

## Arts & Entertainment

### Cheesecake, Sweet Potato Casserole Make Easter Sweet

By MARYLOU MORANO  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

If you celebrate Easter and family and friends are gathering at your place for dinner, you'll want to have a few special dishes to grace your table.

This sweet potato casserole is a new twist on the standard old sweet potato recipe. It can be made a day in advance and warmed before serving.

#### SWEET POTATO CASSEROLE (SERVES 8)

To 2 cups mashed lukewarm sweet potatoes add:

¾ cup brown sugar  
1 cup evaporated milk  
2 well-beaten eggs  
1 ½ teaspoons cinnamon  
Pumpkin pie spice to taste (about ½ tsp.)

Beat all ingredients with an electric mixer until smooth. Stir in ½ cup raisins. Pour potato mixture into buttered 1 ½ cup soufflé dish. Bake in 325-degree oven until a knife inserted into the center comes clean (about 50 minutes). Serve warm.

Try "crowning" your Easter dinner with a special dessert. This cheesecake recipe, which has been in my family for years, is full of flavor, and rivals that served in the fanciest of

restaurants. Best of all, it's easy to make.

#### THE MORANO FAMILY CHEESECAKE (SERVES 8 TO 10 OR 12, DEPENDING ON SIZE OF SLICE)

To a large bowl add:  
1 ½ pounds of ricotta cheese  
2 eight-ounce packages of cream cheese

2 cups sugar  
6 eggs  
1 teaspoon salt  
6 teaspoons flour  
1 pint sour cream  
1 teaspoon vanilla

Beat with electric mixer until all lumps disappear and batter is smooth. Pour batter into greased nine-inch spring form pan and bake at 350 degrees for 1 ½ hours. Then turn off the oven and leave cake in oven for an additional hour. For cheesecake with a browner top, place a shallow pan filled with water in the oven while the cake is baking.

Chill baked cake until you are ready to serve. Remove from pan by running a knife around the edge of pan before releasing spring. This cheesecake tastes better the longer it sits, so make it a day or two ahead, if you can. Top with canned or fresh fruit.



READY FOR THEIR FINAL BOW...Sporting their "finale bandanas," third graders performing in the McKinley Kapers at McKinley Elementary School in Westfield prepared to close out the school's annual production.



### POPCORN™

#### Robots: Machine Politics

By MICHAEL S. GOLDBERGER  
2 & ½ POPCORN

At the very least, *Robots* colorfully and charmingly serves as Junior's introduction to Rube Goldberg (1883-1970). True, the Pulitzer Prize-winning cartoonist didn't have a direct hand in co-directors Chris Wedge and Carlos Saldanha's sweetly told, robotic assimilation of "David Copperfield" and "Robin Hood."

But Goldberg's wacky way of getting the most routine tasks accomplished via the most ludicrously complicated means is nonetheless at the visual epicenter of this good-natured bit of animation.

Too bad it isn't as consistently amusing as it is novel and meticulous in its process. While creativity and imagination abound, *Robots* sputters for lack of that magical empathy.

Certainly we care when teen-aged Rodney Copperbottom, the poor son of a dishwasher robot, heads for the big city in hopes of turning the town on its side with his inventions. It's just that we cared a lot more for the lead cur in *Lady and the Tramp* and, more recently, for the lumbering ogre in *Shrek*.

Still, never-say-die Rodney, voiced by Ewan McGregor, has his allure. Doubtless a role model of frugality and good sense for children who might identify with his trials and tribulations, he's also the hero who assures that you don't have to be a hero to be okay.

While manufactured of hand-me-down and salvaged parts, Rodney throws not one fit about his circumstances. He loves and respects his parents too much for that. Are you listening, Tyler and Britney? And if he despairs, it isn't for long.

You see, while he may hail from Rivet City, it's really River City, or Bedford Falls, or Hannibal, Miss., where this red, white and blue symbol of democracy and enterprise cut his gears. He is the American Dream, passed on to and vicariously lived through our robots.

For smaller children, who may not grok writers Lowell Ganz and Babaloo Mandel's metallic metaphor for an America that they fear is slipping out of our idealistic grasp, the film plays on a simpler level. For instance, did you know that robots could pass gas?

On a higher plain, *Robots* has no equivalent of the whoopee cushion to cause laughter in parents and grandparents who dutifully accompany their offspring to the flicks. It's more like we approve. It appeals to our better instincts... to our morality. Plus it serves as some type of wish fulfillment — Rodney as the perfect child.

So beware, kids. The movie holds Rodney up as an icon. It's the cinematic equivalent of your mother saying, "Why can't you be a good boy like your cousin Rodney?" The fact is, our Rodney may be a good boy who makes his parents proud. But if he wants to get laughs, he should get himself some better writers.

Happily, *Robots* isn't quite so limited in the inspiration and muckraking departments. The fun part is, Rodney's coming of age experience will probably anger holdovers from the McCarthy era whilst warming the cockles of latter day liberals' hearts. Even kiddie flicks can't escape the blue state-red state syndrome.

But in any case, the poli sci message may be a bit highfalutin for tykes.

Call it a primer on what's wrong with corporate America and our throwaway society. For the sad news is, when Rodney arrives in Robot City to seek his fame and fortune, those evil powers that be have all but usurped the vision that inspired his journey.

He had high hopes of bringing his inventions to the attention of Bigweld (Mel Brooks), the rotund and generous epitome of free enterprise. But, just as Scrooge and Marley excised kindly Fezziwig in "A Christmas Carol," boardroom skullduggery engineered by the opportunist Ratchet (Greg Kinnear) and his conniving mother (shades of Angela Lansbury's matriarch in *The Manchurian Candidate*) has all but vanquished the entrepreneur.

It is a new and ugly day in Robot City, where the emphasis is no longer on individualism, ingenuity and affordable spare parts for all. In other words, no national health plan for this bunch of loafers. If Ratchet has his way, only new and expensive robots will find their way out of Bigweld Industries, the company where Rodney planned to gain employment.

The tale is a timeless, recurring plot in Western Civilization, which, even as far back as the Robin Hood legend, recognized that the opposing sides of the aisle really meant business. Hence, if the exiled King Richard the Lion Heart is here Bigweld and Ratchet is the throne-snatching Prince John, then our protagonist is none other than a robotic Robin of Locksley.

So it follows that Cappy (Halle Berry), the executive at Bigweld who believes in Rodney, is his Lady Marian. Take it a bit further and the Runyonesque bunch of gizmos and gadgets who attach themselves to our protagonist must be the Merry Men. Once all of these parts are assembled, you can guess what happens next.

There are plenty of jokes, running gags, double entendres and comic references strewn throughout the script, with most of them emanating from flow of consciousness style from Robin Williams as Fender. The most vocal of the rabble that Ratchet would like to render obsolete, the chattering thingamajig soon becomes Rodney's right-hand 'bot.

In short, as the scrap iron world's answer to Sancho Panza, Williams does his act. And if you think about it later, in and of itself the routine is funny.

You'll recognize his favorite bits of shtick, doubtlessly improvised, with no small amount of gibe appropriated from *The Bird Cage*. But in the context of the overall movie, effectively vying for time with the frenetic visuals and the high-toned story line, this and much of the other attempts at humor seems so desperate. And gosh, the structure is so formulaic. Considering the humanistic message at its core, you'd think the filmmakers would have made *Robots* a little less mechanical.

\*\*\*\*\*  
*Robots*, rated PG, is a 20th Century Fox release directed by Chris Wedge and Carlos Saldanha and stars the voices of Ewan McGregor, Halle Berry and Robin Williams. Running time: 91 minutes.

## LOCAL STARS SPECTACULAR

### SP-F Middle School Pupils Chosen for Select Groups

**SCOTCH PLAINS**—The Scotch Plains-Fanwood public school district is celebrating March as "Music In Our Schools" by noting the accomplishments of talented musicians in the district's middle schools.

Dozens of the district's young singers and instrumentalists have been selected to perform with state and national select groups based on competitive auditions.

At Park Middle School, seven students were chosen for the 2005 Re-

(tenor), Matthew Ritsko (tenor), and Roger Liu (bass II).

Ms. Sellman will be working with all these honor choir members to prepare them for their final gala concert in May.

At Terrill Middle School, 15 fifth and sixth grade choral students, under the direction of choral music teacher Mary Lu Farrell, were selected to perform in the American Choral Directors Association (ACDA) National Children's Honor Choir in Los Ange-



STELLAR MUSICIANS...Scotch Plains-Fanwood middle school music students are celebrating "Music In Our Schools" month this March as well as their membership in several select musical ensembles. Pictured, left to right, are: Park vocalists chosen for the All-State Junior High Honor Choir by competitive audition, including, Matt Ritsko, Devra Traiman, Matt Glassett, Roger Liu, and Tim Carroll.

gion II Intermediate Chorus that performed recently under the direction of guest conductor, Dr. Patrick Freer.

According to Jennifer Sellman, the students' choral director and rehearsal conductor for the Region Chorus, the students included Soprano I voices Kate Barker, Maggie Murad, and Mary Kate O'Connell, who was selected for the third year in a row.

The Soprano II section included Rosie Everson, Samantha Mannino, and Nicole Perro, and Devra Traiman was not only selected for the Alto section but was the highest scoring alto in the region.

Ten sixth graders at Park Middle were accepted as members of the All-State Elementary Honor Choir, including Laura Bruce, Charles Centinaro, Rachel Chan, Kimberly Federico, Alyssia Gonzalez, Priyanka Kamath, Matthew Kersey, Molly Kildow, Sebastian Rosen, and Alexa Uvino.

In addition, five seventh and eighth graders were chosen for the All-State Junior High Honor Choir, including Devra Traiman (alto), Timothy Carroll (tenor), Matthew Glassett

les, Calif.

Terrill students selected for the ACDA choir include Melina Gaglias, Julia VanEtten, Daniel Pesin, Nicholas Poulos, Priya Kamdar, Sara Heiden, Madhu Parmar, Melanie Rome, Heather Ullery, Jessica VanBeisen, Tori Berman, Maddie Dillon, Allison Begalman, Julia Babis, and Peter Surace.

Instrumental musicians at Park Middle also achieved success this year and several have been selected as members of the New Jersey Central Region II Band, a group made up of the outstanding musicians from Monmouth, Middlesex, Union, Mercer, Somerset, and Hunterdon counties.

Students selected for the Region II band include Ryan McTernan (trombone), Kristin Betau (third place flute), Michelle Carroll (clarinet), Blake VanBuskirk (sixth chair alto saxophone), Chris DeCarlo (trumpet), Roger Liu (second year Region II tuba), and Josef Ellis (first chair snare and second year making Region II Band).

Park instrumental music teacher Jon Benicvenga also reported that the Park Middle School contingent placed second out of 81 schools at the Region II auditions.

### Westfield Art Assoc. to Present Annual Members Exhibition

**WESTFIELD**—The Westfield Art Association (WAA) will host Art '05, a salon style exhibition of members' paintings from Saturday, April 2, to Sunday, April 17, in the Community Room of the Westfield Municipal Building at 425 East Broad Street.

The reception and awarding of prizes will take place on Sunday, April 3, at 3 p.m. This, the WAA's 81st Annual Members' show, will feature works by favorite local artists in oil, watercolor, acrylic, graphics, and pastel, sculpture and photography.

Open hours for Art '05 are: Saturdays, April 2, 9, and 16 from 12 to 4 p.m., Sunday, April 3, from 12 to 4 p.m., and Friday, April 8, and Sunday April 17, from 12 to 2 p.m. Tuesday and Wednesday hours, during the two weeks, are from 12 to 2 p.m.

Alexander Piccirillo, an accomplished pastelist, oil painter, and sketching and drawing artist, will judge this year's show. Besides judging shows, he also teaches demonstrations.

Mr. Piccirillo studied at the Brooklyn Museum Art School, received his Bachelor of Fine Arts degree at the School of Visual Arts in New York City, and studied privately with Harvey Dinnerstein and Burton Silverman, both of New York.

He has exhibited from New York to California, Louisiana, Massachusetts, and New Jersey. He has also showcased his artwork at the Pastel Society of America's Annual Exhibitions, the Bloomfield Art League, the Salmagundi Club, and the Montclair Art Museum, among others.

Mr. Piccirillo has received many, many awards, including the "First Place Award" in Graphics at the Bloomfield Art League, The Myra Biggerstaff Award at the Pastel Society of America, and the title of "Master Pastelist" from the Pastel Society of America.

He is currently teaching at the Montclair Art Museum, the Fairlawn Art Association, the Livingston Art Association, New Jersey Center for Visual Arts, Summit, and the Baird Center in South Orange, along with giving private studio instruction in Nutley. He offers workshops at the Morris County Art Association. He is represented by Gallery 214 in Montclair.

Admission to Art'05 is free. The Community Room is handicapped accessible and the public is invited to attend all events.

For more information, please call (908) 687-2945, or Art '05 show Chairman, S. Alyn Schaeffer at (908) 322-2394.

### Honk: UCHS' Little Tale

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 20

Rodriguez, leans at Ugly, planning to have him for lunch. Alex has a ball with this role dishing up the song, "Play with your Food."

Costumes by designer Emily Eger, and assistant designer Kimberly Scutieri are some of the finest seen in all of the area high school shows this season. The outfits of the iridescent school of fish are as impressive as the jumpsuits for the gray geese and the froglets.

Daddy Drake and the little ones paddling in and out of the gorgeous fish scene is a clever, comic interlude within the lovely lyrical dancing.

The domesticated chicken Lowbutt (Katie Czado) has a unique relationship with the house cat Queenie (Alexandra Slomko) that is threatened by Cat who has followed Ugly to the Old Woman's Cottage. Alexandra is a consummate dancer who looks like she just came off the road with a touring company of "Cats." She's that good in voice, presence and dance. The dancing of Cat and Queenie could make Fred and Ginger jealous. Great chem-

istry with Queenie's talented partner Katie makes for a most enjoyable scene.

It is almost impossible to mention all of the interesting and clever staging and "business" that prevails, but Jay Bird (John Rotondo) from "America's Most Feathered" is exceptional while poking fun at the media's intrusion on tragedy.

Also, the "Wild Goose Chase" complete with kazoo band pleases the audience.

Ballet en pointe is always an unexpected delight: Penny (Victoria Spellman) is outstanding in voice and dance as the swan that helps Ugly discover himself.

Additionally, Bullfrog, played by Brian DeOliveira, rocks the house with his Vaudevillian humor, precise timing and spectacular suit.

Other special performers of note include Sophia Mavroudas as Maureen, Joann Tavares as Grace and Jason Brubaker as Turkey.

This little piece named *Honk* that's ostensibly for kids makes big sense for kids of all ages.



KEAN VALUES ARTS...At The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey's 2005 gala fundraiser, "Brush Up Your Shakespeare XI," held on March 5 at the Park Avenue Club in Florham Park, Senator Thomas Kean, Jr. of Westfield receives the Mighty Quill Award on behalf of his father, Governor Thomas H. Kean, from Shakespeare Theatre Artistic Director Bonnie Monte of Madison for his ongoing support of and commitment to The Shakespeare Theatre and the arts. The event raised over \$280,000. Proceeds will support the theatre's artistic and education programs.



WESTFIELD DANCERS...The day after St. Patrick's Day, Wardlaw-Hartridge Lower School students were still celebrating with Irish dancers from Holy Trinity Interparochial School in Westfield who entertained them at luncheon. Second grade teacher at the independent school in Edison, Bev Fantini, a second grade teacher at the independent school in Edison, arranged for the fourth through eighth grade girls to share their two forms of dancing with the students.

### Westfield Symphony Friends Announce Annual Home Tour

**WESTFIELD**—The Westfield Symphony Orchestra (WSO) Friends will present the 21st annual Tour of "Notable" Homes, an opportunity for the public to tour five prestigious residences, on Saturday, May 14, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Among New Jersey's most avidly followed home showcases, the tour will wind its way through neighborhoods of historic Westfield and environs. The homes featured represent both timeless traditional and modern state-of-the-

and curiosity among visitors," said Lee Corcoran and Lisel Perselay, Tour Co-Chairpersons. "The combination of homes represented bring together the best of old and new with refined tastes and motivational décor which embody the pleasures of hearth and home."

There will be a host of activities along the tour including an extravagant gift basket raffle with luxury items from top tier local merchants, cultural venues and restaurants, a spring blooming plant sale, live music, free refreshments and much more.

All proceeds collected from tour ticket sales and activities will benefit the WSO, which also engages educational outreach programs that touch the lives of thousands of area students through special concerts and master classes.

"Every year the Westfield Symphony Orchestra run a spectacular Home Tour which is one of the art architecture.



WESTFIELD ELEGANCE...This home will be included in the Westfield Symphony Orchestra Friends' 2005 Annual Tour of Notable Homes.

One residence, located in Westfield's historic Stoneleigh Park area, offers old and new architecture combined. The residence features a floating spiral staircase, which opens up the traditional center hall colonial, a state-of-the-art home theatre and a kitchen with modern amenities that leads into a sunken family room. Many interesting art pieces, including paintings and pottery, are on display, some of which include works by Andy Warhol, Alexander Calder, Jamie Wyeth, Joseph Yoror, Michael Baxley and Sandra O'Byrne.

"This year's Tour of Notable Homes is sure to bring a level of excitement

Symphony's largest fundraisers," said Norman Luka, President of the WSO Board of Trustees. "The Home Tour makes it possible for us to offer important education and outreach programs while bringing the highest quality classical music to area audiences."

Tickets are \$25 in advance and \$30 the day of the tour. The tour is self-guided with addresses for the featured homes printed on the tickets, and a Tour of Notable Homes Map is also provided. Tickets will be available for sale at a variety of Westfield-area businesses.

For more information or a schedule of WSO events, please call (908) 232-9400 or visit [www.westfieldsymphony.com](http://www.westfieldsymphony.com).

### Westfield Summer Workshop Commences Registration

**WESTFIELD**—The Westfield Summer Workshop (WSW), a comprehensive fine and performing arts program for students from pre-school to grade 12, has begun registration for its 2005 summer program.

Taught by degreed and/or certified teachers, experienced performers and professional artists and musicians, WSW is offering over 80 classes in arts, crafts, music, dance and drama, with separate musical theater productions for both junior and senior high school students.

#### Fanwood Library Will Mark Poetry Month

**FANWOOD**—The Fanwood Memorial Library will note the 10th celebration of April as National Poetry Month by hosting "Poetry Out Loud!" on Tuesday, April 12, from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. in the library's Teen Section.

The program invites residents to read an original poem, favorite poem or listen to poems. All are welcome to attend.

For more information, please call Nancy Kipping at (908) 322-6400.

The WSW program will begin on Wednesday, June 29, and will conclude on Friday, July 29, with a special arts festival scheduled for the evening of July 28. Classes are held from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. daily at Roosevelt Intermediate School on Clark Street in Westfield.

There are 30 individual offerings in the arts and crafts department, with new courses in architecture, exploring art, and knitting/crocheting. Some returning courses in this department are airbrush, graphic design, studio art, basketry, carving, mosaics, needlework, origami, and scrapbooking.

The WSW, now in its 34th season, is open to all New Jersey residents. Brochures will be mailed to households in Westfield, Scotch Plains, Fanwood, Mountainside, Cranford, Clark and North Edison. Residents of other towns may obtain a brochure by calling (908) 518-1551 or by visiting the main office at 150-152 East Broad Street, Westfield.

Additional information on all the New Jersey Workshop for the Arts programs can be found at [www.njworkshopforthearts.com](http://www.njworkshopforthearts.com).