

## Vote-By-Mail Ballots Available for WF Bond Vote

WESTFIELD — Union County Clerk Joanne Rajoppi has announced that Vote-By-Mail ballots for the Westfield Board of Education's upcoming Special Election will be available beginning on Monday, December 3, through the county clerk's Westfield office.

The special election in Westfield, scheduled for Tuesday, December 11, from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m., involves a \$13.6-million school bond referendum. The deadline to apply for Vote-By-Mail in-person is Monday, December 10, before 3 p.m.

The Westfield Annex of the County Clerk is located at 300 North Avenue,

East, in Westfield. Office hours are 8 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays; 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays; and 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Saturdays.

Vote-By-Mail is an easy, secure process that has replaced the absentee ballot. Voters do not need to give a reason why they wish to Vote-By-Mail. To obtain an application form, voters can download the form at [www.ucnj.org/votemail](http://www.ucnj.org/votemail) or they can contact the Union County Clerk at (908) 527-4996. The Clerk's website also includes a video that explains how to fill out the Vote-By-Mail application form.

## Ex-Linden Cop Admits to Filing False Tax Returns

LINDEN — A former Linden police officer has admitted to filing false federal income tax returns for three years by failing to report income from the sale of a rental property he owned, U.S. Attorney Paul J. Fishman announced on Monday.

Walter Durham, 43, of Linden, pleaded guilty in Newark federal court to failing to file false tax returns for tax years 2006, 2007 and 2008.

According to documents filed in this case and statements made in court, in 1998 Durham purchased a three-family rental property in Plainfield for \$50,000 and rented two of the units and received payments in the form of U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development ("HUD") Section 8 assistance from the Plainfield Housing Authority and the New Jersey Department of Commu-

nity Affairs.

Durham sold the property in 2006 for \$375,000, realizing \$216,667 in capital gains, which he failed to report as capital gains on his 2006 federal income tax return. Although he did not own any rental property in 2007 or 2008, documents state that he reported rental real estate losses on his federal income tax returns for tax years 2007 and 2008 in the amounts of \$42,708 and \$43,594, respectively, and failed to pay a total of \$61,754 in federal income taxes, according to the U.S. Attorney's Office.

The count of subscribing to false tax returns to which Durham pleaded guilty is punishable by a maximum potential penalty of three years in prison and a \$250,000 fine. Sentencing is scheduled for March 6, 2013.

## Congress Urged to Extend Tax Relief on Mortgage Debt

TRENTON — Attorney General Jeffrey Chiesa has announced that New Jersey has signed onto a national letter urging Congress to extend tax relief for consumers who have mortgage debt canceled or forgiven because of financial hardship or a decline in housing values.

Mr. Chiesa is among 42 attorneys general to sign the letter to U.S. House and Senate leaders. The letter urges federal lawmakers to extend the hardship-related tax exclusion, in effect the past five years, which would otherwise expire on December 31, 2012.

Under the 2007 federal Mortgage Debt Relief Act, mortgage debt that is forgiven after a foreclosure or short sale, or through loan modification provided to a homeowner in financial hardship, may be excluded from a taxpayer's calculation of taxable income. The exclusion applies only to mortgage debt forgiven on a primary residence.

The tax exclusion's scheduled expiration comes at a time when many New Jersey homeowners, and

homeowners nationwide, are benefiting from the \$25-billion national mortgage settlement with the nation's five largest loan servicing companies: Ally Financial, Bank of America, Citi, JP Morgan Chase and Wells Fargo. The joint state-federal settlement provides \$17 billion in debt reduction and other relief to homeowners. Many other banks across the country also are offering mortgage modification and debt relief.

"It's important that this tax exclusion be extended," Mr. Chiesa said "so that the very consumers who can least afford it are not deterred from participating in the national mortgage settlement, or stuck with an unexpected tax bill for relief they received under the settlement, or through other debt relief programs."

An extension of the hardship-related tax exclusion is included in the federal Family and Business Tax Cut Certainty Act of 2012, which recently passed out of the Senate Finance Committee with bipartisan support.



## Peyton's Peek at the Week In Politics

By Paul Peyton of *The Leader/Times*

**Gov. Christie Announces Re-election Bid for Second Term**  
Governor Chris Christie announced Monday that he will seek a second term next year. The Governor upset Democratic incumbent Jon Corzine in 2009 by 86,000 votes. Newark Mayor Cory Booker is considering a run for the office as are a number of state lawmakers.

**Ex-WF Resident Elected West Va. Atty. General**  
Patrick Morrissey, a former Edison and Westfield resident who ran unsuccessfully for Congress in 2012, has been elected attorney general in West Virginia. Mr. Morrissey, 44, defeated longtime incumbent Darrell McGraw. Mr. Morrissey will be the first Republican West Virginia attorney general in 80 years, according to the *Charleston Gazette*. He takes office on Monday, January 14.

Mr. Morrissey, who said he spent \$2 million in personal and campaign funds in the race, lost to Mike Ferguson in the GOP 7th Congressional District Primary in New Jersey in 2000. He came in fourth behind current state Senate Minority Leader Tom Kean, Jr. (R-21, Westfield) and then Assemblyman Joel Weingarten of Millburn.

**Mayor Breaks Out After Booker Appoints Ally to Council**  
The appointment to a vacant Newark City Council seat led to melee on November 20 that prompted police to use pepper spray on some spectators including the head of workers union who was also arrested, according to media reports.

The near riot broke out when Mayor Cory Booker and the City Council appointed Shanique Davis Speight to fill a vacant council seat that occurred when Donald Payne, Jr. resigned upon his election to Congress to replace his father, the late Rep. Donald Payne, Sr.

According to published reports, Mayor Booker used a state statute that permits him to cast a vote without a quorum or to break a tie, a move that led to outrage from some council members, according to NJ.com. When Council members Ras Baraka, Darrin Sharif and Mildred Crump left the dais when Councilman Anibal Ramos tried to rush through confirmation for Ms. Speight, Mayor Booker appeared to cast the tie-breaker. Councilman Ron Rice, Jr., was absent.

Prior to Mr. Ramos' motion, Councilman Baraka had attempted to speak, but was not recognized by Councilman Ramos, who was serving as acting city council president, NJ.com reported.

Council members Baraka, Sharif and Crump all favored the appointment of John Sharpe James, the son of former Mayor Sharpe James. Mr. James attended the meeting.

Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 617 President Rahaman Muhammad was arrested after he reportedly lunged at Ms. Speight as she was being escorted by police out of the city council cham-

bers, nj.com reported.

**New Poll Gives Christie High Marks Following Sandy**  
A Rutgers-Eagleton poll has found that 67 percent of registered voters now view Christie favorably, a 19-point jump from October following the Governor's performance following Hurricane Sandy, *The Star-Ledger* reported.

Ninety percent of poll respondents said the Governor Christie handled the crisis either "very well" or "some-what well." Among Democrats, 49 percent said they viewed the Governor favorably, up from 22 percent only a month ago.

Rutgers-Eagleton surveyed 1,228 New Jersey adults, of whom 1,108 said they were registered voters. The margin of error was plus or minus 2.9 percentage points. A separate Quinnipiac University poll also gave Gov. Chris Christie higher marks on his handling of Hurricane Sandy.

**Quinn Holds Big Lead for Mayor In Quinnipiac Poll**  
With a 65 percent approval rating, higher than Mayor Michael Bloomberg, City Council Speaker Christine Quinn heads into the 2013 New York City mayoral election year with a 32 percent of the Democratic Primary vote, according to a Quinnipiac University poll released November 21.

The poll found that if Metropolitan Transportation Authority Chairman and Chief Executive Officer Joseph Lhota opts to run for mayor as a Republican, he would lose to an unnamed Democratic candidate 60 to 9 percent. Similarly, if former Bronx Borough President Adolfo Carrion runs on the Republican line, he also would lose 62 to 11 percent.

Other Democrats noted in the poll are former City Comptroller William Thompson, 10 percent; Public Advocate Bill de Blasio, 9 percent; City Comptroller John Liu, 5 percent, and Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer, 4 percent.

## FEMA to Open Ctr. in Linden Today

LINDEN — The Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders has announced that a Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Disaster Recovery Center (DRC) will open in Linden today, Thursday, November 29, at 2 p.m. at the Gregorio Center at 330 Helen Street. The center will subsequently remain open from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m., seven days a week.

The Disaster Recovery Center is to support residents of Union County who suffered damage from the Superstorm Sandy. Any survivor from the 21 counties in New Jersey can visit this DRC.

Disaster recovery specialists from various local, state and federal agencies will be at the center to assist individuals and answer questions regarding disaster assistance. FEMA also has centers in Springfield and Plainfield.

## DWC Plans Holiday Events; HAWK Light Set For L&T

By DOMINIC A. LAGANO  
Specialty Written for *The Westfield Leader and The Times*

WESTFIELD — At its monthly directors' meeting Monday evening, the Downtown Westfield Corporation (DWC) discussed events scheduled for the December holiday season, announced that Urban Outfitters at Elm and East Broad Streets plans to open on December 15 and reported that a HAWK pedestrian light will be located in front of Lord & Taylor on North Avenue.

The DWC is the management entity of the Westfield Special Improvement District. The DWC sponsors several promotions during the holiday season to generate business in town.

DWC Director Sherry Cronin reported that the "town tree" located at the Westfield Train Station was lit in the traditional holiday manner this past Sunday evening. The lighting ceremony was the culmination of an opening weekend of holiday events in town. "This past weekend, we geared up for our Welcome Home to Westfield Holiday Event," stated Ms. Cronin. "We kicked it off with our photos with Santa and Mrs. Claus at Lord & Taylor."

The Christmas tree lighting is a Westfield tradition dating from 1974.

The DWC will sponsor multiple musical groups who will perform in the downtown area on Thursday evenings and Saturday afternoons and evenings.

The Yuletide Carolers will perform on December 1, 15 and 22 at various locations around town from 1 to 2 p.m. On Saturday, December 8, the carolers will perform at Lord & Taylor from 1 to 2 p.m.

The Watson Highlanders Bagpipe Band will perform Saturday afternoons on December 1, 15 and 22 from 2 to 5 p.m. at various locations around town.

The Harmonic Quartet will per-

form on Thursday evenings on November 29, December 6, 13 and 20, from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. at various locations around town.

The New Jersey Workshop for the Arts Alphorns will play at Central Avenue near Quimby Street on December 1, 8 and 15 from 2:30 to 3:30 p.m.

The DWC also will sponsor the Miracle on Elm Street Shopping Spree, a raffle contest where winners will receive one of six \$50 gift cards each week in December. The winner will use the gift cards for any business or restaurant in the downtown area. Detailed information about the contest and a complete listing of all holiday events is posted on the DWC website, [WestfieldToday.com](http://WestfieldToday.com).

As is customary at this time of the year, the Westfield Town Council approved complimentary parking in metered spots on streets and in public parking lots from December 16 through the 26 in an effort to keep consumers shopping in town.

Ms. Cronin stated that Urban Outfitters, a national clothing retailer, would open its Westfield store on December 15. The Westfield franchise is located at the historic bank building at the corner of Elm and East Broad Streets in the heart of the downtown area.

The board also discussed the installation of a HAWK pedestrian light to be located on North Avenue in front of the Lord & Taylor building. The area has been the site of several accidents involving pedestrians.

"The agreement's done and they'll be installing it shortly," stated Town Administrator Jim Gildea. Lord & Taylor will pay for the HAWK light.

The next board of directors meeting, open to the public, is scheduled for Monday, December 17, at 7:30 p.m. The DWC office is located at 105 Elm Street.

## Kean, Bramnick: Business Survey A Positive Sign for N.J.

TRENTON — Senate Republican Leader Tom Kean, Jr. (R-21, Westfield) and Assembly GOP Leader Jon Bramnick (R-21, Westfield) issued comments last week on the newly released New Jersey Business and Industry Association Business Outlook Survey showing business confidence at a five-year high and businesses' outlook on the state's economy the highest in eight years.

"When businesses are confident in their future here in New Jersey, they invest, expand, and create jobs here in New Jersey. This new data is a very positive sign for our state's economic recovery and for our ability to build on the roughly 75,000 private sector jobs that have been created since February 2010," Sen. Kean said. "Under Governor Christie's leadership and with Republicans united in the purpose of taking our state away from the ruinous tax, spend, and borrow policies of the past, job creators large and small, are regaining their confidence in New Jersey as an affordable and worthwhile place to invest. With a Governor willing to say 'no' to government as usual in Trenton and Republican legislators pushing a shared reform agenda hard, businesses are increasingly feeling like they are 'perfect together' with New Jersey. We certainly have more work to do in stabilizing state finances in order to give certainty to the business community. [Last week's] hearing on the minimum wage, in which small business owners pleaded with Democrats to work toward a bill that was

fair to both workers and businesses, were ignored [and] shows that there are still those in Trenton who don't understand how jobs are created. But the path laid out for New Jersey's economy by Governor Christie and Senate Republicans is clearly yielding results."

Assemblyman Bramnick commented: "The positive ratings in the BIA survey are the latest evidence that New Jersey is creating a more friendly business environment and companies are optimistic about hiring more employees in our state. Companies recognize the proactive efforts being made by Governor Christie and his administration to attract and keep jobs in New Jersey. They are also aware that progress is being made on reducing the red tape that has hindered economic development in the past. It is a great sign that companies are confident about their future in our state and shows the governor's commitment to economic development is working."

The poll results also showed a majority of companies have a positive view of New Jersey when compared to other states. A majority of companies say New Jersey is better than or the same as other states in promoting economic development, controlling energy costs, its attitude toward business, attracting new business, controlling government spending, and timely issuance of permits. Four years ago New Jersey fared poorly when compared to other states in all of these issue areas.

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