

## Mayor Skibitsky and Council Recognized for Service to Town

By CHRISTINA M. HINKE  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — During the last council meeting of the year, Mayor Andy Skibitsky led a procession of proclamations recognizing four councilmen — Sam Della Fera, Keith Loughlin, David Oliveira and Kenneth Donnelly — who served their last meeting as members of the governing body Monday night. Jo Ann Neylan then read a proclamation recognizing Mayor Skibitsky for his 15 years of service to the town, 12 of which have been as mayor.

The proclamation noted his role in developing a sustainable financial

plan during the recession, the town receiving its AAA rating from Standard & Poors, establishment of the first quiet zone in the state, improvements to parking and parks and recreation, advocating for one-seat rides, implementing task forces to address emerging issues, and settling the town's affordable housing, among a host of other accomplishments.

Ms. Neylan also noted how Westfield has received many notable accolades from publications.

To conclude the evening, Mayor Skibitsky gave his outgoing speech, which he started by thanking his wife, Debbie, for her support, and their

children. He thanked the many volunteers of the town, the families of the town council members, his fellow council members and town employees.

Town Administrator James Gildea also was thanked. "A town could not ask for a more professional, knowledgeable, effective, caring and skilled administrator. I have often said that Jim is the best administrator in the state," Mayor Skibitsky said.

"What truly defines us as a great community are the people. The people who with great pride call Westfield their home," Mayor Skibitsky said. "It has been an absolute honor to serve this town."

During public comments, a handful of residents, colleagues and former councilmen James Foerst and Kenneth MacRitchie voiced their appreciation to the mayor and council for their service to the town.

Prior to the proclamations, the town council recognized the Westfield High School Football Team for another championship season. The team just completed its third straight 12-0 season by beating Bridgewater-Raritan, 20-7, in the North 2 Group 5 championship game. The team has won 37 straight games.

Devils Football Coach Jim DeSarno said of his team, "This is a great group of young men, both on and off the field. They work very hard in the off season to get ready for the season and they put it all out in the field...but also they are very good in the classroom and community."

"Hopefully we can do this again next year," Mr. DeSarno said. In other business, a property re-valuation letter has been sent to taxpayers, along with a brochure containing a 10-step list of what to expect during the process, Mr. Gildea said. The first public information session is to be held this coming Monday

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HOLIDAY SCENE...The menorah and creche in Westfield are blanketed with snow on Saturday. Tuesday night marked the first night of Hanukkah.

Benjamin B. Corbin for The Westfield Leader

## Andy Skibitsky Looks Back on 15 Years as Mayor, Councilman

By PAUL J. PEYTON  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — Andy Skibitsky told *The Westfield Leader* that he was thankful to the community for giving him the opportunity to serve the past 15 years on the governing body — three as a councilman and the last 12 as mayor.

"It's just been an incredible time," he said during an interview with *The Leader* on November 27. "I've loved serving the people of Westfield."

The mayor thanked his wife of 31 years, Debbie, who he referred to as his "kitchen cabinet," as she has given

him advice when he has been faced with difficult issues, and for allowing him to devote the time needed to serve in public office.

The Skibitskys moved to Westfield in 1997 from Scottsdale, Ariz., where he served on his church's parish council, was active in a local YMCA program, and where both the Skibitskys taught CCD and ran church fundraisers.

The mayor pointed to his relationship with his fellow council members, town employees, as well as the people he recruited such as planner Don Sammet, who previously held positions with Montclair and Asbury Park; Chief Financial Officer Scott Olsen, who came over from Summit; Public Works Director Greg O'Neil, who was previously employed by Princeton, and newly-hired Town Clerk Tara Rowley, who was the clerk in Cranford. He also referred to long-time Town Administrator Jim Gildea as "one of the best administrators" in the state.

He also lauded all the volunteers

who serve the town. "I'm very proud of the people I put on boards," the mayor said. "They are just like the mayor and council; they are volunteers, they don't get paid, but they do very important work,

whether it's the board of adjustment or the planning board or the board of health, the Memorial Library board or the rec. commission..."

He specially mentioned the work of Planning Board Chairman Vincent Wilt and Board of Adjustment Chairman William Heinbokel, noting that those boards have never lost any appeals of their decisions "since

I've been mayor." "They've done a great job on those quasi-judicial boards," the mayor said.

Among the accomplishments he pointed to are the establishment of the town's "Quiet Zone," the first in New Jersey, where horns from freight trains at the Rahway Avenue railroad crossing on the south side of town have been silenced during late-night and early-morning hours.

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HELPING THOSE IN NEED...Veterans and families march around Tamaques Park in Westfield during the March A Mile event on a snowy Saturday to raise money for homeless and in need veterans. The event was organized by Martin Wallberg American Legion Post 3 Westfield.

Paul Lachenauer for The Westfield Leader

## Spirit of Giving Brings Back Christmas Lights

By CHRISTINA M. HINKE  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

CRANFORD — The holiday spirit of giving is upon us as NJ Transit has decided to have a change of heart and allow the township to hang its lighted garland on the train trestle in the downtown without imposing a fee.

"Based on the information we have, it appears we will be able to put the lights on the trestle next week, thanks to Christina Hinke," Mayor Thomas Hannen, Jr. told *The Westfield Leader* last Wednesday evening.

NJ Transit also will accept the township's Joint Insurance Fund's wording as is, Mayor Hannen said.

As of Tuesday, Department of Public Works (DPW) employees have hung the Christmas decorations, and Cranford appears just as festive as it always has during the December Christmas season.

During a conversation Assembly-

man Jon Bramnick (R-21st, Westfield) had with New Jersey Department of Transportation Commissioner Richard Hammer, Asm. Bramnick told *The Leader* he had discovered that NJ Transit was supposed to allow municipalities to hang holiday lights on the train trestle without being charged a fee.

Municipalities that wish to hang holiday lights on NJ Transit property are to contact NJ Transit in advance of installing the lights in order for arrangements to be made to have an NJ Transit supervisor on site while the lights are being hung, Asm. Bramnick told *The Leader*.

NJ Transit also had informed Garwood that three DPW workers would be required to attend a full-day seminar regarding installation of the lights.

Cranford DPW personnel had taken

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THANKS FOR THE MEMORIES...Westfield School District's Coordinator of School/Community Relations, Lorre Korecky, holds one of her grandchildren as she is surrounded by members of the Westfield School System during her retirement party last Thursday at Westfield High School. She sported a wooden apple around her neck the way the high school graduates do at commencement in June. The red apples, with students' names printed clearly, were given out to kindergartners on their first day of school. Ms. Korrecky is retiring after 22 years with the district.

Susan M. Dougherty for The Westfield Leader

## Hartz Adjourns Application Until February 21 Meeting

By CHRISTINA M. HINKE  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

CRANFORD — Hartz Mountain Industries LLC has adjourned its application before the planning board to rezone 750 Walnut Avenue to Wednesday, February 21, 2018.

Hartz has proposed to make the 30.5-acre parcel a residential zone where currently it is zoned for commercial use.

Hartz had presented redevelopment plans to the township committee for a multi-building complex containing 905 multi-family units, including low- and moderate-income housing, pools and a community room.

"When would be the right time to ask for an environmental impact study?" board member Dan Aschenbach asked. Board Attorney Mark Rothman said the board could broach that during the hearing.

Mr. Rothman said Hartz has already filed its application with the municipality and it is deemed complete.

Hyatt Hills Gold Complex located adjacent to 750 Walnut Avenue is a brownfields site with monitoring wells on the Hyatt site to monitor the groundwater. There also are monitoring wells at 750 Walnut Avenue, according to Mr. Aschenbach.

Mr. Aschenbach believes an environmental impact study should be done prior to an application being heard, he told *The Westfield Leader*. "But I believe the conclusions of such a study will help in ruling this issue in or out," he said.

During public comment, Arlington Road resident Rita LaBrutto, also a former planning board member, said she had concerns about the transparency of the planning board. "The Open

Public Meetings Act says your agenda should specify what you will be voting on or discussing," Ms. LaBrutto said.

The planning board voted on November 21 to recommend to the township committee that 215-235 Birchwood Avenue be deemed an area in need of redevelopment, without having the item on the agenda, she said. "It's a big item for the town," Ms. LaBrutto said. "A grave disappointment for anybody who has been following this since 2008, that the planning board failed to put it on the agenda," she said. "It is really shameful."

The board had placed on its agenda posted in the town hall on Monday that it was to present a study on making a portion of North Avenue in the downtown a redevelopment zone, Ms. LaBrutto said, but then was later removed. She said the public had not been given the 10-day notice that the Act requires.

Mr. Rothman said the board has proposed to have the study presented at its next meeting on Wednesday, December 20. The study will not yet be made available to the public, Mr. Rothman said, and it is not yet determined to be on the December 20 agenda because "it is not yet final."

"It is something we haven't even seen yet," Board Vice-President Bobbi Anderson said.

"If a draft is made available as a draft to the board on December 20, it should be made available to the public," Ms. LaBrutto told Mr. Aschenbach.

"I think that is true," Mr. Aschenbach responded.

The Downtown Management

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The official portrait of Mayor Andy Skibitsky by Dave Rossi.



A JOB WELL DONE...The Westfield Board of Education said goodbye to Mark Friedman, left photo, last week who is leaving the board after six and a half years and Chris Langhart, right photo, who is departing after one term of three years. They are pictured with Board President Gretchen Ohlig.

Sarah McGrail for The Westfield Leader

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