



A JOB WELL DONE...Garwood Mayor Dennis McCarthy thanks borough Boy Scouts for cleaning up the North Avenue bus stop. From left to right, are: Mayor McCarthy, Trevor Boan, Jake Boan, Nick Galatioto, Mike Boan, Matt Moore, Michael Kandel, Ryan Baron, Ryan Poladian and Brendan Bucciarelli.

WF Board of Ed. President: Union County 'Likely' Candidate for Pilot

Editor's Note: The following letter was received at press deadline yesterday.

On Tuesday, the Westfield Board of Education received word that Union County was a likely candidate for a 10-year pilot program to create a county-wide school district. Assembly Bill 8 was passed late at night, along partisan lines with absolutely no input from the communities affected. As of Tuesday, our own representatives in Trenton had not received the latest copy of the bill.

Somewhere in the effort to reduce property taxes — a goal that seems to have been lost — legislation has emerged that punishes suburban school districts. Assembly Bill 8 calls for the Board of Chosen Freeholders to apply for participation in the pilot program to the Commissioner of Education, who will select one county to participate. Citizens of the chosen county have no opportunity to vote on the county's participation or even be heard on the application process.

Management of the local school district will be turned over to an appointed county board of education, a county superintendent and a series of district supervisors. Substituting each community's own officials for state appointed officials is a reorganization of structure; it is not the same as saving money. Boards of education in the pilot county will be relegated to a purely advisory role or have the choice to dissolve. The positions of

superintendent of schools, as well as all other district level supervisory staff, will be abolished.

The pilot county program is designed to take decision-making away from local communities without any guarantee of cost savings or continued quality education. There will be a study at the end of the 10-year pilot to determine if there was a cost savings. In the interim, quality school districts will be decimated and residents left to pick up the pieces. The idea of consolidation is to regionalize the state's smallest districts, not some of the largest.

The only ray of hope is that the bill does not become law. The Senate will cast its vote on these critical issues today. It matters little whether the ultimate target of this bureaucratic assault is Union, Morris or Middlesex. The setback to local education will be felt for a generation. Call your senator and stop the madness. Tell our governor and legislators that we sent them to Trenton to fix property taxes, not to make school districts a source of political patronage. Tell the governor and our legislators that we are angry about a political process closed from public view. We are entitled to be heard on any proposal that affects the education of our children and our property values.

Anne Riegel
President
Westfield Board of Education

County Expects Bike Master Plan by March 2007

By PAUL J. PEYTON
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

CRANFORD — Officials expect a draft of Union County's Comprehensive Bicycle Master Plan to be unveiled by March, with the final document released in June, they announced Tuesday. The revised map and supporting documents aim to create safer bike pathways throughout the county.

Liza Betz of the county's division of planning and community development, which held Tuesday's meeting at the Cranford Recreation and Parks Department, said the \$150,000 project was funded in part through a grant from the North Jersey Transportation Authority and included county funds.

According to a county December 4 press release, the project "is designed to encourage the functional and recreational use of bicycles in Union County."

The meeting was the second as part of the county's effort to update its bicycle master plan, which dates back to 1982. The project is being led by the RBA Group and includes the Louis Berger Group, Eng-Wong, Taub & Associates and Fitzgerald & Halliday, Inc.

"We are looking for some input about on- and off-road facilities (bike trails). What and where might those be," said Bettina Zimny, director of planning for the Morristown-based RBA Group.

A number of stakeholders, including municipal and county officials, attended Tuesday's meeting to give input by identifying existing routes and creating new ones based on existing conditions.

"Ultimately, when we wrap up the project, we want to have proposed concepts that can be fed into the funding pipeline so that real things can be built along the county roadways and in the county area," Ms. Zimny said.

Marcy Miller of Fitzgerald & Halliday, Inc., said attendees at a previous meeting indicated that the county needs improved bike facilities, safer conditions and more areas for recreational use for bicyclists. Some residents said bikes are an alternative to automobiles, but while "very desirable, [they are] not always safe."

"Parents want a sense of security if their kids are walking and biking,"

Ms. Walker said, noting that residents have said biking — for commuting, shopping and recreation — needs to be safe and convenient.

"We want to create practical routes and agreeable routes that people actually ride and walk on," she said.

Ms. Miller said the consultants looked at on-street and off-street bike routes to come up with minimal standards, such as drainage and pavement treatments to alleviate pavement cracking.

She said Shared Roadway Pavement Markings could help to dedicate pathways for bikers and walkers — "this lets the bicyclist know what's the best placement for them. It's kind of a guide." She said this concept is being considered in the updated county plan.

Phil Falcone, a former Westfield resident who was active with B.R.A.K.E.S. (Bikers And Kids Entitled to Safety), said, "It really comes down to whether a shared roadway is a good choice for spending taxpayer dollars versus trying off-road bike routes."

Sean Ryan, a planner with the county, said, "One of the big advantages the county has is that it is one of the few counties in the United States that has a linked park system. North, south, east, west, along all the major river corridors there are huge tracks of linear greenways... Originally, they meant to flatten these things and put roads and walkways and facilities. There is ample room to put bicycle facilities circulation stuff for these big greenways through the parks."

A bicyclist himself, Mr. Ryan said Union County is "a dangerous place" for bikers. "You can be the best bicyclist in the world, and there are so many cars that someone will come along and not be paying attention... and you know the results are tragic," he said.

Andy Paluri, an engineer with the Berger Group in Florham Park, said New Jersey "is more densely populated than Japan and India."

Another goal is to establish a corridor that bikers can use from north to south, east and west, as well as potential connections to bike trails in surrounding counties and train stations on the NJ Transit's Raritan Valley Line.

Mountainside Swears In New Police Patrolman

By JESSICA JASKULA
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

MOUNTAINSIDE — Mayor Robert Vigilanti swore in William Stolting on Tuesday as police patrolman for the Mountainside Police Department for a one-year probationary period.

"This is the first time in 20 years that I've sworn in a police officer," the mayor said.

Mr. Stolting, a former Mountainside resident, is a graduate of the John Stamler Police Academy.

In an introduction of the inductee, Councilman Keith Turner said 16 Stamler graduates were asked to interview for the position and from those candidates, Councilmen Glenn Mortimer, Paul Mirabelli and Mr. Turner Mr. Turner and Police Chief James Debbie reviewed the top four.

"We felt Mr. Stolting was the best of the top four," said Mr. Turner. "He graduated number one out of 57 in the academy; he obviously impressed the police interview committee."

Mr. Stolting replaces Officer Annotichi, who relocated to Colorado.

In other business, Robert Shank, account executive for TelVue Virtual Television Networks, presented the company's proposed enhancement for the borough's local access television

SP Public Works

Director Indicted In Hunterdon County

By FRED T. ROSSI
Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

SCOTCH PLAINS — Township public works director Charles Cerami was indicted in Hunterdon County on Tuesday for allegedly keeping more than \$200 from scrap metal sales during his tenure as public works director in Clinton Township.

The indictment in Superior Court in Flemington charged that Mr. Cerami sought to "obtain a benefit for himself" by keeping the proceeds from various scrap metal sales between May 2003 and September 2005 instead of returning those funds to the Clinton Township government. The Hunterdon County Prosecutor said Mr. Cerami faces a maximum fine of \$150,000, five to 10 years in jail or both.

Earlier this year, the prosecutor's office conducted an investigation of the public works department in Clinton Township, but it is unclear whether the indictment was connected to that inquiry. Mr. Cerami's departure from his former position was one in a series of sweeping personnel changes undertaken by the new mayor in Clinton Township.

Mr. Cerami succeeded Walter DiNizo as Scotch Plains' public works director in February after serving as director in Clinton Township since 2002. Prior to that, he was public works director in Belleville for about seven years.

During this fall's election campaign, Scotch Plains Democrats made an issue of how the township public works department was being managed under Mr. Cerami and also called attention to the earlier Hunterdon County investigation. Democrat Kevin Glover, who was elected to the council in November, told *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times* he did not have a comment on the indictment. "We have to let the facts come out," he said, although he added that the news "makes me somewhat concerned."

Mr. Glover said he was "curious how the administration is going to deal with it."

Attempts to reach Mr. Cerami, Township Manager Thomas Atkins and Mayor Martin Marks on Wednesday were unsuccessful.

WF BOA

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picnicking in warm weather; if built, the home would rob the yard of sunlight, she said.

During discussion, board chairman William Heinbokel said he felt that the stacked parking arrangement would likely prove cumbersome, with the likely result being underutilization of the parking. Since the curb cut would remove the one space in front of the home, no real improvement to the parking situation would result, he said.

Board member Francis Smith described the proposal as "offensive on the massing issue."

The board unanimously denied the application.

The board approved a proposal by Covington Real Estate Holdings, LLC, to permit a non-conforming use of the home at 597 Westfield Avenue. Hugh Covington proposed putting his investment advisory firm into the home, which is located at the corner of Park Street (the former site of the Shea law firm). The proposal represents a similar use permitted with reduced traffic intensity.

The board also approved the addition of a non-conforming porch with gazebo onto the home, accepting the argument that it fit with the character of the building and area.

Also approved were additions by Lei Chen and Yun Bai at 729 Kimball Avenue, Marsha and Thomas Detrano at 209 Clifton Street, James McCabe at 1034 Coolidge Street and John and Christina Cooke at 428 Mountain Avenue. The board also approved a deck for Liang Luo and Ling Pang at 50 Doris Parkway.

channel.

TVTN would deliver a local programming feed that would fill in the voids of regular programming with up-to-date information, such as weather, emergency alerts, local calendars and school closings.

"We don't control the channel," said Mr. Shank. "We're providing a feed that runs in the background."

The deal would cost \$1,200 up front, plus an ongoing cost of \$500 each additional month. Sponsors, whose contribution would be acknowledged routinely throughout the programming, should cover the complete cost, he said. According to Mr. Shank, the project should require four or five sponsors, since the proposal calls for a two-year contract.

If sponsorships were not received, the borough would still receive the service for those two years and could choose to pay the monthly rate of \$500 to continue. According to Mr. Debbie, Loews Theaters and Famous Dave's have already showed interest in sponsorship.

TVTN has been in business since 1987 and currently has local access programming deals with Roselle, Rahway and Newark.

Also in discussion, Mayor Vigilanti announced that taxes would raise \$119 a household next year, based on a home assessed at \$150,000. This increase is based on the rise of library contributions, pensions and the Rahway Valley Sewerage Authority assessment.

Additionally, borough employees rejected a proposal to waive health coverage for half of the lowest waiver amount of \$6,595.50 for a family and \$2,547 for a single. The mayor and council will now offer half of the mid-range offer of \$7,968.48 for a family and \$3,219.96 for a single.

In other business, a petition was filed for a streetlight on the corner of Chapel Hill and Ackerman Roads.

The council received raffle applications from Soroptimist International of the Greater Westfield Area for an on-premise silent auction and off-premise 50/50 draw.

Mayor Vigilanti will authorize the tax collector to cancel tax account balances of \$5 and under, whether owed by or to Mountainside.

Escrow returned a bond to MacGregor Plumbing and Heating for a road-opening permit for a sanitary sewer house connection at 310 Indian Trail.

The mayor and council went into executive session to discuss a personnel matter regarding Finance Assistant Jill Goode.

Leaders Discuss Funding

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tion to be done by resolution between local units or entities."

The Assembly passed the measure, 44-30-5 on Monday.

Superintendent of Schools William Foley, asked if categorical aid for special education would be wealth-based and formula driven, and, if so, "would Westfield lose \$4.5 million in aid?"

Mr. Bramnick said the formulas are "still in draft stage...I would hope the leadership would be as fair as possible to suburban districts and districts they perceive to be more Republican."

He said he predicted, based on recommendations he has seen, that the state would allow minimum funding for all districts. "The aid to Westfield will probably be about the same in terms of state aid," he said.

Ms. Riegel addressed the issue of a so-called "super" county superintendent. She said, "what seems so frightening to me is that the proposal includes things like curriculum and hiring teachers — decisions made at the county level and not at the Westfield level. How would it be wise for Westfield?"

Mr. Bramnick said, "It would not be wise for Westfield...I don't think the other suburban districts are going to stand for this."

When asked if the new measures would save money, Mr. Bramnick said, "It absolutely won't save money." In his view, the way to save money is to send in "forensic accountants unannounced into school districts, counties and state governments at 3 p.m. on Friday and walk around and see who's working."

He added, "They talk about making sausage. This is the biggest sausage ever made in New Jersey...and it's a mess."

Ms. Strickland spoke after Mr. Bramnick and said that currently, "one of the things under threat is special education funding." She said the question remains as to whether it will remain as categorical aid or be changed to basic state aid. While no proposal is on paper, she said, "They have said it should be wealth-based."

Concerning the CORE plan, she said, "When you conjoin districts, salaries will come up at a higher level. Until they discuss that reality openly and honestly in real debate form, they shouldn't be pushing merger bills ahead because I think it could cost hundreds of millions of dollars."

She said one of her objections to the CORE proposal is the establishment of a new county office in every county. "The office of the county superintendent would be elevated to such an extent that the salaries would have to be elevated from the county superintendent on down," she said.

Ms. Strickland said the "super" county superintendents would assume



FULLY ENGLTFED...Last Saturday, the Cranford Florist Shop and adjacent structures were engulfed in smoke during a three-alarm fire. The Cranford fire department arrived at 9 p.m. as clouds of thick black smoke poured from the windows and flames blazed at street level. Heavy black smoke could be seen throughout Cranford for most of the night. The Westfield Fire Department also responded to the scene.

POLICE BLOTTER

Westfield

Wednesday, December 6, Mario Hall, 25, of Perth Amboy was arrested following a motor vehicle stop at South and Central Avenues on an outstanding Elizabeth motor vehicle warrant with \$580 bail. Hall was unable to post bail and was turned over to Elizabeth police.

Wednesday, December 6, Ann A. Morgan, 54, of Woodbridge was arrested on the 800 block of North Avenue on a traffic warrant issued by the Perth Amboy Court. She was released after posting \$89 bail.

Wednesday, December 6, Alterik K. Finney, 29, of Elizabeth was arrested on North Avenue near Hatfield Avenue in Scotch Plains on a criminal warrant issued by the Elizabeth Court. Finney was released on his own recognizance as per the Elizabeth Court, with a court date to be set.

Wednesday, December 6, Peter J. Breece, 18, of Scotch Plains was arrested at Westfield police headquarters on an outstanding motor vehicle warrant from Garwood. Breece was released after posting \$89 bail.

Wednesday, December 6, Danielle Mancuso, 18, of Oak Ridge was arrested following a motor vehicle stop at Central Avenue and East Broad Street and charged with possession of less than 50 grams of marijuana. She was released with a summons pending a December 20 court date.

Wednesday, December 6, Edward Gallagher, 48, of Westfield was arrested and charged with driving while intoxicated following a motor vehicle stop at Central Avenue and Quimby Street. Gallagher subsequently was released with summons pending a December 13 court date.

Thursday, December 7, Gerard Thompson, 42, of Westfield was arrested following a motor vehicle stop at West Broad Street and Osborn Avenue and charged with possession of less than 50 grams of marijuana and possession of drug paraphernalia.

Further investigation revealed there were outstanding warrants for Thompson

from the Union County Sheriff's Department. Plainfield and Middlesex totaling \$10,025. After being served with summonses on the Westfield charges, he was turned over to the Union County Sheriff's Department.

Friday, December 8, a private contractor operating the New Jersey Motor Vehicle Inspection Station on the 400 block of East South Avenue reported the apparent theft of a 2009 inspection sticker valued at approximately \$50.

Friday, December 8, a resident of the 100 block of Harrison Avenue reported a burglary at her home. Entry was reportedly gained by forcing open a door on the porch. Numerous rooms on the first and second floor living areas were entered and ransacked. It was unknown at the time what items were missing, police said.

Friday, December 8, Jason Dirmetitis, 29, of Iselin was arrested at a business on the 400 block of North Avenue, West, on an East Orange traffic warrant after police responded to the business on a complaint of a disorderly person. Dirmetitis was released after posting \$110 bail.

Friday, December 8, lawn decorations were reported stolen on the 100 block of Sandra Circle. The value of the missing items was estimated at \$50.

Saturday, December 9, Anthony Marrero, 21, of Elizabeth was arrested at Terminal Avenue in Clark on motor vehicle warrants from Elizabeth, for \$580, and Cranford, for \$89. He also was charged with possession of a fake government identification card as a United States Marine Corps. Marrero posted bail and was released with a summons on the Westfield charge.

Mountainside

Wednesday, December 6, Oladipupo B. Omade, 20, was arrested for driving with a suspended license after being stopped for improper passing on Route 22.

Wednesday, December 6, Peter Y. Marquez, 39, was arrested and charged with being under the influence of a controlled dangerous substance (CDS), possession of a CDS and receiving stolen property. According to police, the suspect was picked up at a Sheffield Street business, where he was reportedly passed out in the lobby. He was transported to Overlook Hospital, where letters belonging to different businesses were found on his person, police said.

Saturday, December 9, a resident of Mill Lane reported one or more unidentified individuals threw eggs at the front window of the house. This was the third incident of this nature in the past few months, police said. The homeowner said she would be installing a video surveillance camera and would be reporting all future incidents to the police along with the videotape, police said. There was no visible damage to the house or window reported at this time.

Sunday, December 10, Liem T. Nguyen, 34, of Plainfield was arrested for DWI after a motor vehicle stop for failure to maintain a lane.

Fanwood

Wednesday, December 6, Police said two individuals attempted to cash a fraudulent business check at a South Avenue bank. When an employee questioned the individuals about the check, the suspects fled, police said. Police were able to identify one of the suspects, and charges are pending, authorities said.

Saturday, December 9, a resident of Princeton Avenue reported that someone opened an unauthorized cell phone account in his name. Police said the incident is under investigation.

Saturday, December 9, Anthony P. Moskal, 18, of Scotch Plains was arrested and charged with making terroristic threats to an individual after an altercation on Montrose Avenue.

Monday, December 11, Andre C. Brothwaite, 19, of Irvington was arrested for an outstanding warrant out of Wanauque Township after a motor vehicle stop on Terrill Road.

Mountainside Board of Ed.

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multiple Union County districts, such as Westfield, Kenilworth and Clark.

SEA offers "payment schedules" based on districts' financial needs, which include payments over multiple budget years.

"Because it's all we do, we pride ourselves in doing it very, very well," said Mr. Nicastro, who is a licensed attorney and a former school superintendent. He said he has been involved with the company since 1994, reviewing and writing legal policies.

The BOE is reviewing the company's service and will revisit the issue at a future meeting, members said.

In other news, a parent voiced her concern about the eighth-grade science program following the recent termination of teacher Wendy Milligan, effective February 9, 2008.

Parent Elitza Meyer, who addressed the board during public participation, said afterwards she wants to know "what the children can expect."

"Kids are sensitive to change," she added.

While Mr. O'Malley did not specify why the teacher was let go, he said he would make the transition as easy as possible for the students.

"I appreciate your patience in trying to understand what I can say," he said. The resolution on the meeting agenda indicated the teacher has a "contractual obligation to work through the effective date of her termination" if necessary.

Mr. O'Malley said he is actively looking for a replacement.

In other business, the BOE has received \$10,020 from a 2005 grant meant to improve school security.

The Mountainside Police Department received the federal Secure Our School grant, on behalf of the district, from the Department of Justice.

Mr. O'Malley thanked Police Chief James Debbie and other officers involved in securing the grant.

He said the district will "utilize it in a way to make sure our kids are safe." The next BOE meeting is January 9 at 7:30 p.m.

PERSONAL INJURY LAW

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