

FMBA Contract With Town Now In Arbitrator's Hands

By PAUL J. PEYTON
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — The Fireman's Mutual Benevolent Association Branch (FMBA) No. 30 contract is now in the hands of an arbitrator. Westfield firefighters have been without a contract for 19 months.

Town and FMBA representatives met with arbitrator James Mastriani on August 18, at which time they presented proposals and exhibits for consideration. The FMBA will submit its financial analysis this month and the town will have the opportunity to respond to that document.

Mr. Mastriani's conclusions in settling the contract are binding. He was the mediator for the FMBA's last contract, which did not go to arbitration. Town Administrator Jim Gildea said Mr. Mastriani was selected by both the town and FMBA to help both sides reach a new agreement.

"It's in the arbitrator's hands," Mr. Gildea said, noting that negotiations between the two sides have concluded. The town wants to add an eighth step at the top of the salary guide for

firefighters. Currently, it takes FMBA members seven years (including their probationary year) to reach the top of the salary scale.

The town also wants to switch from a traditional health plan to a preferred provider system of health care organized by an insurance company. Mr. Gildea previously told *The Westfield Leader* that a PPO would offer similar coverage to FMBA members, but at a lower cost to the town. The town will continue to offer FMBA members a Point of Service plan.

"Employees will still have a choice of two plans," said Mr. Gildea.

Firefighters receive increases each year on the anniversary of their start date with the department, in addition to annual raises based on the FMBA contract. Firefighters who have reached the maximum level only receive regular annual raises.

Under the current contract, a probationary firefighter earns \$29,175. A grade 1 firefighter earns \$34,655; a second grade firefighter makes

\$39,025; a grade 3 fireman, \$45,529; fourth grade, \$52,038; grade 5, \$58,542, and maximum grade, \$65,482. Lieutenants are currently compensated \$73,002 with captains paid \$79,557.

The latest contract proposal is for four years. The previous accord was for three years. The department has 38 full-time firefighters, a fire chief and two deputy chiefs.

The administrator said the arbitrator is likely to take several months before submitting his findings.

New Jersey FMBA Vice President Robert Brower said he could not comment on current negotiations with another town. Westfield FMBA President Robert Tarrantino was unavailable for comment.

The town is also about to begin talks with the 59-member Police Benevolent Association No. 90 and the 41-member Teamsters Local No. 469, whose contracts expire at the end of the year. The Teamsters represent Public Works employees, as well as some workers in the engineering department.



THE BIG DIG...The northern end of Elm Street in Westfield gets completely rebuilt as part of the town's program to permanently repair the street. Old rail ties and Trolley tracks, which were buried beneath the surface for decades, are removed.

Anna Githens for The Westfield Leader

Westfield School Children Head Back to Classrooms Wednesday

By ANNA GITHENS
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — Fifty-nine hundred students — an increase of 107 kids from 2004-2005 — will return to Westfield schools this Wednesday, September 7.

Students will be greeted with new renovations to classrooms, as well as technology and academic initiatives, while teachers begin a new contract ratified last spring.

A new synthetic turf field and running track was completed over the summer, to be ready in time for the fall football and track seasons.

"I certainly think it's going to help both the school and in-town teams competitively in lacrosse, soccer, PAL football and our own football," said Superintendent of Schools Dr. Will-

iam Foley. "It's a really nice venue, it will be better for kids to play on, and may hopefully reduce injuries," he added.

The high school also recently approved a bid to replace the auditorium's lighting and sound system.

Additionally, renovations were made to the Franklin Elementary School boys' and girls' restrooms on the second floor, and air conditioning was installed on the second floor of the new wing. A new classroom trailer was installed at Wilson Elementary School.

The standard range for elementary class size is still between 18 and 25 students, school officials said. Currently, only two classes — in Franklin School's fourth grade — have 24 stu-

dents, the highest number in the district. All other classes consist of 23 students or less.

Franklin School was obligated to add another section in grade 2 for its 123 students, and consequently had to remove a section from its third grade to accommodate the need.

According to Lorre Korecky, Director of Community Relations, some of the district's major academic changes include a revised curriculum in elementary and middle school language arts; high school physical education; middle school science; grade 8 Spanish; grades 9 to 12 Biology I; grades 11 to 12 Biology II — Advanced Placement, and grades 11 to 12 art.

Mrs. Korecky noted that new curricula in grade 12 include courses such as Discrete Mathematics, Probability and Statistics, Italian IV, and English IV — Experiencing Cultural Diversity Through Language and Literature.

Science Olympiad and a debate class are new Gifted and Talented courses, which are offered as electives to all eighth graders.

According to Dr. Foley, Westfield has completely revamped its language arts curriculum at the elementary level and is focusing on balanced literacy by teaching writing and reading as unified skills to youngsters.

"This is the most comprehensive curriculum document I've seen the district produce," Dr. Foley indicated. "It is very pragmatic. There are 'must words' used every day that you have to know how to spell," he added.

There will be a total of 44 new teachers, four new guidance counselors and one new social worker in Westfield this year. Fourteen new hires will be placed in Westfield's elementary schools, as well as 14 in the intermediate schools and 21 at the high school.

"We have a very new and young guidance counselor staff," remarked

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Sticker-Shock At the Gas Pumps, But No Reduction In Consumer Use

By DEBORAH MADISON
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

AREA — Drivers everywhere are wondering how much higher gas prices will go. Prices at the pump have escalated to an all-time, record high, with the national average at \$2.65 per gallon as of Sunday.

The usual end-of-summer decline in consumption will not be enough to offset the additional increases expected from major disruptions to oil facilities in the Gulf of Mexico caused by Hurricane Katrina.

Refineries in the Gulf of Mexico, which produce over one million barrels a day, were shut down in anticipation of the hurricane causing another jump in gasoline prices.

On Tuesday, crude oil rose to \$70 per barrel, escalating gasoline prices to \$2.67 per gallon on the average, nationwide. Every \$10 dollar increase per barrel raises the price of gas at the pump approximately 13 to 15 cents per gallon, depending on the source.

Gas prices rose approximately 13 cents in the last two weeks of August alone, following a 20 cent increase during the first two weeks of August. Retail diesel prices also are rising at unprecedented rates, closely mirroring the increases in regular gasoline, which has a ripple effect on everything from apple juice to zippers that are transported by truck and rail.

At the Sunoco Station on Route 22 and Willow Avenue in Scotch Plains, a gallon of regular gasoline was \$2.53 per gallon on Saturday, and jumped to \$2.61 per gallon on Tuesday. Owner of nine years, Om Bathla, told *The Westfield Leader* that the prices are set by the parent company of his franchise, with only a seven-cent leeway for his profit. He said that even though the cost to fill the tank has doubled, from \$15 to \$20 last year to over \$40 this year, people are still filling up and consumption seems to be steady. Customers are complaining to him about the prices, but most recognize that he is not to blame.

Hash Patel, managing partner of the Route 22 Exxon in Scotch Plains, said that people could only blame themselves for not voting for the right political leaders. Mr. Patel told *The Leader* that voters put the wrong politicians in power, who are allowing this situation to escalate and making poor political decisions that affect the price of gasoline.

One of his customers, Scotch Plains resident Wilma Lockhart, agreed that politics have a lot to do with prices at the pump. Ms. Lockhart said she believes that politicians could do something to stop the price from escalating, but are somehow profiting from deliberate gouging.

The only solution she can think of is to tell her teenage children to walk instead of drive everywhere, and she has stopped letting them use the car for short trips to the store. Her family rented a van to drive down south this summer, instead of taking two cars, which would have been too costly.

Westfield resident Stephen Tunney, who was filling up at the Fanwood Getty on South Avenue, where gas went from \$2.47 per gallon Saturday to \$2.69 Tuesday, said that although supply and demand is mostly to blame, he believes that politics and price gouging are playing a part in the sudden jump in price.

"The government could do something about it, but isn't," Mr. Tunney said.

However, according to government sources, the huge jump in retail prices is not due to politics or price gouging, which was the cause of the sudden jump in prices in the 1970s. According to The Energy Information Administration — a statistical agency of the U.S. Department of Energy created by Congress in 1977 — the price of gasoline is simply a matter of supply and demand economics in a global economy.

The main cause for this rise in price is that supply has not been able to keep pace with demand, in part due to emerging economies like China and

India using more gasoline than in previous years, according to the EIA's website, www.EIA.doe.gov.

Other global economy experts agree. According to Ben Halliburton, co-founder and chief investment officer of Tradition Capital Management in Summit, the rising price is due to an increase in demand along with dwindling supplies that are driving the price of every barrel of crude oil up.

Productivity has decreased since the 1980s, which is not a deliberate reduction, but a function of the Earth's supply of crude oil in the wells. It is becoming more difficult, time consuming and costly to extract crude oil from deeper wells, he said.

Mr. Halliburton said that increased demand by industrialized nations would continue to outpace supply, while the summer demand would slack off in September, slightly lowering the price.

It's difficult to say where the price will settle out, Mr. Halliburton said, adding "I don't foresee a bubble bursting and it's not enough of an increase to affect any significant change in the overall economy, yet."

"Oil prices would have to escalate from the current \$68 per barrel up to \$90 a barrel to see an energy-induced inflation," Mr. Halliburton said. He does believe that people are already changing the vehicles they purchase, looking for smaller cars, rather than large SUVs. He said changes in consumption will take time to show up on the market.

Local produce suppliers disagree about how much the increase in gas prices is affecting local economy. One produce supplier at the Scotch Plains outdoor produce market told *The Leader* that he has had to raise his prices, due to increased transportation costs, which is causing people to buy less of his high-end dessert products.

Another produce supplier, Champ Planet, who sells homemade chutneys, relishes and salsas said, "gas is

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'Slim Jim' Toddler Rescue Featured on Satellite News

By HORACE CORBIN
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

WESTFIELD — The Westfield Fire Station on North Avenue was the location of live satellite news broadcasts by NBC and CNN at 7:30 last Friday morning. The story aired across the country, known as "Slim Jim," featured firefighter Jim Pfeiffer with 16-month old John Butterfield.

Westfield firemen and police rescued the child from a 10-foot hole where the child had fallen and became trapped Monday afternoon, August 22 at Tamaques Park. They lowered their slimmest member down the shaft through a one-foot clearance headfirst by tying a rope to his ankles. He grabbed the child, yelled

up to the rope crew, and they yanked him out.

In the TV interview, firefighter Pfeiffer held the spry toddler while explaining the rescue. He noted that being called slim by his colleagues was just "normal firehouse humor in good fun that occurs around the country." He said it was a team effort where everyone did his job and everything turned out alright.

The rescue team showed up for the news broadcast and to be reunited with little John and his dad, John Butterfield.

Westfield Fire Chief Dan Kelly said they have received many e-mails of congratulations from around the country, including as far away as Ohio and California.



John Butterfield



GOOD NEWS...The rescue team of Westfield firefighters and police pose last Friday with toddler John Butterfield in front of the satellite news truck after the live national news interview. Pictured above, left to right, are: Captain Roger Sawicki, Patrolman Greg Kasko, Lt. Anthony Tiller, Firefighter Benjamin Corbin, Lt. Tom Ryan, Lt. Scott Miller; Firefighters Michael Duels, Michael Skubish and Jim Pfeiffer; son and father John Butterfield and Fire Chief Dan Kelly. Not shown are: Deputy Chiefs Ken Dannevig and David Kelly; Firefighter Michael Sawicki; Patrolmen Harold Caulfield and Robert Beaton.

Horace Corbin for The Westfield Leader

MS Schools Add 21 Teachers, Admins.

By ANNA GITHENS
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

MOUNTAINSIDE — The borough's school district will have 21 new teachers and administrators when its two schools — Deerfield and Beechwood — open this Wednesday, September 7.

Rod McLaughlin has joined the district as its new business administrator, and Michael Craver is the new assistant principal/curriculum coordinator. Maureen Miller has been hired as the new Director of Special Services. Four new special education teachers also have been hired.

In addition, there will be four new core-curriculum teachers and two new school nurses.

According to Chief School Administrator Dr. Richard O'Malley, sections were added to accommodate the large number of children attending grades 1

and 3 (95 and 98 students, respectively).

"We are very excited about this school year, primarily because of the new Everyday Math program and the Connected Math program," said Dr. O'Malley. Grades kindergarten through 5 will implement the Everyday Math curriculum; grades 6 to 8 will use Connected Math.

"We are also focusing on professional development this year with a new program, the Mountainside Educators Institute for New Teachers," said Dr. O'Malley, explaining that this will be a three-year program. "We are putting our resources toward training new teachers," he added.

New computers have been installed in the Beechwood Computer Lab. New smart boards and a new E-Walk Web service (Web-based software program for school administrators) also have been installed.



NOT JUST ANOTHER FENDER BENDER...This Trans Am lost its battle with a light pole at noon on Sunday, August 28, near the corner of Central Avenue and North Avenue in Westfield.

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