

# Arts & Entertainment

## Miss America 2003 Erika Harold Visits Westfield Before Talk Against Youth Violence in Cranford

By MICHELLE H. LE POIDEVIN  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

**WESTFIELD** - Stepping out of the elevator of the Westfield Inn with casual black pants, a bright blue shirt, and a black leather jacket, no one would guess that the modest 22-year-old with the trillion-dollar smile was Miss America 2003, Erika Harold.

The beauty queen, who has been accepted to Harvard Law School, where she will pursue fields of public interest and public policy, is without pretension and is enveloped by an intrinsic sense of glamour - a sentiment echoed by General Manager of the Westfield Inn, Andrea Tamkutonin.

Running slightly behind schedule, Harold, who had arrived in Westfield on the evening of November 5, was on her way to talk to Cranford students from Kindergarten through fifth grade about arming themselves against youth violence.

"I want to provide them with tangible ways to stand up for themselves against bullying and to help them build up their self-esteem," Harold told *The Westfield Leader and The Times of Scotch Plains-Fanwood*.

Despite the time constraints on her schedule, Harold took time to explain

how even a simple invitation to a student who feels left out or alienated, can help to improve a child's confidence and self-image.

"I want to encourage the children never to apologize for who they are and not to blame themselves for being bullied," said Harold. Urging children not to allow negative comments and bullying to have control over them is also



Benjamin Corbin for The Leader/The Times  
**ROOM AT THE INN...** There was plenty of room at the Westfield Inn when Miss America 2003, Erika Harold, stayed overnight before appearing at Cranford school to address the issue of bullying and youth violence.

important to Harold.

While she didn't have time to shop in downtown Westfield, shortly after her arrival Harold dined at one of Chez Catherine's cozy corner tables, where she said, "the food was outstanding."

"Everyone has been so kind and welcoming," Harold said, admitting that the downtown ambience has motivated her to put Westfield on her list of places to visit again when she has more time.

An Urbana, Ill. native, Harold, who graduated Phi Beta Kappa from the University of Illinois, is clearly more than just a pretty face with perfectly coiffed hair.

Before capturing the Miss America crown, Harold, as Miss Illinois, was the national spokesperson for "Fight Crime: Invest in Kids," The Teen Victims Project of the National Center for Victims of Crime and the Student Pledge Against Gun Violence." She was also the University of Illinois Chancellor Scholar and received first prize in an Afro-American studies research paper contest.

Harold, who is African-American, Cherokee Native-American, Greek, German and Russian, spoke in three languages to a gathering of students in Peoria, Ill. about combating youth violence, shortly before leaving for heading off to Atlantic City for the Miss America competition.

When a teenaged student asked her to sing "Jesus Loves Me," Harold, who performed an impressive operatic number at the competition, gladly obliged. After capturing the crown, Harold



Benjamin Corbin for The Westfield Leader and The Times  
**ROYALTY COMES TO WESTFIELD...** Miss America 2003, Erika Harold, pictured, left, was interviewed by *Leader/Times Arts & Entertainment Editor, Michelle H. Le Poidevin*.

traveled to New York City in late September, where she joined the Anti-Defamation League in a campaign to end youth violence. "Empowering Youth Against Violence: Respect Yourself, Protect Yourself."

Harold told *The Leader and The*

*Times* that adults have told her about instances, which still haunt them, when they were taunted and bullied by their peers as children, and she wants to do all she can to put an end to the abuse and build children's belief in themselves.



Michelle H. Le Poidevin for The Leader/The Times  
**PUMPKINS PROTEST PARKING?**...Either a gripe against parking meters or a late Halloween stunt prompted pranksters to cap this Quimby Street parking meter with a giant gourd, found early Friday morning.



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### Pen & Ink: Thou Shall Not Steal Just Punishment From Actress Winona Ryder

By MICHELLE H. LE POIDEVIN  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

Reality bites for Winona Ryder, but not as much as it should. The star of *Mr. Deeds*, *Heathers*, and *Beetlejuice* was found guilty of grand theft and vandalism for her illegal shopping spree through Saks Fifth Avenue, but the kicker is that she probably won't serve a second in jail for what a crime that would normally drag the everyday Jane Doe through the mud. Instead, she'll do some community service and atone for her sins at Saks.

Through this verdict, America relearns the sour lesson - not only does crime pay, but so does celebrity.



**SHE'S NOT THAT INNOCENT...** A jury recent found actress Winona Ryder guilty of grand theft and vandalism, yet the actress from films like *The Age of Innocence* will likely serve no jail time. What's fair about that?

for criminal behavior. And, simple slaps on the wrist like community service are just as inexcusable.

I can recall several Saturday shopping trips when, with only two sweaters draped over my arm, I was approached by a salesperson, asking if I wanted them held at the front desk until I cared to try them on. In many area shops, a saleswoman will ask if you need help finding your size, or even go as far as stalking you until you are forced to spell it out for them: "I'm just browsing. If I need your help, I'll ask for it."

Yet, unusually, the surveillance tapes showing Ryder with arms burdened with clothing, never compel a salesperson making similar offers. She wanders from showcase to showroom, selecting items from the racks with a bucket hat plopped over her head. Ryder's conscience never once got in the way and the consequences never seemed to weigh in. Because, as a celebrity, the consequences are always minimal and, subconsciously, I think they know that going into the crime.

As an everyday Jane Doe, I resent the fact that the rules never apply to the famous. I hardly believe that Ryder's community service will include her picking up litter on the side of the Garden State Parkway or working laborious hours at a Hollywood homeless shelter. The justice system is sure to coddle the wide-eyed actress with little more than some time away from making more cinematic flops and failures, proving that all bad deeds go unpunished.

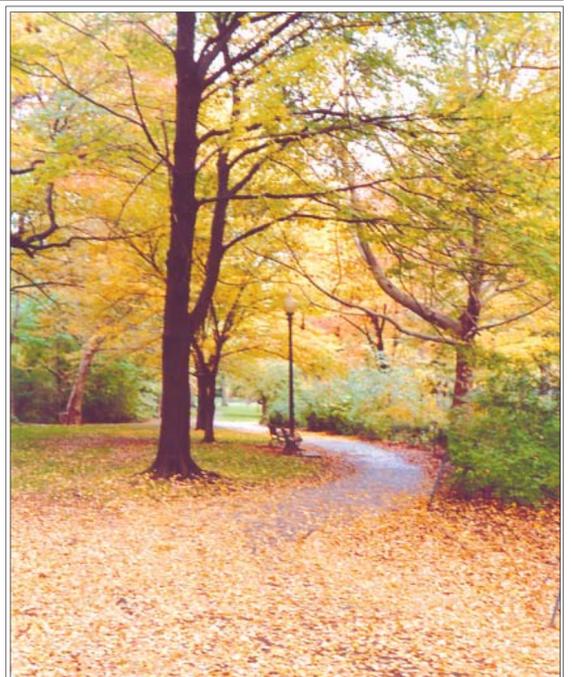
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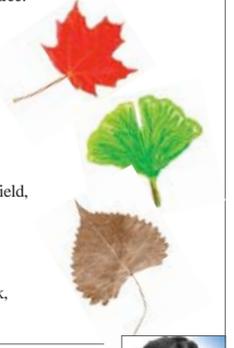
Michelle H. Le Poidevin for The Westfield Leader and The Times

### Picture in Poetry: "The Shape of Leaves" by Arthur Siz

Ginkgo, cottonwood, pin oak, sweet gum, tulip tree: our emotions resemble leaves and alive to their shape we are nourished.

Have you felt the expanse and contours of green along the edges of a big Norway maple? Have you winced at the orange flare searing the curves of a curling dogwood? I have seen from the air logged islands, each with a network of branching gravel roads, and felt a moment of pure anger, aspen gold. I have seen sandhill cranes moving in an open field, a single white whooping crane in the flock.

And I have traveled along the contours of leaves that have no name. Here where the air is wet and the light is cool, I feel what others are thinking and do not speak, I know pleasure in the veins of a sugar maple, I am living at the edge of a new leaf.



### My Take on It

With Kerriane Spellman Cort

### Focus on Giving Thanks, Not Celebrities' Nonsense

By KERRIANNE SPELLMAN CORT  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

**FANWOOD** - Ben Affleck and J Lo make it official. Dawson's Creek star Joshua Jackson is charged with drunken assault, Winona Ryder is convicted of theft (but will not serve jail time), Jam Master J and actor Merlin Santana are both shot and killed in separate incidents, OJ misses a court appearance for allegedly speeding his boat through a shallow area in Florida waters where Manatees breed and Al Roker has lost 100 pounds.

There it is, folks - recent entertainment news. I find myself scouring entertainment websites in the hopes of finding something interesting to write about, but, unfortunately, not one scrap of these supposed newsworthy happenings changes how I feel about anything.

The tragic deaths of Jam Master J and Merlin Santana are awful and only prove that we are living in a world gone mad; a world without rules where you can no longer be safe in your parked car or recording studio. Their shocking deaths are a horrible reminder of how fragile life is.

Jackson's drunken brawl at a weekend hockey game is laughable. Guys go to sports events and get drunk on occasion. Picking a fight with someone at one of these said events is not uncommon. Drew Grissom, the security guard that Jackson allegedly punched is going to press charges. Well, of course he is. He was assaulted by a famous television star. He's got dollar signs in his head as well as the opportunity for his 15 minutes of fame.

Yawn. Joshua, grow up and stop acting like a drunken frat boy. Grissom, if you are truly injured then I am deeply sorry. If not, then get over it and stop thinking that you can retire in a few years because the man who hit you happens to be a celebrity.

J Lo and Affleck. Now, there's a winning couple for you. This is her third marriage and he plays the same role in every movie that he ever appears in. Maybe he will have a calming effect on the self-important diva and maybe she will give him a personality.

Ryder's recent trouble with the law is hysterically funny. There are

fans out there sporting "Free Winona" T-shirts. I'm sure that Ryder is deeply touched by all of the support of her dirty little habit. Court documents state that Ryder has been suspected of shoplifting in the past. The only difference is that this time she got caught. Poor Winona.

Prosecutors say that they will not seek jail time, but you can rest assured that if the suspect was a minority single mother seeking a five-finger discount to clothe her babies, this would be an entirely different scenario. Shame on the Los Angeles Court System.



**LOVE...HOLLYWOOD STYLE...** Will three be the magic number for J Lo? And why do we care so much?

Speaking of the Los Angeles Court System...OJ is in trouble yet again, this time in Florida for allegedly threatening the well being of the endangered Manatee. Simpson doesn't care about anyone or any other living thing except his own pathetic self and he should just put himself in a rocket and catapult himself to outer space so we never have to hear from him again.

Roker's recent weight loss is wonderful. Good for him. I just hope to God that the media doesn't turn this into another Oprah Winfrey fiasco where paparazzi will spot him at McDonalds and feel the need to tell us about it. Make sure not to super-size it, Al. People might be watching you.

It is autumn. The winds of change are blowing into all of our lives. As the leaves fall, the days get shorter, and soon, the Granddaddy of all holidays will jump up and bite us on the behind. Our country is in a constant state of heightened alert and we all know that at any given time, things can drastically and irreversibly change.

I think I will choose to not pay much heed to nonsensical drivel in

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