



A MESSY COMMUTE... President's Day ended up being a tough commute for a local resident who had to work.

Andrew Skibitsky Picked Over Caruana For Mayor by Republican Committee

By PAUL PEYTON
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — The Westfield Town Republican Committee last week chose Third Ward Councilman Andy Skibitsky over First Ward Councilman Sal Caruana in a tight race for the party's mayoral slot in the Tuesday, June 7 Primary. Forty-one of the 42 committee members were present for the February 16 meeting.



Andrew Skibitsky

"I'm very thankful to have received the support of the committee," Councilman Skibitsky told *The Westfield Leader*. "I look forward to the campaign."

He declined to discuss his campaign platform at this time, calling such an announcement "premature."

Councilman Caruana was also considered by the committee for the mayor's slot but did not garner enough support from among the 41

committee members present for the February 16 vote.

"I am disappointed I didn't get the nomination for mayor," he said. He noted that he was nonetheless "excited" about the prospect of returning to represent the first ward for another term.

"(There is) a lot of work to be done and a lot of challenges ahead," he said.

Chairman of the Westfield Town Republican Committee, Assemblyman Jon Bramnick (R-21), and Councilman Skibitsky and Caruana all said the party would be unified behind the mayoral nominee.

"The bottom line is that everyone got along very well (at the committee meeting). The committee selected Andy Skibitsky who will receive the regular organizational line for Westfield," said Assemblyman Bramnick.

"The Republican organization is 100 percent behind Andy," he said.

He noted that Mr. Skibitsky has begun reaching out to Republicans in town to earn their support for his campaign.

"Hopefully it is a unified organization," said Assemblyman Bramnick.

"We are going to (reach out) to Republicans and Democrats and those independents who favored one candidate or another," he added.

Councilman Skibitsky also said he felt that "there is a lot of unity at the (local) party level."

Councilman Caruana noted that "the party is going to be unified; it's going to work hard to get the voters' confidence in the election process."

"I'm very enthusiastic about the opportunity for all of us to serve," he said.

A global marketing director with Schering-Plough in Union, Mr. Skibitsky has been a resident of the town since 1997. He graduated cum laude from Rider College and has served as a volunteer on Westfield's Housing Commission, represented Westfield on the Union County Community Development Revenue Sharing Committee, and has served as a coach in Westfield's Wrestling League.

He has been married to his wife, Debbie, for 18 years, and has one

daughter, Hope, and three sons, Drew, Shane and Troy.

The remainder of the Republican ticket will be announced when the committee reconvenes in the near future, according to Assemblyman Bramnick.

The committee will be looking to fill a slot in the second ward to replace Councilman Rafael Betancourt, who is not seeking reelection. He has represented the second ward for the past five years. The committee will also seek a replacement for Mr. Skibitsky in the third ward. In addition, the party will be looking for a candidate to run in the fourth ward, where it is not known if Democrat Larry Goldman will seek a fifth term.

The Leader has learned that Mr. Caruana will be seeking reelection in the first ward. In addition, it is known that Vicki Kimmins, second ward; former Westfield Board of Education President Darielle Walsh, third ward, and Eric Leuthold, fourth ward, are all considering seeking their party's nomination.

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Proposed Tax Levy, Cost-Savings Measures Considered by WF BOE

By ED COONEY
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — The proposed tax levy for the Westfield school district's 2005-2006 budget is \$68,130,181, an increase of \$3,689,051, according to a report given at Tuesday's Westfield Board of Education meeting.

Using the average assessed value of a home in Westfield of approximately \$180,000, the tax increase to the average Westfield homeowner is estimated to be \$324. The tax levy would compute to \$3.69 on every \$100 of assessed value on a Westfield resident's home. The tax levy that Westfield citizens voted on last year amounted to \$3.55 per every \$100 of assessed home value, but state legislation referred to as S-1701 mandated a reduction of the tax levy to \$3.51.

Superintendent of Schools Dr. Wil-

liam Foley noted that the net result of S-1701 is "no property tax relief." The legislation required that all New Jersey boards of education reduce their fund balance, usually kept in reserve over the course of a school year to deal with emergencies, to an amount no greater than 3 percent of its operating budget.

Any excess had to be given back to residents in the form of tax relief. Normally, the fund balance could be drawn upon to help defray the cost of the upcoming budget, but S-1701 is demanding further cuts in board fund balances statewide this year, forcing boards of education to seek funding through the tax levy.

Dr. Foley said that without S-1701, the tax levy "wouldn't have gone up as high."

The board took time at Tuesday

night's meeting to discuss several cost-saving measures implemented during the formulation of the proposed 2005-2006 budget.

By switching the district's insurance carrier to Oxford Health Care, the district will save approximately \$582,000 over the course of the contract. Additionally, 60 percent of all district personnel are in managed care programs due to collective bargaining agreements, which Dr. Foley called "a big deal."

"There are very few school districts that have managed to amicably accomplish what we have in controlling health care costs," he said.

The restructuring of the Information Technology Department, discussed at last week's meeting, will save \$99,445 this year, and the reduc-

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Estimate on Reeve House Project Now Placed at \$1.3 to \$3.3 Million

By PAUL PEYTON
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — During a presentation at Tuesday night's Town Council conference meeting, the Westfield Historical Society estimated the cost to convert the Reeve House at 314 Mountain Avenue into a museum and archive location for the society's countless historical records at between \$1.3 and \$3.3 million.

The rehabilitation cost alone had originally been estimated at \$500,000.

The town and the society signed an 18-month lease for the Reeve House in 2004, at which time the society said it would launch a fundraising drive to see if it could raise the necessary funds to rehabilitate the house, which backs into Mindowaskin Park. The lease period will end in August of this year.

Karrie Hanson of the historical society said the cost has a wide disparity due to the extent of the project. She said the cost would depend on whether an upstairs apartment for a museum caretaker is included; the size of the archives to be included in a separate addition to the existing house; whether or not an elevator is installed to provide access to the upper floors, and whether there will be direct access for the public to the museum from Mindowaskin Park.

Sherri Cronin, a society board member and volunteer, said the society wishes to enter into a three-year partnership with the town whereby the town would be asked to provide \$150,000 for the project beginning in 2006. She described the money as an annual "performance-based contribution."

Society member Bud Boothe, a former mayor, noted that of the \$160,000 the society has listed as cash and investments, \$50,000 was surplus left over from the town's 1994 Bicentennial celebration that was turned over to the society by the Bicentennial Commission. Mr. Boothe said the commission wanted the money to help in the effort to turn the Reeve House into a museum.

The town acquired the property through deed with the Reeve family in 1985, although Edgar Reeve, who had willed the property to the town, was given a life-right to remain in the house. He resided there until his death on December 28, 2001.

If the home is not used as a museum or by a not-for-profit organization,

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PRELIMINARY SCHOOL BOARD BUDGET RECEIVES GREEN LIGHT Mountainside Waits for Overdue Beechwood School Odor Results

By BETSEY BURGDORF
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

MOUNTAINSIDE — At the Tuesday night meeting of the Mountainside Board of Education, Board President Peter Goggi announced the results from LEW Corporation, the environmental testing company hired to investigate the odor at Beechwood School, have not yet been received.

LEW did additional sampling at the school as requested by the school board and reportedly were going to

deliver the results this week.

"We look forward to receiving that report and presenting the findings at the next board of education meeting," Mr. Goggi said.

The 2005-2006 preliminary school budget of \$12,139,469 was put forth to the governing body for its approval to send the figure to the Union County Superintendent of Schools. Once the figure is approved at the county level it will then be presented to the board for its final approval. Of the total

budget, \$10,442,048 contributes to the tax levy.

"The preliminary budget needs to be sent to the union county superintendent, then we have some time to change some things in accordance for next year," Mr. Goggi commented.

The final budget will be presented for board approval at the Tuesday, March 22, meeting.

Interim Chief School Administrator Walter Rusak announced that to date 69 kindergarten age students have registered with the district. Residents who have children who are eligible to enter kindergarten in the fall are asked to contact the school for screening.

The eighth grade Washington, D.C. trip will take place on Thursday and Friday, May 5 and 6.

Business Administrator Paul Vizzuso stated that \$10,000 was budgeted for the trip in the 2004-2005 school budget.

Mr. Rusak also announced that the GEPA's (Grade Eight Proficiency Assessment) would be administered from Monday to Friday, March 7 to 11. The NJ-ASK (New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge) will be given from Monday to Friday, March 14 to 18.

Curriculum Coordinator Angela Cosimano made a presentation to the board regarding the technology curriculum and the purchase of the new science textbooks.

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TESTING, TESTING 1, 2, 3... At a recent meeting of the Mountainside Board of Education, board members listened to a presentation regarding next year's school budget in the Beechwood School Media Room. Since the beginning of the year, the meetings have been videotaped and can be viewed on Channel 35.

STUDENTS REACT TO FEB. 16 DRUG SEARCH County K-9 Unit Probed Westfield HS for Drugs

By MICHELLE KUPPERSMITH
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — Westfield High School (WHS) was searched by drug sniffing dogs led by the Narcotics K-9 Unit of the Union County Sheriff's Department on February 16.

WHS Principal Dr. Robert Petix told the school community in September that the administration was working with local law enforcement to combat the drug problem at the high school.

Since then the WHS administration has been working with Union

County Prosecutor Theodore Romankow, the Westfield Police Department and the K-9 Unit to implement a plan to search the school.

During the search, four teams of dogs swept the designated areas of the school. The search was not a holistic one, but rather a random one, according to an e-mail sent to parents and students on February 16. The dogs did not come in actual contact with any of the students in the building.

Dr. Petix said in the e-mail that he does "not believe that the presence of

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ACADEMY GRADUATE... This beautiful and highly trained police dog graduated last week as one of twelve in his class at the Stamler Police Academy in Scotch Plains. He joins the county sheriff's department to protect the public in searching for drugs and explosives.

Ormsby-Cary Throws Hat Into BOE Race

By ED COONEY
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — Newcomer Ann Ormsby-Cary submitted her application for candidacy to the Westfield Board of Education last week for one of the three seats on the board that are up for election in April.

Ms. Ormsby-Cary is the fifth Westfield resident to announce her candidacy for the board, along with incumbents Alice Hunnicutt and William Ziff and fellow newcomers Steven Dorry and Gary McCready.

The candidate and her husband, Larry Cary, a lawyer, have lived in Westfield for 10 years. They have two sons currently enrolled in Westfield schools; one is an eighth grader at Edison Intermediate School, and the other is a fourth grader at Tamaques Elementary School.

Ms. Ormsby-Cary, who currently serves as co-president of the Tamaques School Parent-Teacher Organization, earned her Bachelor's Degree at Drew University and furthered her education at New York University, where she earned her master's degree from the graduate school of journalism.

Following her education, Ms. Ormsby-Cary worked in the field of public relations for 20 years for such

organizations as The United Way of New York City, the New York City Council, and the New York City Bar Association.

Ms. Ormsby-Cary told *The Westfield Leader* that her experience in public relations would be an asset to her as a member of the board because she "learned a lot about building consensus and making things happen."

She told *The Leader* she is "a communicator," and stressed that "communications between homes and school personnel need to be strengthened."

Ms. Ormsby-Cary lauded the impending launch of the district's new Website, but also stated that there needs to be development of "other ways to communicate with parents." She also added that the district needs to "seek more opportunities for parents to become involved at the intermediate school level."

The various courses offered in Westfield's schools are a high priority to Ms. Ormsby-Cary, who said, "The most important thing about a school system is the curriculum."

She told *The Leader* that as a board member, she would "work hard" to ensure the best possible curriculum at each of the district's schools.

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Ann Ormsby-Cary

Correction

In last week's *Westfield Leader* a story under the headline, "Council Tables Two Demolition Permits" contained factually incorrect information.

The story should have stated that a demolition permit to Messercola Bros. Building Co. for 8 Mohawk Trail was deferred by the Town Council due to what the governing body felt was untidy and unsafe conditions at another property Messercola Bros. Building Co. Inc. is working on at Willow Grove Road and Dixon Drive.

A second permit to Majestic Homes II, LLC was also tabled for a property at 135 Harrow Road until the town is in receipt of a Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) certification that an asbestos issue on the property has been cleared up.

Last week's story incorrectly identified Majestic as working on the Willow Grove Road property when in fact it was Messercola that is the contractor for the 8 Mohawk Trail and Willow Grove properties.

In addition, the story incorrectly stated that there was an underground leaking oil tank at the Mohawk Trail property.

The Westfield Leader apologizes to Majestic Homes, II, L.L.C. and Messercola Bros. Building Co. for the errors and to our readers for any confusion the story may have caused.

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