



Gov. Chris Christie Takes Office: 'Change Has Arrived' at Statehouse

By PAUL J. PEYTON and SONIA OWCHARIIV
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

AREA - New Jersey is under new leadership after Tuesday's swearing-in of former Westfielder Chris Christie as the state's 55th governor.

Signaling the huge challenges he faces, headed by a \$1-billion shortfall this year and \$10 billion starting in July, Mr. Christie promised, "One person can make a difference; I will make a difference."

"While the economic hour is dark, there are brighter days ahead," Governor Christie said.

Mr. Christie's ascent to the Statehouse has its roots strongly planted in Union County. His new administration also has strong ties to the Cranford-Westfield area.

The new governor, who lived on Prospect Street in Westfield from 1987 to 1989 and near Tamaques Park in 1991, was a partner in the then-Cranford law firm of Dughi, Hewit & Palatucci (now Dughi & Hewit). Prior to living in Westfield, he and his wife, Mary Pat, resided in a small apartment above a liquor store in Summit and later bought their first home in Cranford.

One of Governor Christie's law partners in the Cranford firm, William Palatucci of Westfield, was put in charge of organizing the inauguration along with Mr. Christie's brother, Todd. While at the law firm, Mr. Christie specialized in securities law, appellate practice, election law and government affairs.

"The governor was known as a hard-working and able attorney for the 14

years he was living and working in the Westfield-Cranford area. He took a great interest in the personal lives of everyone at the office, always quick with a good word and offers of help," Mr. Palatucci told *The Westfield Leader*.

Born in Newark, Mr. Christie moved to Livingston with his family. Later, he joined Dughi, Hewit & Palatucci in 1987, becoming a partner six years later. Governor Christie is a graduate of the University of Delaware (1984) and Seton Hall Law School (1987). According to the University of Delaware website, Mr. Christie served as student government president in his senior year and was succeeded by his future wife.

A former Morris County Freeholder and state Assembly candidate, Mr. Christie received his political big break when President George W. Bush appointed him United States Attorney for New Jersey in December 2001 and served seven years. The New Jersey Bar Association opposed the move, citing his lack of experience. He went on to become the state's longest-serving U.S. Attorney.

As a U.S. Attorney, Mr. Christie drew a national reputation going after and winning successful convictions of public officials - 130 of them - with no defeats. The convictions list was highlighted by former Newark Mayor and state Senator Sharpe James, a Democrat, and ex-Republican Essex County Executive James Treffinger.

In his inaugural address, Mr. Christie said, in addition to cutting some state programs while transforming others, spending would have to be curbed at the municipal level. "We have the largest budget deficit per-person of any state in the Union. We have the highest tax rates in the nation," he said.

Following his election as governor over incumbent Jon Corzine this past November, Mr. Christie named former state lawmaker and ex-Westfield mayor Richard Bagger as his chief of staff. Mr. Bagger, who served on the Westfield Town Council and was mayor in 1991, served for 10 years in the Assembly. He was elected to the Senate in 2001, but served only one year before resigning due to a promotion with his employer, Pfizer.

As a show of bipartisanship, Governor Christie called the state's new legislative leaders, Senate President Stephen Sweeney and Assembly Speaker Sheila Oliver, both Democrats, to the podium. "Let us shake hands as a symbol for our citizens of all that is possible in a future that demands that who gets the credit finally takes a back seat to doing something worth getting credit for," Governor Christie said. He vowed to represent all New Jerseyans, regardless of political affiliation, wealth status or age.

Mr. Christie has appointed former Westfield resident Bret Schundler, the

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Garwood BOE Sets Tuition For Pre-K School Program

By LAUREN S. BARR
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

GARWOOD - The Garwood public schools will offer a tuition-based pre-kindergarten program for the 2010-2011 school year for three- and four-year-olds. At Tuesday night's board of education meeting, the board voted unanimously to charge \$2,500 for a half-day program and \$5,000 for a full day.

Superintendent Teresa Quigley said that the board had given the issue a lot of thought, and because board members "take pride in our school system," they chose to continue to offer a pre-K program rather than eliminate it. She said the "state keeps giving us mandates" to fund programs, but does not tell the board how to fund them.

Mrs. Quigley said the classes will be mixed ages, with a maximum of 15 children. This will require one teacher and one paraprofessional per classroom.

Board Member and Finance Committee Chairwoman Susan Groning said the board looked at fees for both public and private pre-K programs, and that the fees the board came up with are lower than most. She also said that Garwood will have certified teachers, which not all private pre-schools offer. Mrs. Groning also said that in looking at the upcoming 2010-2011 budget, the board would face a deficit, with teacher salaries increasing 4.3 percent and health insurance costs set to rise by approximately \$100,000.

Several parents asked questions and raised concerns about the pre-K pro-



Courtesy of Giovanna Palatucci

PAST AND FUTURE... Governor Chris Christie gives his inauguration address Tuesday at the War Memorial in Trenton. Pictured, left to right, are: Former Governors Thomas H. Kean, Donald DiFrancesco, Richard Codey and Jon Corzine; state Assembly Minority Leader Alex DeCroce, Senate Minority Leader Tom Kean, Jr. (LD-21, Westfield), Assembly Speaker Sheila Oliver (LD-34, East Orange), Senate President Stephen Sweeney (LD-3, West Deptford), and Mr. Christie's former law partner, William Palatucci of Westfield. Not pictured, but standing near the podium, are former Governors Brendan Byrne and Christine Todd Whitman.

Needle Point Files 'Builder's Remedy' Against WF Council, Planning Board

By MICHAEL J. POLLACK
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD - As one builder's remedy claim against the Town of Westfield gets dismissed, another similar lawsuit has arrived.

If successful in a builder's-remedy lawsuit, a plaintiff is allowed to proceed with the construction of a development at a higher density than would otherwise be permitted in a given zone, as long as a sufficient portion of the project is dedicated to providing affordable housing.

While filing an affordable-housing plan with the Council on Affordable Housing (COAH) can offer a municipality some protection, it does not fully guarantee complete safeguard from such a grievance. Being a member of COAH is also voluntary.

At present, Westfield's plan has not been certified by COAH. However, Town Administrator Jim Gildea said Westfield "intends to pursue COAH certification as soon as it is able." COAH will not accept a plan while litigation is ongoing.

"We decided to get certified," he said. "The town planner was working on it with other town professionals. The plan was finalized, approved by the planning board as part of the master plan and submitted to COAH before [a prior builder's-remedy] lawsuit (called 'Sunnyside') was filed."

Discussed in executive session last

Tuesday, the new lawsuit, which was served on the town, Mayor Andy Skibitsky, the Westfield Town Council and the Westfield Planning Board in late December, alleges that the town is hindering the development of affordable housing.

While one legal team defends the town, council and Mayor Skibitsky, the planning board, a separate statutory body, requires its own legal defense, which is provided by the board's attorney.

The plaintiff, known in the suit alternately as 466 West Broad Street and 440 North Avenue East, refers to a company doing business at 212 Lenox Avenue, the location of Needle Point Homes in Westfield.

The plaintiff has alleged that both areas of land, 466 West Broad Street and 440 North Avenue East, are suitable for multi-family developments,

but the defendants have unfairly "re-buffed" the business in its attempts to move its plans forward.

Thus, the plaintiff has demanded judgment against the defendants, declaring that the zoning ordinance and other land-use regulations of the town are "unconstitutional, null and void" and that the business is entitled to a builder's remedy, requiring re-zoning of both properties to permit construction.

The 466 West Broad Street property, zoned R-6 (6,000 feet minimum) for residential multi-family use, is the site of the former Heart and Soul Cafe, catty-corner to McKinley School. The lot at 440 North Avenue East, zoned for general business, is the site of the former White Diamond, next to Lindeman Buick.

The plaintiff also has requested that certain expenses, including applica-

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BOE to Implement New Student-Management System

By SARA MAGNOLA
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD - The Westfield Board of Education (BOE), Tuesday night, unanimously voted to approve the implementation of Genesis, as the new student management system for the public school district.

In response to heightened state mandates on student data collection and a growing number of users, the board requested that the district's chief technology officer, Brian Auker, along with an 18-member committee, who represent all aspects of the district, make a recommendation on which student management program would best meet the district's data management needs.

"The committee was thorough and performed a comprehensive evaluation," Westfield High School Principal Peter Renwick said.

During Superintendent Margaret Dolan's report on the new system, Mr. Auker presented the board with an overview of the selection process, which

began in October 2009. After identifying what features were required, the committee conducted research to narrow down their choices. They then reached out to colleagues in districts that are similar to Westfield in size and needs, and who have already implemented student management system. At the end of the process, all of the committee members felt Genesis was the most appropriate choice.

"We wanted to make sure [the new system] would be able to handle the traffic," Mr. Auker said. "[Genesis] is more robust."

The purchase of the Web-based software, which offers a Parent Portal, more efficient state reporting, customizable report cards, flexible scheduling, and integrated grade book and health record applications, as well as the ability to integrate with the existing programs utilized throughout the district, will cost \$157,100. That, along with additional costs associated with the imple-

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Courtesy of Glenn Mortimer

GLORY DAYS... New Governor Chris Christie and wife, Mary Pat, rock out to Bruce Springsteen hits Tuesday night during an inaugural celebration at Newark's Prudential Center. Governor Christie and Lieutenant Governor Kim Guadagno were sworn into office earlier that day.

Teachers Unions React To Schundler Appointment

By PAUL J. PEYTON
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

AREA - The selection of former Westfield resident and 2001 Republican gubernatorial candidate, Bret Schundler, a proponent of school vouchers, school choice and charter schools, as education commissioner has drawn a mostly positive reaction from local school officials, although concerns on possible school aid reductions and spending limits were foremost on their minds.

Mr. Schundler is a product of the Westfield public school system, having graduated in 1977 from Westfield High School (WHS), where he made All-State in football. He later had a career on Wall Street before being elected to two terms as Jersey City mayor. He lost the governor's race in 2001 to Jim McGreevey.

Senator Tom Kean, Jr. (LD-21, Westfield), the Republican leader in the state Senate, has called Mr. Schundler, "one of the most vocal advocates of charter schools and school choice in the nation."

"Bret can be expected to champion reforms that will bring equally dramatic improvements in the education of the children of our state," Mr. Kean said.

Ginny Leiz, president of the Westfield Board of Education, said her concern was what Governor Chris Christie and Mr. Schundler's position is on moving school board elections to November and imposing stiffer restrictions on increasing school budget spending. She said proposals in Trenton are to no longer allow spending adjustments outside of the current state-imposed cap of 4 percent, or to move to a 3-percent cap. Both

proposals, she said, are to move to "automatically-approved" budgets, which would no longer go before voters.

"I wish him (Mr. Schundler) well in a certainly difficult economic time," Ms. Leiz said. She said there is "much uncertainty" and "real concern" as to the future of school funding in New Jersey and spending limits for boards of education.

"It will be interesting to see how the governor's relationship with the NJEA (New Jersey Education Association) will play out," Ms. Leiz said, noting that the Westfield school board will soon begin negotiations with the Westfield Education Association (WEA), whose contract expires in June. "We need to continue our close relationship with our teachers' union."

Westfield Superintendent of Schools Margaret Dolan said, "We always are pleased when we hear of the accomplishments of our graduates. We are certainly proud of the fact that our 1977 Westfield High School graduate, Bret Schundler, has been named commissioner of education, responsible for all the public schools in the state. We congratulate him on this honor."

Kim Schumacher, president of the WEA, said the choice of Mr. Schundler, as well as Mr. Christie's Chief of Staff Rich Bagger, another WHS graduate, is "fabulous" for Westfield and points to the quality of the town's public school system.

She said her concern is how the current economic crisis will impact public-education funding in New Jersey. "What does this mean for (public) education?" Ms. Schumacher asked. "We (Westfield) don't get a lot of funding

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Michael J. Pollack for The Westfield Leader

"WE'LL WALK HAND IN HAND"... Walkers take to East Broad Street in Westfield, Monday, to celebrate the life of Martin Luther King, Jr. (MLK) and sing Civil Rights-era freedom songs such as "We Shall Overcome." The walk began at the South Avenue circle by the MLK monument and proceeded toward Temple Emanu-El, where a service to commemorate the life of Dr. King took place. Above, a young woman carries the message of Dr. King: "Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that."



Courtesy of Timothy Mulhill

INAUGURATION PAUSE... Westfield High School graduate Bret Schundler, pictured left, Asm. Jon Bramnick, second from left, Rich Bagger and Senator Tom Kean, Jr., right, all of Westfield, pose at Governor Chris Christie's inauguration luncheon Tuesday. Mr. Schundler has been named commissioner of education and Mr. Bagger is the governor's chief of staff.

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