

THE STUDENT VIEW

The weekly column written by local high school students

During Violent Rumors, WHS Achieves 'Normalcy'

By NEIL FITZPATRICK
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

Rumors of threats caused a stir at the high school this April 20 when the significance of the date was realized as both the anniversary of Columbine and Hitler's birthday. Many kids missed school as word of a possible shooting spread.

As I sat in school last Thursday taking notes in half-empty class rooms, I found myself becoming angry with my teachers for punishing those students who showed up with a seemingly endless stream of work. I felt I should have been rewarded simply for my attendance on such an unusual and originally anxious day.

This desire manifested itself again when I heard that one fourth of Westfield High School had stayed home on April 20. Why? Was it out of genuine fear of a rumor with seemingly no basis other than the violent significance of the date? Whose fear was it, the parents' or the child's? Or

was the absence simply out of a desire for a day off? After all, who would say no to a day off? Why did I not take the day off? What, exactly, was the right thing to do?

All of the questions seemed to boil down to the basic issue of fear and how we allow it to govern our lives. It seems logical that if one were to stay home on such a day as last Thursday, a day which with the added police force was most likely the safest day of the year, then one would have to be absent every other day of the year as well. After all, what is to stop a conspirator from changing the date of the action to a less conspicuous one?

However, the notion of missing every day because of what-if scenarios is not only irrational but also impossible. Instead, life would have to go on as normal with the knowledge of such a grim possibility ever present but not hindering daily functions in any way. Normalcy is, in fact, what went on April 20 at the high school, and originally what bothered me so much until I recognized it as a positive thing.

The normalcy showed that the faculty and kids would not allow fear to dominate routine and, thereby, took away its power to divide.

Neil is a sophomore at Westfield High School.

WF's Michael Agresta Named Kean Scholar

WESTFIELD - Kean University's New Jersey Center for Science, Technology and Mathematics Education (NJCSME) awarded 41 full-tuition scholarships to first-year students, including Michael Agresta, a 2005 graduate of Westfield High School.

Of the 277 scholarships awarded, 143 foundation scholarships totaling \$265,000 were presented, constituting the largest numbers of their kind in the history of the university.

The endowed foundation scholarships are awarded to students based on a variety of requirements, such as SAT score, GPA and/or financial need. Foundation scholarships are also awarded to students who are enrolled in a specific degree program, have graduated from a particular high school or are of a non-traditional college age.

Romano Makes Dean's List at Wash. College

WESTFIELD - Washington College in Chestertown, Md. announced its Dean's List for the fall 2005 semester.

Westfield resident Christine Romano, a senior, earned Dean's List distinction. She is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Nicholas Romano. Christine is majoring in Human Development.

Students who made the Dean's List achieved a grade point average of 3.4 or higher for the semester.

UPCOMING FREE DIVORCE SEMINAR

The Family Law Department of the Cranford law firm of Dughi & Hewit, P.C. is pleased to announce that a free three part divorce seminar will be conducted April 27th, May 4th and May 11, 2006. The seminars will take place at the Short Hills Hilton.

Following the initial presentation each evening, there will be opportunity to ask questions of the panelists both on a group basis and individually. In addition, all attendees shall receive a free 1/2 hour office consultation at a subsequent date.

Reservations are required but no names are needed. If you feel you have interest and can benefit from attending one or all three of the seminars, you may contact the law firm at (908) 272-0200.

The seminar will be presented by the Chair of the firm's Family Law Department, Mario C. Gurreri, Esq., who has 34 years of experience in the field. He will be accompanied by his two partners, Richard A. Outhwaite, Esq. and April L. Katz, Esq.

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SCIENCE NON FICTION...Winners at the Park Middle School 2006 Science Fair include: Disha Rao, Dylan Sands, Justin Glock, Gregory Kashmer, Elise Ringel, Samantha Renfree, Madeline Krema, Bobby Evans and Sonali Kamath.



MUSIC TO HER EARS...Karen Yula, a Jefferson School music teacher and this year's Westfield Rotary Club's Philhower Fellowship winner, concludes an instructional lesson prior to a surprise visit by Superintendent of Schools William Foley, announcing her selection for the annual elementary teacher of the year award.

Karen Yula Garners Philhower Fellowship

WESTFIELD - Karen Yula, music teacher at Jefferson School in Westfield, is the 2006 recipient of the Westfield Rotary Club's Philhower Fellowship in recognition of outstanding teaching at the elementary school level.

Nancy Jackson, president of the Rotary Club, presented Ms. Yula with the award at the Rotary Club luncheon on April 25, at which Ms. Yula was the guest of honor. She will also be honored at a reception at Jefferson School on May 2 at 7:30 p.m. prior to the Board of Education meeting.

Ms. Yula has been with the Westfield Public Schools for her entire 29-year teaching career, beginning at the former Grant School and then teaching at Wilson and Washington Schools for several years. In addition, she taught at Roosevelt Intermediate School for one year. She is one of the directors of the All-City Chorus, a Westfield elementary school auditioned group.

Her interest in teaching and in music extends beyond the school day. In the summer, Ms. Yula offers a music-enrichment program for third, fourth and fifth graders through a group called Artists Performing and Entertaining. She is also a fully certified yoga instructor in the area and incorporates yogic skills in the classroom. A graduate of Kean College, she holds a degree in vocal and instrumental music K-12.

In accepting the award, Ms. Yula said she "feels blessed to do what she

loves and continues to love after all these 29 years."

The Philhower Fellowship was established in 1993 by the Rotary Club to honor former Westfield Educator and Rotarian Charles Philhower and to recognize the importance of teaching in the elementary grades. This is the first year that the award is designated for a special area teacher in the Westfield public schools.

Westfield BOE to Hear Enrollment Suggestions

WESTFIELD - The Westfield Board of Education will receive a report from the Citizens Advisory Committee on Enrollment (CACE) at its meeting to be held Tuesday, May 2, at 8:30 p.m. in Jefferson School, 1200 Boulevard.

The report will consist of the committee's recommendations on dealing with the enrollment imbalances at the elementary and intermediate levels in the district. The public is welcomed to attend. The business meeting will directly follow a 7:30 p.m. celebration in honor of Jefferson School's music teacher, Karen Yula, who is the 2006 Westfield Rotary Philhower Fellowship recipient.

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WHEN:
7:30 - 9:00 pm
Wednesday May 15th

For more information, please contact the Adult School at:

(908) 232-4050

or

adultschool@westfieldnj.com

NOTE: The class WILL NOT MEET at Westfield High School May 1st

Education Matters

Communication Between PTC, School Leaders Is Vital

By Mary Thompson
President, Westfield Parent-Teacher Council

I am very proud to be a part of the Parent Teacher Council (PTC), which is an umbrella organization that oversees the activities of all Westfield school's Parent Teacher Organizations. Our goals include: coordinating the activities of the individual parent-teacher groups, promoting a liaison between the parents and the schools and promoting the welfare of children and youth.

We meet twice a month at the Board of Education administration building to review district-wide projects, where Dr. William Foley and our BOE president and vice president provide us with an update of their activities. This forum not only provides an excellent opportunity for parent representatives to become informed about what's happening in our school district, but also provides an opportunity for dialogue between our parents, the superintendent of schools, and our BOE representatives, who are eager to receive feedback and hear about our parents' and students' real life experiences.

We strongly encourage our parent community to become PTC representatives, attend these meetings or be involved with the many committees the PTC supports.

The vitality of these committees may be measured by their accomplishments. The Bikers, Runners, and Kids are Entitled to Safety (BRAKES) committee, headed up by Sara Strohecker and Deirdre Geline, continues to address school safety issues, promotes "Walk to School Day" and is currently working on the idea of "Walking School Buses" in conjunction with the town.

Merry Wisler and Julie Tarr took the lead of our Budget Task Force. With their group diligently working this year to "get the vote out," the results of the election prove their efforts paid off. Under our Educational Studies Committee, the School Nutritional Awareness Council (SNAC), chaired by Sara McKeown and Lisa Bleich, has infiltrated our schools not only with information about healthy eating, but at Westfield High School, SNAC has been successful in identifying nutritional food choices with the "SNAC" label.

In recent years, educational initiatives included a review of our technology needs and the organization of our guidance counselor departments. Our Music

and Fine Arts Committee continues to successfully promote Youth Art Month, and Louise Dedeo, our PANDA (Prevention Awareness of Narcotics, Drugs and Alcohol) chair, is reaching such heights as to discuss its role in our curriculum. Our Special Education Committee, guided by Fee Butrick, Annie Corley-Hand and Maryann Gingrich, has generated increased interest and attendance at their evening presentations, led by experienced professionals.

It's been a privilege to work with this dynamic group of individuals, as well as with all of the PTO/PTSO Presidents. As a relatively small group of individuals, it is quite rewarding to experience the substantive achievements, which have benefited the Westfield students at all grade levels. I am grateful that we have such a dedicated and dynamic group of community leaders to represent us.

The Parent Teachers Council also establishes scholarships for graduating seniors at Westfield High School. Last year, 18 students received scholarships totaling \$33,500. The PTC supports our students in many ways - through these scholarships, our active role on committees, and through communication with other parents and the school administration in a community where education continues to be a high priority.

Taylor Swaak Lauded In State Essay Contest

SCOTCH PLAINS - Taylor Swaak, a fifth-grade student at Park Middle School in Scotch Plains, is one of 75 semifinalists chosen out of 7,000 New Jersey students who participated in the Letters about Literature essay contest administered through New Jersey schools in November 2005. Taylor wrote to J.K. Rowling about the Harry Potter series.

The awards ceremony will be held on Monday, May 15 at the Governor's Mansion in Princeton.

The Letters about Literature contest is run by the Center for the Book from the Library of Congress. Students are asked to write a letter to an author explaining how that book or work affected the student. Entries are first sent to the national office for an initial round of judging. New Jersey's teachers and school librarians sent 7000 entries. Only about one percent of the 7000 entries became semifinalists.



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