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Paul Peyton
ASSIGNMENT EDITOR
Suzette F. Stalker
COMMUNITY
Michael Pollack
EDUCATION & ARTS
Victoria McCabe
JOURNALIST

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Horace R. Corbin
PUBLISHER
David B. Corbin
ASSISTANT PUBLISHER & SPORTS
Karen M. Hinds
OFFICE MANAGER

Fred K. Lecomte
MARKETING DIRECTOR
Michael L. Bartiromo
MARKETING PRODUCTION
Robert P. Connelly
OPERATIONS & LEGALS
Ben Corbin
SERVICES

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Letters to the Editor

BOE President Thanks 5,000 Voters In Westfield; Highest Total In 30 Yrs.

I continue to feel lucky to live in a town like Westfield that places such a high value on education. Last Tuesday, the community demonstrated its commitment to education by supporting the annual school budget. It's not easy in these times of high taxation to make this commitment. I want to thank the 5,000 residents who took the time to vote; this turnout was the highest level in 30 years (26 percent of registered voters).

I also want to thank those who supported me personally in my re-election to the board. Looking forward, we face many challenges, including the immediate hurdles of replacing the high-school principal and solving enrollment issues at the elementary and intermediate school levels. I'll continue to try to base my decisions on what's good for our children and their families.

The level of the public's participation in the school election should make the community feel proud. Getting the budget passed this year was truly a team effort, reflecting the involvement of the Parent-Teacher Council's (PTC) Budget Task Force and the PTO/A Presidents, the Westfield Education Association who encouraged parents and all teachers living in Westfield to vote, as well as private citizens and organized groups such as the Westfield Boosters and Coalition for the Arts.

I especially appreciate the efforts of my colleagues on the Board and Dr. Foley, Bob Berman, Lorre Korecky and the other district staff who worked so hard to expand our community outreach efforts and develop a budget that the community could support. Thanks also to the local press for their coverage of our budget process again this year.

Congratulations to Beth Cassie and Jane Clancy; I look forward to working together this year. Thanks to candidate Doug Stokes for his interest in our schools as well. Also, I want to express so much thanks and appreciation to Kim Rhodes, who completed six years as an active, insightful member of the board. She'll truly be missed.

Two-way communication between the community and the board remains as vital as ever. If there is feedback about the budget vote or other topics that you'd like to share, please feel free to e-mail the board at boe@westfieldnj12.org.

Anne Riegel
President, Westfield BOE

Perhaps It's Time to Reexamine The Open Space Tax Concept

The concept of open space trust funds started at the state level in New Jersey in 1998. Governor Christine Todd Whitman wrote, "We have embarked on an historic effort to preserve and protect one million acres of open space and farmland over the next 10 years."

Senate President Donald DiFrancesco wrote in October 1998, "Yes Vote on Second Question will keep New Jersey green into 21st century and beyond. New Jersey citizen, passing Ballot Question No. 1 will allow us to protect New Jersey's open spaces without raising taxes. In fact, it does not contain any additional cost to the taxpayer at all. The proposal relies on \$98 million a year for the next 10 years from existing sales-tax revenue to purchase open space, farmland and historic sites, as well as to provide a total of \$1 billion dedicated to protecting these natural resources."

The public overwhelmingly approved the Ballot Question.

Mayor Geri Samuel in 1999 brought a municipal open space tax to Scotch Plains to be funded "at a rate not to exceed \$.02 per \$100 of total municipal real property valuation."

Township officials said revenue generated by the tax will go primarily toward local baseball fields and parks. It was estimated then that the new tax would generate \$187,000 each year for the next 10 years.

This newspaper wrote in September of 1999: "it is imperative...to look closely at the impact this could have on the overall property tax picture—not just the increase of dollars per taxpayer needed to support an open space program."

In 2000, Union County joined the open space tax bandwagon. Freeholder Angel Estrada explained that the county has just 103 square miles of landmass, but a population of a half-million people. "One of the problems for Union County is that there is not enough available land, at least that I have seen, to be turned over into parks," he said.

Union County taxpayers passed an annual tax increase of \$.02 per \$100 of assessed valuation. That rate would channel \$6.5 million into a Union County Open Space Trust Fund each year. The tax would

generate \$65 million for the county over 10 years, to be used for development of the county's parks and recreation system, for the acquisition of open space for the county and for towns to purchase open space and develop local parks.

Concerns started to creep into the open space tax program.

In April of 2000, while supporting the trust fund, Summit Councilwoman Cynthia Martin suggested language be included "to clearly indicate that the money be used to acquire open space rather than immediately funding development." Ms. Martin wanted to see the tax capped at one cent. "Three to four cents is too burdensome on Summit."

In April of 2002 our editorial read, "County should not use taxpayers' open space funds for developer projects. While the Union County Freeholders' recent decision to approve the \$9-million acquisition of 63 acres of land in Summit for open space purposes was a worthy one, the almost-simultaneous admission that some of that same property could eventually be sold to developers was troubling."

In October 2003, Senator Nicholas Scutari, then a freeholder, said, "This (open space) includes the 23-acre tract in Scotch Plains known as the Seville Property, which would have otherwise been a prime target for housing and retail development."

At the County Freeholder Candidate's Debate of November 2005 in Cranford: "I don't think the money is being used properly. Voters aren't getting what they voted on," Mrs. Pat Quattrocchi responded, referring to the fact that money put aside to purchase open space was not used to preserve land but to purchase the Union County Arts Center in Rahway, as well as plans to build a children's museum."

In February of 2006, the county reversed its position and scrapped the proposed Green Meadows Farm in Scotch Plains at the Seville property.

Regardless of what Mr. DiFrancesco said in 1998 about the open space tax, we don't think the public actually believed him that something magic will happen and it will not cost the taxpayer anything.

Perhaps it's time to examine just what the public is actually getting with all these open space taxes.

Superintendent Thanks the School Board and Westfield Community

The approval of the 2006-07 Westfield school budget on April 18 by 1,146 votes reflected a vote of confidence for the Board of Education, but more than that, it was an indication that education is a priority in our town.

For the first time in 33 years, 26 percent of Westfield voters came to the polls. This is significantly more than the 12-18 percent we have experienced in recent years. A good deal of the credit for the voter turnout goes to the Parent Teacher Council Budget Task Force, who generated a system of reminders during the weeks prior to the election.

I also appreciate the tremendous effort of our board members who conducted every budget meeting in public for over three months, responded to public recommendations by expanding voting hours, and demonstrated fiscal restraint by proposing a moderate increase to the budget that included replacement of certain textbooks and computers, repair of two roofs and the intention to hire four new elementary teachers to accommodate the largest first grade enrollment since 1970.

I am grateful for the support of the community on these initiatives. I congratulate Anne Riegel and Beth

Cassie on their re-election to the board and welcome Jane Clancy as a new member of the board. Thank you to Doug Stokes for his sincere interest in serving the community, and I wish continued success to Jesse Garfinkel as he enters college life.

We are indeed fortunate to have such qualified people in Westfield who are committed to our children.

As we prepare for 2006-07, we will continue to deliberate on possible solutions to face the challenges created by our enrollment growth. On May 2, at 8:30 p.m. at Jefferson School, the Citizens Advisory Committee on Enrollment (CACE) will present to the Board of Education its recommendations on enrollment imbalances at the elementary and intermediate level. The public is welcomed to attend or to watch the taping of the meeting on Blue Devils TV36.

I will hold additional meetings at other locations through the month of May. Input from the public will be of paramount importance as we continue to plan for the years ahead.

William Foley, Ed.D.
Superintendent of the Westfield Public Schools

Letters to the Editor

Volunteering Spirit Is Heart of United Way

The spirit of volunteering is the heart of the Westfield United Way.

This is National Volunteer Week, a week when America makes a special effort to recognize the contribution of hundreds of thousands of volunteers.

At the Westfield United Way, we don't need a special week because volunteers are at the heart of the Westfield United Way every day.

When the Westfield United Way reaches out, volunteers help do the stretching. The volunteers and non-profit agencies of the Westfield United Way work hard to make your generosity felt through our entire community.

So, to our volunteers, we say thank you for every person you have touched. Thank you for your time, your talents, and your treasures. People often say, "Westfield is different." One of the primary ways in which we are different is the level of caring and the involvement of our fellow Westfielders.

So, a thousand times, thank you!

Linda B. Maggio
Executive Director
Westfield United Way

Voters Should Be Informed at Polls When Candidate Drops Out of Race

As you know by now, the school budget passed 3:2 (3,099 yes; 1,953 no). The two incumbents won, as they usually do, Jane Clancy took the third spot with 2,764 votes and Douglas Stokes had 2,302.

What troubles me is that Jesse Garfinkel received 958 votes. That's certainly more than enough to have possibly changed the outcome of the board of ed election.

I know that he withdrew after the ballots were printed, and I wish him well in college, but either some or all of those 958 voters didn't know or voted for him out of protest.

Protest can be a good thing, it can send a message, but all they did was waste their vote.

Shouldn't there be some mechanism for notifying the voters when you sign at the polls that there has been a change in the ballot? A large, brightly colored, prominently placed sign at each polling station, as well as the election workers informing you of this, would reduce these wasted votes. The teachers sending home reminders to parents to vote with a list of the four remaining candidates helps only those with kids in the public school system.

If your kids go to a private school, or you don't have kids in the system, you never see that note. You might have read it in this newspaper, but after the announcement a couple of weeks ago, you might have forgotten, especially if you've returned from vacation with the kids. If you're like us, without cable TV, you can't get that information that way either. You need that final reminder at the polling booth and there has to be a way of getting that important information across at the moment when it is most important.

Every vote counts in every election. This was brought home in the general election when the fourth ward council seat was determined by just one vote. While there is no question on the outcome of the school budget, imagine what could have happened if these 958 votes were otherwise distributed amongst the candidates for the board of education.

Jeffrey Messing
Westfield

Mrs. Szot Embodies Everything One Could Want As A Teacher

I was sent a copy of your article regarding Mrs. Dorothy Szot of Holy Trinity School. I must admit I have been out of Westfield for many years but have always had a soft spot for the school and Mrs. Szot. My husband and I were presidents of the school board when our child was attending the school.

We always felt that Mrs. Szot embodied everything one could want as a teacher and leader of a school. Obviously I do not know the complaints but am quite sure that the values that most people are looking for when they choose a parochial school have not changed in the mind and heart of Dorothy Szot.

In observing the world condition today, holding on to some of our old ideals doesn't sound like a bad idea to me. As far as curriculum, I would assume she and

Holy Trinity School Pastors Should Return Principal to Her Position

I am very disappointed and upset with the three pastors who co-sponsor Holy Trinity Interparochial School. By refusing to renew the contract of the principal, Mrs. Szot, they have blatantly denied her respect, dignity and gratitude she has so justly earned and deserves.

In her 40 years of service to Catholic community, and Westfield, she has enriched the lives of thousands of students, academically and spiritually. Her compassion, understanding, generosity and love have encompassed them all.

Additionally, her dedication to academic excellence is unsurpassed. Her philosophy of education and desire to help each and every child has made Holy Trinity Interparochial School a unique and successful institution. Her strong Christian values permeate the walls of this school and her students most often return to thank her for her wisdom and guidance.

Personally, I have had the privilege of knowing and working for this extraordinary woman for 14 years. She is my principal, teacher, confidant, advisor and good friend. I have the utmost respect for her decisions and professionalism.

I implore the three pastors of Holy Trinity Interparochial School to correct the injustice they created and restore to her the position she has served with distinction.

Maureen Quinn
Westfield

Does Westfield Still Care About Overdevelopment?

It seems that it does not after the town's planning board recently approved a development project for a building at 751 Central Avenue over the protests of many neighbors. Many residents of Myrtle and Central Avenues, on the corner of which the property is located, are very concerned about the proposed project, which seems to represent the definition of overdevelopment.

The two-story property, with residential Myrtle Avenue behind it and two-family homes directly across from it, was previously used as an office building. There was no excessive noise or activity associated with it and a small number of vehicles generally parked in the lot. The current proposal to develop the building includes a third story and rear addition so the property can accommodate a bank with two drive-up lanes on the first floor, office space on the second floor and apartments on the third floor. It also includes expanding the parking lot.

We, as neighbors, are quite distressed about this project for a number of reasons including serious traffic and safety issues related to the proposed drive-up lanes, the deterioration of the character of our neighborhood and the numerous variances required by the project. These variances include the degree of screening, lighting and distance to adjacent property of the parking lot, as well as lot coverage and building height, among others.

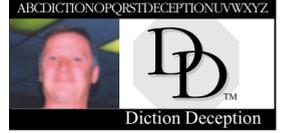
If this development project does not represent the definition of overdevelopment, I do not know what does.

We have all read and heard so much around town about overdevelopment by way of McMansions. However, McMansions are still generally attractive homes, albeit at times out of scale with the lot or neighboring homes. Although some people do not like McMansions and feel they change the character of surrounding neighborhoods in a negative way, it is unlikely that the presence of McMansions brings down the value of surrounding homes, and in many cases, it probably causes their value to go up.

On the other hand, the development of the property at 751 Central Avenue will have no benefit to neighbors and will arguably reduce the value of our properties. It is understandable that the owners of commercial properties want to maximize the cash-generating potential of their properties, just as builders try to maximize their return by building McMansions. But isn't it time that the leaders of the Town of Westfield stepped up to control this overdevelopment in this often-forgotten corner of Westfield just as they have done to control the spread of McMansions in other areas of town?

I strongly urge town leaders to take action to have this project scaled back before it sets a precedent for other such projects, unless this is the way the residents of Westfield want their town developed.

Virginia Cosenza
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.

- Yird – Scottish for earth
- Laurin – A fatty, acrid, crystalline substance contained in the berries of the laurel
- Thesmothete – A legislator or lawgiver
- Proterandry – The maturation of the male organs of reproduction in advance of the female organs

- CYPHONISM**
- A state of purification or having impurities removed
 - The study of the mammary gland and its milk-producing secretions
 - A form of ancient punishment consisting of smearing the victim with honey and exposing him to insects
 - Blood letting as a form of medical practice
- TOHUBOHU**
- A gum resin which oozes from the Indian hemp
 - Mixed or jumbled
 - Minced chicken or veal, mixed with eggs and bread crumbs
 - Chaos
- CATABASIS**
- A chamber in a Greek church, under the altar, where relics are kept
 - A mountain pass
 - In anatomy, the study of involuntary muscle contractions
 - A slaughterhouse for cattle
- MELIC**
- Producing honey
 - Of song or poetry
 - Well-formed; symmetrical
 - Resembling a grape cluster in form

Partisan Releases Are Not Real News

On the second page of your April 20 issue, you published what purported to be a news item with the headline "Kean: Menendez Misleads Students and Teacher." Other than a single sentence introduction by your paper (which incorrectly described Mr. Menendez as the "challenger" when he is the current U.S. Senator from New Jersey), the item was nothing more than a verbatim reprint, all in quotation marks, of a press release by State Senator Tom Kean, Jr.

This was hardly a news item, although it was given some six column inches of space. If it was a news item, it was not balanced by the inclusion of objective reporting or comments from Mr. Menendez.

Partisan political press releases like this should not be held out as news and do not belong on the news pages of the paper where readers might misconstrue it as news. At best, they belong in a section of the paper specifically identified as being for such press releases, as you usually do for the candidates in the local school board, mayoral and town council elections.

Charles Stotter
Westfield

BOE Member-Elect Thanks Voters

First, I would like to congratulate all of the people who worked so hard on "getting the word out" about this year's school budget. The public was truly informed throughout the entire process and while the decision to vote "yes" might not necessarily have been an easy one to make, it was a critical one.

Next, I would like to say how honored I am to be elected to the (Westfield) Board of Education and to applaud all of the candidates for their hard work and dedication. I am appreciative of the support from our community and am looking forward to begin facing the many challenges that lie ahead. I am prepared to listen to and learn from our community and to make well-thought-out and careful decisions.

I know that serving on the board can sometimes be a difficult and demanding job, and I want to thank my family in advance for their support. I would not be able to do it without them.

We are grateful to be a part of the entire Westfield community, and I sincerely thank my family, friends and supporters for giving me this opportunity to help contribute to the cherished future of our town and our children.

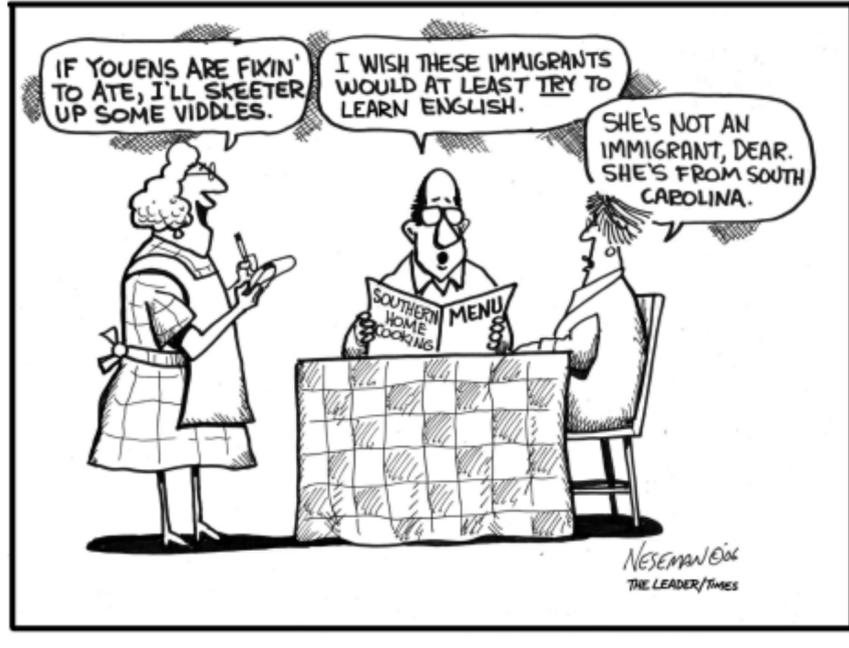
Jane Clancy
Westfield

Congratulations to the WF-BOE Winners

I congratulate the candidates who were elected and I am proud of the Westfield voters for supporting education and our children's futures by passing the budget. I will remain involved in the Westfield community by continuing to serve on the Westfield Memorial Library Board of Trustees and by supporting the Westfield Public School system.

I would like to thank my family, friends and the Westfield Community for all of their help and support during my campaign for the Board of Education. I am honored to have received the support of so many of you and I thank you!

Doug Stokes
Westfield



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Phone - (908) 232-4407
Mail-PO Box 250, Westfield 07091
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