail square footage.

The DWC also discussed ways to punish those caught writing graffiti, suggesting that they would be assigned to do cleaning and maintenance of the downtown as part of their imposed community service.

Ms. Cronin said the DWC has been working to remove or paint over graffiti promptly, but the problem continues to worsen. The group considered the addition of closed-circuit cameras to monitor areas of the downtown.

Concepts for improving the Broad Street facade of the New Jersey Workshop for the Arts also were discussed.

New DWC Chairman Dominick Verdian Monday's meeting, following the resignation of David Martone last month. Mr. Martone resigned after it was determined the new South Avenue location of his cooking school was outside the boundaries of the SID. Since he held a merchant seat, he had to resign.

A vice chairman to take Mr. Verdian's former board position has yet to be named.

On Tuesday night, the town council named Xocolatz business owner Jamie Chavez to the Downtown Westfield Corp. board to replace Mr. Martone.

## GW BOE

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Courtney spoke to the board about a lunchroom policy. Superintendent of Schools Teresa Quigley asked the student to speak with her during school so they could discuss the matter.

In ceremonies, the board recognized achievements of students, presenting certificates to children who qualified for the borough's honor society during the third marking period.

The Lincoln School multipurpose room was full of parents and family members as students received their certificates from board member Karen Rusin.

"You can see we have a lot of bright young students," Ms. Rusin said.

The board recognized former board members Monty Brown and Gary Maher for their service, presenting each with certificates of appreciation for their time on the board. Mr. Brown and Mr. Maher did not seek re-election to the board during April's election.

"I thank them for their hard work," President Adele Lewis said. "They will be missed, but as you can see, members have a way of coming back."

grade boys traveling team and the under 10-year-old girls summer softball team with resolutions of commendation.

The council passed a resolution to adopt new rules for public use of the borough's community room. These rules include a fee schedule that depends on the group. The council has added a refundable security deposit for groups serving food. The security deposit is \$200 for Mountainside groups, and \$375 for non-residents.

A first reading on an ordinance for quarterly and monthly parking permit fees stated that parking permits would be \$120 per quarter and \$60 per month. The fees would increase by 5 percent on January 1 of each year.

Due to a common use of Portable Containerized Property Storage Facilities (PCPSFs) in the borough, the council heard an ordinance on first reading to limit the use of PCPSFs. The ordinance does not apply to governmental units, but to residential one, two and three zones in the borough. The ordinance would regulate the use of PCPSFs to maintain the borough's residential zones.

Also on first reading, was an ordinance to apply a \$50 fee for any construction project to change contractors after the issuance of a building permit.

The council announced new meeting days, which will be the first Tuesday of the month for its work session, and the third Tuesday of the month for regular council meetings. This change was proposed earlier this year to allow time in between meetings for the council to take care of any matters that may need more than a week's work. The new schedule will take effect beginning in June.

## Westfield Council

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order to derive alternative solutions, would cost the town tens of thousands of dollars; however, Mr. Blancato pushed for the town to "do a deep dive" of all pertinent statistics.

Mark Ciarrocca, chairman of the public safety, transportation and parking committee, told Mr. Blancato that the town is in a "financial crisis" and that losing \$70,000, for example, would be "significant."

Mayor Andy Skibitsky said waiting would not change the town's decision to raise fines. He said the town is in "dire straits financially" and must look at ways to generate revenue.

Bob Saunders, who spoke at the last public meeting, said he felt "challenged" to come up with alternative ways to approach the budgetary situation. He and others met with Mr. Ciarrocca and Mayor Skibitsky, last Saturday, to discuss a list of possible solutions, which included using the extra capacity in the parking lot behind the former Blockbuster site and treat it as meter parking, raising the hourly meter rate from 50 cents to 75 cents and pushing back the enforceable hours from 6 p.m. to 3 p.m. in Lot 8, which is used for permit parking.

Mr. Ciarrocca said he supported the increase in fines, but that the parking committee will consider Mr. Saunders' suggestions.

Mr. Saunders replied, "The conversation [on alternative ways to address Westfield parking] should happen before the decision is made...I shouldn't have been challenged to come up with something better if it really wasn't going to be considered in lieu. I think that's a little disingenuous [on the council's part]."

Mayor Skibitsky responded, "Please, don't call this council disingenuous." Then he said that decisions are not arrived at "overnight."

Joe Spector, proprietor of The Leader Store, said, "History keeps repeating itself, at least in Westfield. The major structural flaw lies in Westfield's elected leadership. Besides its failure to plan for a budget effectively for its future, it has been the tendency to settle for Band-Aids when the wound is deep and is badly in need of a surgical procedure."

Continuing with the motif, Mr. Spector said the parking "disease" continues to spread throughout the entire system, and the town, in its role as "physician," is merely "prescribing sedatives."

Mr. Spector said the town and the council "should be out of the parking business."

Acknowledging that "hindsight is 20/20," Mr. Caruana took issue with Mr. Spector's "pet interest in life" — a 450-space municipal parking deck on Elm Street. Mr. Caruana said that "in a perfect world" it would result in an annual loss of \$250,000. "Mayor Skibitsky said it's 'off the table.' With these [current] economics, it's off the table forever," Mr. Caruana said.

Mitchell Mankin, owner of Made-moiselle Bridal Shop, accused the council of "bad timing" when making its decision to raise fines, consid-

ering the economic downturn.

Mr. Mankin also said that parking enforcement officers are not "approachable." He cited an incident in which he felt his wife was treated with a "lack of courtesy" and said there "has to be better vibes."

Town Administrator Jim Gildea said, "It's easy to make scapegoats. These are town employees who don't make a lot of money and probably have one of the toughest jobs in town. To insinuate that we have rudeness and courtesy problems [on the part of parking officers] is plainly not true. These are hardworking people. It's a thankless job. These people take verbal abuse from residents and non-residents, employers and employees, every single day. Let's be careful about blaming [officers] for giving tickets; that's not rude, that's doing their job."

Mr. Gildea told *The Westfield Leader* that parking-enforcement officers earn between \$30,000 and \$35,000 annually.

The council also formally adopted its \$37.88 million municipal budget by a 6-1 vote. Fourth Ward Councilman Tom Bigosinski voted against the budget because certain part-time professionals continue to be enrolled in the state pension system. First Ward Councilman Frank Arena and Second Ward Councilwoman Vicki Kimmins were not present.

The 2008 budget will increase by \$1.86 million. Local property taxes will support approximately \$22 million of the \$37.88 million budget (58 percent).

The tax levy represents an increase of 9.38 percent from last year. That percentage is made up of town expenses, capped at 4 percent, as the state dictates, plus 5.38 percent in state-mandated expenditures, such as library costs and pension payouts. The 2008 municipal budget will represent an approximate jump of \$180 a year for the average Westfield home assessed at \$183,500.

The council also introduced Meghan Cornish, the new health officer, and William Drew, the new town planner.

When reached after the meeting, Mr. Gildea and Mr. Caruana both told *The Leader* that Mr. Drew's previous experience with COAH (Council on Affordable Housing) issues made him an attractive choice. He has worked in the planning field for more than 20 years and took a pay cut to come to Westfield, according to Mr. Gildea.

Mr. Gildea told *The Leader* that Mr. Drew, from West Milford, would earn \$93,000 a year. Judy Thornton made \$88,000 and was in line for a raise, said the administrator.

Mr. Gildea said officials debated how to fill the vacancy, but decided that it was "too great a risk" not to select someone who can manage the town's COAH obligations.

Mr. Caruana told *The Leader* that it is considering charging the planner's time on applications and site plans to an escrow bond to recoup some of the money paid toward Mr. Drew's annual salary.

## Rescue Squads Cont.

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The added distance is not the only thing concerning local rescue squads. The influx of patients that will occur at remaining hospitals has left many wondering how hospitals, such as Overlook, JFK and Robert Wood Johnson, are going to cope.

"It is not just a matter of distance," said Joseph Law, an emergency medical technician for the Scotch Plains Rescue Squad, which takes about 60 percent of its calls to Muhlenberg.

"We are looking at a big change considering the majority of patients go to Muhlenberg or Overlook...Muhlenberg and Union [Hospital] will be down, and Overlook has too many patients as is. For us to bring our patients there is out of the way for them not having the room."

Mr. Law continued by saying, "When a hospital has no beds, they can't take any more patients, so where do we take them when Overlook is filled with Muhlenberg, Union and their own patients?"

"Hospitals are all pretty much at capacity with Muhlenberg open," Mr. Laferera said. "JFK, which is already overwhelmed with patients, will

be worse off with Muhlenberg closed. Sometimes we go there and our crews will have to wait 10 to 15 minutes to get a bed. I can't imagine what it will be like with Muhlenberg closed."

Similarly, Mr. Lawson said, "I've been at hospitals where you have three or four crews walking in at once that have to wait."

Regardless of the squad, everyone seems to agree that the situation at Muhlenberg is unfortunate, and another hospital closing is the last thing a rescue squad wants to see happen.

"Somebody is going to have to help out when more hospitals become entrenched with the same situations," Mr. Oatis said. "I just hope that sometime, somewhere, someone can come up with a solution that will help a lot of people."

"We would rather not be running to far off places, but if we have to, we will," Mr. Oatis said. "As long as we continue to get great volunteers, we will serve our community and the community surrounding us."

Westfield, Cranford and Mountainside rescue squads were contacted, but calls were not returned.

## Freeholders to Introduce 2008 Budget on May 29

By RAYNOR DENITZIO  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

ELIZABETH — The Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders determined the items to be discussed at its next regular meeting during the board's monthly agenda-setting session last Thursday night. Items on the agenda are the county's 2008 operating and capital budget.

County Manager George Devanney released his executive budget of \$436.8 million with a proposed tax levy of \$254.3 million in February. Under that plan, spending would increase \$22.4 million over last year while taxes would jump \$15.5 million, 6.48 percent, according to information released by the county's public information department. County taxes would increase in 20 of the 21 towns in Union County.

Final numbers for the operating and capital budget were not available at press time.

According to Sebastian D'Elia, director of the county's office of public information, final budget numbers will be available by the end of the week.

Also set on the agenda is a capital ordinance for funding various projects,



**DIVE IN...** With just over two weeks to go, the Westfield Memorial Pool is nearing completion. Palm trees are in, water features in the children's pool are ready, and the umbrella stands are in place. The decks are being completed, as are the ramps to the main deck. The adult pool is being power-washed to ready it for tiles and its final coating in the next week. After that, it's a splashing good time.



### Westfield

Saturday, May 17, Lynde Jules, 19, of Westfield was arrested on an outstanding Westfield criminal warrant after a motor vehicle stop at North Avenue, West, and Crossway Place. Jules was released after posting \$200 bail.

Sunday, May 18, Kevin Quattlebaum, 27, of Jersey City was arrested following a motor vehicle stop on the 600 block of South Avenue, West. He was charged with possession of less than 50 grams of suspected marijuana and possession of a controlled dangerous substance in a motor vehicle, and was released with two summonses.

### Scotch Plains

Monday, May 12, a business on Martine Avenue reported that someone through a rock at the window of his building.

Tuesday, May 13, a resident of Seneca Road reported that his neighbor took garbage and threw it on his lawn.

Tuesday, May 13, a resident of Seneca Road reported that someone removed her daughter's pocketbook, which was left at a Park Avenue store.

Wednesday, May 14, a business on Park Avenue reported that someone damaged a sign at the rear of the store.

Sunday, May 18, William Graham, 53, of Scotch Plains was arrested and charged for driving while intoxicated (DWI) after being stopped for a motor vehicle violation. According to police, Graham was transported to headquarters where he was processed and released on a summons.

Sunday, May 18, a resident of Midway Avenue reported that someone removed her backpack from an East Second Street store.

### Fanwood

Sunday, May 11, Jaime R. Jervis, 26, of Roselle was arrested on outstanding warrants out of Roselle, Roselle Park and Elizabeth after a field investigation.

Monday, May 12, Vanderlei C. Rodrigues, 34, of Newark was arrested on an outstanding no-bail body warrant from the Immigration and Customs Enforcement Authority. According to police, he was processed and turned over to immigration officials.

Monday, May 12, Stephanie A. Kendall, 29, of Fanwood was arrested after a field investigation on Mary Lane for an outstanding Plainfield warrant. According to police, she was processed and turned over to the Plainfield Police Department.

Wednesday, May 14, Justo Caceres, 30, of Plainfield was arrested on an outstanding Edison warrant, as well as a no-bail body warrant from the Immigration and Customs Enforcement Authority.

## Jury Awards \$5.5 Mill. to Family of Student Murdered

By FRED T. ROSSI  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — A State Superior Court jury in Essex County, last Thursday, ordered the City of Newark to pay \$4.1 million to the family of Sohayla Massachi, a Seton Hall University student who was murdered in Westfield in 2000, and demanded Seton Hall University and Argenbright Security company to pay out the remaining \$1.4 million, or 25 percent, in the Estate of Sohayla Massachi v. City of Newark Police Department case.

The decision arose because of mistakes made by a Newark 911 operator and police dispatcher during the May 2000 incident.

At the time of the incident, Ms. Massachi, a 1994 graduate of Westfield High School, was abducted by her former boyfriend, Christopher Honrath, from a street near the Seton Hall campus on the afternoon of May 10, 2000. He then drove Ms. Massachi, 23, to his apartment on Central Avenue, where he shot Ms. Massachi and himself.

During the kidnapping, two high school students saw Honrath pull a screaming Ms. Massachi into his car, parked on South Orange Avenue in front of the university in South Orange.

One of the students ran to the security booth at the university's main gate and reported what she had seen to an Argenbright Security employee, who told her that the incident "was not on campus, and there is nothing they could do for her."

The two students then called the South Orange Police Department from one of their homes and reported the abduction, along with a description of the two people involved, as well as a description of the car and its license plate number.

Minutes later, two off-duty Essex County Sheriff's Officers who witnessed the abduction called 911, which routed the call to Newark, where a 911 operator told the county officer, "What are [police] going to do? By the time they come out, this car will be gone."

The operator also incorrectly entered information about Honrath's vehicle into the 911 system and failed to report its last-known location or that

According to police, he was processed and turned over to immigration officials.

Sunday, May 17, Alesia E. Burgess, 44, of Irvington was arrested and charged with driving under the influence (DUI) on Martine Avenue for operating a motor vehicle while under the influence of drugs/alcohol. According to police, she was processed and released to a responsible adult.

Monday, May 19, Peter M. Cacciottolo, 20, of Fanwood was arrested on Forest Road and charged with criminal mischief to borough property at a Forest Road park. Two male, 17-year old Fanwood juveniles were also arrested and charged with criminal mischief to borough property.

### Mountainside

Tuesday, May 13, Tameca Holland-Womack, 25, of Somerville was arrested and charged with driving with a suspended license after being stopped on Route 22, East for several motor vehicle violations.

Thursday, May 15, Kevin Woodbridge, 25, of Union was arrested at the Scotch Plains Police Department for an outstanding Mountainside warrant in the amount in the amount of \$500.

Friday, May 16, an employee at a Route 22 gas station reported that a man asked the attendant to fill his vehicle with gas and after receiving the gas stated that he left his wallet at an area restaurant. According to police, the suspect fled the scene when the attendant went to notify police of the incident.

Monday, May 19, a resident of Wychwood Road reported illegal dumping to police after observing three garbage bags full of beer cans and other garbage on municipal property. According to police, the dumping seems to be ongoing as this is not the first incident the resident, as well as other area residents continuously clean up discarded garbage bags.

Monday, May 19, Tony Forbes, 22, of Plainfield was arrested and charged with driving with a suspended license and failure to exhibit documents after a motor vehicle stop on Route 22, East. He was also charged with an outstanding warrants out of Green Brook Township in the amount of \$314.

Tuesday, May 20, Meghan Nadeau, 23, of Warren was arrested and charged for DWI, refusal to submit to a breath test and consumption of an open container of alcohol in a motor vehicle. According to police, she was also issued a summons for careless driving for driving with a flat tire. She was processed and released to a responsible adult, police said.

## WF BOE

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12 mathematics program, which the board approved. She said this "allows students to get all the necessary skills to move on in math." The revision includes a free, five-year partnership with Learnia, a web-based tool to help determine if students and classes are in line with state and local test scores. It pinpoints areas for learning improvement for individuals and classes. She said new textbooks are not needed for this.

The board approved \$443,000 for out-of-district placement for the 2008 extended school year. Ms. Dolan said the costs and the number of students were about the same as last year.

Frank Fusaro of the Westfield School Boosters Association, a volunteer organization that provides financial assistance to high school athletics, asked the board for permission to use Kehler Stadium for banner advertising by businesses to support athletics. The boosters would administer the advertising plan. No decision was rendered by the board.

As a fundraiser led by students, a circus is planned for Friday, June 13 at Edison Intermediate School. Throughout the year, 368 students read 16,000 books and raised \$1,200 to help finance the circus.

Ms. Dolan said the circus would be set up on the practice football field because it is a place that has very little grass and is used for programs that are "hard on the field." She said the Westfield police and fire departments would assist with traffic control.