

Scotch Plains Resident Criticizes Bruce Johnson's 'Devil's Den' View

First I'd like to preface my comments by stating that I possess nothing but the utmost respect for Bruce Johnson and his knowledge of Westfield High School (WHS) athletics. I look forward to picking up your paper every week to read Bruce's insights; he is truly a wealth of information and the preeminent historian/authority of WHS athletics.

With that said, as a lifelong Scotch Plains-Fanwood (SPF) High School fan and someone who has followed Raider athletics for the past 20-plus years, I took exception to Bruce's comments in the 'Devil's Den' (Sept. 22). First the facts: The Westfield-SPF football game was nothing short of an 'Instant Classic.' The game featured an improbable comeback chock full of emotion amidst a backdrop of a fervent cross-town rivalry with enthusiastic and passionate fans on both sides.

The Raiders never gave up and found a way to win 32-29 in overtime, vigorously

storming back from a 26-6 second-half deficit. Instead of praising SPF, Bruce chose to take issue with the official, in essence crediting him with giving SPF the win. While he tried not to come off as bitter, once again, he threw cold water on SPF athletics. I dare to wonder if the roles were reversed and Westfield had benefited from a late penalty flag if Bruce would've blasted the official and made personal attacks.

I also found it strange that Bruce was essentially commending a pair of Westfield fans for berating the officials as they left - is that good sportsmanship and losing with class? Instead of harping on the officials' call for the next 40 years as Bruce did with the baseball umpire, I prefer to view the game as one of the best I've ever seen at any level and as one of many classic WHS-SPF gridiron encounters.

Ross Blacker
Scotch Plains

Editorial Was Surprising: Fanwood Has Positive Development Partnerships

I read with great surprise the editorial "Political Economic Powerhouse in The County West of the Parkway," which focused on Plainfield but quoted an unnamed source as saying, "How is it that Garwood's getting it done (progress downtown) and not Fanwood?"

This unnamed source must not have been on South Avenue in the last six months to see that the Dunkin' Donuts is being rebuilt, the area across from the Chelsea is under construction (soon to become a beautiful mixed-use property in keeping with Fanwood's Victorian theme) and the Dean Oil property now has an "under contract" sign on it and the purchaser has a plan for that property's redevelopment. There also are several other redevelopment projects that are before the planning board.

I had the pleasure of hearing Mayor Colleen Mahr speak at the Fanwood-

Scotch Plains Rotary luncheon last week. Mayor Mahr made a very thorough presentation about all of the redevelopment plans moving forward in Fanwood. We are very lucky to have a mayor who is such a great communicator and a skilled negotiator with a background in urban development.

Mayor Mahr and the Fanwood Borough Council have created such a positive environment with the property owners and merchants that they are all working together, not with the threat of "eminent domain" but in partnership for the betterment of our community.

The unnamed source may want to read a few back issues of *The Scotch Plains Fanwood Times*, which has covered Fanwood's progress extensively.

Patricia Plante
Fanwood

Young Athletes Have Nearly Reached Goal of SP-FHS Ice Hockey Team

With awkwardness never evidenced on the hockey rink, a dozen teenaged boys in suits and ties and a couple of young women filled the chairs at the Scotch Plains-Fanwood Board of Education meeting last week.

Faces intense and serious, the "team" listened quietly to heated discussions regarding their bid for a Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School (SPFHS) ice hockey team. They were worried. SPFHS Principal Dr. David Heisey, originally thought to be a supporter, had appeared to equivocate.

Superintendent of Schools Dr. Carol Choye was not an advocate. The president of the board was vague about her status. Difficult questions were raised about "pay to play," costs, responsibility and priorities. The boys fidgeted as the wheels of local government ground slowly. Without the swagger normally seen on the rink, boys stepped to the mike to talk about hockey being their anti-drug and a desire to represent their high school. Dr. Choye was touched. Board members

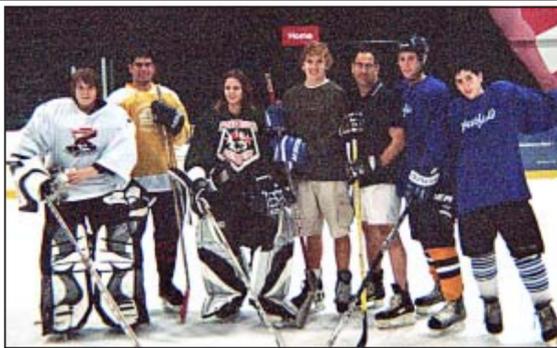
responded with seriousness and respect.

A few weeks later, dressed in matching jerseys, sporting third-place medals from a travel league, the hockey players again took their front-row seats to continue the battle. Again, our young men stood up, identified themselves and voiced their dreams of competing for SPFHS, wanting the same opportunities most neighboring schools already have. Other towns, such as Westfield, came forward with information and history to support the players' plan.

Parents spoke eloquently to support their children's hope, but the voices of a dozen teenagers held more passion.

Now, in September, months after they began, these determined young men have almost achieved their goal. The last period has begun as the board of education finalizes the steps to make a dream reality. And 12 dignified young athletes, who worked within the system, are all MVPs in my book.

Linda Van Fossen-Bromley
Scotch Plains



ASSISTING HOCKEY SQUAD...Westfield Third Ward Council Candidate Dave Haas takes time out to assist the Westfield High School ice hockey team at their captain's practice.

Living in Westfield Can Be Taxing on Your Wallet

By Tom Jardim
Candidate for Mayor of Westfield

Electing a mayor and town council is a serious matter, amounting to the difference between solving long-standing problems or letting them fester and grow.

So that you can understand your choices better, I plan to utilize the pages of this newspaper and any other means I can to let you know where I stand.

First, on taxes. You should ask yourself two questions: First, why are my taxes so high? And second, are we getting our money's worth?

When I served as mayor between January 1997 and December 2000, taxes stayed at a fairly steady and low rate, increasing by only about .03 cents per \$100 of assessed value. That's about the average rate of inflation for that same period, and certainly less than the rate of pay increases in the town's labor contracts then in effect.

These increases were small in comparison to what I view as the huge and unnecessary municipal tax increases over the last few years. Since I left office as mayor of Westfield, municipal taxes between the years 2001 and 2005 have risen by 34 percent! That is an astounding increase, especially considering that the average rate of inflation during that same period was about 2.5 percent.

In one year alone, 2004, the mayor and town council raised taxes by 11 cents per \$100 of assessed value. After looking into it, I could find no other time in this town's history when municipal taxes have risen as much in one year, and I would challenge anyone to determine when else that happened.

It should be noted that my opponent, then Councilman Andy Skibitsky, voted for this unprecedented increase and commented in this newspaper that while he was

"troubled by the increase...I don't have the answers."

Well, I think I may have a few answers. First, don't spend money studying problems; spend money solving them. The most glaring example of that was the nearly \$1 million that the mayor and council spent studying a fatally flawed parking deck plan that was rightfully defeated in last year's referendum.

Second, during my four years as mayor, I argued for across-the-board cuts in non-labor, discretionary spending. It is my firm belief that the town could cut as much as 10 percent on such expenditures without residents noticing any decrease whatsoever in services.

Third, the mayor and council should appoint a non-partisan advisory committee to meet quarterly with the town's operating divisions in order to determine if there are ways to operate more efficiently and plan long range issues and projects better. Currently, there is simply no periodic review of the operating divisions and their spending habits by the town's governing body.

And finally, the town council has to get out of the business of reacting to problems and commit itself to long-range problem solving. Doing so would not only tend to save money over the long run, it would also free the council to focus each department on delivering services better.

A recent headline in this paper asked whether Westfield's GOP was becoming the tax-and-spend party. As a taxpayer myself, I take no glee at what seems, based upon the last few years, to be the obvious answer to that question. It doesn't have to be that way.

I hope you will give me a chance to help get Westfield's town government get back to the less taxing days of years past.

Fucillo Politicizing Westfield User Fees Is Outrageous and Partisan Tactic

I am writing in response to former Democratic mayoral candidate Thomas Fucillo's "outrage" on user fees.

While I respect the right of Mr. Fucillo to express his opinion, I find his timing and target to be highly partisan.

I would ask Mr. Fucillo to re-read the editorial piece I wrote a few weeks ago and focus upon the fact that Westfield citizens who head our athletic leagues agreed with the concept and accepted that in the long-run, all organizations and children would benefit.

The user fees were unanimously supported by the Westfield citizens who make up our recreation commission. The Westfield Town Council did not introduce the plan without reaching out to the athletic user groups for input, comments and ultimately their support.

Without user fees, we could not support the highly successful teen programs, summer playground and summer sports camps that have exploded in popularity under the guidance of Dee MacKay and Tracy Kastner in our recreation department. Over the last three years, attendance at the summer playground has grown from 894 children in 2003 to 1,500 children in 2005. Attendance at summer sports camps has grown from 220 children to 450 children during the same period. Ms. MacKay and her staff have introduced 21 new programs since she joined the recreation department in 2003, all supported by user fees.

Without user fees, we would not have the A-1 pool facilities at Westfield Memorial Pool, enjoyed by 9,700 members

who are mostly Westfield citizens. The pool expansion project, completed in 2001, is 100 percent supported by user fees.

When I attend the Memorial Pool with my family, I don't see "outrage" on families that pay a reasonable membership fee to relax and socialize at exceptional facilities. All I see is the laughter and smiles of the children and adults who splash into the slide pool or surface from doing "belly flops" and "cannonballs" from the upgraded diving tank.

Might I add that user fees have been instrumental in teaching thousands of Westfield children how to swim over the decades.

In a nutshell, user fees help improve the quality of life of Westfield citizens while enabling the rational allocation of scarce resources. The operating budget of the town's recreation department is less than \$20,000, and tax-supported salaries in this department make up less than 1 percent of the town's total budget.

I think town residents are receiving great value from the leadership of Bruce Kaufmann, Dee MacKay and Tracy Kastner.

Is this really an outrage? Or is Mr. Fucillo's letter an outrage in that it is a politically partisan attempt to discredit volunteer Westfield residents in our athletic leagues, recreation commission and town government who are trying to improve our parks and athletic fields without resorting to property-tax increases?

Peter Echausse
1st Ward Councilman

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