

Stop & Shop Purchases Former Merrill Lynch Bld. for \$1.95 Mil.

By PAUL J. PEYTON
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — The Stop & Shop Supermarket Co., LLC has completed the purchase of its Westfield store, located at 233 and 219 Elm Street, as well as purchasing a non-contiguous property at 195 Elm Street, according to public records released by the town assessor's office. *The Westfield Leader* has been unable to confirm whether Stop & Shop will purchase an adjacent building, which lies between 195 Elm and the supermarket property.

According to records from the Union County Clerk's office property search website, the store and existing parking lot were purchased from Weldon Materials, Inc. for \$3.2 million on November 18, after Stop &

Shop bought out the lease from its landlord. County records indicate that Stop & Shop purchased 195 Elm Street for \$195,000 on February 6. "I can confirm that we purchased

(on the existing building or 195 Elm Street)," said Robert Keane, a spokesperson for the Quincy, Mass.-based Stop & Shop Company.

The adjacent building, located at 203 Elm, which houses offices for three state legislators and a dentist, is located between the former Merrill Lynch building and the supermarket property, abutting Stop & Shop's parking lot.

Lawyer Paul Williams and local dentist Dr. Sheldon Glickman have owned the building at 203 Elm Street for more than 30 years, Mr. Williams told *The Leader*.

"No one has approached us," Mr. Williams responded when asked if Stop & Shop was looking to purchase his building. "We haven't heard anything."

When he was told by *The Leader* the selling price for 195 Elm Street, Mr. Williams responded, "I'll be damned."

The building is the home of the state 21st legislative district offices of Sen. Tom Kean, Jr. and Assemblymen Jon Bramnick and Eric Munoz. Chief of Staff Elizabeth Cornwell said the building has housed a legislative office since 1986, when former State Assembly Speaker Chuck Hardwick relocated his office from Quimby Street to Elm Street. She said the current state lease for their first floor office expires at the end of 2007.

Morgan Stanley brokerage, which had offices on the first and second floors, moved to Summit months ago.



Victoria McCabe for *The Westfield Leader*
PURCHASE COMPLETED... Stop & Shop has bought its building, right, and the 195 Elm Street property, left. A lawyer and a local dentist own the 203 Elm Street property, center.

those properties but we cannot make any official announcement at this time

Vehicle Strikes Crossing Guard at Intersection

By SUZETTE F. STALKER
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — A longtime Westfield crossing guard was struck by a motor vehicle while on duty last week but was able to return to his post within two days, authorities confirmed. According to Captain Clifford Auchter of the Westfield Police Department, John "Chic" Miller, 79, was on the job at 8:08 a.m. March 1 at the intersection of North Avenue and Tuttle Parkway near Roosevelt Intermediate School when the incident occurred.

Captain Auchter said the driver of a Chrysler wagon, identified as Ol Pessolano, 42, of Westfield, was attempting to make a left turn onto North Avenue from Tuttle Parkway when she struck the guard. The driver stated that she didn't see the guard as she was making the turn, Captain Auchter said. Mr. Miller, a Westfield resident, complained of pain in his leg following the accident and was transported to Overlook Hospital in Summit. He has been a crossing guard for 18 years.

Captain Auchter stated that Mr. Miller was standing in the street when he was struck, although he didn't

know whether any children were in the process of crossing when the accident happened. No one was injured besides the guard, and the motorist was not issued any citations, he said.

Sergeant Scott Rodger of the Westfield Police Department told *The Leader* that Mr. Miller was treated and released from Overlook Hospital and was back at work by Friday.

Zoning Questions Delay Redevelopment Repeal

By MICHAEL J. POLLACK
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — In a brief conference session Tuesday, town council members discussed further the legalities of repealing the redevelopment distinction of lots one and eight, and the first non-conforming corner lot addressed under new development regulations designed to curtail overdevelopment.

During the citizens' open discussion, Sharon Stockwell and Allan Solomon questioned the council on

the status of repealing the redevelopment distinction. In the last month, the council came to a consensus to repeal the distinction, which came about as a precursor to launching a parking deck.

While Town Attorney Robert Cokren did present a draft of the repeal, he said the paperwork is "preliminary" and wished to speak with the town planner, who he hasn't had the opportunity to consult with. He said redevelopment plans were adopted before the council enacted its special redevelopment ordinances. "There is no law on the subject. It's an issue of first impression. I want (town planner) Blais's (Branch) to

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WF BOE, Town Council Review School Budget

By JAMES HALLERAN
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — Last Wednesday night marked the first time that members of the town council met with the board of education (BOE) in an informal meeting at the Westfield High School library. Both sides were there to discuss shared services and the proposed school budget, on which residents will vote Tuesday, April 18.

School Board President Anne Riegel said the purpose of the meeting was "cost effective" planning.

"The goal of the meeting was to come together and discuss areas where we both can save money. A few examples are sharing office and building supplies, as well as the management of the town and school athletic fields and road paving. We also wanted

to inform and update the council on the process of our budget," she said.

Mrs. Riegel also said, "Mayor (Andy) Skibitsky wanted this meeting to happen. Even though he could not be here, he did not want it to be postponed. Mark Ciarrocca is acting in his place."

BOE Finance Committee Chairman Richard Solomon addressed the council, discussing the school budget. He said the rejection of the school budget last year was a "wake up" call.

"It had been the first time in 10 years that a school budget did not pass. We lost by 65 votes. Our biggest obstacle is that in Westfield 60 percent of the households do not have children and they are indifferent to the budget. I felt that we had been complacent."

Mr. Solomon said that this year the board has taken a proactive marketing approach by organizing meetings and sending out reminders to attract residents to the voting booths.

He detailed a number of items for the council that, he said, put a strain on the school budget. He cited the high cost of utilities, healthcare coverage for employees and growing enrollment, which he said is the largest since 1970. Combined with the fact that 86 percent of the budget revenue is from local property taxes, he said the school board receives little aid from the state.

First Ward Councilman Sal Caruana offered advice to the board: "I have people coming up to me all the time with their concerns about taxes. What I have found out is that if you show the public that each dollar is being passed through an eye of a needle and that there is no waste and the quality of the product is good, they will understand how much something costs."

He said by highlighting the school's achievements and selling its quality, residents would be more inclined to vote and support the budget.

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Ben Corbin for *The Westfield Leader*
THE KID-IN-THE-HAT... Children at Tamaques Elementary School dress up in Dr. Seuss hats as part of the school's second-annual Read-a-Thon on Monday.

John Morgan Reflects On Years as Westfield Parking Services Director

By CHRISTIE STORMS
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — There are many things John Morgan will miss now that he has resigned as Westfield's parking services director, a position he held for the past three years.

"The best part of my job was that I got to be downtown everyday," said Mr. Morgan, who recently began his new position as national sales manager with the Metric Group in Cranbury, the company that installed the pay stations in Westfield. He has spent the past three years collaborating with them as town parking director.

Leaving the position is bittersweet, he said. "It's not something I was looking to do."

However, when Metric presented their offer, it was too good to refuse.

Mr. Morgan described the challenges he faced when he first took the helm as Westfield's parking director in February 2003. At that time, he had already been serving the town for almost 30 years as a member and eventually captain of the special police.

"We had some meters that were 10 years old, and some that were 50. You could get two hours for a quarter on some, and on others it was 50 cents for an hour," he recalled. "It was a dysfunctional situation."

He said some meters either didn't work at all or had been removed and never replaced, and collecting revenue from each individual meter was a time-

consuming task. The Metric Group's pay stations had already been purchased, but were not being used.

What concerned Mr. Morgan the most was that parking functions were spread all over town. If someone had a question or a problem, he or she was redirected to several different departments.

He discussed these concerns when the town approached him about becoming parking director, replacing Barry Sommers, who had left the position within a matter of months.

Mr. Morgan reported that he got nothing but cooperation from the past and current mayor and town councils. The parking department he helped create has five enforcement people who rotate between enforcement, traffic control and collecting, as well as four part-time office employees.

As the director of parking services, Mr. Morgan oversaw all parking operations. This included issuing permits, selling parking tokens and cards, handling parking enforcement and collecting revenue, as well as han-

dling all parking-related phone calls.

Mr. Morgan cited the many benefits of the new pay-station parking system that he implemented with the Metric Group.

"People used to complain that they got a ticket because they didn't have any change for the meter," he said. "Now you have pay stations that take coins, tokens and dollar bills."

Meter capacity has extended from two hours to four hours for short-term meters, and there is a "10 minutes free" button on on-street meters for quick trips.

"Metric also has the only system where you can monitor everything by computer," Mr. Morgan said, explaining that every machine is connected to the main server at the police department via wireless network.

From his desk, Mr. Morgan can get an instant reading on how many spots are empty and can monitor which areas are the busiest.

The system will notify him instantly if a maintenance issue arises, such as

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WACC President Allison O'Hara Resigns

By CHRISTIE STORMS
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — Allison O'Hara, president of the Westfield Area Chamber of Commerce (WACC), has officially announced her plans to resign effective Friday, April 28. Ms. O'Hara said her husband has received a job transfer that will relocate their family to Colorado.

After serving two years as executive director for the chamber, Ms. O'Hara had recently been promoted to president this past November. Ms. O'Hara said she is pleased with the progress the chamber has made during her years of leadership.

"We've increased participation and attendance in events like Spring Fling and Festival, and brought in 'This Is It Productions' to brand the events," Ms. O'Hara said. "We also revitalized the farmer's market with a new day and time and have seen a lot more activity."

One of Ms. O'Hara's proudest accomplishments is the "Speed Networking" monthly meetings she developed. This allows merchants to meet one-on-one for a few minutes at a time, speaking with approximately 10 individuals an hour.

"This facilitates them to identify potential customers, mentors and strategic partners," she said.

Ms. O'Hara reported that the chamber is hoping to introduce the Westfield Gift Card program this spring. Cards could be bought for any amount and used at participating stores.

"The biggest challenge we will continue to face is maintaining the membership and activating the memberships," she said.

Getting businesses to talk with other businesses, as well as providing services for new businesses that are "just getting off the ground," will also continue to be goals.

According to Hans Winberg, chairman of the WACC, there is no formalized system in place for finding a new president.

Informally, he has begun asking members to identify the qualities most important to them for a new candidate. He stated he would ideally like to find someone well before Ms. O'Hara leaves so as to provide a seamless transition.

"I've really enjoyed working with Allison, and she's going to be a very difficult person to replace," Mr. Winberg said. "She really brings a lot of talents to the table, but I am glad for her family and their opportunity."

Ms. O'Hara reported that the new president may or may not be someone who is already on the board. She cited how she had not been a board member when chosen as director due to her previous years of commitment to community service.

"We see this as a positive opportunity for positive change," Ms. O'Hara stated. "We welcome suggestions from chamber members and we will be working with other community agencies to look for help in the transition and to work on creating some kind of partnership for the future."

The WACC was established with the purpose of serving as an economic development resource that provides opportunities for businesses to succeed. The chamber currently has more than 320 members.



Allison O'Hara in Fall 2005

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