

MS Mayor Discusses Hikes Impacting 2006 Budget

By KIMBERLY A. BROADWELL
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

MOUNTAINSIDE – The borough council is set to introduce its municipal budget Tuesday night. The council was unable to take action at the April 11 meeting due to the lack of quorum. Three of the five council members were not present.

Mayor Vigilanti announced that a work session would be at 7:30 p.m. on Thursday, April 20, prior to the governing body's regular meeting that will begin at 8:30 p.m., to make up for the April 11 meeting.

Although the total budget has not been revealed, Mayor Vigilanti indicated there were nine areas in Mountainside, noting these were all areas that "we have no say in." He added that the increases would total almost \$500,000.

He confirmed that police salaries were up \$120,000; the Mountainside Public Library budget is increasing up by \$62,650 and the Rahway Valley Sewerage Authority fee is rising \$92,238. Mayor Vigilanti reported that borough employee health insurance was increasing by \$35,000, police retirement costs are up by \$90,176 and employee retirement would increase by \$16,466.

The mayor noted that gasoline for vehicles were up by \$11,000 and gas heat for the municipal building was increasing by up \$10,000, while electricity are rising \$8,000. He said with "careful planning," the borough could "absorb some of these costs," noting Mountainside could use some of its "reserve fund" and also its "small surplus."

Mayor Vigilanti concluded by say-

ing the borough had also saved some money within the last year by leasing police vehicles instead of purchasing them. He addition, he said there was a \$13,000 surplus in the snow removal line that could be saved for the following year.

The mayor also said he was working on a proposal for borough employees to help pay for a portion of their health care fees on a sliding scale basis. He said the proposal would state that the sliding scale portion paid by the employee would be for the "family portions only."

Rahway River Cleanup Scheduled Earth Day

AREA – Cub Scout Pack No. 30 of Clark will hold its annual Rahway River clean up on Earth Day, Saturday, April 22. This year, the focus will be on the section of the North Branch (Bloodgood Branch) of the Rahway River upstream and downstream of the dam at Winfield Park.

Interested volunteers should meet at the parking area adjacent to the waterfall of the Rahway River by the dam at Winfield Park at 8:45 a.m. The clean up will mostly take place between 9 a.m. and 1 p.m.

There is a large volume of debris and garbage to remove from the riverbanks and the floodplain. This includes shopping carts, tires and floatables (cans, bottles, plastics, etc). Union County will supply gloves and garbage bags, and material donations (donuts, bagels, coffee, bottled water, paper towels, hand-wipes, etc) to support the volunteers. Last year, over 100 people participated.

Eighteen Vehicle Burglaries Reported In Overnight Spree

By SUZETTE F. STALKER
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD – Eighteen motor vehicle break-ins were reported on Westfield's south side between early Friday evening and Saturday morning, authorities confirmed on Monday.

Captain Clifford Aucther of the Westfield Police Department told *The Westfield Leader* the incidents occurred between 6 p.m. on April 7 and 8 a.m. on April 8.

The overnight spree included seven vehicles on Ayliffe Avenue, two each on Bell Drive, Connecticut Street and

Faulkner Drive and one apiece on Rahway Avenue, Belmar Place, Boulevard, Central Avenue and Washington Street.

Captain Aucther said the vehicles were parked in front of their owners' residences when the break-ins occurred. He said he believed that "most, if not all, were unlocked" at the time. The captain noted that items of small value were removed from almost all of the vehicles.

"We presume they're related," he observed, noting that all the incidents occurred within close proximity to one another.

WACC Announces New, Upcoming Business Events

WESTFIELD – The Westfield Area Chamber of Commerce invites all local business people to its upcoming activities.

The chamber continues to offer speed networking meetings. The next two meetings will take place on Thursday, April 20 and Thursday, May 18 from 12:30 p.m. to 1:30 p.m. at Shackamaxon Golf & Country Club, 1607 Shackamaxon Drive, Scotch Plains. WACC members can participate for \$20 and non-mem-

bers for \$25. Seating is limited; please call the Westfield Chamber to reserve participation. The April event will be facilitated by Denis Marcoux, consultant for The Entrepreneur's Source.

The WACC's Business After Hours will be held Thursday, April 20 from 6 p.m. until 8:30 p.m. at the Grand Summit Hotel, 570 Springfield Avenue in Summit. Sponsored by eight local chambers of commerce, this annual business-to-business expo attracts nearly 100 exhibitors and hundreds of attendees. Food, a cash bar and connections with business leaders from throughout the county will be provided.

On Wednesday, April 26, from 6 p.m. through 7:30 p.m., the chamber will host a Business After Hours Speaker Forum at Commerce Bank, 560 North Avenue East in Westfield. The Chamber welcomes Melanie Willoughby, government relations with New Jersey Business and Industry Association, to discuss "The High Cost of Doing Business in NJ and What We Can Do About It." Admission is free.

For a complete list of upcoming activities, membership benefits, and services, please check the chamber's website at www.westfieldchamber.com or call the chamber at (908) 233-3021.

Chambers to Host Business Expo April 20

SUMMIT – The Grand Summit Hotel at 570 Springfield Avenue in Summit will host the Annual Business After Hours EXPO on April 20, from 6 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. This annual event attracts a large gathering of businessmen and women from Union County and surrounding communities and provides an opportunity to explore business opportunities with local firms in a relaxed atmosphere.

Refreshments will be served and a cash bar is available.

This event is co-sponsored by the Suburban Chambers of Commerce (Summit, New Providence and Berkeley Heights), Westfield Area Chamber, Chatham Area Chamber, Greater Elizabeth Chamber, Gateway Regional Chamber (Union County), Union Township Chamber, and the Millburn-Short Hills Chamber of Commerce. Admission is free, however, reservations are appreciated. For more information, call (908) 522-1700, ext. 16.

Bramnick Holds State House News Conference

TRENTON – Assemblyman Bramnick held a news conference on Wednesday morning asking the governor to allow the investigation team at university hospital to look at other entities.

Asm. Bramnick, R-21, asked the governor to urge U.S. Attorney Chris Christie to send Stern's investigative team to audit other state entities after their work is completed at the hospital. "There is no doubt we need audits, reviews and investigations of many state funded entities," Mr. Bramnick said.

He has repeatedly requested outside audits and has previously introduced "economic SWAT team legislation". Presently, the state government relies on internal audits, which are simply insufficient.

"Every day we learn of abuses that have occurred at UMDNJ. We need to find mismanagement throughout state government in order to save the taxpayers millions of dollars. I suggest the forensic investigation team go straight to the school construction fund as their next project," said Asm. Bramnick.

Westfield Car Shows To be Discontinued

WESTFIELD – Mr. Hans Winberg, President of the Westfield Area Chamber of Commerce confirmed to *The Westfield Leader* yesterday that the traditional summer car shows in the downtown of Westfield will no longer be held. He noted that nothing was ever said bad about the shows, but that it takes a lot of work by the Westfield Chamber of Commerce with little to no benefit.



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POLICE BLOTTER

Westfield

Tuesday, April 4, after being stopped for a motor vehicle violation, Robert A. Roguso, 24, of Maplewood was arrested at Lenox and Central Avenues on an outstanding Garwood traffic warrant. He was released after posting \$125 bail.

Tuesday, April 4, a resident of the 700 block of Grandview Avenue reported being the victim of identity theft after it was discovered someone in Colorado had used his name and Social Security number to open up an account.

Wednesday, April 5, Christopher Merrick, 43, of Somerville was arrested at the south side Westfield train station on a contempt of court warrant from Bound Brook for \$270. The Bound Brook Court recalled the \$270 warrant and substituted one for \$20 that Merrick posted.

Wednesday, April 5, Major Montgomery, 35, of Scotch Plains was arrested in the south side Westfield train station parking lot and charged with possession of less than 50 grams of suspected marijuana and possession of drug paraphernalia. Montgomery was issued a summons and released.

Saturday, April 8, the Westfield Post Office on Central Avenue reported that three of its vehicles were damaged while parked in the post office lot. The windshield on one vehicle was broken, the right side mirror and a windshield wiper were damaged on a second vehicle and the left side mirror was damaged on a third.

Monday, April 10, an 82-year-old Watchung woman had her purse stolen during a strong-arm robbery that occurred in the parking lot of a North Avenue store.

Police received a report at 12:44 p.m. that a black male in his 20s, about six feet tall with a medium build and short hair had approached the victim as she exited the store and grabbed her purse, which she was carrying over her shoulder.

According to Captain Clifford Aucther of the Westfield Police Department, the victim fought back momentarily – tearing the suspect's white T-shirt during the struggle – but he was able to pull the purse out of her hands. The suspect then fled the scene in a waiting vehicle, described as a red or maroon colored Honda, of which he was the driver. There was a passenger in his vehicle, described only as a black male.

The victim sustained a small cut on one of her fingers and was treated by Westfield Rescue Squad personnel.

Based on a partial license plate number obtained during the incident, police believe the vehicle used by the suspects had been stolen in Piscataway within 24 hours prior to the robbery having occurred. Anyone with information is asked to call (908) 789-6086. All calls will be kept confidential.

Scotch Plains

Tuesday, April 4, an incident of theft was reported at a Route 22 gas station. An employee stated that an individual drove into the station and obtained \$10 worth of gas, then fled without paying for it.

Wednesday, April 5, a student at Union County Vocational-Technical

Schools reported the theft of her digital camera from her unlocked locker. The camera was valued at approximately \$300.

Thursday, April 6, a burglary was reported at a Route 22 gas station. One or more unknown persons pried open the attendant's booth and removed cash.

Sunday, April 9, a resident of Country Club reported that one or more unknown individuals entered his motor vehicle and removed several items.

Sunday, April 9, a disorderly person was reported on the premises of a Terrill Road church. Police asked the individual to leave and she complied without further incident.

Mountainside

Thursday, April 6, Altarese Wilson, 30, of Irvington was arrested in Mountainside Municipal Court on an outstanding warrant for \$350 out of Newark. Mountainside police also charged him with possession of suspected Ecstasy. Wilson had been in court for sentencing on a charge of possession of less than 50 grams of suspected marijuana. A search pursuant to the warrant arrest revealed the suspected Ecstasy concealed in a Tic Tac container in Wilson's front left pants pocket.

A New Providence Road resident reported that her five-month-old Golden Retriever was stolen from her yard. The owner reported that the day before the dog disappeared, a black male and two white males had been playing with the dog, named Suede, through her side-yard fence and she suspected they took her dog. Police said Suede is equipped with a micro chip which, when scanned by a vet, would help locate the owner.

Friday, April 7, Jonathan N. Jimenez, 22, of Perth Amboy was arrested at Perth Amboy police headquarters on an outstanding warrant for \$464 out of Mountainside. He was transported to the Union County jail.

Saturday, April 8, police reported that someone attempted to steal a 2003 BMW wagon from a parking lot on Route 22, East. A side passenger window was shattered. No items were reported removed from the vehicle. Police said the crime occurred between 7 and 10 p.m. and there are no suspects at this time.

Sunday, April 9, Keith P. Stewart, 27, of Fanwood was arrested on Route 22 at Sheffield Street and charged with being under the influence. The arrest occurred following a motorcycle accident. Police said Stewart was transported to Overlook Hospital in Summit for evaluation.

Monday, April 10, Diego J. Quiros, 26, of Newark was arrested on Route 22, East near the Springfield line and charged with driving while intoxicated and being an unlicensed driver. He was given a breathalyzer test and released.

Police reported that someone attempted to steal a 1997 Toyota Corolla from the parking lot of a New Providence Road hospital. Police said it is believed the suspect inserted a metal object in the ignition switch. Molding under the steering wheel was pried and wiring exposed. Nothing from the vehicle was removed, police said.

Pennsylvania Ave. Blaze Still Under Investigation

By PAUL J. PEYTON
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD – Fire officials are continuing to investigate the cause of a blaze at a single-family home in Westfield.

The April 4 fire began in a two-car attached garage on the right side of the home, located at 890 Pennsylvania Avenue, and quickly spread to a first-floor kitchen and family room and then up the heating and ventilation ducts to a second-floor bedroom and proceeded into attic space, according to Westfield Fire Chief Dan Kelly.

"The fire spread horizontally and vertically throughout the interior of the dwelling," Chief Kelly said.

The first alarm came in at 11:54 a.m. through a private home alarm system and was followed up with several 9-1-1 calls from neighbors, Chief Kelly said. Upon arrival, firefighters saw "heavy flames and smoke" venting out of the attached garage. Flames also were visible from the first- and second-floor windows.

The blaze was brought under control in 45 minutes. The chief said no firefighter injuries were reported. No one was at home at the time, although the owner's sons responded to the scene.

The chief said 26 firefighters from the Cranford and Westfield fire departments fought the blaze, which began just before noon. He said the home sustained "extensive structural damage" and is not habitable at this time.

He said three all-terrain vehicles that were stored in the garage are believed to have been a "contributing factor" in the fire. One of the vehicles, a Sportsman 500 manufactured by Polaris Industries, is listed on the United States Consumer Product Safety Commission website as being on the recall list.

The Roselle, Plainfield and Springfield fire departments provided mutual aid to Westfield during the fire, which sent three pumper trucks and an engine truck, a utility vehicle and two shifts of firefighters to the scene.

The Area Votes

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Also seeking election are Cathy Jakositz, Geraldene Duswalt and Joseph Tinnirella.

In Garwood, voters will cast ballots on a \$5.2 million tax levy that will decrease taxes for the average assessed home by \$13. The total tax levy is down \$87,075. Unlike Mountainside, Garwood taxes are going down due to funds received through the breakup several years ago of the regional school district. The total school budget this year is \$7,408,099.

Garwood residents will select two board members from a list of five candidates, which includes incum-

ber Adele Lewis who is board president and is employed as board secretary for the Garwood and Maplewood planning boards; board member Barbara Greet and Susan Groning, a life-long borough resident. Running for a one-year unexpired seat are incumbent James Matheson and challenger Lisa Marano, a member of the Parent-Teacher Association.

Mr. Matheson filed Monday as a candidate for borough council. Borough Clerk Christine Ariemma said if Mr. Matheson is elected to both positions he would only be able to serve on one.

WF-BOE Report

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Dr. Mary Fleck, principal of Franklin Elementary School, added, "I think we're very much in line with what some other districts are doing... it's a tough issue."

Dr. Foley said the total budget increase is 4.05 percent over last year. The tax increase for the \$68.2 million school levy, if passed by voters, would be 3.85 percent, or \$2.8 million over last year, he said. Taxpayers would pay an increase of \$253 for a home assessed at \$179,600 to support the local public schools.

Eighty-six percent of the budget would be funded by local property taxes, 6 percent by state aid, 3 percent from federal aid and 5 percent by other sources, the superintendent said.

Dr. Foley stressed that state aid has remained flat for six years. "We're glad we didn't get a cut."

He added, "I don't have any control over what Trenton does. You have to

decide whether it's affordable."

Dr. Foley said if the school tax levy is defeated, cuts would most likely come from the areas of general education, administration, athletics and co-curricular activities. He said support services and class size would probably be affected.

"I don't want to do that," he said. "The community has to tell the board what kind of education it can afford. "Don't vote (the budget) down because you're mad at me or you're mad at your child's teacher," he said, adding that a "quality" education requires a budget.

Board member Beth Cassie, who attended the meeting and is seeking her second term, added, "It's not okay to say that you're too busy to vote. This is the most important thing you need to do."

The school board and budget election is Tuesday, April 18 from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m.



11 am to 5 pm - Rain or Shine

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Non-Stop Entertainment - Performances by The Vinyl Addicts, Hoi Polloi,
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