

Westfield Receives AAA Rating; Candidate Prods Mayor, Council

By MICHAEL J. POLLACK
Specialty Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD - The Westfield Town Council announced Tuesday night at its meeting that the town has received a AAA creditworthiness rating; during the public comment session, though, Democratic Mayoral candidate William Brennan criticized the closed nature of the town's budgetary meetings.

Mr. Brennan, a Birch Avenue resident, directed three questions to Mayor Andy Skibitsky.

In response to the town's four unions - police, fire, Communications Workers of America (CWA) and Teamsters - rejecting a voluntary re-

quest to forego pay for two vacation days in order to control expenses, Mr. Brennan asked if the mayor and council would require non-unionized department heads to give back the equivalent of two days' pay.

Mr. Brennan referenced an ordinance setting salary ranges for non-union positions and department heads, noting that 10 positions see salaries of more than \$100,000 - town administrator, \$142,143; chief financial officer, \$101,515; police chief, \$129,621; town engineer, \$114,253; fire chief, \$116,756, and two deputy fire chiefs, \$105,507 each. He again asked whether the mayor would ask non-union employees to give back.

Secondly, Mr. Brennan said that with municipal job cuts looming, "before we start laying off people, it's important that taxpayers have the right to go to [finance policy committee] budget meetings." He said he understands that when personnel discussions begin to center on "specific individuals," the public, by law, cannot be privy to those talks.

However, he asked if the mayor will "open up" the budget sessions to townspeople.

Thirdly, he asked the mayor, "Can you guarantee people that before you lay off fire, police and DPW that you will personally attend these budget sessions?"

Mayor Skibitsky would not respond from the dais, saying that the forum is not meant for a "question-and-answer session." Rather, he said, it was for public comment only.

After the meeting, the Democratic mayoral candidate said the mayor is "ducking" him. "[The mayor] is going to avoid me. The mayor refuses to debate me. I asked him to address very important questions," Mr. Brennan said.

When asked which of his three concerns was paramount, Mr. Brennan said the issue of opening the budget meetings to the public. He said in the case of Westfield's board of education, he attended meetings at which the board discussed fiscal hardships and general budgetary cuts without going into specific personnel matters.

"It clearly can be done, and there is precedent for that. You don't have to discuss these matters in a closed session," he said. "There's no justifiable reason why they don't open these meetings up."

He again mentioned the top salary earners and asked, "These people can't give two days back? Symbolically, shouldn't the town administra-

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GAZEBO SOUNDS...The Westfield Community Band entertains an appreciative audience on July 2 at Mindowaskin Park in Westfield as part of the 97th season of summer concerts. The Sons of the American Revolution and Daughters of the American Revolution join the band for their traditional ceremonies. Speakers and the Town Crier proclaimed the health of the town and the strength of the nation.

WF Plan. Bd. Approves Land Use Element, New Retail Lot

By CHRISTINA M. HINKE
Specialty Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD - The Westfield Planning Board on Monday approved the land use element of the town's master plan as well as a new retail and office building on South Avenue.

Town Planner Bill Drew said after the meeting that the only changes to the land use element since the last meeting held about two weeks ago were "details recommended concerning rezoning of certain properties," specifically about three business lots that he said would be "better utilized for residential" because they would "otherwise be isolated."

At the last meeting, planning board members Jim Foerst, the town council liaison to the board, and Robert Newell voiced concerns with the density and 40-foot height of some areas. Sharon Stockwell, chairman of WeCare, a Westfield organization that monitors public and private development in the town, asked the board when the town council would vote on the land use element. After the council conducted first reading on the matter, Tuesday, *The Westfield Leader* learned Wednesday that second reading would take place at the town council's Tuesday, August 4, public meeting.

Ms. Stockwell told *The Leader* that one of the main concerns of WeCare is the lack of enforcement of the property maintenance code. She said in today's poor economy, contractors who buy vacant buildings for razing and reconstruction have left many properties vacant and in poor conditions. She cited one example as 37 Cowperthwaite Place behind the Stop and Shop supermarket.

WeCare has made recommendations to the Land Use Task Force, she said, but does not know if those rec-

ommendations were implemented.

The board also heard and approved a variance application for 312 South Avenue, East, in a GB-3 zone that allows business and retail use. Co-owner James Petersen proposed to operate a retail establishment on the first floor for a showroom of cabinetry and some lighting and roofing samples for his home remodeling business and lease professional offices on the second floor.

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Eileen O'Donnell for The Westfield Leader HEAR YE, HEAR YE...Lowell Schontz of Westfield for the first time acted as Town Crier last Thursday night at the Westfield Band Concert recital at Mindowaskin Park.



BLOOMING GOOD TIME...Members of the Downtown Westfield Corporation, dignitaries and invited guests mingle with the judges of the America in Bloom contest, July 1, at Acquaviva delle fonti restaurant in Westfield. See page 3 for more.

Freeholders Hire Private Co. To Manage Golf Courses

By PAUL J. PEYTON
Specialty Written for The Westfield Leader

ELIZABETH - The Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders approved a five-year, \$421,000 contract with Illinois-based Kemper Sports Management to provide golf course management at Union County's two public courses, Galloping Hill in Union and Ashbrook in Scotch Plains.

The contract follows what officials said was golf operating losses of \$500,000 in 2007 and \$700,000 in 2008. The county freeholders approved the closing of Oak Ridge Golf Course in Clark earlier this year due to what officials said was an operating deficit of \$410,000.

Al Faella, director of parks and community renewal, said Kemper was one of two companies that bid on the county contract. RDC Golf Corp., owner of the Forsgate Country Club in Monroe Township, also submitted a proposal.

Kemper manages 70 courses in 28 states, including Heron Glen in Hunterdon County and courses in New York, Maryland, Pennsylvania and Virginia.

"By a large margin, a unanimous margin, the recommendation was made to go with Kemper for many reasons. Some of which are their experience in managing public courses, collaborating on the first tee program for our youth and managing other similar type public courses," Mr. Faella said.

He said the county would be able to "take advantage of the purchasing power that they (Kemper) have by buying in volume and passing those discounts onto the things that we purchase."

As part of the contract, Kemper will receive 5 percent of any additional revenues generated over the golf operations budget to be set by the county.

Mr. Faella said the county wanted a private firm to manage clubhouse operations, which he defined as "non-maintenance-related golf services" such as food and beverage sales. He said the county wanted to look for "new approaches to its existing golf operations and to move from significant losses towards profitability."

The freeholders, he said, authorized \$3.2 million in improvements at Galloping Hill and Ashbrook golf courses through a bond ordinance in



LIGHT IT UP...A composite of fireworks' photos shows the variety of colorful blasts on display July 4, during the Independence Day celebration at Nomahegan Park in Cranford.

Springfield Avenue Bridge to Close One Year for Re-Construction

By CHRISTINA M. HINKE
Specialty Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD - Starting sometime this month, the county-owned Springfield Avenue Bridge located by the Cranford Canoe Club will begin yearlong construction to replace the 103-year-old structure. The county stated in its press release that the bridge is "rated as being functionally obsolete." The State of New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) had required Union

County to prepare a "bridge alternatives analysis" for the bridge, according to minutes of a Cranford Township Committee agenda in January.

During its closure, detours will direct traffic to other county roads including Kenilworth Boulevard, Michigan Avenue and North Avenue. These county road detours are to help "keep as much of the through traffic off the local streets as possible," said Mark Smith, deputy mayor and commissioner of public works and engineering for Cranford.

The start of construction had been pushed back from June because the township's engineer Richard Marsden, Jr. had found fault with part of the detour plan, specifically trucks using Orange Avenue with a turn that is too difficult to navigate, Mr. Smith said. So, the engineer had talked to the county about other possibilities on county roads.

The bridge sits right between the downtown of Cranford and Nomahegan Park and is a route that bears an average daily traffic flow of approximately 17,000 vehicles, according to a Union County press release.

"I would imagine Orchard would get a good bit of traffic" by cars trying to navigate around the bridge, Mr. Smith added. "I think it's going to be a mess," Mr. Smith said about the traffic.

Canoeists who rent canoes from the Cranford Canoe Club pass under the Springfield Avenue bridge as the start and end to their three-mile journey along the Rahway River for possible sightings of baby deer, turtles and other animal life. The closure of the bridge would put a halt to this route the Canoe Club offers as the mainstay of its business. The opposite direction is a half-mile with very little nature life to see, according to a worker at the club, Jimmy Venia.

He said the timing of the construction, taking place in a year when the

economy is at its lowest in decades, is "a little inconsiderate" and will "negatively affect the business."

Area families come to the club to take a canoe out on the Rahway River. "It's a moderately-priced activity and a good thing to do on the weekends,"

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Klinger-Kueter Ends Her WF Council Bid

WESTFIELD - Westfield Democratic Party Chairman Kenneth Rotter told *The Westfield Leader*, Monday, that Carolyn Klinger-Kueter advised him that she is ending her campaign for a Second Ward council seat.

"In my opinion," Mr. Rotter said, "Carolyn would have made a tremendous councilwoman. She has devoted most of her adult life to Westfield. As a music teacher, she has enriched the lives of countless children through the gift of music. As a citizen volunteer, she has given countless hours of her time and support to many Westfield civic organizations."

Mr. Rotter said it was his understanding that she has "rethought the time commitment required and has decided that at this time, she is unable to give to the office of town council the time required. I respect Carolyn's decision."

Speaking with *The Leader*, Monday, Ms. Klinger-Kueter said she "still plans to devote time to the many organizations and volunteer groups [she] has worked with over the last 50 years."

She added that she "plans to support the other Democratic candidates in any way [she] can."

Second Ward Democrats who might be interested in seeking the position of town council should contact Mr. Rotter at (908) 868-3707 or by e-mail at ken_rotter@yahoo.com.

Michael J. Pollack assisted with this report.



WELCOME...Senator Tom Kean Jr. and his wife, Rhonda, welcome former Congressman Mike Ferguson and Assemblywoman Nancy Munoz of Summit on July 1 to the grand opening of the senator's new office location at 425 North Avenue in Westfield. Pictured, from left to right, are: Mr. Ferguson, Mrs. Munoz, Mrs. Kean and Mr. Kean.

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