

Westfield Councilman Goldman Comments On Police and Insurance Issues

By LAUREN S. PASS
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

Editor's Note: This interview was conducted upon the request of Fourth Ward Councilman Lawrence Goldman after the editorial printed in the July 25 edition of *The Leader* and *The Times of Scotch Plains-Fanwood*.

WESTFIELD — "Virtually everything in that editorial is wrong," Fourth Ward Democratic Councilman Lawrence Goldman said of the editorial in the July 25 edition of *The Westfield Leader* and *The Times of Scotch Plains and Fanwood* regarding the unsettled Westfield Police Department contracts.

Councilman Goldman expressed his frustration that in the six years he has been on the council that there have been no steps taken to negotiate health insurance providers.

He said that the only discussion that took place was in reference to the town joining a Health Insurance Fund (HIF), similar to the Joint Insurance Fund (JIF) for liability that the town already participates in. This policy would allow Westfield to pool funds with other towns in order to negotiate lower costs. It was determined by the council that the HIF was not prudent.

Councilman Goldman said that during the budget process the council agreed to explore several issues, including health insurance. He said that the Finance Committee, which is chaired by Second Ward Republican Councilman Matthew Albano, was supposed to meet with various insurance providers, but by June there had been no further discussion.

He said that at the June 11 council meeting, where he led the Democrats in a vote not to go into closed session, he used that opportunity as a means of forcing Councilman Albano to call a meeting of the Finance Committee. "It had nothing to do with politicizing the police contract."

He said that in his years on the council, the council has always stood together on bargaining. The council works with the labor attorney and relies on his expertise to guide them through the process.

Councilman Goldman said that though health insurance is an aspect of the police contract, it affects all town employees.

"This whole issue should be separate from the police contract," he added. "All I wanted to do was give our council an opportunity to look at what's available."

He said that he would still like to hear from other companies and that the affiliation and location of the insurance company do not matter if the town is getting the best deal. "I don't think we're doing that."

He went on to dispute the minutes of the June 25 Finance Committee

meeting, which were supplied to *The Leader* and *The Times* upon request in the form of a memorandum by Councilman Albano.

"Those weren't minutes, that was a memorandum," he refuted.

He added that what was included were Councilman Albano's "personal view" of what happened at the meeting and that no formal decision was made. According to Councilman Goldman, Councilman Albano asked no questions of the insurance company BGIA, and there is no basis for concluding that there will be extra fees. He also noted that he and Councilman Albano were the only members of the finance committee present at the meeting with BGIA.

According to Councilman Goldman the council has not heard an update on the negotiation progress since the council meeting on June 11, but expects to hear more at the July 30 conference meeting.

Councilman Goldman said that in reference to the rumors circulating town stating that the Democrats on the council are responsible for the delay of the contract negotiations, he responded that it is a, "flat out and out lie," and that there is, "nothing to it whatsoever."



Larry Goldman



FOR THE BIRDS...Resting proudly on their shovels after planting a nature garden in Lenape Park are: front row; Missy Graff, Vicky Schwartz and son Jonathon, Clare Minick, Mary Beshears and her two sons, Mae Deas, Ellen Burke, Holly Hoffman, Betty Ann Kelly; back row, Frank Budney, Linda Horning, Gerry Breitenbach, Frank Burke, Annie Pizza, and Michael Aita.

Volunteers Plant Butterfly, Bird Garden in Lenape Park

WESTFIELD — Volunteers, from ages 8 to 82, planted a bird and butterfly garden in Lenape Park near the large pond at the end of East Broad Street in Westfield. On May 18 and June 1, they planted more than 50 trees, shrubs, and perennials.

Conceived by the Greater Watchung Nature Club, the endeavor became a community project, with volunteers bringing plants from their gardens and local nurseries also helping. Amberg Perennial Farm of Scotch Plains, Dreyer Farms of Cranford, Ferrara Garden Center of Westfield and Williams Nursery of Westfield donated many plants. Union County Vo-Tech provided three oak trees. The grandfather of a volunteer donated white spruces and pines. Clare Minick, a Westfield garden designer, coordinated the effort and planned the layout.

Frank Budney and the Friends of Lenape

Park installed monitors and bluebird houses at the eastern end of the park. The Union County Department of Parks and Recreation (UCDPR) provided refreshments for the volunteers on National Trails Day, June 1. UCDPR provided loads of wood chips.

The garden will provide habitat and protective cover for birds that frequent the park. Viburnum, serviceberry, inkberry and winterberry bushes will provide fruit for the birds. Asters, coreopsis, and Joe-Pye weed will attract butterflies.

For information about the Greater Watchung Nature Club, please call Clare Minick, (908) 232-9218. For information about the Friends of Lenape Park, please call Frank Budney at (908) 687-2169. For information about Union County's Adopt-A-Program, please call (908) 527-4900.

Midshipman Nelson Wraps Indoctrination At Naval Academy

SCOTCH PLAINS — United States Navy Midshipman Joseph R. Nelson, a 2002 graduate of the Union County Magnet High School in Scotch Plains, recently completed six weeks of United States Naval Academy Indoctrination (Plebe Summer) in Annapolis, Md.

The fast-paced orientation begins four years of preparation for commissioning as naval or Marine Corps officers. Midshipman Nelson learned basic skills in seamanship, navigation, infantry drill, sailing and marksmanship, plus the Brigade of Midshipmen's Honor Concept.

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WF Resident, Officer Charges Council to Settle PD Contract

This letter is in response to Councilman Walsh's letter to the editor in last week's *Westfield Leader*. I am responding as a resident of this Town since 1972, a registered voter since 1983, and a homeowner since 1994.

After reading Councilman Walsh's letter to the editor, I can't help but view it as a partisan opinion by an individual attempting to push the blame onto another political party or individual. It appears to me that Mr. Walsh is attempting to do some damage control to save his own, and quite possibly some of his fellow Democrats, political reputations.

The last sentence of Mr. Walsh's letter states: "It is my hope that the Mayor will instruct our labor attorney to resolve this matter without further delay."

Mr. Walsh, I believe you are singling out Mayor McDermott as the reason why the police department's contract has not yet been settled. Maybe it is an attempt to gain an advantage with the undecided electorate for an upcoming election, or do you truly believe that Mayor McDermott is the reason why the police department and the Town of Westfield have yet to settle a contract.

I am, without doubt, convinced that the Town's labor attorney can resolve this contract matter if he is dealing with a bipartisan Town Council instead of one that continues to play "party politics". Maybe certain members of the Town Council have tied the hands of our Mayor. It is about time that "party politics" be put aside and this issue be settled.

What bothers me the most is that I am, as a taxpayer, reading about consultation fees and other frivolous expenditures being paid to companies and consultants without hesitation. But when it comes to labor contracts, some of our elected and/or appointed Town officials have no problem delaying the settling of a contract

because of, what I believe to be, partisan politics. I've never had a problem paying the increase in my tax bill due to the educational needs of this town's youth. Also, when there is an increase in my taxes to provide a better "quality of life" for this town's residents, I am without hesitation, willing to pay my share of the tax bill. With that being said, why is it that the services of our police department, which include the safety of our residents, are something that some council members feel is worth only a 0 percent increase?

Councilman Walsh stated in his letter to the editor: "They (the police) work hard for us..." "They keep our streets, our homes, and our neighborhoods safe." "They are in my estimation one of the finest police departments in the State of New Jersey, and Westfielders are rightly proud of them." After reading this I couldn't help but recall a conversation I had with another Westfield Councilman several years ago.

I was boarding an airplane returning from vacation when a gentleman sitting in the same row as me acknowledged a jacket that I was wearing; it had a Westfield Police Golf Outing patch on it. It turns out that the person I was talking to was Westfield Councilman Lawrence Goldman. After introducing myself to Mr. Goldman as a member of the Westfield Police Department, Mr. Goldman went on to tell me how professional he thought the Westfield police are and how appreciative he and the rest of Westfield's residents are of the job that the police do.

Mr. Walsh and Mr. Goldman, actions speak louder than words. With that being said, lets put "party politics" aside and resolve this issue. It's time, Mr. Goldman and Mr. Walsh to, as the old saying goes, "put your money where your mouth is."

Gregory W. Kasko
Westfield

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