

The Westfield Leader

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Legal Newspaper for Union County, New Jersey

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Letters to the Editor

Former Council President Agrees: Plainfield Impacts Fanwood Tax Base

Editor's Note: The writer was a member and chairman of the Fanwood Planning Board during the 1980s and was Borough Council President during Mayor Louis Jung's administration.

I was amazed by the outpouring of criticism of a recent *Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times* editorial (September 22) by leaders of Fanwood's Democratic Party. I thought the editorial made exactly the right point: Unless the mess in Plainfield is squared away (something I doubt will ever happen, given the political culture of New Jersey), Fanwood and Scotch Plains will continue to have a very difficult time expanding their tax base with strong business. One of the things I learned campaigning door-to-door in Fanwood was that our residents demanded the Fanwood Police Department be protected - because they viewed it as the "thin blue wall" that protected them from crime in Plainfield. A revitalized Plainfield, with honest government, would benefit Fanwood and Scotch Plains immeasurably.

I do, however, understand the Democrats' sensitivity about an anonymous quote in the editorial lamenting the borough's alleged lack of progress in downtown redevelopment. Had I been in office, I would have fired off a letter similar to that of Mayor Mahr.

Things are happening on their watch, and they are entitled to claim credit. But in public service, one builds upon what went before. Had the borough council not adopted a new, comprehensive zoning ordinance perhaps four years ago, the town would be as stagnant as it had been through the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. Councilwoman Karen Schurtz (D) began the project, and got it substantially ready. It fell to me to put on the finishing touches and move it through council - a process that took more than a year and one which found the council united.

Even more significantly, former Mayor Louis Jung ran on a platform of downtown redevelopment. Unlike his Democrat predecessors, Mayor Jung didn't just talk about downtown redevelopment. Once elected, it was the major objective of his administration. Mayor Jung appointed Fanwood's first downtown coordinator to serve as a liaison between business, landowners and the borough government.

Mayor Jung sought the advice of the best experts in New Jersey on downtown development, creating a bold, visionary redevelopment plan after more than 20 (I

think the number is 28, but I'm not sure) public hearings - most of them televised - by either the council or the planning board. That plan was ultimately adopted by the council, and was praised by Mayor Mahr after her election as a good plan. I believe it is the underpinning for what her administration has done.

Following adoption of the downtown redevelopment plan, Mayor Jung ran an extraordinarily open process to solicit proposals for redeveloping Fanwood's core downtown block. The winning developer - who was dumped by Mayor Mahr and her team - was selected by a committee that included councilpersons from both parties, the planning board, borough staff and public representatives.

If Mayor Mahr is able to see new buildings go up, and new business attracted, it is because of the foundation laid during Mayor Jung's administration. As I said, in public service, one builds upon what was done by one's predecessors.

Indeed, the building being built across from the Chelsea was proposed during Mayor Jung's administration - and, according to the developer's attorney, was inspired by the downtown redevelopment plan and initial developer's proposal during Mayor Jung's administration. Ground has yet to be broken, according to the *Times'* front-page story September 29, on projects proposed during Mayor Mahr's tenure.

Even though I've moved out of state for business reasons, I'm pleased Fanwood is moving forward. I cared passionately for Fanwood while I lived there and I wish it nothing but the best in the future. That's why, for the love of Fanwood, I'll be making a donation this year to the Fanwood Community Foundation. I hope current residents will, too.

Joel Whitaker
Silver Spring, MD

Commuter Notes Parking Improvements

I would like to commend the Westfield Town Council for rolling back the parking fees at the train station lot. I believe this effort demonstrates their commitment to keep parking fees at a reasonable level. The parking lot also looks great after the recent paving project. Now, if they can only figure out a way to help commuters park their cars in a straight line when it snows, I'll be forever grateful.

Mark Doherty
Westfield

Maybe Most of What Our Parents Told Us Was Correct about Growing Up

The "Laws of Unintended Consequence" could shape the future of Westfield.

Consider a Year 2100 bond issue of parking at the middle schools: As we continue to hold our children back (in many cases for an athletic "edge") future parents begin to realize that there is in fact no edge as everyone is doing the same thing; i.e., every child who was eligible for 1st grade is actually in kindergarten so, in order to reestablish an "edge," they will therefore have to start holding their children back at least two years. As this trend perpetuates itself, the BOE has no choice but to issue a bond to build new parking facilities in the middle schools so that the students can park their cars.

Consider 2100 real estate values where the median home price is \$5,471,000: As equal playing time in travel sports spills over into the classroom, (the reason for this is that, if it is good for a child's self-esteem in sports, it should be good for them in the classroom also) every student in Westfield is given straight A's just for signing up for the class and showing up for the lessons. This of course attracts many more people to the town and hence pushes up the real estate prices to unheard of levels. However, due to the "hold them back" trend, houses take longer to turn over as the average age of graduating seniors is now 24, so the kids stay home a little longer.

Consider 2100 real estate taxes where the median annual tax bill is \$100,000 that includes an additional \$2,500 in restaurant minimums: Due to the "everyone gets straight A's" syndrome, plus the fact that kids in Westfield now enter first grade at 12, Westfield is inundated with new families wanting their children to be in its schools. The result of this is additions being built to all schools, more teachers being hired and more pre-school activities being sought, all of which greatly increase the taxes. Also, the town needs to make sure that the tax revenues it receives from local merchants in the downtown district continue to flow. Given that 379 of the qualifying merchants are in fact restaurants, the town levies a "restaurant minimum" (just like a country club) of \$2,500 each year on every homeowner.

Consider Year 2100 volunteer coaches: As the annual premium for liability insurance for volunteer coaches surpasses \$20,000 per annum (due to the number of lawsuits brought by parents who feel their children should play more based upon the equal-playing-time law), so, these unsung heroes who give up so much of their personal time resign their posts and sign up for the military where, they feel they have less chance of being "shot at." Given the difficulty of the coaching task, the U.S. Marine Corps adds "Coaching Westfield Sports" as an option for a tour

of duty; however, the Marines can only show in self-defense if "attacked" by over-zealous parents.

Consider 2100 religious landscape: The shock sustained by many students on being rejected by Ivy League schools (let's not forget they have grown up in an "equal playing time" society and therefore they should get in like everyone else) is so devastating that more than 23 percent of graduating seniors become Krishna monks. Accordingly, the town builds a Hari Krishna center to accommodate the trend.

Consider the 2100 Parking Deck - DMZ Lifted: After the "Civil War" of 2081 between the north and south side, a DMZ was created across the train tracks. This is lifted in 2100 when NJT finally decides to provide Westfield commuters with a one-seat ride to NYC and pays to build a parking deck above the train tracks so it is 50 percent on the North Side and 50 percent on the South Side. The parking deck also nullifies the existing 8.5-minute maximum-parking-time law, implemented in 2047.

Consider 2100 McMansions: A new design trend hits Westfield homes - the "Garden Room" - named as such because the garden (all of it) is now actually inside the house.

Is this cynical? You bet. Is most of it said tongue-in-cheek? Sure. But I have something nagging inside of me that says we all turned out okay with parents who would never have even thought to make the kind of noise, and do some of the things, that we do today.

When we are just getting old enough to realize that 99 percent of everything our parents told us is in fact correct, we also have children telling us they were wrong. Well, were they?

Stuart Williams
Westfield

Roll Back Fees and Refund Parking Money

Mayor candidate Tom Jardim is right when he says that the parking fee increases were earmarked for the construction and maintenance of the parking decks. In 2000, the town council expressly raised the parking fees to fund the decks.

When the decks were defeated, the town council tried to justify the increases based upon market demand and comparable municipal parking fees. The plain truth is that the town council has decided to make the parking fees a commuter tax to fund other items in the operating budget.

The town council should make the commuters whole by rolling back the fees and refunding the monies.

Keith Firestone
Westfield

Campaign Lawn Signs Are Freedom of Expression, I'm Gonna Get One

In the October 6 *Westfield Leader*, Frank Arena of the Westfield GOP Campaign Committee urged the people of Westfield not to post lawn signs for the upcoming mayoral and town council elections because doing so would be "putting neighbors in compromising positions" and "would fly in the face an informal pact" that is apparently in effect in Westfield.

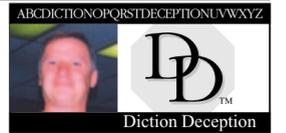
I had no idea when I moved to Westfield that I was agreeing to "an informal pact" to waive my right to free expression. I always thought that one of the basic tenets of a democracy was that the free expres-

sion of disparate opinions would lead to better and more responsible government. Nor did I realize that Westfielders were so fragile that they could not withstand the differing political views of their neighbors.

I guess Mr. Arena has a different view of democracy than I have. That is fine. I can respect that. If Mr. Arena does not want to post a lawn sign, that is his right.

As for me, I'm gonna get me a lawn sign.

Margaret Maloney
Westfield



Below are four arcane words, each with four definitions - only one is correct. The others are made up. Are you sharp enough to discern this deception of diction?

If you can guess one correctly - good guess. If you get two - well-read individual. If you get three - word expert. If you get all four - You must have a lot of free time!

All words and correct definitions come from the board game *Diction Deception*.

Answers to last week's arcane words.
1. Chitra - The Indian spotted hog deer
2. Hierodule - A Greek temple slave
3. Intertrigo - An eruption of the skin produced by friction of adjacent parts
4. Tocsin - An alarm bell

ABACIST

1. One who casts accounts with a calculator
2. A tile or square in a mosaic pavement
3. One who destroys one's sight by placing a red-hot basin close to the eyes
4. A skylight

TASSIE

1. A small cup
2. Armor for the thighs
3. Clay for making melting pots
4. Tea time

YACH

1. To boast or brag
2. To come up suddenly
3. An exclamation of despair or hopelessness
4. Strong beer or ale

SPOLIATE

1. To wither or wilt
2. To trap; snare
3. To plunder or rob
4. To coil or wind round

Mayoral Candidates on TV Dancing Was Fun

My partner John Russitano and I have a local television show called "Make You Wanna Dance." During the month of October we are airing a special episode that was so much fun to shoot. Mayor Andy Skibitsky and Mayoral candidate Tom Jardim and their wives graciously agreed to take time out of their busy schedules and come on and take a dance lesson from us.

We thank them all for their bravery. It was a wonderful show of support for local television, which is obviously a subject that is near and dear to our hearts. It surely showed that there is a lighter side to local politics and we just hope that they had as much fun as we did.

Kara Shovlin
Westfield

Sid Fay-Houlihan Turf Field is Impressive

I would like to take this opportunity to thank both the Town Council and the Westfield Recreation Commission for their hard work and continuous efforts to make the new turf fields at Sid Fay and Houlihan a reality. Just recently, I had the opportunity to attend a soccer game at Sid Fay/Houlihan and I was truly impressed with what I saw. As my children approach the ages when they will be utilizing these fields, I look forward to the chance for them to play at such a great facility. In a town like Westfield, with a history so rich in youth athletics, these improvements to our recreation fields are a great asset to our town.

Daniel Duffy
Westfield

Lower Fees and Parking Lot are Great

I just wanted to drop a quick note of thanks to the Westfield Town Council for reducing permit parking fees. In light of the town's decision to not pursue construction of a parking deck, this reduction is fair and appropriate.

In addition, the South Avenue lot looks great after the recent re-pavement.

Rich Toner
Westfield

Vote November 8, 2005

See: goleader.com/05vote
Candidates Public TV Forums Filmed:

Westfield: Monday, 8 pm, Oct. 17
Fanwood: Tuesday, 8 pm, Oct. 18

Governor (1, 4-yr.)

Jon Corzine (D)
Doug Forrester (R)
Jeffrey Pawloski (L)Hector Castillo (Ed)

State Assembly D-21 (2, 2-yr.)

Jon Brammick (R)(D)
Eric Munoz (R)(I)
Steve Merman (D)
Bruce Bergen (D)

State Assembly D-22 (2, 2-yr.)

Linda Stender (D)(I)
Jerry Green (D)(I)
Nancy Malool (R)
Elyse Bochicchio (R)

Union County Clerk (1, 5-yr.)

Joanne Rajoppi (D)(I)
Saundra Spector (R)

Union County Freeholder (3, 3-yr.)

Angel Estrada (D)(I)
Rick Proctor (D)(I)
Nancy Ward (D)(I)

Patricia Quattrocchia (R)
Stuart Kline (R)
Albert Dill (R)

Westfield Mayor (1, 4-yr.)

Andrew Skibitsky (R)(I)
Tom Jardim (D)

Westfield Council Ward 1 (1, 4-yr.)

Sal Caruana (R)(I)
Audrey Fisch (D)

Westfield Council Ward 2 (1, 4-yr.)

Vicki Kimmins (R)
Frank Fusaro (D)

Westfield Council Ward 3 (1, 4-yr.)

Danielle Walsh (R)(I)
David Haas (D)

Westfield Council Ward 4 (1, 4-yr.)

Eric Leuthold (R)
Thomas Bigosinski (D)

Fanwood Council (2, 3-yr.)

Joan Wheeler (D)
Bruce Walsh (D)

Michael D'Antuono (R)
Maureen Mawby (R)

Garwood Council (2, 3-yr.)

William Schadewald (D)(I)
Walter Tucker (D)(I)

Anthony Sytko (R)
Bruce Peterson (R)

Mountainside Council (2, 3-yr.)

Keith Turner (R)(I)
Paul Mirabelli (R)(I)

(I)=Incumbent

Users of Cell Phones, Please Be More Considerate While Driving

The use of cell phones while driving seems to be on the increase. There are no statistics we know of that point to a rise of accidents as a result. But, it's unnerving to pedestrians, while crossing the street, to see a driver headed toward them, glued to the phone with a distant stare in their eyes.

Pedestrians rightly freeze while crossing, not knowing whether the driver actually sees them and intends to stop or whether a tidbit of conversation going on with the phone will distract the driver from the brake.

Who knows what's in the driver's mind while on the phone - a fight with the spouse, closing a big business deal, or more likely discussing what kind of

cereal to pick up at the supermarket.

The 'driving while distracted' game has risen to a new level, based on a few observations last week. Some drivers now are placing their laptops on the dashboard so they can retrieve information while talking on their cell phone - all the while, cruising through busy traffic and pedestrian areas.

We ask drivers who are doing these things to please consider how thoughtless and dangerous it is to others.

We don't want more laws. We want more considerate conduct from users of cell phones while driving their cars - and elsewhere too.

If Penn State, Alabama and Notre Dame Can Do It, So Can Westfield

The vaunted football programs of Penn State, Alabama and Notre Dame have been in the tank for the last few years. Many said Joe Paterno was finished at 78, that Notre Dame couldn't get the recruits while insisting that the players be educated and that Alabama wouldn't recover from NCAA violations that left them without scholarships.

Well, as most football fans know now, these teams are back on the national scene - and most are overjoyed. There's still spunk left in Poppa Joe and New Jersey's Charlie Weiss has brought life to the Fighting Irish as their new coach. A housecleaning at 'Bama now has them back on top.

These are three examples of how vaunted programs of past glory, having slipped into the mire of defeatism, had the commitment and gumption to climb out of it.

The Westfield High School Blue Devil football team is in this position. They must ask themselves how they are going to restore their pride and the program that was once the envy of the state Title

Town USA.

The Blue Devils didn't win a conference football game last year and it looks to be the same this year. It's a tremendous frustration for the players, parents, coaches and ardent fans. What's wrong?

It just doesn't feel, sound or smell like football on the Devil sidelines any more - no excitement, no adrenaline, no bands blaring fight songs. The cheerleaders are exasperated in trying their best to inspire a numbed crowd.

Westfield's not a bunch of losers - there's pride, great talent and commitment. It will be interesting to see how the Blue Devils will go about righting themselves. How long will it take?

Football, in many ways, is like life. Sometimes you get knocked on your butt and have your face driven into the turf. It's full of passion and physical contact, like life. And like life, it's better to win than to lose. But, sometimes you lose and you must spit out the bitter taste, get up off the ground and dish it out.

Go Blue Devils!

Is 'Ethically Flexible' the True Term for Politics in New Jersey?

The two millionaires competing for governor in New Jersey promise to cut taxes, eliminate fraud and corruption, end pay-to-play no-bid contracts, prohibit eminent domain from taking private property, make government efficient, end the practice of appointing questionably qualified individuals to government posts as rewards for political support or personal affection, stop padding pensions and quit distributing grants only to towns controlled by political parties of their persuasion.

As for winning elections, prevailing political thought is that the threat of power will prevail over the din of corruption. It's not disgust about wrangling from the coffers. It's fear of being on the wrong side. Then, there will be no patronage for you.

Handlers of candidates and officials dismiss corruption by labeling such conduct 'ethically challenged.' In practice, many politicians consider it a

powerful asset to be 'ethically flexible.'

The voters in New Jersey are a little numb given the McGreevey calamity and numerous other incidents. What will they do?

There are only two governor seats up for election this year in the U.S. - New Jersey and Virginia. Although NJ election laws prohibit corporate gifts to NJ candidates, that's easily being overcome. Political ads will flood TV and people will receive mail about how bad the other guy is. On the fun side, celebrities will visit before November 8 - such as former President Bill Clinton did at Kean University and former NYC Mayor Rudy Giuliani did in Westfield.

New Jerseyans are in for many interesting experiences in the few weeks that remain in the campaign for governor. We can't be sure what tactics will be employed before and after the election, but we're certain that they will be 'ethically flexible.'

