

The Westfield Leader THE SCOTCH PLAINS-FANWOOD TIMES

— Established 1890 —

Legal Newspaper for the Town of Westfield,
Boroughs of Mountainside and Garwood
And the County of Union, N.J.

Legal Newspaper for the Borough of Fanwood
And the Township of Scotch Plains
And the County of Union, N.J.

Members of:

New Jersey Press Association • National Newspaper Association • Westfield Area Chamber of Commerce
Scotch Plains Business & Professional Association • Fanwood Business & Professional Association

Periodicals - Postage Paid at Rahway, New Jersey

Periodicals - Postage Paid at Rahway, New Jersey

P.O. Box 250 • 251 North Avenue, West
Westfield, N.J. 07091

P. O. Box 368
Scotch Plains, N.J. 07076

Tele: (908) 232-4407 • E-mail: editor@goleader.com • Web: www.goleader.com • Fax: (908) 232-0473

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to the offices of the newspapers at
P. O. Box 250, Westfield, New Jersey 07091

Published every Thursday by Watchung Communications, Inc.

Paul Peyton
ASSIGNMENT EDITOR
Suzette F. Stalker
COMMUNITY
Michael Pollack
EDUCATION & ARTS

Horace R. Corbin
PUBLISHER
David B. Corbin
ASSISTANT PUBLISHER & SPORTS
Ben Corbin
SERVICES

Jeff Gruman
SALES MANAGER
Michael L. Bartiromo
MARKETING PRODUCTION
Robert P. Connelly
BUSINESS OPERATIONS

SUBSCRIPTION PRICE

www.goleader.com/subscribe

One-year - \$28 • Two-year - \$52 • Three-year - \$76 • One-year college (September to May) - \$20

UCC Must Look to Other Options to Save Observatory

The Union County College (UCC) Board of Governors and Board of Trustees are considering shutting down the popular Sperry Observatory on the campus of Union County College in Cranford.

College officials say the school needs space for extra classrooms, given the growing number of students signing up for UCC classes during these turbulent economic times. But, in our opinion, the numbers do not add up. Better economic times will return with student population likely to drop, but once the observatory is removed, it will be gone forever.

UCC approved its \$68-million budget last week. Tuition is going up \$6 per credit hour to \$100 for county residents and \$200 for out-of-county residents. Tuition, based on 21 credit hours, will now be \$4,700 for students living outside the county and \$2,700 for county residents. Tuition accounts for \$42.5 million of the 2010-2011 Fiscal Year budget, with the county chipping in \$13 million and the state

another \$10.5 million, both subsidized by taxpayers.

Any additional revenue from the extra students utilizing the observatory space would be lost on salaries for additional instructors, which will likely have to be borne by the taxpayers. We agree that UCC and Amateur Astronomers, Inc. need to come to a financial arrangement, which UCC said it must achieve if the observatory is to stay open. Or, perhaps, fees must be charged to persons attending observatory programs to offset maintenance and other related costs.

We believe there are other better options such as leasing classrooms from financially strapped boards of education in area high schools or utilizing the existing UCC Commons lounge area or even installing portable classrooms. The observatory is a valued facility that not many counties possess. We should not lose it for additional classrooms that only increase the burden on taxpayers.

Fait Accompli, So Sad

Tuesday night a week ago, the Westfield Board of Education (BOE) approved a three-year contract with the teachers' union - The Westfield Education Association (WEA). The new contract gives pay increases of 3.9 percent for each of the next three years (12.2 percent total compounded). The public will vote next month, on April 20, for the 2010-2011 school budget (as well as elect new members to the board of education).

In spite of the fact that the WEA contract is not set to expire until June 30, 2010, the BOE approved the new contract before the voters have an opportunity at the polls. The BOE officials were well aware of the

governor's desperate need to bring finances in order and that state education aid would not be possible at the level of last year.

Rather than cooperate with the emergency, the unions and the BOEs statewide seemed joined at the hip and are thumbing their noses at the public and the governor. Once again, the taxpayers will be hammered.

A grievous error, in our view. Now, there is little room for compromise in dealing with the fiscal emergency. So sad.

It begs the question, "Why bother to have a vote next month?" The situation is fait accompli.

Net Increase In Cost of WF Teachers' Salaries, Benefits Is Only 0.8 Percent; District-Wide Held to 2.67 Percent

As a member of the board of education, I believe the greatest challenge and the single greatest issue facing the Westfield community with regard to our school system is the budget. Each year we struggle to craft a budget that balances many factors. On one hand are the cost drivers - increasing health insurance premiums, salaries, utilities, increasing enrollment and decreasing state aid. On the other hand, we all want our schools to remain top notch, providing the best education possible to all our students, while at the same time keeping property-tax increases to a minimum. These competing factors seem virtually irreconcilable.

Last week, the board approved a new three-year contract with the teachers' union. The new contract, to which I am proud to have contributed as a member of the board's negotiating team, includes some extremely cost effective measures.

We accomplished our primary goal of eliminating the traditional indemnity health insurance plan. We were able to secure a contribution toward the premium from each of our over 500 teachers, and achieved a fairly significant increase in both the office visit and prescription drug co-pays. These items have resulted in an aggregate savings of over \$1,000,000 per year over what the costs would have been if things had remained the same.

In addition, there are several other cost-saving items in the new contract including: holding stipends flat for the first year of the contract, which then increase by only 2 percent per year for the remaining two years; keeping starting salaries flat for new hires in each of the three years, and new hires who are not Westfield residents will no longer be allowed to enroll their children in Westfield public

schools without paying tuition.

As a result of these savings, the net increase in the cost of the teachers' salaries and benefits is only 0.8 percent. District-wide the increase in the total cost of salaries and benefits for all our employees has been held to only 2.67 percent.

Since salaries and benefits represent almost 80 percent of our total costs, the impact of this minimal increase on the overall budget is huge. We still have other hurdles to clear, but the new teachers' contract certainly helps. As I have always done, I will work hard to keep costs down, while trying hard not to negatively impact the quality of the education we provide our children.

Once again, thank you for your support.

Richard Solomon
Westfield BOE Candidate



Your State Legislators

---LD-21---
Sen. Thomas Kean, Jr. (R)
425 North Ave. E.
Westfield, N.J. 07090
(908) 232-3673

Asm. Jon Bramnick (R)
251 North Ave. West
Westfield, N.J. 07090
(908) 232-2073

Asm. Nancy Munoz (R)
57 Union Place, Suite 101
Summit, N.J. 07901
(908) 918-0414

---LD-22---
Sen. Nicholas Scutari (D)
1514 E. Saint Georges Ave.
Linden, N.J. 07036
(908) 587-0404

Asw. Linda Stender (D)
1801 East Second St.
Scotch Plains, N.J. 07076
(908) 668-1900

Asm. Jerry Green (D)
17 Watchung Ave.
Plainfield, N.J. 07060
(908) 561-5757

LD-21 includes Westfield, Mountainside, Garwood, Summit and Cranford.

LD-22 includes Scotch Plains, Fanwood, Plainfield, Clark and Linden.

E-mail

senkean@njleg.org
scutari@njleg.org
asmbrannick@njleg.org
asmunoz@njleg.org
astwender@njleg.org
asmgreen@njleg.org

7th Congressional District
Representative Leonard Lance, 425 North Avenue E., Westfield, NJ 07090 (908) 518-7733

Letters to the Editor

Union County College Interim President Addresses Sperry Decision

A public campaign has been mounted regarding the relationship between Union County College (UCC) and Amateur Astronomers, Inc. (AAI). UCC would like to dispel any misinformation or misconception about the matter.

Union County College is the public community college for the County of Union, primarily serving the citizens of the county.

Amateur Astronomers, Inc. (AAI) is a private not-for-profit organization interested in astronomy. Over the years, it has utilized space on UCC's Cranford campus pursuant to an Agreement between AAI and UCC. The last such agreement was signed on July 22, 1987, almost 23 years ago.

AAI hosts astronomy activities in the William H. Sperry Observatory. The observatory is owned by UCC. AAI members, many of whom are not Union County residents, have enjoyed the virtual exclusive use of the observatory for many years without any financial contribution.

UCC maintains the premises at its sole expense. AAI has resisted all requests that it contribute financial support for operational or maintenance expenses.

Over the last five years, UCC has seen an unprecedented increase in the number of students enrolled on each of its campuses. This has placed a severe burden on college facilities and resources, requiring the governing boards to make difficult decisions, guided always by the desire to provide quality education and career-oriented training to college students, most of whom reside in Union County.

After careful deliberation, the Board of

Governors and the Board of Trustees of the college made a decision to more fully utilize the observatory for academic purposes in fulfillment of its commitment to afford quality career and academic educational opportunities to Union County residents.

For this reason, the college decided to terminate the agreement with AAI so as to use the building for academic classrooms in fulfillment of its mission. The decision was not an easy one, but it was solidly based on the college's need to best accommodate the large majority.

Although UCC has cancelled the decades-old agreement with AAI, the governing boards have listened to representatives of AAI and have agreed to meet with their representatives to discuss an agreeable accommodation that would enable AAI to share limited access and use of the observatory with the college.

Any such agreement will require AAI to contribute reasonable financial support to defray the cost of maintenance and operation of the observatory.

Union County College wishes to thank everyone who expressed their interest by e-mail or letter. We wish to assure them that the Board of Governors and the Board of Trustees will engage in a constructive and meaningful dialogue with AAI, and make a final determination that best serves our students, the residents of the county and the AAI in a fair and reasonable manner.

John Farrell, Jr.
Interim President, UCC

Victor Richel,
Chair, UCC Board of Trustees

Teachers' Contract is 'Anti-Kid'; Add Teachers, Reduce Salary

Nassau County, N.Y. Executive Ed Mangano recently said, "We cannot look to the taxpayer for additional dollars in this environment..." Unfortunately, a Westfield Board of Education unwilling to take on the teachers' union did not see it this way, ratifying a contract providing a 12.2-percent salary increase over the next three years. At the end of this contract, salary costs for existing teachers will have increased by \$6 million - offset slightly by a \$1-million reduction in health insurance costs. Given that teachers' salary costs are the major item covered by our property taxes, this contract means that, combined with likely municipal and county tax increases, the average household in Westfield can expect \$500 annual increases in property taxes for each of the next three years.

What the board should have done in this environment is to have cut an excessive \$57,286 starting salary by 10 percent and frozen salaries for existing teachers. That still would have left a salary, medical and pension benefit, extensive vacation, and job security compensation package far better than most in the private sector and still competitive in the public sector. Any employees who did not like it could easily have been replaced by many, many qualified people eager to teach in Westfield.

In my opinion, this is not just a financial issue, but it is also an ethical issue. The value of the total Westfield compensation package for an education major straight out of college is about double what is available today in the private

sector to a comparably qualified college graduate, if a private sector job can be obtained at all. To ask a private-sector employee starting out to pay taxes to support double the compensation package for a similarly qualified public sector employee starting out is just plain wrong.

A board member stated, "We are all in it for the kids." In fact, unnecessary raises like this are arguably "anti-kid". That same money could have helped maintain small class sizes (more teachers) and other school programs, which the realities of state and local finance in New Jersey will cause to be under constant attack in the future. That is what the children need. What this community as a whole needs is an end to the pattern of disregard and disrespect of the taxpaying public as a whole, especially when so many are enduring economic hardship.

Finally, a good public school system is indeed important to maintaining property values. However, unnecessary increases in teacher salaries are not essential to a good school system and actually hurt property values. Sometime during the life of this teachers' contract my annual property tax bill alone will exceed the annual mortgage payment on my home 20 years ago. Westfield homeowners will not get as much as they would like for their homes when they sell, because so much of a purchaser's budget will have to go toward an excessive Westfield property-tax bill instead of the price for the home.

Jeff Bashi
Westfield

SPF BOE Candidate Lewis: Sharing Services Must Be More Aggressive

My name is Michael Lewis, and I am running for one of the Fanwood seats on the Scotch Plains-Fanwood Board of Education (BOE). I am running because last year, for the first time, I faced a dilemma. In my heart, I knew the BOE had worked hard and conscientiously to put together a responsible budget; I had worked with some parents to redirect its priorities and had had the opportunity to learn some of the constraints under which it operated. In our towns at least, it is truly a labor of love and civic responsibility. But my head kept telling me that our property taxes were going to go up \$400 a year before factoring in county and municipal increments, and that a state tax rebate was unlikely. It was a tough call, and that call will be no easier this year when the budget comes up for a vote.

There is no pat answer as to what is to be done, because inherent structural weaknesses (over-reliance on property taxes, inequitable allocation of state aid, and a tilted negotiating platform vis-a-vis the teachers' bargaining unit) cannot really be addressed at this level. But I do know that we are at a crossroads when it takes outside encouragement to ensure proper continuing maintenance of our physical plant (how I got involved in the first place); one shudders to think of the cost of capital improvements going forward, and a justification based on a modest percentage tax increase year-to-year can no longer be sustained.

I believe passionately that sharing services - between districts, and between our district and towns - must be pursued more aggressively and creatively than has been the case in the past. Recently there have been discussions relating to the allocation of resources toward the teaching of foreign languages, and of how other districts share the services of a grant writer. There is no logical reason why a language teacher cannot be shared across districts; indeed, if anything, evolving technology enhances the potential of off-site sharing. The subject of sharing a grant writer came up in the course of developing a five-year strategic plan for the district last year. There is nothing new under the sun.

But let us go further. This year Mountainside received a substantial retroactive billing from Berkeley Heights for the education of its high school students. Last year, the administration was approached by the father of a student in another district willing to pay tuition for an education here. Perhaps the opportunity exists here to smooth enrollment in schools to allow the hiring of teachers when such hiring might prove more efficient from a cost standpoint than simply plugging holes. And, taking things to their logical conclusion, because our district is in fact well run (and because the

administrative function is at its roots simply a back office writ large) perhaps the services of our administrators can be shared with those of other districts.

No one likes to work harder, or give up their autonomy, or face a flat paycheck. I have already been told that some ideas are not possible for one reason or another: contractual, legislative, technical, mismatched school calendars. And I do acknowledge without reservation that the district has undertaken a number of initiatives to share services already. I would reply that - if anything - this would be a reason for a greater standardization across districts, and a redoubled lobbying effort in Trenton to make it possible. I believe that there is an inevitability to much of what I am proposing, but, if I promise nothing else, I promise that I will work tirelessly to hasten the day.

My email address is michael_lewis88@verizon.net. I am married, have lived in Fanwood for close to 13 years with a daughter in fourth grade at McGinn Elementary School. I am a proud graduate of what was Park Junior High School, and of Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School (Class of 1971), where I received a lot of encouragement to think independently - even though it took awhile to find a voice. If anything, I ask for your support but whether you choose to support me or one of the other worthy candidates consider the budget carefully and vote on April 20.

Michael Lewis
Fanwood

Pres. Correctly Identifies Healthcare 'Bogeyman'

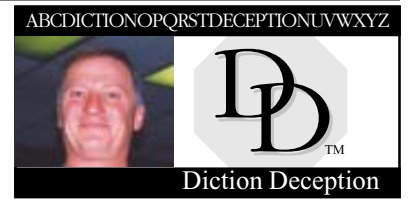
State Senator Tom Kean, Jr. derides the efforts of the federal government to reform the health-insurance industry in his latest *Trenton Times* column and asserts, "We are making real progress to make New Jersey more affordable for the middle class..."

Yet, when I recently e-mailed Senator Kean (as well as Governor Christie and the Commissioner of Insurance and Banking) asking how the state could approve the 35-percent increase in the premium for my Horizon Blue Cross small-group health-insurance policy, he never replied.

People in most other states pay a fraction of what New Jersey residents pay for health insurance, and yet, premium increases such as the one I will be forced to pay continue to get approved.

President Obama has correctly identified the bogeyman in the healthcare crisis - the insurance companies - and it's about time someone, somewhere, stood up to them.

Bill Gottdenker
Mountainside



Below are four arcane words, each with four definitions - only one is correct. The others are made up. Are you sharp enough to discern this deception of diction?

If you can guess one correctly - good guess. If you get two - well-read individual. If you get three - word expert. If you get all four - You must have a lot of free time!

All words and correct definitions come from the board game Diction Deception.

Answers to last week's arcane words.

1. Abacist - One who casts accounts with a calculator
2. Tassie - A small cup
3. Yach - To come up suddenly
4. Spoliare - To plunder or rob

HIPPARCH

1. An arena for horse racing
2. The Trojan horse
3. An ancient war horse
4. An ancient Greek calvary commander

HILUS

1. The anklebone
2. A basin with a drain, near the altar of a church, for the disposal of holy water
3. In anatomy, a small notch or opening where vessels and nerves enter an organ
4. A diagrammatic representation of something; a summary; a scheme; an outline

LUETIC

1. Grayish blue
2. Syphilitic
3. Pertaining to white blood cells
4. Producing blood

YURT

1. A Siberian hut
2. To jerk or flinch
3. Violating faith or allegiance
4. To limp

Atlas-Berney to Hold Forum With MS Voters

MOUNTAINSIDE - Mountainside Board of Education candidate Marilyn Atlas-Berney will host a "Meet the Candidate" event at her home on Monday, March 22, at 10:30 a.m. Residents are invited to attend and meet the candidate. Mrs. Atlas-Berney will be available to have candid discussions on issues and answer questions voters would like to discuss.

"I am available to answer any questions in an honest and direct fashion. My sole motive in running for a seat on the board of education is to work towards making an even better educational environment for the students of Mountainside. I also wish to clarify that in no way has any educational organization, foundation or association endorsed my campaign or offered support. Any statements previously made that may have been misconstrued were borne out of a place of generosity and caring for the programs which affect the children of Mountainside," Mrs. Atlas-Berney stated.

For more information, contact Mrs. Atlas-Berney at mabesq@verizon.net.

More letters on pages 5, 6 and 18

Letters to the Editor

MS Ed. Does Not Endorse Candidates, Accept Funds

As the current president of the Mountainside Education Foundation (MEF), I wish to state the Foundation's position on candidate endorsement. MEF does not endorse any individual for office nor does it accept funds previously earmarked for a specific campaign. This clarification is in response to a candidate's announcement published in last week's *Westfield Leader*.

There are five candidates seeking election to the board of education. We are a fortunate community to have so many capable individuals step forward to volunteer their time and talent. We appreciate their efforts and thank them for their willingness to serve.

Tricia Freer
Mountainside

Census Mailing Costly, Benefits Post Office

Editor's note: This letter was sent to the Census Bureau and copied to the newspaper.

We received our preliminary letter from the U.S. Census Bureau this week. The one that came in a "presorted, first-class mail, postage and fees paid" envelope. The one telling us that in another week we'd be receiving the actual census form to fill out. It is extremely important that we all complete our forms and return them to the Census Bureau so they can have their data, which is eventually disseminated in many, many useful ways. But a reminder in advance that the forms will be coming? I'm not so sure that was necessary.

Taking figures from the census 10 years ago, the number of housing units in the U.S. was 115.9 million. If this advance letter was sent out to all of them, at the rate of 41.4 cents apiece, presorted first-class, this preliminary mailing cost to "us" was almost \$48 million. The only entity I see benefiting from this mailing would be the United States Postal Service.

Please, government agencies, remember we are in tough economic times right now, and we ask you to prioritize well how you spend our money.

Judith Wussler
Scotch Plains

Deadlines

General News - Friday 4pm
Weekend Sports - Monday 12pm
Classifieds - Tuesday 12pm
Ad Reservation - Friday 4pm
Ad Submittal - Monday 12pm

To Reach Us

E-Mail - editor@goleader.com
Phone - (908) 232-4407

For more information, see
www.goleader.com/help