

The Westfield Leader

— Established 1890 —

The Official Newspaper of the Town of Westfield and the County of Union

Member of:
New Jersey Press Association
National Newspaper Association
Westfield Area Chamber of Commerce

Periodicals - Postage Paid at Westfield, New Jersey
P.O. Box 250 • 50 Elm Street
Westfield, N.J. 07091

Tele: (908) 232-4407 • E-mail: press@goleader.com • Web: www.goleader.com • Fax: (908) 232-0473

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to the offices of the newspapers at
P. O. Box 250, Westfield, New Jersey 07091

PUBLISHED EVERY THURSDAY BY WATCHUNG COMMUNICATIONS, INC.

<p>Michelle H. LePoidevin <i>A&E and EDUCATION</i></p> <p>Suzette F. Stalker <i>COMMUNITY</i></p> <p>Jennifer Pinto <i>PROFESSIONAL STAFF</i></p>	<p>Horace R. Corbin <i>PUBLISHER</i></p> <p>David B. Corbin <i>ASSISTANT PUBLISHER & SPORTS</i></p> <p>Karen M. Hinds <i>OFFICE MANAGER</i></p>	<p>Fred K. Lecomte <i>SALES DIRECTOR</i></p> <p>Michael L. Bartiromo <i>MARKETING & PRODUCTION</i></p> <p>Robert P. Connelly <i>CLASSIFIEDS & LEGALS</i></p>
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SUBSCRIPTION PRICE
One-year - \$24 • Two-year - \$46 • Three-year - \$66 • One-year college (September to May) - \$16

THE TIMES of Scotch Plains - Fanwood

— Established 1959 —

Official Newspaper of the Borough of Fanwood and the Township of Scotch Plains

Member of:
New Jersey Press Association • National Newspaper Association
Scotch Plains Business & Professional Association
Fanwood Business & Professional Association

Periodicals - Postage Paid at Scotch Plains, New Jersey
P. O. Box 368 • 1906 Bartle Avenue
Scotch Plains, N.J. 07076

Letters to the Editor

9/11 Memorial Booth On Display At Spring Fling Street Fair

This year's Spring Street Fair on Sunday, April 28, will be a day of festivity and fun, but we ask that you take 5 minutes that day to do something very important for the many families in the Westfield area that lost a loved one on September 11th. Please stop by the September 11th Memorial Park Committee booth, located on East Broad Street, between Elm and Prospect, and take a look at the plans that are currently underway to create a lasting memorial for the 12 members of the Westfield community who were lost to all of us on that tragic day.

Staffing the booth on April 28 will be the volunteer members of the Committee who are anxious to share with the community the progress of this fitting tribute to our neighbors. Professional renderings of the planned memorial and park will also be on display.

The September 11th Memorial Park is an outgrowth of the tremendous interest and concern that the community expressed this fall in the wake of this horrific tragedy.

If you would like to contribute to the project, checks can be made payable to the "September 11th Memorial Park Committee, Inc., P. O. Box 712, Westfield, New Jersey 07091.

Janis Weintin
Chair, September 11th Memorial Park Committee, Inc.



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. Excecation - The act of making blind
2. Temerarious - Headstrong; reckless
3. Varus - Bowlegged
4. Vעתitation - The state of being carried

IMPETRATION

1. To obtain by request or entreaty
2. To enslave or imprison
3. A sudden and forceful action marked by impulsiveness
4. Imposing or overbearing

SPADASSIN

1. In Botany, a fleshy clublike spike bearing minute flowers
2. A crackling or sizzling sound
3. A swordsman
4. A sudden flood or outpouring

HEBDDOMDALLY

1. A penguin
2. In weekly periods
3. A type of schizophrenic characterized by senseless laughter
4. A daydreamer

STIRIOUS

1. In a trance-like state
2. Resembling icicles
3. Turmoil
4. Precipitous; extremely steep

Government Should Decide Difference Between Public and Private Information

One of the positive things that governments have done in recent decades has been to be more open and accessible to the public they serve. Meetings are no longer conducted in secret, elected officials' votes are cast openly and a great deal of government records and documents are available to the public. And this increased access has been accomplished at all levels of government.

Of course, some confidential government records, especially at the local level, need to remain that way, especially when they concern legal matters, personnel matters or information that, if made public, could affect a negotiation or a contract. But not every government record is confidential. We, the governed, have a right to inspect local government budgets, the minutes of the meetings of governmental bodies, expense accounts and the like.

Recently, there arose a situation that made some wonder about certain gray areas of government records. At a recent meeting of the Union County Board of Freeholders, a resident questioned them about whether the limit on prisoners held in the county jail had been exceeded because, he explained, he had requested and received a lengthy computer printout listing the names of all prisoners held in county jails on a certain date and found the number to far exceed what he believed to be the limit. This resident held the computerized list in his hand as he spoke. Later, this same resident, now holding another computer printout, this time the listing of all the county-owned vehicles, questioned a decision by the freeholders to shed some excess county-owned automobiles.

After answering the resident's questions on these two matters, Freeholders Daniel Sullivan and Nicholas Scutari appeared to be quite exercised that this resident had been able to get his hands on these county government documents, one, a listing of names of prisoners in the county jail and the other a seemingly innocuous list of county-owned vehicles. Mr. Scutari instructed County Manager George Devanny to tighten controls on the release of documents while Mr. Sullivan seemed to imply that any county government employee who was found to have released these two documents would be fired.

But before the county government acts in haste, and maybe without cause, it needs to first ascertain whether the release of either of these documents violated any law. It's far from certain whether a list of prisoners is confidential information. And why a listing of county vehicles might need to be kept secret is very questionable. Just because a county resident may have surprised the freeholders with questions about some government documents he had in hand, should not be an excuse to clamp down on the public's right to have access to government information.

Of course, if it turns out that these materials were intended to be kept confidential, the public should be told why this is the case and then, of course, better safeguards should be put into place to protect confidentiality. But, first, before the county government takes any action that could ultimately be seen as excessive, it should first determine what is and what isn't public information.

Composite Construction List and Schedule Should Be Prepared For the Entire Region

This region of the county has several major and important public works construction projects scheduled for its roadways, parks and schools. Many will begin shortly, and some are already underway. Many organizations and contractors are involved in these projects, and the work and inconveniences will be with us for several months.

The culled communities of Cranford, Westfield, Springfield, Fanwood, Mountainside, Clark and Scotch Plains have common interests and responsibilities for the success of the work. Eventually, it will get done, and we will be better off for it. But, how much disruption will result from these efforts? This is somewhat under our control.

In our small circle of about 10 miles, there is a bustling population of approximately 100,000 people, with scores of important businesses. The region is a highly integrated network, and it is the center of major thoroughfares, including connections from the Parkway to Route 22, Summit to Westfield, Elizabeth to Plainfield, Mountainside to Edison, Cranford to Fanwood and New Providence or Berkeley Heights to Scotch Plains.

We all know the disruption that can result from unexpected incidents such as traffic accidents, storms and floods. There is very little that can be done to predict when these types of incidents will occur. We all just grin and bear it - grind our way through it.

However, the situation is different with the upcoming construction projects. We know they are going to happen, and we know about when they will occur. So, we have destiny somewhat in our control. All we need to do is organize our knowledge, plan, coordinate and communicate. Then, everyone can adjust and compensate to minimize the impacts. Sounds easy, but it is more difficult than imagined. It is very difficult to obtain details of these projects in advance - even if just from one town. It is even more difficult to get a master list and schedule for the entire set of the culled communities.

Given the magnitude of what is at stake, with the construction projects and the number of people that will be affected, we think that it is a common sense and profitable idea for the communities to assemble a composite list and schedule of all the projects. We urge that this composite list be given to the public, and that it be updated on a regular basis.

We find this very difficult to achieve. Even here in Westfield, with our close ties to officials and department heads, obtaining information is extremely difficult. It seems like everyone is reticent to publish information for fear they might be wrong or that they might be second-guessed or held to criticism. So the task of preparing a composite list for the region is even more daunting, and it's not just the road projects that should be on this list - the school projects and progress may be even more important.

Rahway Avenue projects in Westfield have already been started. Snarls and traffic accidents occurred as a result of the construction during the art show at the Armory two Saturdays ago. Residents near Westfield High School are already experiencing the effects of initial work there, as parking spaces near the school have been diminished.

There's no doubt that there will be traffic delays and disruptions. This is an unavoidable part of the game when construction occurs. We are a highly integrated society, and even small changes affect our daily routines. If school openings are delayed this fall due to the construction projects, a whole new set of problems would be encountered.

With the many towns, the many departments and the many school districts involved, will it ever be possible to develop and publish a simple composite list of the construction projects? Given the importance of the matter, the fact that it is easy to do if willed - we urge that this be done as soon as possible. But, by whom?

Resident Says Concern Is About a Parking Lot, Not About Prejudice

Ok...I spilled my coffee on myself reading the letter to the editor entitled "Former Westfielder Questions Residents Against Temple Lot". As a current Westfielder whose home borders the proposed parking lot, I would like to respond.

The letter states that "a (parking) lot has become available that would alleviate these problems". Just to clarify, there is no lot available. There is a home surrounded by trees in a residential neighborhood. This property has been residential for at least 100 years. The residents in the area of this property are concerned about their property values and the urbanization of Westfield.

The letter implied that if Westfield residents oppose the Temple expansion, regardless of reason, we are prejudice. As I see it, my choices are: I can have a renovated home bordering my backyard, several new homes bordering my backyard or a parking lot the size of Drug Fair's in my backyard. An easy choice for me.

Other residents who are opposed to the proposed parking lot might picture a Westfield with homes giving away to parking lots, parking decks and strip malls - fluorescent lighting in place of trees. Traffic (volume) and cars (are) increasing yearly. These are all valid concerns about a parking lot but are all lumped under the accusation of prejudice.

The writer asks us to put aside our prejudices and imagine it was a church expanding into adjacent properties. Well I'm imagining and it doesn't change the fact that I want to protect the reason I moved to my home in Westfield. I don't feel, and most people agree, that if the residential property were paved over by a Catholic Church, Protestant Church, Jehovah Witness Hall, Buddhist Temple or Islamic Mosque it would not change the fact that it is a parking lot.

As a matter of fact, I wouldn't be happy to have my children play in my backyard next to a parking lot paved by the American Legion, VFW, Mason Organization, a school, library, YMCA, doctors office, catering hall or daycare center either.

My point is that there are dozens of worthwhile groups in our area who would like to expand and many who have attempted to; but they must respect their neighbors, not infringe upon the rights of their neighbors and play by the same planning and zoning rules adopted to protect the community. I would hope the purpose of these organizations is to contribute to the community not circumvent or divide it.

As for safety, there is plenty of parking behind the Temple on streets that would not require crossing East Broad or any streets at all. The elderly and children can be given priority in the existing parking lot. The writer seems to express that the lot would alleviate the Temples parking problems.

Westfield Parents Form "Press", Protest WHS Open Lunch Policy

This letter was originally sent to Westfield School Superintendent Dr. William Foley and Westfield High School Principal Dr. Robert Peix.

As a follow-up to conversations and several letters, which you have received, concerning effective enforcement of the Westfield High School Closed Campus policy and the Open Lunch privilege, this letter confirms that the parents involved will be presenting a petition signed by over 250 taxpayers to the Board at its April 23 meeting.

There is clearly community concern regarding the safety of underclassmen currently leaving the school without supervision or accountability and a strong sentiment that the High School should reconsider the open lunch privilege. As the petition states, we strongly believe that the privilege should be limited to the Senior Class during lunch, and that the general school policy governing student and outsider ingress and egress must be effectively enforced.

Please note that an informal poll of the surrounding school systems revealed that we are the *only* system in this region in which an essentially open campus exists. Polled communities include: Cranford, Fanwood, Scotch Plains, Summit, Mountainside, Berkeley Heights (Governor Livingston Regional HS), Union, Elizabeth and Springfield (Jonathan Dayton HS) - **not one** of these schools allows any student to leave during school hours.

New Providence allows seniors only to leave for lunch, if pre-approved by their parent. Students must sign out and in, are not allowed out if on the detention list and driving is prohibited during lunch. It is our feeling that the policies adopted by these communities are motivated by the same sense of concern for student safety that inspires the parents supporting this petition.

We very much appreciate the time you have taken to hear our concerns and trust that the Board will consider our request seriously and take appropriate remedial action.

Martha Kiczyszowski,
Robert Ratner, Thomas Dwyer,
Carolyn Fleder, Steve Goodman, Hilary Abramowitz
Westfield
For: Parents for Responsibility in Ensuring Student Safety (PRESS)
press12345@hotmail.com

Help "GIFT" Improve Gumbert Park For The Residents Of Westfield

There is a growing segment of the Westfield community that is concerned about the number of kids who enjoy what are commonly called "extreme sports," riding or doing tricks on or over various obstacles while on a skateboard, bike, or roller blades. To date, these obstacles can often be found at your local bank, church, school, or train station.

There is also a growing segment of our community that sees Gumbert Park as an underutilized and unsafe place of Westfield greenery. The park currently holds two main attractions, baseball fields and basketball courts, with a token nod to a walking/jogging path and some playground equipment. It is also bisected by an increasingly busy street, South Chestnut Street.

Finally, there is a concerned group in the Westfield community, identified as "GIFT" - Gumbert Improvement For the Town. We envision a wonderful opportunity refurbishing Gumbert Park to make it a multi-purpose, year round park that includes, among other things, a skatepark for Westfield's "extreme" athletes and a safe zone of Westfield greenery for all citizens.

For anyone interested in finding out more about either creating a skatepark in Westfield or refurbishing Gumbert Park, please stop by the GIFT table at the Westfield "Y" booth in front of G.O. Kellers on Sunday, April 28.

Alice Barbieri
Westfield

Freeholder Ruotolo Defines Union County Plan For Summit Property

Last week's editorial entitled "County Should Not Use Taxpayers' Open Space Funds For Developer Projects" requires an immediate answer from the Freeholder Board. As Chairman of the Open Space Trust Fund Committee, I take this opportunity to provide you readers with some facts.

The Union County Open Space Trust Fund was approved in 2000 when the voters of Union County overwhelmingly approved a referendum at the polls and was established last year. Simply, there is no fine print involved. The fund is to be utilized for open space acquisition and preservation for both passive and active recreation, as well as historic preservation within the County, under the direction of the Freeholder Board acting in the best interest of County residents. The Freeholder Board has been remarkably aggressive in identifying and pursuing all parcels of open space within Union County borders.

There are 63 acres of land adjacent to the Watching Reservation owned by The New Jersey American Water Company, the largest available parcel of land in Union County, with the next largest at just over 13 acres. The County is in negotiations with American Water Company to acquire the land, and the bond ordinance introduced for first reading on Thursday allows the County to acquire the necessary funds expeditiously, should an agreement with American Water Company be reached. Prior to the County of Union becoming involved, there was a plan in place by an engineering firm to build 37 residential units on the property. The Freeholder Board will not allow this to happen.

The County of Union plans to partner with New Jersey Green Acres and purchase 57 acres of the American Water Company land and permanently designate it as Open Space. Green Acres is committing \$1.5 million to the acquisition. The remaining seven acres will be purchased with capital funds and designated for public auction, with the potential bidders on the property severely

Temple Emanu-El Member Says UNITE Is Not Anti-Semitic

As a member and neighbor of Temple Emanu-El, please allow me to set the record straight regarding the proposed parking lot on East Broad Street. The neighbors who formed the group "UNITE" are not anti-Semitic.

In last week's issue of the Leader, Joanna Chereny used the word "sickened" to describe her feelings regarding Unite. Everywhere I turn the word anti-Semitic is being used to describe this group. Is one considered anti-Semitic if they do not want to have a beautiful 1 acre piece of property in their residential neighborhood turned into a cement parking lot? Were the neighbors of the YMCA anti-Semitic? Are the neighbors near the proposed Elm Street parking deck considered anti-Semitic? Are

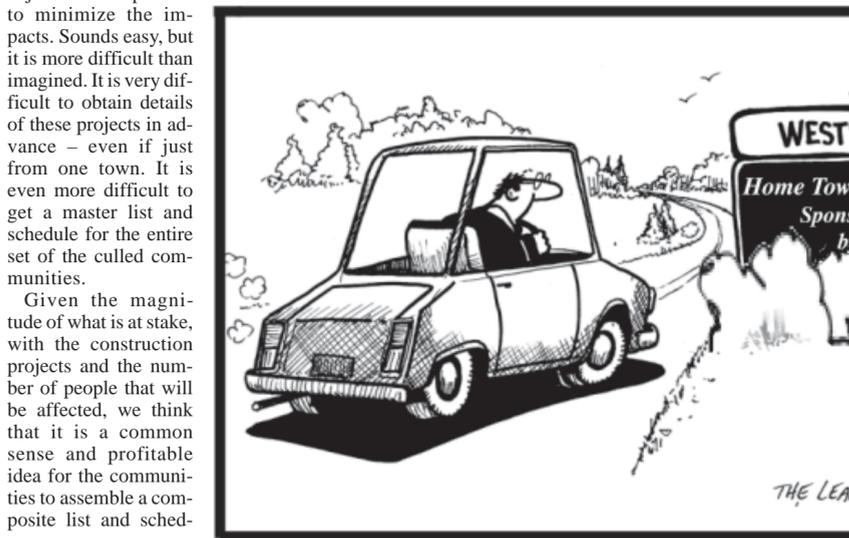
Gardner Thanks Residents For Support With BOE Election

I would like to thank you for your continued support for me as your representative on the Westfield Board of Education. As your representative, I have always tried to listen carefully and to act thoughtfully. I will continue to do both.

It was also gratifying to have such a difficult school budget passed by almost 60 percent of those of you who voted in last Tuesday's school election. This budget required sacrifices both in terms of reductions in worthwhile programs and in higher taxes. It was a difficult decision for the board and for you. I appreciate the fact that, in spite of the limited time frame and limited forum for discussion, the community attended our board meetings, tuned into channel 36, participated in budget discussions at our schools, read articles in this and other newspapers, and made a decision based upon as much factual information as possible. That decision will be to the benefit of the Westfield community as a whole because the public schools are an integral part of the community.

My goal is for the Westfield schools to offer the kind of education that will bring out the best in each student. I look forward to the task of assisting in the deliberations that will lead toward that end. I welcome your suggestions, and even your complaints, because that is the only way that the school system remains accountable to the public.

Arlene Gardner
Westfield



Another Letter on Page 5