

# The Westfield Leader

— Established 1890 —  
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Legal Newspaper for Union County, New Jersey

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# The Scotch Plains - Fanwood TIMES

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## Letters to the Editor

### Westfield McMansion Threatens to Become New Wychwood Gatehouse

Westfield is in jeopardy of losing one of its most admired and valued landmarks. The community of Wychwood has suffered enough at the hands of indifferent builders and homeowners.

In the Wychwood book, published in 1931, Arthur Rule, developer, dedicated Wychwood to "fostering the daydreams of childhood-fairy tales and legends; woods and flowers; birds and little animals; sunshine and rain; moon and starlight; school and holidays; games, parties, birthdays- and those glamorous distant years when the youngsters will be grown up and do as they please!"

Regarding the South Gate, he says "South Gate is not the architectural keynote of Wychwood, but it does epitomize the spirit which it is intended to foster in the community-tradition, charm, and the love of Nature. The difference of the architecture of South Gate is a frank protest against the besetting faults of most domestic architecture of today - commonplaceness, monotony, lack of imagination."

How ironic. I can't help but think that Mr. Rule, for all the love of this neighborhood that he built, is turning in his grave.

Today, the Wychwood community is fighting for its survival. There is a subdivision application pending for one of its most treasured landmark properties, one of the South Gate gatehouses. The present owner intends to subdivide the property, allowing for the building of yet another McMansion. The new home, as depicted in the architectural rendering, will be wedged between the current gatehouse and East Broad Street, with the driveway creating hazardous conditions, as it enters the already complicated four-prong roadway. In essence, the McMansion will become the "new gatehouse."

I encourage all Westfield and Wychwood residents to consider the impact of this most undesirable prospect and to let your voice be heard. The Westfield Zoning Board will hear the application for subdivision on January 4 at 8 p.m.

Amy Jester  
Westfield

### WHS Junior Feels Secure with Existing Measures on Campus

After reading Ms. Sabino's letter last week [School Security and Locks Are Unfortunate Necessities], I was left wondering which school she was referring to, because it certainly could not have been WHS [Westfield High School].

As a senior at WHS, I have had the benefit of one of the best public educations available in the state. Throughout my four years there, never once have I felt unsafe, at risk or vulnerable to attacks. As a matter of course, I've found paraprofessionals regularly patrolling the hallways and every door besides the front and back locked from the outside shortly after school begins. In addition, I have always felt that there was a relatively constant police presence around WHS (even if it is just to give parking tickets). Indeed, there may not be armed guards at every entrance of the school, as Ms. Sabino suggested there should be, but there is no need for such excess because WHS is safe as it is.

Adding regular "police-like" guards would do nothing for safety and only serve to increase student apprehension. With enough on our minds as it is, the last thing we need to see is a uniformed officer patrolling the halls or manning the doors, monitoring our every move. Posted guards would serve only to strain already tense relationships between students and authority as well as cost an extraordinary amount in tax dollars.

A strong emphasis on crisis preparedness and high administrative awareness to school security have provided students with a well-founded sense of safety, and as a four year student, I have found the security provided for students to be more than proficient.

I strongly question the baseless attack

made on the Open Lunch policy as well. What Ms. Sabino neglected to mention is the fact that a consent form must be signed by a parent or guardian for an eligible upperclassman to partake in the Open Lunch program. Seeing the overwhelming amount of both juniors and seniors who have a "Y" printed on their student ID, permitting them to leave campus for lunch, serves as an affirmation of the parental comfort and support of the program. Should a parent feel uncomfortable with Open Lunch, they can simply indicate that their child may not go out, and the paraprofessionals at the door will not allow them to leave campus.

As a student, I can also attest to the fact that there is a certain measure of joy and happiness attained by leaving campus, even if it is just for a period, to unwind and get food from a local restaurant. Although Ms. Sabino's definition of what gives joy was rather, well, nostalgic and sweet, the fact of the matter is that allowing upperclassmen to leave campus for lunch gives them a chance to relax and enjoy themselves for a period outside of the noisy cafeteria and hustle of the school along with a well-deserved bit of independence. In addition, I'm not even sure where the technology mentioned in her letter is relevant; students will still talk to each other whether they are eating on or off campus, there is no difference between the two.

Perhaps Ms. Sabino should take a trip into the WHS cafeteria to see students actively socializing or watch them leave campus happily to eat lunch with friends before making such complaints. Of course, she'll be stopped at the front door and directed to the main office to sign in.

Ben Zakarin  
WHS Class of 2007

### Converting Lincoln School Into Childhood Ctr. Will Create Havoc

I am writing in regards to the January 23, 2007, voting for the \$9.4 million school bond issue in Westfield.

According to Superintendent William Foley, during one of the many meetings I attended during the 2005-2006 school year, the school children population growth should level off by 2009-2010. If the bond referendum passes, by the time Lincoln School is converted into an early childhood learning center, the population will be declining. So, is this a cost effective solution? Consider the fact that many parents at the meetings continually stated their primary concern was for "neighborhood schools." In no way will this learning center be a neighborhood school. Instead it will create havoc with bussing and added traffic. Therefore, additional parents may choose not to send their kindergartners to Lincoln School. Already, many families do not send their children to the half-day kindergarten offered by the public school system.

The increase population fluctuates throughout the years. In the lower grades, not only is there a teacher in each class but also aides and volunteer parents. To add an extra three to four students to each class should not be difficult to do. Many of the parents today went to school with a larger class size and received a good education. If smaller classes are desired, enrollment in a private school is an option.

The conversion of Lincoln School into an early childhood learning center will result in the creation of a tenth school. This \$9.4 million bond will not pay for the annual maintenance cost of operating the school nor any additional teaching staff and administrative personnel (salary and benefits) that may occur. How is this cost to be paid? Perhaps through the April school budget, which is only three months away? No! Enough!

Dolores Sheley  
Westfield

### Westfield Library Nears Fundraising Goal, Thanks the Community

On behalf of the Westfield Library Board of Trustees and the Friends of the Library Improvement Committee, I thank you for your generous contributions to our fund raising campaign.

Our "new" library opened in 1988. As with our homes and offices, over time the way that space is used changes, our needs change, new carpeting and fresh paint are required. Such is the case with our library. Because of your generosity, we only need \$37,000 to reach our goal of \$700,000. As the year draws to a close, we are working to raise the balance needed.

Our library is an important part of the Westfield Community, in part because education is important to us. We are always striving to serve each of you better. This renovation will make more space available for fiction, the most popular of our collections. We will have a teen area for the first time and cozy furniture in the Children's Department. Adults will have a new reading area on the first floor, and there will be a new area with comfy arm chairs and tables for laptop use.

Look for announcements of the reopening of the Westfield Memorial Library in the spring. Checks should be made payable to the Friends of the Li-

brary Improvement Fund. They can be mailed to the Library or left at the Circulation Desk.

Again, thank you to those who have already donated, and to those who do so.

Cynthia Cockren, President  
Westfield Library Trustees

### Country's Top Media Just Don't Get It

Many secularists, along with anti-Christmas fanatics, have done much over the years to eliminate Christmas from the public square. This war on Christmas, however, has been dealt some major defeats recently, such as Wal-Mart's decision to greet customers with "Merry Christmas!" and similar actions by other retail stores, not to mention the revival and popularity of traditional Christmas movies, such as *The Nativity Story*. Yet these Christmas common sense victories are getting short shrift by a lot of the top media.

A lot of Americans are sick and tired of the attacks on Christmas, but a lot of the top media just don't get it.

Michael Chapman, Media Research Center, Alexandria, VA

## Sen. Scutari Deserves Praise For Not Backing Down on Reform

The joint legislative committees in Trenton have released 98 recommendations to start addressing New Jersey's financial crisis. But before the ink could dry, Governor Jon Corzine ditched efforts to reform the state's pension and benefits system.

The Governor said legislation to implement a "defined contribution" retirement program instead of the current pension system, should not include employees represented by collective bargaining groups (unions). He said these changes should be part of contract negotiations, not legislation.

When Sen. Nicholas Scutari (LD-22, Linden), co-chairman of the Joint Legislative Committee on Public Employee Benefits Reform, heard of the Governor's changes, he said he would not sponsor the legislation as his committee co-chair Nellie Pou did. He was quoted as saying the Legislature "has certain duties and obligations and rights." We congratulate Sen. Scutari for sticking to his guns and not backing down to the Governor and the unions.

As a result of the Governor, it is unlikely any action will be taken on the reform bills this year.

Mr. Scutari knows something about the cost of local government. Prior to his election in 2003 to the Legislature, he served on the Linden Board of Education and the Union County Board of Freeholders. Last month Mr. Scutari said, "While we

support fair compensation for state workers, we need to put an end to excessive perks that increase the cost of government on property taxpayers."

We believe Trenton needs more elected officials like Mr. Scutari to work for all citizens and that changes need to be across the board. In our opinion, it is unfair to make changes for some and not others. Unions oppose all measures - as demonstrated by Monday's march on Trenton lead by the NJEA.

It is essential to eliminate dual office holdings, pension padding and the many other abuses. Still, this in itself will not end the crisis. Elected officials are only part of the problem.

School boards are lobbying hard against the so-called "super" county superintendents and changes in how aid would be calculated. Whether these approaches are the correct way to go is up for debate, but New Jersey taxpayers cannot continue to financially support more than 616 school districts, 566 municipalities, 486 local authorities, special districts and 21 counties.

With all 120 seats in the legislature up for election next year, it will be interesting to see if more legislators show the courage Sen. Scutari has in standing up to the Governor and the powerful union heads.

In our view, everyone must address the problem for the common good. If not, greed will do us in.

### Local School Board Programs Face Big Impact If Legislature Recommendations Are Implemented

The legislature's four forces changed with finding ways to bring about immediate, sustainable property tax relief announced 98 recommendations in mid-November. While some of the proposals could make a positive difference if studied thoroughly and enacted carefully, the legislative leadership seems determined to push new laws to adoption within a matter of weeks with little public input and no clear idea either of their savings to the taxpayer or their long-term consequences.

Our local board of education has grave concerns that the proposed legislation will not bring about promised property tax relief to communities like ours and will not treat all children in the state equally. Along with education groups throughout New Jersey, we are worried that unintended consequences from the changes will have a negative impact on the quality of education in our state, which has been considered among the highest in the country.

The Department of Education and legislative staff have developed a school funding formula for all districts, which will be unveiled soon. Under the old formula, 45 percent of districts in the state, including Scotch Plains-Fanwood, are considered too wealthy to receive basic state aid, known as equalization aid. The only state funding most of these districts receive is for special education, a categorical aid.

The new proposed formula reportedly changes special education aid from categorical to equalization aid, which will mean that districts like ours will no longer receive the only state aid we've been entitled to, since we are not eligible for equalization funds. The special education money taken from districts like ours will be redistributed to middle income districts that have a need for more state aid.

But our local district still will have to provide special education services. In order to find the funds to replace the \$2.9 million special education aid SP-F receives, the Board of Education must make

drastic cuts in program and teaching positions or ask the local voters for approval to spend above the cap. Not only will our taxpayers not receive the promised relief, we would need to agree to pay even more in order to maintain what we have or watch our class sizes jump up.

Legislation has been introduced to create a "Super" Superintendent of Schools in each county with final authority over administrative and financial functions of every school district in the county. More powerful than the current county superintendent position, the new "super" superintendent would be politically appointed by the governor. He or she would strip local boards of education of the final decision in budget, human resources and governance matters and have absolute veto power.

The main function of the "super" would be cost reduction, not educational quality. These political appointees, whose decisions could not be appealed, would have veto power over board-approved local budgets and would be able to cut important, non-mandated programs in the name of cost savings.

While empowering a county superintendent to help local districts to make joint purchases or to promote other shared services would be helpful, creating a "super" could enlarge a county bureaucracy and cost more in the long run. And by making the final decision in all financial matters, the "super" would take such decisions away from local control, distancing education policy from parents and voters. Even the decision as to whether a district may present an extra question to the voters at budget time would need to be approved by the "super."

Legislation also has been introduced to move the election of school board members to the November general elections, which will almost ensure that such elections become partisan. The purported reason for the move will be to increase voter turnout, but the result will be to insert political influence and control into the current non-partisan functioning of most

boards of education. Running for election in a crowded field of general election candidates, few board candidates will be able to afford the marketing pieces and other campaign expenses needed to win without party backing. Good board candidates who do not see themselves as political will hesitate to run.

This same legislation would eliminate the vote on school budgets that are under the state spending cap. Again, local parents and voters would be distanced from their local schools as state control increases.

New Jersey funds approximately 38 percent of education costs statewide, compared to the 50 percent average of other states. In the past five years the state has not followed its own funding formula, short changing communities nearly \$1 billion a year in school aid. Property taxes have risen accordingly to make up the difference. The reason for increasing property taxes is not high spending districts; it's inadequate state aid to public education. Until the state examines its own spending patterns and adopts an equitable funding formula, property tax relief is unreachable.

What we are supporting locally? Fair, open, public debate before rushing to pass new laws whose consequences are not thoroughly understood.

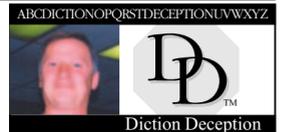
An education funding formula that provides a level of basic support for every student, regardless of residence.

Special education aid that is kept separate from the state's basic formula aid - for every special needs student, regardless of where he or she lives.

A focus on educational excellence, as well as efficiency.

The decisions made in the next few weeks will have a huge impact on our local education program, our local property taxes and our local control. Please stay informed and contact our state legislators and the Governor with your concerns.

Linda Nelson, Member  
SP-F Board of Education



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.

1. Teff - A grain plant of Abyssinia from which flour is made
2. Terebinth - A small European tree of the sumac family. Turpentine tree
3. Deave - To confuse or stun with noise
4. Dichostasis - Spontaneous subdivision

ZAX

1. A blister beetle
2. An instrument for trimming roofing slates
3. Resilient; flexible
4. Marked with crossbars

VALISE

1. A small suitcase
2. A sleeveless garment worn over or under armor
3. A type of sweet onion
4. A light, rounded helmet with a visor

PHOCINE

1. Marshy; covered with water
2. Relating to seals
3. Of or like a sea slug or shell-less snail
4. Shiny; glossy; beaming with light

SPREAGHERY

1. The act of deriding or ridiculing
2. Violation of faith or allegiance
3. Cattle stealing
4. A cowardly, contemptible act

See more letters on page 22.

## Letters to the Editor

### Westfielder Writes Leaf Pickup Job Well Done

So often we hear people complaining about this or that in our daily lives. We would like to take the opportunity this paper offers to express a "job well done" to the leaf crews of Westfield's Department of Public Works. Given the miles of streets and number of trees that fill our town with a tremendous amount of leaves, they have done a great job keeping up after them.

The leaf hotline, as well as being able to obtain bags from the conservation center for pick-up (within 24 hours), has been of great assistance.

Thank you for helping keep our neighborhoods well maintained.

Debby and Bob Burslem  
Westfield

### Summit Taxpayer Tells Of City Demographics

My recent letters covered capping budgets at the 2005 level for 2006 for Summit City, Summit Public Schools and Union County.

Now I turn to the subject of Summit demographics. In 2000, the last year for which data is available, U.S. Census Bureau counted 7,879 households, 5,378 live in owner-occupied housing (meaning they pay property taxes). There were 4,549 school age children, 3,650 whom are currently enrolled in public schools (so about 900 attended parochial or private schools). No one knows for sure how many families (percent of total) use our public schools, but it is estimated about 25-30 percent maximum.

Meanwhile 2,054 households contain at least one individual 65 years old. This works out to a 26 percent market share - approximately the same size as in the public schools.

Schools are clearly our number one community asset, but our now commander a bigger slice of our tax levy than a majority of taxpayers can afford. The total burden of schools plus city plus county will be \$12,570 on our average household this year. That's another 7 percent increase, twice the rate of inflation. It's sure to drive senior citizens and young working class families further out of town - the very diversity that makes for excellent public schools.

The challenge is to back the Summit Taxpayers Association. You are cordially invited to join an organization of families that is formed to represent you as a Summit taxpayer.

The Summit Taxpayers Association will meet at 7:30 p.m. on Thursday, December 14, 2006 at the home of Ed Vant, Jr. located at Wellington Place Condominiums, 90 New England Avenue, No. 7, Summit, NJ 07901.

The Summit Taxpayers Association's mailing address is P.O. Box 474, Summit, NJ 07902-0474. The phone number is (908) 522-9470. Email: edvantjr@aol.com. For more information, see www.summittaxpayers.org.

Ed Vant  
Summit

### Reminding Readers To Pay Attention

Your editorial "Public Has Right to Know Details of Government Executive Sessions" was especially appropriate because of the day it was published - December 7, the anniversary of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941.

It's somewhat disheartening, though, that 65 years later, you had to remind your readers that they must pay attention to how their government operates or lose rights that so many gave so much to protect the generations to come.

Kudos to you, though, for pointing out many of the deficiencies in the state's Open Public Meetings Act and the shortcomings of elected and appointed officials throughout the state - and indeed, the nation, too - who stoop so low to chip away at the rights so many paid for with their lives at bloody places such as Normandy Beach, Iwo Jima and the Battle of the Bulge.

Martin O'Shea  
Stockholm, N.J.