

Arts & Entertainment



Pen & Ink:

With Michelle Le Poidevin

Making Marriage Work, MTV-Style

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

Once the ice sculptures have oozed into a puddle and the wedding cake of strawberries and cream has been diminished to the size of a cupcake, newlyweds prepare to pursue the myth of "happily ever after." Without deluding themselves, most know that a marriage takes heaps of work.

Maybe the most hilarious depiction of your other fulltime job - your marriage - is shown in MTV's "Newlyweds: Nick & Jessica," which airs every Tuesday at 10:30 p.m.

Make no mistake, not everyone is fortunate enough to be living in a mansion like Mr. Lachey and Ms. Simpson, so while I'm not comparing the income of the average American family to that of the B-list pop performers (who laughingly call themselves "recording artists"), it is somehow refreshing to see that even filthy-rich newlyweds have their conundrums.

Jessica is a princess who has had to train herself to pick her bath towels up off the floor, to make her own bed, even to throw away vases of wilted flowers and the water they've been lolling in. During a camping trip, Nick admitted to his brother and sister-in-law that he has a "five-year plan" to rid Jessica of her spoiled behavior.

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Michelle H. Le Poidevin for The Westfield Leader and The Times
TAKING A NEW DIRECTION...Westfield native and filmmaker Peter Ventrella and his mother, Louise Ventrella, pose after an interview with The Westfield Leader and The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times.



Michelle H. Le Poidevin for The Westfield Leader and The Times
FOCUS ON THE FINER POINTS...Looking into one of the cameras on set, Peter offers some advice to makeup artist Deborah Hubbard about some touch-ups that need to be made before filming.

FILMMAKER TEAMS UP WITH HIS MOM TO PRODUCE 'SECOND SEASON'

Retirement Isn't Death Sentence, But New Chapter With Limitless Promise

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

WESTFIELD - Maturing is deemed admirable when the term is pertains to wine, cheese, and other products that "improve with age," but shouldn't the same be said for human beings?

Peter Ventrella and his mother, Louise Ventrella, certainly think so. Before developing their television series, "Second Season," a half-hour, interview-based program, which underlines the thriving lifestyles of local and famous 50+ Americans, Peter, the program's producer, discovered that 50 percent of Americans would be over 50 years of age in the next year.

Television, he explained, was virtually ignoring this demographic. The aging of his own parents had dawned on him, as did the cresting of the baby-boomer generation and the expanded life expectancy.

"I realized there was definitely an idea here for a show," said Peter, in an interview with The Westfield Leader and The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times. In February, Peter, a television writer living in Los Angeles, had granted an interview to the newspaper about his documentary on the Westfield band, "Splooge."

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Michelle H. Le Poidevin for The Westfield Leader and The Times
LONGTIME FRIENDS...The host of "Second Season," Louise Ventrella runs through some preliminary questions she will ask Westfield resident, Dr. Stephen DeFelice, right.

the sciences, people are living longer, fuller lives," contributed Louise, the gracious and poised on-camera host of "Second Season." "With more and more people approaching retirement age, they are freer to do so many new things. This is really more the beginning of life than the end of life."

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word 'retire,' in the program," informed Louise, who stressed that the series will accentuate the limitless promise open to 50+ individuals, then perhaps later examine some in-depth issues with which they must grapple.

The Leader and The Times attended the September 16 taping of "Second Season," which included an inter-

Goumba's Endorsement: Candidate Hopes Voters Won't Fugget About It

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

COUNTY - As a non-politically motivated favor between two paisans, "Sopranos" lead actor James Gandolfini wore pal Joe Renna's campaign button like a badge of honor on Emmy night, September 21.

Since television audiences caught sight of the endorsement, the phone has been ringing off the wall at the graphic design studio of the Independent candidate for the Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders.

"It's boosted my campaign a tremendous amount," Renna told The Westfield Leader and The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times Tuesday morning. "Every time they see pictures of James Gandolfini at The Emmys, they'll see my button."

While groups like UNICO and other Italian-American organizations stand firmly against HBO's "The Sopranos" because they feel the program perpetuates negative stereotypes about Italian-Americans, Renna disagrees. He doesn't see how Gandolfini's endorsement and relation to the program about a murdering and adulterous Mafia leader could have any unpleasant association to his Freeholder campaign.

"This is a freedom of speech issue," he said. "As far as the show stereotyping Italians, I don't think it does that at all. In fact, it ("Sopranos") shows how miserable that lifestyle is and it doesn't glorify that life of crime."

Uncertain of the actor's political affiliation, Renna said his friend's decision to wear the campaign button had nothing to do with politics, although the actor is familiar with Renna's platforms and political beliefs.

"This was not a political move by him. We've talked in the past about



James Gandolfini

the relation between how much influence there is with celebrities and politics," he said. "He (Gandolfini) doesn't get involved. He's a very down-to-earth guy."

Uncle Floyd, a singer/comedian who recently performed at Westfield's FestiFall, is also a Renna supporter, he offered.

Renna, who was raised in the Peterstown section of Elizabeth, is a marketing and advertising professional who also publishes a newspaper *Around About Peterstown*, which spotlights the culture and Old World values of Italian-Americans.

Though Gandolfini and Renna attended different schools, they met through a roommate of Renna's best friend, Vito Bellino. For two years, Renna worked at Gandolfini at his New York nightclub.

Bellino asked Gandolfini if he would wear one of Renna's campaign buttons on a "Sopranos" episode, but the actor said that wearing it at The Emmys would give his old

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Take the Stage

With Susan M. Dougherty



Like Hurricane Isabel, Pterodactyls Mesmerized

By SUSAN M. DOUGHERTY
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

CRANFORD - An uninvited guest named Isabel came to visit New Jersey last weekend, the opening night of *Pterodactyls*, the Nicky Silver play presented by The Theater Project, Union County College's theater in residence at the Cranford campus.

Although the big bad wolf of a storm deterred some of the intended audience members the first two nights, it couldn't blow this house down.

Billed as "a comedy that bites back," the show parallels the hurricane/tropical storm that showed its temperamental side. First, both were deceptively mild in nature. No Category 5 hurricane here, just a tropical storm with a punch.

The show, which opened 10 years ago in New York City, deals with alcoholism, AIDS, infidelity, incest, homosexuality, materialism and other social issues American society has come to recognize as part of its everyday fabric of life.

Don't be fooled that there will be no damage, however, for *Pterodactyls*, like Isabel, has the force to knock the ground out from under the oldest, deeply rooted tree.

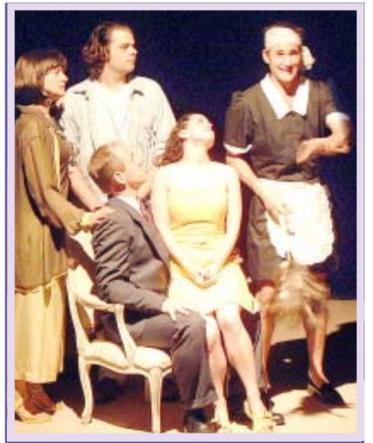
As usual, the Studio on Stage at The Theater Project has assembled a cohesive production team to put together this piece. Under Mark Spina's mature eye, directorial choices serve the actors and the play quite well; pacing and delivery can be credited to his savvy direction.

The outfits by Costume Designer Daaimah Talley, especially the ones of Grace, the mother, are million dollar ensembles. Scenic Designer Fred Kinney's stark, monochromatic vanilla set of two chairs, a couch, a telephone table and a standing globe bar are contrasted by the red bones of a dinosaur's remains that reside in the backyard of a family.

The monster's skeleton is liter-

ally and figuratively dug up and put together by the son and then fleshed out by the family's words and conflicts. The play itself unfolds like a freight train racing into the station at 70 miles per hour.

Daughter Emma (Megan Muckelmann), who has just brought home a young man she has only known for three weeks, announces to



Susan M. Dougherty for The Westfield Leader and The Times
ALL EYES ON THE FRENCH MAID...Tommy, convincingly played by Matt McCarthy, confesses to the family of his fiancée that the female's outfit he wears is "liberating." The Nicky Silver two-act play is billed as "a comedy that bites back." For those who enjoy delving into the stormy waters of family dynamics and unspoken secrets, this is an unforgettable piece, which won numerous awards and nominations when it first premiered in 1993.

her shopaholic mother Grace (Liz Zazzi) that she is planning to marry him. To the country club mom's dismay, he only has a job as a waiter at the local "Salad Palace" and lives in a lean-to in the downtown area.

Since her maid has quit, Grace makes the would-be groom Tommy (Matt McCarthy) don her French maid's dress and shoes and assume the role of domestic while he lives with the family. Of the maid's outfit, he says that wearing it is oddly "liberating and titillating." That should be our first clue that this bridegroom's not ready to say "cheese" to the wedding photographer.

Add to this, 20-something-year-old son Todd returns home after living on the street for five years. Hauntingly played by David Maulbeck, Todd announces to his mother Grace, that he has AIDS.

In a shockingly realistic scene where neither one really listens to the other, Todd needs to repeat in various decibel levels, "I have AIDS" at least a dozen times while she rattles on about the minutia of her meaningless life. This is the sort of character the play deals with the ones

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Adams' Sultry Voice, Botti's Sincere Performance Sate Jersey Jazz Audience

By BRAD TINFOW
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

WESTFIELD - If the size and enthusiasm of the audience was any indication, Jersey Jazz by the Lake was a tremendous success.

The event, which was originally scheduled for Nomahegan Park on September 20, was held at Echo Lake Park instead.

Featured performers were the Richard Reiter Swing Band, Jeff Golub, Nestor Torres, Chris Botti, and the headliner, Oleta Adams.

In addition to music being offered in the bandshell, the Kids Kingdom Traveling Jubilee was set up on the top of the hill with inflatable climbing wall, slides, dragon cave, combat arena, and other amusements.

A samba percussion ensemble performed on a small stage, inviting heavy audience participation and receiving it.

Many adults and children visited

the recently build September 11 memorial, which listed the names of Union County residents who per-

ished in the disaster.

The downside of a festival with a number of bands performing is the setup time between acts. I was unable to reach the event until 5:15

p.m., which was apparently 10 minutes after Nestor Torres had concluded his performance.

It wasn't until 6 p.m. that Chris Botti began playing. He finished shortly after 7 p.m., and Oleta Adams began at 8 p.m.

Once Botti and his instrumental group began playing, my impatience was wiped away immediately with the highest quality jazz. The instrumentation of the group was trumpet, guitar, bass guitar, keyboard, and drums.

Although trumpeter Botti introduced the melody for all the songs (many of which he wrote), and did a lot of improvisation, all of the players were featured in one or more extended solos. They were all topnotch performers.

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The guitarist, in addition to playing great lines, used the electronics at his disposal to produce sounds reminiscent of Jimi Hendrix (espe-

cially on their HEARTSTRINGS...Chris Botti heralded some heartfelt sentiment into the Jersey Jazz By The Lake audience.

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Michelle H. Le Poidevin for The Leader/The Times
EAGLE EYE...Assisting in the film production, Drew Koski, a member of the band "Splooge," stands by as Peter gets the camera into focus.

view with Westfield author Dr. Stephen DeFelice at Louise's home.

Inside the dining room, a vase of pink roses was set behind the table where Louise and Dr. DeFelice practiced their questions and answers before taping. A bottle of red wine and two filled glasses were set nearby as Dr. DeFelice fidgeted with his signature bowtie, Louise's make-up was retouched and Peter checked the "zebra" (that's filmmaker lingo) on the cameras. The small camera crew and make-up artist, Deborah Hubbard, scuttled between the kitchen, foyer and dining room.

Each episode would be introduced with a brief jazz/pop medley, while terms like "medical advances," "retirement planning" and "health and fitness" flashed randomly across the screen.

The first installment of "Second Season", which has already aired on Westfield TV-36, spotlighted the new post-retirement challenges encountered by New York Giants baseball player Bobby Thomson, remembered for "The Shot Heard 'Round the World" homerun in 1951.

Len Cariou, who won a Tony Award for *Sweeney Todd* in 1979, has joined Dr. DeFelice ("Old Italian Neighborhood Values") and author Cris Bode ("Fit After 50") in answering Louise's insightful questions on the "Second Season" sets. Oscar and Golden Globe award winner Ernest



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Funding has been made possible in part by the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, Department of State, through a grant administered by the Union County Division of Cultural and Heritage Affairs			