

Candidate Campaign Release

Caruana Calls For Charity Agenda In Westfield Council

WESTFIELD — First Ward Town Council Candidate Sal Caruana says that elected officials have a moral obligation to use their leadership positions to encourage or lead private efforts to assist the less fortunate in the community.

"I believe the Town Council and Office of Mayor should take permanent ownership of certain charitable endeavors so that the special needs of some of our neighbors, such as seniors and the disadvantaged, are never beyond their focus," said Mr. Caruana.

Mr. Caruana outlined a charitable effort called "Neighbor to Neighbor" that he would like to see established in the future. The program involves residents emailing a volunteer coordinator a list of common items like children's clothes, toys, books and old computers that their family has outgrown, according to age, description or size. The coordinator would then try to match these offers with specific needs that are submitted to him/her by local houses of worship or other organizations assisting individual families in economic distress. A location (perhaps the municipal building) could be designated for the exchange, with the donor and recipient arriving hours apart on a mutually agreed upon day.

"With the generosity of spirit that makes Westfield a special community and with the use of technology, we can

improve the daily lives of many by anonymously matching the goods from those who have to give, to those who are in need," said Mr. Caruana.

"There are 800 Westfield residents living below the poverty line (\$23,000 in annual income for a family of four) and many more who are not much above that mark. I believe that our town officials need to remember that the important quality of life issues to this segment of our community are not potholes and leaf removal, but vital necessities such as food, clothes and medicine."

Mr. Caruana also noted that Westfield has a number of seniors who need assistance, companionship and transportation. "Our elected officials should encourage many of the charitable organizations in the community to understand and give more focus to their special needs."

"For seniors who are alone, disabled or infirm, it's extremely difficult just to go visit the doctor or go to buy groceries," he said. "We need to do all we can, as public officials and as private citizens, to ensure that the needs of the neediest members of our community are addressed."

Mr. Caruana is encouraging First Ward residents to contact him with their ideas and concerns. He can be reached via email at SalCaruana@aol.com or by phone at (908) 233-4039.

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Owens Proposes Ward 2 'Neighborhood Network'

WESTFIELD — Maintaining community vitality depends on active communications. Second Ward candidate for Town Council David Owens, at a meeting with neighborhood residents last week, called for creation of a "neighborhood network" to enhance the community's existing informal communications structure.

"My involvement in the Save the Rialto committee and, more recently, the Ward 2 Traffic Group has shown me that active citizen participation in municipal activities is critically important to maintaining community vitality," said Mr. Owens. "Grassroots efforts do work and they depend on active communications."

"Six years ago, when Westfield Main Street found out that the Rialto Theatre was to be sold and converted into a retail complex, Michele Picou sent out a call to people around the community to try to save the movie house. At first there were just a few of us, but each time we gathered to discuss the next step in our plans to save the Rialto, there were more of us. That grassroots groundswell was at the heart of our eventual success. That campaign showed just how important it is for our community leaders to call people together to work out sensible solutions to real problems."

"The neighborhood network is a very basic form of social organization. It is the backbone of local government. Being part of that network and seeing how important it is in solving local problems

is the key factor that propelled me into seeking a seat on the Town Council.

"But the network should do more than react and respond to urgent, immediate needs. It should be a regular part of our community life. We need to keep it active as a means of anticipating municipal issues before they become critical problems. That means our municipal leaders have to be proactively involved in the network, too."

"Those of us who seek to serve on municipal organizations, like the Town Council, that depend on citizen volunteers, have to be proactive in communicating with our constituents. It is up to us to keep the neighborhood networks active. That's called leadership."

"As a councilman, I would hold monthly office hours and quarterly ward meetings where we can all gather to discuss what's going on. That's just the first step in maintaining community vitality."

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By Horace Corbin for The Westfield Leader and The Times
STATE RECOGNITION...Norbert Bernstein receives a proclamation at his retirement party last Sunday from Asw. Linda Stender, praising him for 30 years of service as the Director of the Scotch Plains Public Library.

Candidate Campaign Release

Betancourt Looks Out for Westfield's Long Term Needs

WESTFIELD — Second Ward Town Councilman Rafael Betancourt said his experience as Council Liaison to the Planning Board for the past two years has been invaluable in terms of helping him fight against overdevelopment in town, and in terms of highlighting several key issues for the Town Council to consider this fall.

"Being a member of the Planning Board and Town Council takes up a great deal of my time and attention, but it's very much worth it because of all the important issues that are brought up that need the council's attention," said Councilman Betancourt. "For example, last year the Town Council passed an ordinance prohibiting 'shoehorning.' As a Planning Board member, I have consistently objected to applications requesting subdivision of properties when the granting of those requests would be detrimental to the appearance of a neighborhood, and thus contrary to the council ordinance against shoehorning."

Keeping an eye on the town, Councilman Betancourt specified three issues that recently came up in discussions concerning the adoption of the town's Master Plan: In-lieu-of parking fees for businesses; additional high school parking and future financing for traffic calming projects.

"I was told by the town's planning professional that these issues did not need to be included in the Town's Master Plan but needed to be addressed directly by the Town Council," said Councilman Betancourt. "I'm willing to do that and I'm hopeful that my colleagues will agree that these are issues that should take priority this fall."

In an effort to balance future development with the need for parking, Councilman Betancourt is supporting a proposal requesting that businesses applying for parking variances pay an in-lieu-of parking fee if those businesses cannot provide the number of parking spaces required by local zoning laws. The money would be set aside by the town to invest in the development of future parking spaces, which could include the purchase of new lots or the financing of parking facilities.

"The In-lieu-of parking fee is really

about businesses paying their fair share for additional parking downtown. Taxpayers should not have to shoulder the burden. If a large retail business, for example, wants to come here but can't provide adequate off-street parking for their clientele, they should be asked to contribute to the town's future parking needs. It's in the town's best interest, as well as the best interest of the business," said Councilman Betancourt.

The second issue is creating additional parking for the high school behind the Armory. Councilman Betancourt said he would like to discuss the subject as soon as possible with the Board of Education before the development projects on nearby Codding Road get underway. He pointed out that once new homes are built there, near the proposed parking lot, there may be significant resistance to the idea from the new residents.

"The time to build the parking lot is now, before Codding Road is developed. We've done the engineering and the town is willing to invest in building the access road. Once the 120-car lot is complete, students — or parents attending plays or events — would use the crosswalks on Rahway Avenue to get to the high school. It's a much safer alternative than kids crossing all the streets surrounding the school as they do now, with no safety measures in place," he said.

The third issue Councilman Betancourt hopes to bring to the Town Council is developing a long-range financing strategy to address the increasing demand for traffic calming measures. He said the town needs to address how to finance these requests, which may need to be dealt with as capital improvements.

"Just as we now do with road repairs, the Council needs to sit down with the Town Engineer and the Department of Public Works and prioritize requests for traffic calming measures. These measures are in such great demand from residents that I'm going to recommend that we include traffic calming in all future capital budgets. If we don't have a long-range plan for traffic calming, we're really just using a Band-Aid approach to safety, and I think we can do better than that," said Councilman Betancourt.

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Tom Fuccillo Presses For Revamped Garbage Plan

WESTFIELD — Tom Fuccillo, candidate for Westfield Mayor, wants to revamp the town's garbage pickup, by replacing current private contracting for residential pickup with one municipal hauler contract.

According to Mr. Fuccillo, there are many benefits of having one waste disposal firm contract with the town, including an overall decrease in the cost of garbage collection to Westfield's residents, the ability for homeowners to deduct the cost of garbage collection from their state and federal tax bills, an increase in residents' satisfaction with garbage pickup service as a result of the town's increased buying and bargaining power over one contractor and a reduction in residents' monthly bills since the garbage pickup cost would be included in residents' taxes.

In addition, because collection costs typically represent between 40 and 60 percent of a community's solid waste disposal costs, a municipal-wide contract could dictate the collection and disposal technology and thus further decrease the costs to town residents.

"According to a recent U.S. Environmental Protection Agency report, a well-designed competitive procurement of garbage collection is the key to obtaining the most reasonable rates and highest quality service," Mr. Fuccillo said.

"No one can claim that our municipal solid waste program is broken. At the same time, however, no one can claim that it works as efficiently and as cost-effectively as it could and should. When you really weigh the benefits of the present system against the advantages of an improved system, there is no reason why the town shouldn't consider making changes."

One of the improvements that the town could implement with a municipal-wide

waste-hauling contract is to institute so-called "dual-collection" of residents' garbage and recycling. Such a system would not only be cheaper to residents, but it would also mean that residents could place their recyclables with their garbage cans rather than curbside.

Mr. Fuccillo believes the current system is not competitive, since residents effectively have no choice over which private garbage hauler will collect their trash. "It is well-known that competition is one way to lower costs or improve service, but no competition exists in the present system."

"The U.S. EPA indicates that garbage disposal rates have been known to drop as much as 20 to 60 percent as a result of a competitive bidding process, especially if collection services have not been bid out for a long time."

As an example, Mr. Fuccillo cited Hillsborough County, Fla., where a competitive contracting process was used to select a municipal solid waste and recyclables collector. As a result, rates dropped by almost 30 percent for the average resident.

Each year, approximately 220 million tons of municipal solid waste or garbage is generated in the United States. This means each person generated an average of 4.46 pounds of solid waste per day.

Mr. Fuccillo lives on Hillcrest Avenue with his wife, Kristin, and their two sons, Thomas and Michael. An attorney with a New York investment firm, He also serves on the Board of Directors of the Downtown Westfield Corporation.

Volunteers for the campaign or residents who wish to share their thoughts and concerns with Mr. Fuccillo are encouraged to call (908) 232-0205 or visit the campaign's website at TomforMayor.com.

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