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## Technology Gone Amuck, Can We Be Cell Phone Free

In this "Land of the Borg", we call it technology but it's nothing more than electronic communication and many of us are its slaves. We're addicted and this "collective" doesn't know how to function without it. The thought of being without a cell phone leaves many feeling naked and in panic.

Government now says you can't have healthcare without its website, whether the website works or not. Many can't navigate to a street address without first Googling it. School kids have trouble focusing on learning without checking it out online first; but only while they are "texting" and not listening to their teacher. The word of the day is, "It's on the Internet so it must be true" — or, "Who knows what's in it until we pass it".

It's hard to have a conversation without someone interrupting and saying, "excuse me, I need to answer this call". At the supermarket, the aisles are stalled while someone phones their spouse to collaborate on whether to buy the 14 or 20 oz. box of Cheerios.

Some of the consequences are merely annoying yet others lead to chaos, such as with ObamaCare. The impact on education of our youth is more insidious. The concern is the "dumbing down" of America.

Cross a street and you'll get a first-hand look at a real "in your face problem" — "texting while driving (TWD)". It's scary. More accidents are now caused by "texting while driving" than those while under the influence (DWI). This epidemic seems unstoppable. When someone gets behind the wheel, it's like they are in another world unto themselves — oblivious to others and unconcerned for others.

We believe the need to correct TWD is urgent and that the technical means to do so are readily at hand. Cars and cell phones should be engineered so that TWD cannot operate while driving — no questions asked, no exceptions, period. The phone will not work during such times.

A Rahway woman was texting when she crashed into a pickup truck on Routes 1 & 9 two weeks ago, killing the truck's driver, Essex County prosecutors say. She was arraigned on the homicide charge and is being held in lieu of a \$50,000 bond. She faces a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison. Of course this does nothing for the victim.

We must not succumb to the "Land of the Borg". Engineer TWD to be inoperable.

BTW, help our kids learn better too.

## No Candidate Should Misinform, Manipulate Public Safety

"They call this the silly season of politics for a reason," according to Dr. Larry J. Sabato, a Rhodes Scholar and director of the nonpartisan University of Virginia's Center for Politics. "Unfortunately, it is one of the main reasons people are turned off by politics."

Like most of you, I have been reading the campaign literature mailed to Westfield residents and printed in the local media. While I understand that every candidate wants to win your vote, I am disturbed by the emergence in our town of the politics of fear and alarm. To mislead the public, be it deliberately or simply out of ignorance, in order to create a "crisis" where none actually exists is doing a grave disservice to our community. There is absolutely no justification for causing undue alarm to our residents.

Frankly, I think Americans are justifiably sick and tired of the seemingly endless wrangling and backbiting that permeates the political process nowadays. As your mayor, though, I have a duty to communicate accurate information sans campaign rhetoric to all the residents of the town. To that end, these are the facts as they relate to the Westfield Fire Department:

The WFD is among the minority (25 percent) of departments in the state that is a paid "career" department. In addition to the fire chief and deputy fire chief, it employs 28 full-time firefighters.

The town maintains a "minimum staffing level" of six firefighters. By way of perspective, six municipalities border Westfield — four of them have volunteer departments and two of them have paid "career" departments. The minimum staffing levels

of the two neighboring municipalities with career departments are four and five, and both of those municipalities have significant "risks" such as office parks, commercial properties, and warehouses within their borders.

There have been no layoffs of firefighters, but, like all other departments, there has been a gradual reduction over the past five years due to attrition. As firefighters retired, the fiscally responsible question we had to ask is, do we really need nine Lieutenants and two deputy chiefs? Are we top heavy? We did reduce the number of deputy chiefs from two to one and the number of lieutenants from nine to four, again through attrition.

In the three fires over the course of two years my opponent refers to, all had extenuating circumstances and had intensified and spread prior to the fire department ever being notified. Similarly, the potential for loss of life and an entire town block was averted during the Ferraro's fire — the severity which can be attributed to old building codes.

Contrary to my opponent's statement, our mutual aid agreement did not "cause[d] a house to burn to the ground." In fact, mutual aid is a quintessential example of an effective shared service agreement.

Lastly, my opponent called for the hiring of four firefighters in the near term. With the 2 percent cap and the approximate \$100,000 per firefighter cost (salary, training, equipment, pension, health insurance) in the first year alone, he does not indicate how to pay for four new hires in the near term or the long term. For the past eight years my opponent has been on the Finance Policy Committee. If he

was truly concerned for the safety of our residents, it is my hope that he would have raised this issue at some point over the past eight years.

While trying to create headlines may be a predictable campaign strategy during silly season, no candidate should ever manipulate and misinform when it comes to something as crucial and as challenging as public safety.

Thank you for taking the time to read this and for allowing me the opportunity to clarify the facts.

Andrew Skibitsky  
 Mayor of Westfield

## Jerry Armstrong Deserves Kudos for His Help During Sandy

As the one-year anniversary of Super Storm Sandy approaches, we would like to acknowledge our neighbor Jerry Armstrong. Many of you may know Jerry as the caretaker at Nomahegan Swim Club. We are lucky enough to have Jerry as our neighbor.

We lost 13 trees in the storm. One punctured our roof and ripped our electrical service off the house. Trees blocked our access driveway. There was no power and no way we were going to get a "tree guy" to our house. Springfield Avenue was closed... but not for long, because we live near Jerry. Within hours Jerry had freed the pinned down wires and cleared the access to our driveway. He then set to work clearing Springfield Avenue and helping everyone up and down the street. He is an amazing and caring individual.

Thank you Jerry Armstrong.

Martha and Patrick McDonald  
 Westfield

## Letters to the Editor

### If Anyone Can Deliver A One-Seat Train Ride to WF, Mayor Can

Even those of us who are seeking election can be astonished by the campaign antics of certain candidates during this "silly season." For example, a neighbor recently shared with me a campaign mailer from Councilman David Haas, in which he claims that he can deliver a one-seat train ride into Manhattan.

Mr. Haas is well aware that those efforts have been ongoing for decades, and that Mayor Skibitsky is singularly responsible for bringing Westfield closer than ever to direct rail service to New York. Mr. Haas must not have read the press reports on the issue this past August, when Raritan Valley Rail Coalition Trustee Martin Robins was quoted describing, "a meeting that was called by Mayor Andy Skibitsky, who deserves a lot of credit for having taken the initiative. [H]e brought with him Senator Thomas Kean, Jr. and the two Assembly people from [the] district, Jon Bramnick and Nancy Muñoz, and they visited with New Jersey Transit and they apparently got a commitment that New Jersey Transit by the spring will put dual-mode locomotives into service ...."

Mr. Robbins "welcome[d] this as a

break-through first step, and [he] commend[ed] everyone who has worked on this, especially the initiative of Westfield's Mayor Andy Skibitsky." If anyone can deliver a one-seat train ride to Westfield, Mayor Skibitsky can. More incredibly, Councilman Haas criticizes Mayor Skibitsky for seeking to continue his effective service to the residents of Westfield, when Mr. Haas has himself served nearly a decade on Westfield's governing body. Sadly, Councilman Haas has far less to show for his years of service than our mayor. Moreover, his campaign running mates are a former councilman who resigned before the end of his term, and a twice unsuccessful council candidate. Where is the new blood, Mr. Haas? If Councilman Haas is truly interested in "fresh ideas and new energy," as he has said on these pages, he should support David Oliveira to replace him on the Town Council. Mr. Oliveira, who has not previously sought or held public office, is just the kind of fresh face that Mr. Haas is looking for, and cannot himself provide.

Sam Della Fera, Jr.  
 Westfield

### Was Councilman Beckerman Making Up Health Insurance Savings for SP?

I read Councilman Lou Beckerman's recent letter about insurance savings. He was heralding good news of a \$60k savings in next year's health insurance for the township. Having heard nothing of this at any council meeting this year, I submitted an OPRA request to the town to learn more. I've since learned that the council members haven't been provided any information on this subject. So is Mr. Beckerman making this up? Or perhaps he has used his insurance contacts to get an early look at what the results may be? And if so, is he not aware that it is entirely inappropriate for a councilman to be making public comment on what is clearly an ongoing contract negotiation?

This serves as a reminder of another incident from the beginning of 2013. When it came time to hire the township insurance broker, the council initially made a motion to adopt a resolution hiring Doyle Alliance. It was Councilman Bo Vastine who pointed out that the previous insur-

ance broker, Connor-Strong, had capped their fee at \$50k — a significant savings over last year — and that there was no such cap from Doyle Alliance. The council, under the new direction of Lou Beckerman and the Scotch Plains Democrats, then chose to table the resolution to a subsequent meeting. At the next meeting, the Democrats unveiled a new bid from Doyle Alliance that included a cap for just slightly less than Connor-Strong's original proposal (other bidders were offered no such second chance). So Lou Beckerman got his way and Scotch Plains hired his preferred broker Doyle Alliance for the same amount of savings that would have been achieved under Connor-Strong.

So Lou Beckerman tries to take credit for something that was going to happen regardless. And now Lou Beckerman is also asking us to believe a promise of more savings for next year.

Ed Saridakis  
 Former Scotch Plains Council, BOE

### Letter Writer's Advocacy for Disregarding Safety Was Breathtaking

I am one of the legions of commuters who take NJ Transit from Westfield. I bike to the train station for the exercise, fresh air, and scenery, but I'd also like to think I'm earning some positive karma from my fellow citizens, both in keeping a car off the road and in freeing up a much-coveted parking spot at the train station.

However, the biggest downside to biking to the train is not the frigid winter temperatures. Nor is it the risk of getting one's bike stolen. Rather, it's the danger in crossing South Avenue, especially this time of year with the shorter days. Despite dismounting my bike, despite a well marked crosswalk, and despite having lights on both the front and back of my bike, I find it distressingly common for cars to zip right by and not stop as I attempt to cross.

So you can imagine my astonishment that Craig Nowlin, in his letter

to the editor, advocated drivers should just blow through crosswalks, pedestrians be damned. His advocacy for disregarding safety, commonsense, and the law is simply breathtaking. I can only hope he mistook this for the April 1st edition.

This is not to say pedestrians and cyclists are blameless; they should not dart into the crosswalk and expect drivers to jam on the brakes, particularly in slick or otherwise more challenging conditions. However, drivers should try driving the speed limit, paying attention to the crosswalks, looking for pedestrians, and preparing to stop. And putting down the cell phone.

And instead of crossing guards or traffic lights, how about the police? These drivers represent a highly underutilized revenue source for our town.

Mark Kaplan  
 Westfield

### Questions on Communications Ctr. Had to Do With What Was Missing

I was surprised to see the town attorney enter the fray concerning the compliance of the town with the bidding laws surrounding the purchase of the communications center by the WPD. His assertion that all legal documents were properly filed is without question. He is a good attorney who is quite capable of insuring that all the "I's" were dotted.

The questions that were asked, and which his intervention does not answer, predate the need for legal counsel, especially one that follows the rules.

There is no doubt that the seller filed an affidavit of non-collusion. This means that he has done nothing that would influence the purchase and leave intact the level playing field sought by the Legislature in requiring this document. Nowhere does it mention that the seller flew two policemen to Utah and housed them at the seller's expense. Nowhere does it mention that there was an agreement that the seller would build a custom communication center to Westfield's specifications before such

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specifications were written. The affidavit leaves out that the center was delivered to Westfield and stored here from the time it was on display at a show that the town agreed to host at the Armory. The seller also neglected to list the two vehicles sent with the center, one of which was a "gift."

All of the above took place before any public notice that Westfield was thinking about such a purchase. Since the town attorney bills by the hour, it is understandable that the town would only ask for his input when necessary. After notice that the specs would be allowed to be posted, the attorney would be needed. I doubt he was fully apprised of the history that preceded the allowance of specs.

He did, however, mention the "due diligence" of the WPD in their obviously thorough investigation of manufacturers. Would he be able to give us a list of the number of manufacturers who flew WPD representatives to inspections?

The seller also makes no mention of the agreement that the low price also included Westfield's promise to drive the center around to prospective buyers and act as "demonstrators" for the manufacturer. Did that agreement follow the affidavit of non-collusion? Is that why it is absent?

No one can doubt that all legal documents are filed. I believe the questions had to do with what was missing as opposed to what was filed.

A. John Blake  
 Westfield

ABCD EFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ  
  
 Diction Deception

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. Tew — To hurry or work fussily  
 2. Loriot — The golden oriole of Europe

3. Poephagous — Grass eating  
 4. Poikilonymy — The mingling of names or terms from different systems of nomenclature

**LUCIFUGOUS**  
 1. Vague; hard to understand  
 2. Translucent  
 3. Avoiding light; nocturnal  
 4. Animals that contain a substance in their blood that combine with enzymes to produce light

**GRIFFE**  
 1. A ditch or a moat  
 2. A steward  
 3. In law, a notary or scrivener  
 4. The child of Negro and mulatto

**SCLEROGEOUS**  
 1. Scaly or horny  
 2. Becoming thick or hard  
 3. Filmy or sticky  
 4. Having many legs, such as with centipedes

**THANATOPHIDIA**  
 1. Poisonous snakes  
 2. An abnormal fixation with death  
 3. Birds of prey, such as hawks or falcons  
 4. Spiders

More letters on pages 17, 18

## Letters to the Editor

### Too Impatient To Wait For A Child on Bus?

A fellow Westfield resident has referred to the school transportation system as a private limousine service funded by taxpayers. I find this statement particularly offensive since the majority of the students utilizing this service have some sort of disability.

As a mother of one of these children, I find it appalling how impatient our society has become. Every morning I would watch drivers make illegal u-turns because they could not wait one minute for a child to be buckled in. Even more obscene is that a child who works so hard to accomplish tasks most people take for granted is thought of as an inconvenience.

Jennifer Brophy-Lane  
 Westfield

### Buses Are for Special Needs Kids In Town

When I was reading Mr. Martucci's "Kids Should Be At Curb For School Bus" letter I mostly agreed with him. I have two sons who take the bus. I always have them ready and actually feel a little guilty making my neighbors wait for them to board. But they do. And they have never complained to me about it. They actually wave to my kids and are always incredibly well, friendly.

It was his last line that was so rude. Since with a little bit of asking around, he would have found out that these buses are not a limousine service as he said, but buses for kids with special needs. Some with autism, maybe cerebral palsy in wheelchairs and even some with developmental delays that just use the bus to help separate home and school.

My great grandfather used to say you are the boss of a word until it comes out of your mouth. This is one time Mr. Martucci where you could have used his advice.

Juliet Passante  
 Westfield

### Re. Letter In Your October 17th Paper

In much of the article he (David Haas) talks about tradition and "fresh ideas." I also came across a campaign piece of his where he is trying to make the claim that he is behind a one seat NJ Transit ride from Westfield to N.Y. Penn Station. Is this his idea of traditions and fresh ideas? If he is going to start a tradition of trying to take credit for something such as this (that has been decades in the making, by the way) that he is not even remotely attached to, then I think the people of Westfield should strongly consider this self-serving farce when they go to the polls in November.

It's been just about a year since Super Storm Sandy ravaged New Jersey and Westfield. The leadership that Mayor Skibitsky provided us during this most trying time has been recognized nationally. Now is not the time to even contemplate turning the reigns over to someone that believes a fresh idea is one that is not even his and not even fresh. That is not leadership.

Janice Sampson  
 Westfield

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 CONTACT POTUS**

CHARLIE  
 August 10, 2012

