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History Should Remain Unfettered, Not Rewritten For Today's Agendas

A little more than a decade ago, Westfielders voted to invest public funds to build a new library. Now, the Westfield Memorial Library is the most widely used library in the county. Voters thought back then, that when it comes to committing public money for a project, the decisionmaking should include comparing it to all the community priorities and needs. They thought too, that the matter should be determined by public vote - a novel democratic notion! The public voted. The public chose the project they viewed to be of greatest priority to the community. They had the option too, by vote, to do nothing at all. We think the citizens made a wise choice back then. We think the town government made a wise choice back then too with the process. "Trust the people."

Westfield's neighbors have followed suit in bolstering their public libraries. As a result, the region's library system is in pretty good shape. Public libraries give all citizens access to knowledge and to history. The events of the world and the history of this nation are well recorded there. The caretakers of our libraries are professional and dedicated. The archives are there to see - they are what they are. So, that which is available at the libraries is pretty much without today's spin - it's unfettered. Is this uncommon today as marketing and politics "determine facts by polls of the moment?" We encourage all to spend a little more time in the libraries. Take a journey through the archives.

Fortunately, our founding fathers gave us a constitution that included freedom of speech and the right to vote. Throughout the last three centuries, many Americans fought and died to uphold these freedoms. As a literate nation, we maintain our public libraries and provide public education for our citizens. But, not everything is perfect - nor will it ever be.

The public education system in New Jersey seems to be lagging behind the progress of the public library system, in our view. The power and money of the statewide public school system has been grabbed by vested interests, an alliance of the teachers union and the state Department of Education. They wield too much power. Few will speak up for fear of reprisal. Politicians dodge the issue, concerned about being cut off from campaign donations.

Law Suit! Just How Did Westfield Get Themselves Into This Mess

It seems that the Town of Westfield is effectively suing itself. Sounds ridiculous, but if it's true, you'll be paying for it. It will be a coup for the modern New Jersey legal industry. If this is allowed to stand, the lawyers and the politicians will have figured out a new and novel revenue source with enormous potential to tap the taxpayers.

It's a little hard to follow how matters ended up this way in Westfield. We see that it happened somewhat like this. Last fall, the Ward Commission, as established by statute, was charged with reviewing the town's voting districts (wards). This must be done every 10 years after each census. The Ward Commission is comprised of five members: two Democrats, two Republicans and the town clerk. As the town's population doesn't change much, one would think this is not a big deal. The Ward maps could have remained unchanged.

However, the Westfield Democrats petitioned the Ward Commission to merge the Cacciola Place neighborhood into the same Ward. At the time, it was divided between Ward 2 and Ward 3. The Democrats intended this merger to be into Ward 3. When confronted with the proposition, the Republicans agreed with merging the neighborhood, but proposed that it be put in Ward 2. The three options possible (merge to Ward 2, merge to Ward 3 or do nothing) met the numerical distribution requirements of the statute.

The vote was along party lines with the town clerk left as tiebreaker. He went with the proposal favored by the Republicans, the party in power at the time. Then came the November elections. The Democrats gained control of the town council for the first time in history. Now matters get complicated.

Two citizens represented by attorney, and past Democratic Westfield Mayor, Thomas Jardim filed a lawsuit against the Ward Commission decision. Further, last week, the town council, controlled by the Democrats, voted to fund

So, although New Jersey spends money among the highest per pupil in the nation for public education the results are hard pressed to be average compared to the country overall. This system encumbers our local school systems, teachers and boards alike, from doing the best for our children in education. The schools in this area are very good because many workarounds have been developed. They're good in spite of matters dictated by the state alliance.

But, how many workarounds must our local schools be forced to make because of this state-union monopoly? And how much more property tax must the homeowner endure as a result? With this interference, will the Scotch Plains-Fanwood school system ever be able to reach contract accord in a manner satisfactory to the community and fair to the teachers and, most importantly, best for the education of the children?

Perhaps, even more insidious, is the state level determination of curriculum. Last week, January 28, Ellen Sorokin in an article in *The Washington Times*, blasted the New Jersey Department of Education for the revised version of history standards. Sorokin wrote, "George Washington, Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin are not included in the revised version of the New Jersey Department of Education history standards - a move some critics view as political correctness at its worst." She further writes, "The latest revisions to the state standards have disappointed educators across the country..."

To us, this controversy has an interesting relationship to the crusade work by William Sanders of Mountainside. He has been campaigning since 1998 to have the portrait of George Washington hanging in our public schools (see *The Westfield Leader*, February 22, 2001 - page 4). Mr. Sanders is now gaining national recognition. He recently was featured in USA Today and has appeared on FOX News.

We don't think that the New Jersey Department of Education, along with the New Jersey Education Association, should be rewriting history. We agree with the professionals of the public libraries, that history is what it is. And maybe having a portrait of George Washington hanging in our schools is a nice reminder.

and join the lawsuit. It gets perplexing. To our understanding, the town must now also pay for the expense of the Ward Commission to defend itself.

Is the town suing itself?

There are wails by the attorneys and elected officials involved that this must be done out of a matter of principle. They say it's not a matter of gaining political power or of "to the victors go the spoils." They say it's for the good of the people of Cacciola Place. We'd like to believe them.

So, as ridiculous as this has become, here's a suggestion: how about all the lawyers go "pro bono" or better yet, submit the dispute to the American Arbitration Association. They could flip a coin with better results than currently contending.

They could become statesmen and Westfielders first; not Democrats and Republicans and attorneys.



HUNG UP!! Hung Up's 35th Year: Looking At Events Which Changed Us

By Milt Faith, Executive Director
Youth and Family Counseling Service

This is the beginning of my 35th year of writing "Hung Up," the longest-running column in New Jersey. I want to thank the many readers who have made this possible, and I want to express my gratitude to Horace Corbin, Publisher of *The Westfield Leader* and *The Times of Scotch Plains-Fanwood* for having the column appear on a monthly basis these many years.

I have continued to enjoy writing the column. The problems have focused on every conflict and trauma which we all experience in our everyday lives. I have continued to respond to the questions in a straightforward, direct, honest, rational and psychological manner - using a sense of humor, at times, to get my point across.

Some letters could not be published because of the hostile nature of the questions or the use of inappropriate language. Some responses were written specifically to the reader if an address was included and it seemed appropriate to do so.

In truth, the last four months of 2001 created more anxiety and concern in me, in confronting the aftermath of the World Trade Center disaster. These months have been the most difficult ones for me professionally, as I interacted with the enormous traumas of grief and loss involving so many of our fellow citizens and friends.

In the early 1990s, I was active in the Persian Gulf War, as I co-lead a support group for relatives and friends of those who had some special fighting in the war. I co-lead the group with the Reverend Roger Plantikow at the First United Methodist Church of Westfield. However, nothing prepared me, personally, and professionally, in this present catastrophe - the World Trade Center.

A horror of the first magnitude, it brought home our feelings of vulnerability, being out of control, feeling hopeless. Immediately, I became involved in reaching out to those who were touched by the event. This involved interacting with youth and adults at the schools and churches, and with individuals and families who were directed to Youth and Family Counseling Service.

Letters written to "Hung Up" received individual responses when possible and appropriate. I became involved in leading a local Support Group and in setting up other groups in the county which would deal with the adults, and the children who had lost a parent.

The WTC disaster touched many lives in different and unexpected ways. Individuals who had experienced loss in the past, and had not resolved these issues of losing a loved one, began to identify with the present loss of so many, and reached out. Many developed panic attacks and had trouble sleeping. There was no question but that the disaster created a domino effect which touched all of us - and will continue to have its impact for years to come.

Leader Reader Is Outraged About Town of Westfield Suing Itself

I write to express my outrage at the Democratic majority on the Town Council for their disgracefully political decision to waste our tax dollars to intercede in a lawsuit against the recent ward commission.

Let me first say that I was quite anxious to see what the agenda of the new majority on the council would be. I wondered whether they would put more money into the police department, fire department, hire some additional crossing guards or maybe even pave my bumpy street.

Instead they have chosen the lowest road possible, to waste our tax money to further their political aims. A short recap of this mess is in order for those that may not know what is going on.

The ward commission rendered its report last year, adding some streets from ward three into ward two to balance the population of the wards based on the latest census. Sensing that this new alignment was somehow harmful to the Democrats, former Mayor Tom Jardim rounded up a grand total of two people out of more than 15,000 voters to sue the ward commission to overturn the results. The legal bills of the ward commission will, undoubtedly be paid by us, the taxpayers, when this frivolous lawsuit is thrown out since the statute entitles the commission to be reimbursed for their reasonable and necessary expenses.

As if this wasn't enough, the Demo-

Our lives - practical and psychological - have been changed forever. My mission was to attempt to reach out to heal - to enable those touched by the disaster to move on, to resolve the depressions and anxieties, and find healthier coping skills.

The process is not easy. One has to experience the various stages of loss. First, there is the initial shock, the difficulty of acceptance of the truth of a loss. Then there is a need to detach, to deny. Eventually, one has to confront the overwhelming pain. Anger and rage follow, appropriate emotions which help bring out and externalize the pent-up feelings of blame, hopelessness and sadness.

With the (hopefully) eventual acceptance of the harsh reality, we attempt to move on and seek healthy coping skills so that we can effectively go on with the challenges in our lives - and try to take care of ourselves and those we love. It is not easy, and yet it is the path to continued growth and readjustment.

This has been a period of growth for those, like myself, who have spent their professional lives involved with individuals who are hurting. I feel blessed that I am continuing to play a role via my clinical work, column, speeches, etc.

In celebrating these 35 years of "Hung Up," I want to, again, thank my readers - for writing, reading and listening. My wish to you, as it was five years ago when I wrote my 30th anniversary column, remains the same:

"If this past year had its losses, may the next year have its gains..."

If this past year was bad, may next year be better...

If this past year was good, may next year be the best."

Letters to the Editor

Westfield Councilman's Wife Looks For The Political Bad Guy

Two years ago when my husband came home from work and advised my two sons and I that he was resigning from his job as Town Prosecutor and running for Town Council, we shared a very special moment of pride. I was moved by his willingness to let go of a well paying job to do one for nothing.

Surprise! Westfield town government is no longer about getting things done. It is only about politics! Often, I'm awakened by his arrival and his comments. Still half asleep, I see images of some childhood like game; almost like it were tallying points! It is very sad for us to see him give up so much for so little. Can anyone relate?

The Ward Commission 5-ring circus is a perfect example. Westfield prides itself on a strong Town Charter. Our



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. Lutulent - Thick; muddy
2. Acromion - The outer extremity of the scapula
3. Foudroyant - Attacking suddenly and severely
4. Melloid - A blister beetle

EXPERGEFACTION

1. An awakening or rousing
2. Plunging; diving into water
3. Releasing or relieving pressure
4. To remove from command; expel

DEJEUNER

1. A bath with medicated water
2. A daydreamer
3. A late breakfast or luncheon
4. The West African red monkey

CARDECU

1. A werewolf
2. The North American caribou
3. Former French coin of silver
4. In math, a number taken to the 10th power

HALIEUTICS

1. The process of preserving with salt
2. The study or art of fishing
3. A process of cleansing the body; fasting
4. In medicine, the study of gallstones

Answers will appear in next week's issue.

Reader Compliments Maestro's Performance

Those many of us who were part of the audience on the evening of February 2 at the Union County Arts Center in Rahway enjoying the performance of the Westfield Symphony, were treated to an unusually fine rendition of Beethoven's Symphony No. 3 "Eroica". But the performance of conductor David Wroe was really the highlight of the evening. The Maestro's physical activity in leading the musicians was a rare sight to see. His emphasis by hands, arms, and body compare easily to movements of an athlete or a dancer. He put everything he had into conducting. He was so dynamic in his conducting that the audience hardly watched the musicians. With no music sheet in front of him, he knew every note and every nuance of the symphony. Standing ovation and curtain calls? You bet.

Marvin Gershenfeld
Westfield

Well, I need to get some sleep now so good night.

Esperanza J. Betancourt
Westfield

More Letters on Page 5

Westfield Council's Parking Deck Plans Raise Questions for Resident

It is most unfortunate that the Westfield Town Council members have not heard or choose to ignore that the United States is in a recession, job losses have resulted in higher unemployment rates, and small as well as large businesses are struggling to remain solvent.

As reported in the January 14 issue of *The Westfield Leader*, the Town Council voted to explore development of the multi-million construction of "two or possibly three parking decks" which somehow will create 900 parking spaces; and they authorized the hiring of Patrick Henry of the Atlantic Group located in Princeton to begin preliminary planning.

Here are some questions that might be answered:

1. Just how was the need for the number of 900 more parking spaces calculated for Westfield?
2. Approximately how many Westfield commuters will be using them?
3. About how many out-of-town commuters will be using them? Will the out-of-town commuters pay higher fees than the Westfield residents?
4. About how many Westfield shoppers will be using the parking decks?
5. About how many out-of-town shoppers will be using the decks including those who work in Westfield stores, offices, and businesses?
6. In terms of real estate tax revenues to the Westfield coffers, who will pay the most monies to construct the "two or three" parking decks? The residential taxpayers or the members of the business community or out-of town commuters?
7. Although long-term bonds might

be issued by Westfield, and clever tax abatement plans have been proposed, will the decks ever operate at a profit or at least break even...or will the local residents end up paying for these vehicle decks for many future years.

8. How much will it cost daily or annually to manage a parking deck in terms of security personnel, money collection, cleaning expenses, and later major maintenance projects?

9. Does Patrick Henry of the Atlantic Group wish to offer any alternatives such as a shuttle services used in other towns before he begins this assignment? Does Mr. Henry wish to draw on his previous experience to propose other suggestions?

These are hard economic times for many Westfield residents. Faces with another large increase in taxes, many senior citizens and younger low-income persons will be forced to sell their homes.

The net result will be the possibility that the home of the senior citizen will be sold to a family with three or four children, thus adding to school costs and higher property taxes.

There must be another way to solve this problem without putting the major portion of construction costs as a burden on Westfield residents, most of whom not use the "two or three parking decks." Perhaps Patrick Henry and the Town Council should concentrate on a plan to make these parking deck ideas self-sustaining by having those who do constant and daily parking absorb the bulk of building, personnel, and maintenance costs, or explore other solutions.

Mrs. Lawrence Forgas
Westfield

