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Letters to the Editor

Parent-Teacher Council President Urges Affirmative Vote for Budget

I am writing this letter to encourage all Westfield voters to vote in favor of the school budget on Tuesday, April 16.

I believe the budget is well crafted in light of the current state of school funding. Consideration has been made of the expenses of the district, including the rising costs of professional staff, rising health care insurance for the district employees, and the freeze on state aid from Trenton.

Our fine schools continue to show excellent results, as indicated by *The Star-Ledger* report on March 7. Westfield students' SAT average is among the highest in the state; indeed, that benchmark is one of the main reasons why people buy homes in this town—now and in years gone by. It is no wonder that Westfield continues to increase its school enrollment each year.

We will enjoy another Homestead rebate this year. It will help to ease the increase. Taxes are by no means anyone's

favorite bill to pay, but school taxes are extremely important. They represent our investment in the future.

While the current school budget proposal asks my household for approximately \$9.47 a week (I have two children in the system), I compare that cost to some of the other items that we frequently expend: cable TV, cell phones, Internet connection, manicures, dog food and magazine subscriptions.

I know that every resident does not spend the same way our family does, but I also know that every homeowner benefits from our excellent school system. Retirees have found their home to be their greatest investment return. By keeping our academic standards high, homeowners self-fund their retirement.

That is why I ask all residents to vote yes for the budget proposal.

**Merry C. Wisler, President,
Westfield Parent-Teacher Council**



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. Houve - A hood or cap
2. Hordeaceous - Resembling barley
3. Tabinid - A horsefly
4. Ereption - Taking or snatching away by force

ONYCHOPHAGY

1. Permanent and progressive loss of memory; Alzheimers disease
2. The habit of biting the fingernails
3. Skin disease marked by bacteria causing it to decay
4. The destruction of ancient monuments

XEROSTOMA

1. Having little to no sense of smell
2. Having no stomach
3. Dryness of the mouth from lack of normal secretion
4. Lack of yellow pigmentation

CRINIGEROUS

1. Hairly; covered with hair
2. Preserving through freezing
3. Shrinking or cowering, usually in fear
4. Forming rings

RETROUSSE

1. Predicting the future by understanding the past
2. Turned up at the tip like a pug nose
3. Running backward
4. Any reference book

Answers will appear in next week's issue.

Mum's the Word on Candidates Until April 8 Filing Deadline

The local guessing games will be resolved next Monday when the behind-the-scenes maneuverings of mayoral and council candidates, would-be candidates and might-have-been candidates end with the disclosure of who filed petitions and, sometimes more interestingly, who didn't. Right now, it's a lot of fun listening to the rumor mill, as the local committees choose their candidates.

It's going to be a busy election season around here this fall; what makes it more fun right now is that many of the candidates who will be on the ballot are not yet known. For strategic political reasons, and sometimes just for fun, many have refused to confirm or deny their interest in running in the weeks leading up to April 8, the deadline for filing nominating petitions to be placed on the Tuesday, June 4 Primary ballot.

In addition to Mayor Gregory McDermott, four seats on the Westfield Town Council will be in play. These seats are currently held by Democrats Carl Salisbury, Claire Lazarowitz and Lawrence Goldman, and Republican Rafael Betancourt. Presently, the council is controlled by five Democrats over three Republicans. Who'll be running for these five seats besides, it's presumed, the incumbents? Even they have surprised us before, and been last minute dropouts. It's anyone's guess, and the speculations have been interesting.

There are some interesting rumors about the possible Democratic mayoral candidate for Westfield, for example. The names of former mayor Tom Jardim, Councilman Salisbury and current Freeholder Mary Ruotolo have been bantered around. On the Republican side, rumors have been spread that Mayor McDermott won't run again and that Councilmen Betancourt or Matt Albano will pick up the banner.

For council seats up for grabs, the return of past Councilman Neil Sullivan to run against incumbent Councilwoman Lazarowitz has been conjectured. Pure speculation, say town party leaders, Democrat Ken

Rotter and Republican Vic Trzesniowski—but mum's the word.

Three Township Council seats will be contested in Scotch Plains, with Republican Councilmen Frank Rossi and Guy Celentano confirming their intention to seek reelection. As for the Democrats, the plans of Councilwoman Geri M. Samuel, the governing body's lone Democrat, are still not known, and recently the township Democrats issued an appeal for interested candidates to come forward.

Democratic party Chairman Ken Lipstein assures this newspaper that they will have a strong, qualified set of candidates again, mum's the word.

In Fanwood, two Borough Council seats, those currently held by Stuart Kline and Thomas Ryan, will be up for grabs, as Democrats seek a way to build on last November's twin victories and further narrow the current 5-2 Republican majority.

In Mountainside, two Republicans, Keith Turner and Paul Mirabelli, are up for reelection in a community where no Democrat has ever held a Borough Council seat. Things will probably stay this way in the 2002 elections.

Some of these contests will likely be easy sprints to reelection for incumbents. Others, however, are likely to be hard-fought battles that could shape local politics and governmental policy for several years to come. It will be fun to watch the all-out political war in Westfield, as both parties are highly motivated and well supported.

In the interest of preserving a strong democratic spirit, advancing good government and giving voters a true choice we hope none of the local elections in our area this fall are uncontested. It would be great if the yawners of uncontested school board elections occurring in two weeks could also become this way in the future. After all, is it really that much fun winning a contest where there is no opponent?

Parent-Teacher Assoc. Encourages 'Yes' Vote of SP-F School Budget

The Executive Board of the Terrill Middle School PTA has unanimously endorsed the proposed 2002-2003 budget, approved by the Scotch Plains-Fanwood Board of Education.

This budget was crafted with two goals in mind. The first and foremost objective is to deliver a solid, quality education to the students of our community. The second goal is to limit the burden of Scotch Plains and Fanwood property taxpayers.

Although our school district will receive flat funding from the state this year, this level of funding is essentially a cut because the student body is projected to increase by 174 students.

This budget will allow us to maintain current class sizes and purchase new books that are needed. We will be able to increase staffing as necessary, help the anticipated move of our fifth graders into the middle schools and provide an additional guidance counselor at each middle school.

The World Language program will be expanded to include grades four and five. At the High School, improvements include the addition of Astronomy and Zoology programs to the curriculum. This will round out our High Schools science program to provide four years of science for all of our students, as is now expected by most colleges.

As you drive by our schools you can now see direct results from last year's school bond. The money has gone toward the necessary construction and

BOE Vice President Says Bd. Made Sacrifices While Crafting Budget

In a letter to this newspaper last week, Keith Hertell simultaneously criticized the Westfield Board of Education for not making "sacrifices" in order to deliver an acceptable budget, and proposed that the board increase spending to retain eighth grade sports.

This inconsistency demonstrates the inherent difficulties in formulating a school budget at a time of increasing enrollments and costs and decreasing state aid. No one wants to cut programs, but no one wants to pay higher taxes.

As a member of the board's Finance Committee, I know only too well how difficult it is to maintain a quality educational program within an acceptable budget.

Westfield schools offer many valuable programs to meet the needs and interests of our students and their families. The board struggled to determine which programs to reduce or eliminate given our extraordinarily tough budget situation. I, too, was very disappointed that programs, such as eighth grade sports and the summer Primary Enrichment Program, needed to be cut so the budget would fit within the state-mandated cap.

The board has done exactly what Mr. Hertell has suggested. We have thought creatively about how to most effectively use our staff and reduce costs, without harming the quality of our educational programs, and we have asked the community to make sacrifices by eliminating some non-academic programs.

The Westfield Board of Education was able to keep the proposed budget increase for 2002-2003 within the state mandated budget cap of 5.7 percent. The debt service for our elementary and high school bonds brings the budget increase to 6.7 percent. The tax impact, however, is 9.7 percent because the state is paying a smaller portion of the total budget, there is less fund balance and lower interest on our investments. The budget maintains the high quality school system that brings eager buyers for homes in Westfield.

I would urge voters to approve the proposed school budget for the benefit of our children and our community.

**Anne Riegel,
Vice President
Westfield Board of Education**

School Superintendent Sites District's Progress In Endorsing 2002-2003 Budget

Over the years, I've witnessed the strength of community support for the Westfield Public Schools demonstrated in many ways. Westfield citizens have supported school budgets and bonds to accommodate changes in enrollment, curriculum and to update our aging facilities.

As a result of school funding laws and the lack of ratables in a town like Westfield, the bulk of school budget income rests with the local taxpayer.

This year, Westfield received about 7.5 percent of our revenue from the state, while the state aid average was 32 percent. With state and federal aid frozen for 2002-2003, the reliance on local taxes is greater than ever.

In some years, we have been able to absorb the impact of limited state support with fund balance and interest income, but these revenues also have declined as the economy has weakened.

On the expense side, many of our fixed charges come with double digit increases. Insurance has increased 24 percent despite changing carriers and requiring employee contributions. Special Education expenses will increase by 16 percent, and our debt service by 39 percent, as we make the first payment on the high school bonds.

The board has cut almost \$800,000 out of the operating budget, ending good programs like the summer Primary Enrichment Program and eighth grade sports, keeping the operating budget increase at 5.7 percent, within the state budget cap.

Despite this difficult budget, our students continue to shine. SAT scores are up and student performance on fourth-eighth and 11th grade state tests is among the highest in the state.

We are educating over 5,500 students, more than 700 students more than in 1996. 99.7 percent of our seniors graduate and 95 percent continue their education. We have added essential additions to our elementary schools and have broken ground for a new science wing at the high school. We have introduced foreign language at the elementary level, integrated technology into the curriculum and added teachers to keep class sizes reasonable.

As I listened to residents at five public meetings on the budget, read countless e-mails and answered many calls, the message was always the same: the children must come first. The board restored several budget cuts, like All City Music,

BOE Vice President Says Bd. Made Sacrifices While Crafting Budget

television production and new computers because parents emphasized their importance. Even those who publicly support a lower tax increase argued strongly against the cuts that were made.

I believe that the budget we are proposing strikes the best balance between educational excellence and fiscal responsibility. What really matters is what you think. Copies of the budget are available in the board offices at 302 Elm Street. Information about the budget is posted on our website, www.westfieldnj.com.

TV36 is running an informational segment that describes the highlights of our 2002-2003 budget. *Emphasis*, which provides an overview of the budget, will be mailed to every resident next week.

I urge Westfield residents to become informed about the budget and to vote on Tuesday, April 16.

**Dr. William Foley
Superintendent of Westfield
Public Schools**

For Many, Holidays Were Solemn Reminder Of Those Victimized By Events of Sept. 11

Another holiday season has passed. The leftovers are being carved up into sandwiches and the chocolate bunnies are unrecognizable with their heads bitten off. The Seder plates and special dishes have been put back into their cabinets, to collect dust until next Passover. Alarm clocks are set once again for 6:30 a.m. and the kids are back to studying for tests and waiting for that magical last day of school just around the corner.

For many of us, the routine of daily life is back to normal in most ways: holidays, groceries, laundry, and homework. But for some families, approximately 6,500, life will never be the same again. Every holiday dinner, will mark another special occasion that a loved one is not sitting at the table. The diminished laundry and sparser grocery bill are constant reminders that someone dear and loved is missing.

These are people who live in our communities, whose children attend school with ours, who stand next to us at the grocery store. For them, life will never be the same without their beloved partner, parent or child who was abruptly stolen from them on September 11.

Although it is comforting to put the tragic events of that horrific day behind us, we must not forget the

families who were most deeply scarred by that act of terror. Perhaps now, more than ever, these families need our support and love. As the shock and fear of the horrific attack wears off, the real depth of grief and sorrow set in, especially on holidays. Some of us may even feel a twinge of guilt for enjoying ourselves in the wake of such a terrible tragedy.

Two major holidays of this season, Easter and Passover, remind us that joy and grief are often intermingled. Both of these holidays celebrate not only loss and sacrifice, but miracles in the face of hopelessness. Every holiday has taken on a deeper meaning for all of us because of the sacrifice made by the victims of September 11. Like fallen war heroes, they died because we have the freedom to live and worship as we choose, because we are Americans: Christians, Jews, Muslims, Sikhs, Atheists, and dozens of other sects among us. They died defending our right to choose. Every one of them is an American hero and every religious holiday is more meaningful and more joyous in honor of them.

Happy Easter and Good Pesach from *The Westfield Leader* and *The Times of Scotch Plains-Fanwood*.

'Yes' Vote on Budget For Westfield Schools Benefits All Residents

I would like to express my support for the education budget, on which we'll be voting on Tuesday, April 16. State aid has been frozen for the first time in 25 years, and several programs have had to be reduced from their planned size in order to accommodate the town's needs.

I think it's important for all citizens of Westfield to support our education system. For parents, there can be no more important investment than in their children's future, and for those families without children in our school system, Westfield's commitment to education supports our community and our property values.

So I urge everyone to get out and vote "yes" to the budget on April 16.

**Simon Lack
Westfield**

Clergy Urges Sports Programs To Avoid Scheduling on Sundays

Editor's Note: Copies of this letter were also sent to Mayor Gregory McDermott, members of the Town Council, the Town Administrator, the members and chairman of the Recreation Commission, the Westfield Y and the PAL.

We, the undersigned senior clergy of the Westfield interfaith congregations, wish to express our concerns about sports activities, which are scheduled on Sundays.

For many years, sports organizations avoided scheduling sports activities on Sundays out of respect for religious observances and educational programs.

Unfortunately, with the increasing interest in sports and secularization of our culture, this no longer seems to be a consideration.

Sunday morning sports events and practices (and even those scheduled early afternoon out of town) conflict with religious education opportunities at all houses of worship in Westfield. Additionally, they conflict with primary worship opportunities at most churches.

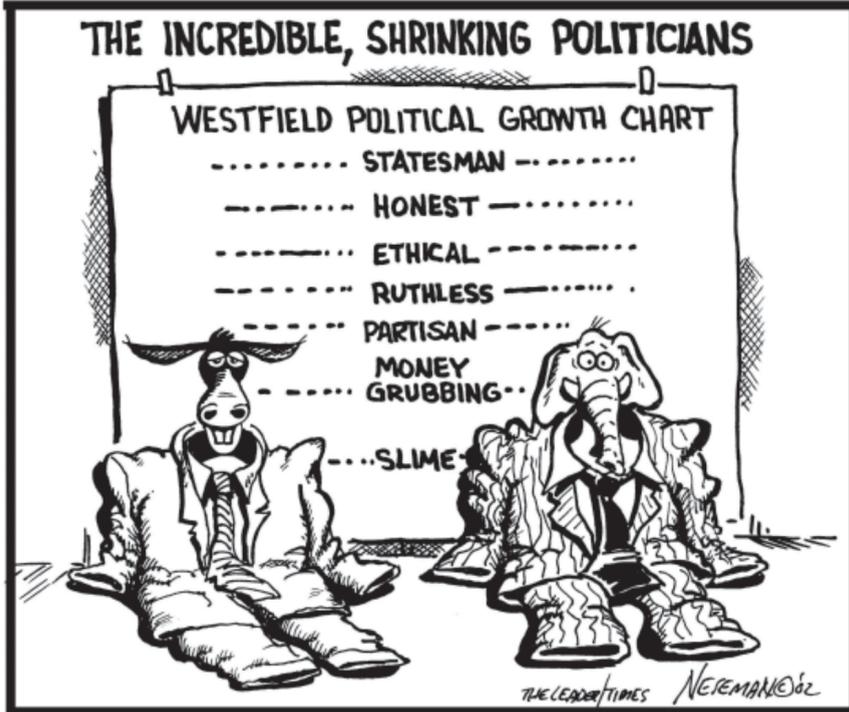
It is wrong to force children and their families to choose between enriching one's religious life and participating in sports.

Many would agree that our culture benefits greatly from the moral and ethical development of children and their families that comes from involvement in religious activities and recreational activities contribute to the overall well-being of our community, we should not compete for the allocation of such a precious commodity—our time.

We urge all sports programs in Westfield to make every attempt to avoid scheduling activities at times on Sundays that will cause a conflict between religious programming and recreational activities.

Together, we can enhance and improve the quality of life in our community.

**The Reverend Dimitrius Antokas,
The Reverend William Ross
Forbes,
The Reverend Andrew
Hammersley,
The Reverend Monsignor William
Harms,
The Reverend Paul Kritsch,
The Reverend David Harwood,
Rabbi Charles Kroloff,
The Reverend Monsignor Joseph
Masiello,
The Reverend Stanford Sutton,
The Reverend Dr. Darla Dee
Turlington,
The Reverend Leon Randall,
The Reverend Dr. Christopher
Atwood**



Fanwood Resident Disgusted With Westfield Landlord's Greed

I have to express my disgust for the greed being displayed by the owner of the South Avenue Shopping Center in Westfield. The shopping center, which used to house a Mandee shop and Dress Barn, has been leased to Harmon Cosmetics, which is in direct competition with the Beauty Outlet, a small shop located a few doors down.

I have shopped at the Beauty Outlet for the last 20 years and have always found the owner Michael helpful and courteous to his patrons, he has always gone out of his way to answer questions

and his knowledge of the products he sells is impressive. Do you think you will get that quality of service at a large chain?

The greed displayed by the landlord has been displayed by many of the landlords in the downtown area, pushing out the small mom and pop stores for the larger chains. I find it quite disturbing—what is next a Borders right next door to the town Book Shop? A Subway next to Duke's and Hershey's?

**Kathryn Sidebottom
Fanwood**

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