

## Man, 46, Arrested With Loaded Gun In Tamaques School Lot

By PAUL J. PEYTON  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — A 46-year-old armed Delaware man was arrested last Thursday afternoon in the parking lot of Tamaques Elementary School in Westfield after police received information from New Castle County Police Department in Delaware that the man was en route to Westfield.

Thomas J. Wilkie, of Bear, Del., has been charged with second-degree unlawful possession of a weapon, third-degree possession of a firearm in or upon the grounds of an educational institution, fourth-degree possession of hollow-point bullets and fourth-degree trespassing on school grounds.

Westfield Police Chief Chris

Battiloro said police units responded to the school around 3:54 p.m. after they received a call from New Castle County Police, "seeking an individual they believed may be on the premises of Tamaques School."

"Police responded immediately and found the individual in his car in the Tamaques School parking lot, in possession of a firearm and ammunition. The individual was immediately taken into custody while the building was placed on lockdown with after-school activities in session," according to a statement from Westfield Police Chief Chris Battiloro. "A security sweep of the building and its perimeter was conducted prior to the lockdown being lifted at approximately 5:32 p.m., and children were released to their parents without incident. Police ca-

nines were brought in for a final, precautionary sweep, but there is currently no evidence to suggest any threat to the community."

According to a press release from Acting Union County Prosecutor Jennifer Davenport, police located Wilkie in the front seat of his 2019 Mitsubishi SUV, parked in the school's parking lot, holding a .45-caliber handgun loaded with hollow-point bullets. Two additional loaded magazines of ammunition were recovered on Wilkie, with another 130 rounds of ammunition located in the vehicle's trunk.

When asked by *The Westfield Leader* why Wilkie had come to Westfield, Union County Prosecutor's Office spokesman Mark Spivey said the "motive remains under investigation."

Citing a "senior law enforcement official," NBC News reported last Friday that Wilkie "targeted the school because of a relationship gone bad with a faculty member."

NBC News also reported that Wilkie, while not armed, gained entrance to the school looking for a woman who worked at the school. When he could not locate her, Wilkie returned to his car and called the woman, who told him she was tutoring a student and was not in the school but would return. Wilkie then waited in his car and called his brother who, in turn, called Delaware State Police, who called Westfield authorities.

According to an nj.com report, Thomas Wilkie's father, George, confirmed that his (Thomas') brother, Chad, had called New Castle Police trying to find out where his brother was.

"The Westfield Police Department thanks the staff of Tamaques School and the Westfield Board of Education for its cooperation to ensure the safety of everyone on the property," Chief Battiloro said in his statement.

"I'm very grateful for the swift work  
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## Council Introduces Bond Ord. for Ladder Truck

By MICHAEL BONACCORSO  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

GARWOOD — After several town-hall-style meetings, discussion with fire department personnel, and equipment demonstrations, the borough council last Thursday unanimously introduced on first reading a \$1.3-million bond ordinance for the purchase of a ladder truck for Garwood's fire department.

A public hearing and adoption on the ordinance will occur at the Thursday, June 27 council meeting.

"I remember the tough conversations with them as I told them that I wasn't ready to say yes to that," said Councilwoman Jennifer Blumenstock in describing her opinion on a ladder truck purchase three years ago.

Councilwoman Blumenstock said when she was campaigning for her council seat three years ago a ladder truck purchase was not "financially feasible" for the borough.

"It's been nearly three years since those initial conversations, but in that small amount of time, there isn't actually much that has changed on both fronts," Ms. Blumenstock said.

Councilwoman Blumenstock said the council has learned "extensively" about various fire department operational aspects throughout the last year. The fire department has been instrumental, she said, in describing how the ladder truck's functions will add to the efficiency of the department's operations; the challenges faced when fighting fires, and mutual aid limitations in assisting borough residents.

"With every conversation or new  
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CELEBRATING 150 YEARS OF SPFD... Multiple fire departments from across Union County and New Jersey participated in the Scotch Plains Fire Department's 150th anniversary parade down Westfield Avenue in the township Saturday, including units from Westfield, Clark, Cranford, Elizabeth, Garwood, Mountainside and Linden.

Paul Lachenauer for The Westfield Leader

## WPD Chief Commends Actions Leading to Armed Suspect's Arrest

By CHRISTINA M. HINKE  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — Westfield Chief of Police Christopher Battiloro made a statement at Tuesday night's council meeting regarding the arrest of an armed man, Thomas Wilkie of Delaware, at Tamaques Elementary School Thursday afternoon.

"On Thursday, June 13, 2019, at 15:53 hours, the Westfield Police Department responded to Tamaques School... to locate an individual in crisis," he began.

Officers Jeffrey Johson and Michael

Pollock arrived on the scene first, Chief Battiloro said.

Wilkie was seated in a parked vehicle directly opposite the school's main entrance and was armed with a .45 caliber handgun fully loaded with hollow point bullets, the chief said.

Officers Johson and Pollock approached the vehicle on foot and quickly disarmed the suspect, then took him in custody without incident, the chief said.

"While the normal school day ended, some 30 children were on premises in an after-care program... out of an abundance of caution, a decision was made to lock Tamaques School down," Chief Battiloro said.

A search of the exterior grounds and interior of the building was conducted with the assistance of two K9s from the Union County Sheriff's Office, he said. No additional threats were found, Chief Battiloro stated.

"While the explicit purpose of this subject's presence at Tamaques School may never be known for sure, we can all concur the worst was entirely possible. I wish to commend all those officers, detectives and supervisors, who responded to this incident. I am certain their brave and

courageous actions thwarted any chance of tragedy and ensured the safety and well-being of all those children," Chief Battiloro said, further commending his fellow officers.

He also went on to say that during the investigation, he had learned that "local news media was angered by their inability to receive specific information regarding this incident when they want it, when they need their story," he said.

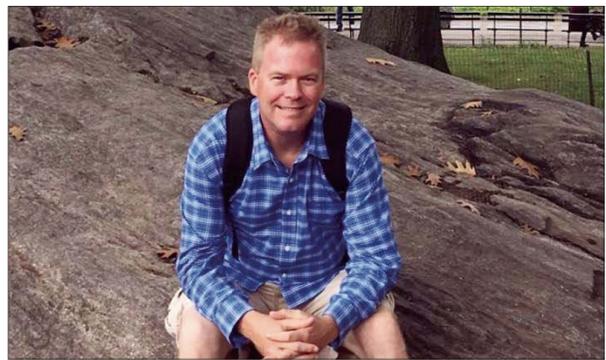
"I received almost constant calls, emails and text messages from local news media," he said.

"My first priority was not to respond to their requests for their information, but rather ensure the safety of those 30 children," he said.

The WPD continues to actively investigate and has "no further comment on this incident at this time," the chief said.

Wilkie had a detention hearing set for yesterday, June 19.

Mayor Shelley Brindle said in a statement that, "I continue to be in close contact with the board of education as they evaluate their school security protocols. You'll see enhanced police presence in and around all of our schools this week to close  
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ARRESTED... Thomas J. Wilkie, of Bear, Del., was arrested Thursday in his car in the Tamaques School parking lot in Westfield with a loaded .45 calibre gun, hollow point bullets, additional loaded magazines of ammunition on him and another 130 rounds in the trunk.

Courtesy of Facebook

## Parents Voice Concerns About School Safety

By JENNIFER GLACKIN  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — The board of education spent the bulk of Tuesday's meeting addressing concerns about school and student safety after last Thursday's arrest of a man with a loaded gun and ammunition in the Tamaques School parking lot.

Thomas Wilkie, 46, of Bear, Del. was arrested after school hours and charged with unlawful possession of a weapon, possession of hollow point bullets, trespassing on school grounds, and possession of a firearm on the grounds of an educational institution.

"There is no doubt that this has shaken all of us," stated Superintendent of Schools, Margaret Dolan, Ed.D. Ms. Dolan continued, "We are grateful, certainly, to the Westfield Police Department for their swift response."

She also informed the assembled of the immediate steps the district will take to increase safety in the schools. She stated that all 10 schools will be locked after school hours until the end of the school year. The

Westfield police will be providing an ongoing police presence in and around the schools, and there will be additional security measures at middle school and high school graduations. Ms. Dolan, along with other school administrators, will also meet with district security consultants, StoneGate Associates, LLC, to "begin a comprehensive examination of where we go from here."

Many parents began by thanking the police for their quick response, but also raised questions and concerns about the handling of the incident in question and security going forward. Parent Kathleen Murphy pointed out that while the inside of the school was on lockdown, the students at lacrosse practice on the school fields were not addressed. She went on to state that this particular incident was an external threat, and she believes there should be a clear policy dealing with students using the playground and playing fields during a lockdown situation.

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FOOD DRIVE COMMITTEE... The Borough of Mountainside is partnering with the Foodstock organization by holding a food drive the week of July 7 to 13. Residents can drop off food at Borough Hall during normal business hours. Over 50 municipalities are participating in the program. The goal is to provide 10,000 pounds of food to area food banks. All food collected at the Mountainside location will be donated to the Community FoodBank of New Jersey in Hillside. The committee for the Mountainside food drive is, pictured from left to right, Councilman Glenn Mortimer, Mountainside Chief Financial Officer Jill Goode, Bob Swisher from Foodstock, Borough Council 2019 candidate Donna Pacifico and Councilman Rene Dierkes.



FATHER'S DAY CATCH... Alice Crawford of Cranford, pictured at right, won first place for the 7 and under category and first place overall for her catch measuring 16.5 inches at the Cranford Jaycees Father's Day Fishing Derby. She won a \$50 gift card to Amazon. Her dad, Paul, and her sister, Alana, center, are also pictured with a friend.

Christina M. Hinke for The Westfield Leader

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