

Library Renovations

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Fiction, the library's most-used collection, can grow "significantly" by moving upstairs to space formerly occupied by rooms used for back issues of periodicals and newspaper microfiches, both of which are now available online. Space for audio-visual materials, like movies, music and audio books, will increase as well.

"If you look at your own home and how your needs and use of space have changed in the past 18 years, the library is no different," Cynthia Cockren, library board president, said. "It's a great plan that accomplishes a lot on a relatively modest budget."

Ms. Cockren said the renovation would involve no new construction. She added that there would be a fully accessible public bathroom on the second floor.

Local architect Barbara Vincentsen & Associates is drawing up the final blueprints and adding some finishing touches to the project, which the library hopes to begin work on "sometime in the next few months."

Interior decorating and space planning have been overseen by Suzan Globus of Globus Design Associates, a Red Bank company specializing in library design, and by the library board's Building and Grounds Committee, led by Barbara Bagger.

Reflecting "the central role the library plays in Westfield life," financial support for the remodeling has been widespread "from donors large and small, elderly and young," officials said. They said that contributions, which are tax-deductible, have come from private donors, local cultural organi-

zations, businesses and "even a few children who raised money at birthday parties."

The Friends of the Westfield Memorial Library have contributed \$100,000 to the campaign. According to co-President Pat Burns, the Friends like the way the library's plan "offers something for every age group and keeps the library accessible to all."

The Friends, with 400-plus members, support the library with fundraising activities such as the annual book sale. "Besides," Ms. Burns added, "it was time for an update, just like you have to do for your house sometimes."

According to Mr. Israel, the library staff has raised about \$1,000 at the circulation desk, making direct appeals for donations of \$1, \$5 and \$10. Other notable contributions have included a \$25,000 gift from an individual who wished to remain anonymous and a \$5,000 donation from Citibank, which recently opened a branch in Westfield.

Library Treasurer Roger Sullivan noted that naming opportunities are available in various positions around the library for both local businesses and individuals. The fundraising campaign hopes to reach its goal of \$700,000 by the end of the year. Ms. Cockren said, saying she hopes people will look favorably upon the library as they consider their annual charitable giving.

Checks can be made out to the Friends of the Library, with a designation for use by the improvement committee. For further information, call Mr. Israel at (908) 789-4119.



UNPLUGGED...Above is an artist's rendering of the proposed wireless lounge space.



NEXT STOP...Northside Trattoria owner Chris Boyle and Leslie, the bartender, point to the genuine subway sign that hangs in the restaurant. New York Yankee closer Mariano Rivera autographed the sign when he was in Westfield last Monday.

McMeekan Lawsuit

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

and New Providence and completed training at the Union County Fire Academy, alleges that another volunteer "was accepted immediately despite the chief's continual representations to [Mr. McMeekan] that there were no openings" and that the department hired a firefighter "who was not even on the hiring list and had not even passed the hiring test." The lawsuit charges that a second firefighter was hired who likewise did not pass the hiring test.

Mr. McMeekan further alleges that of the five firefighters ahead of him on the list for the volunteer department, "three were the sons of Westfield fire officers." He said two "scored below [Mr. McMeekan's] score on fire academy exams and final class ranking."

The plaintiff states in the lawsuit that he "conducted videotape interviews with six Westfield firefighters who admitted on camera that they submitted volunteer applications after March 2002 [when Mr. McMeekan had submitted his] and had attained spots as volunteers soon after, contrary to Chief Castellano's representations...that there were no volunteer openings." He also alleges he was told by the former chief to seek employment with the Springfield Fire Department, which in turn said he should stick with the WFD volunteer list as "his chances were better."

The lawsuit alleges that Mr. Castellano told Mr. McMeekan that in addition to the entrance exam for the WFD, he "could not benefit from 'volunteer points'...and 'chief points' [that] bolstered the overall testing scores of others."

Mr. McMeekan alleges that he met with Mr. Gildea in June 2004 to "discuss his concerns that he was being sidelined by Chief Castellano." He charges that "during the [Division of Civil Rights] fact-finding," Mr. Gildea "lied as to [Mr. McMeekan's] purpose" for calling Mr. Gildea.

Mr. McMeekan said he recorded the conversation with Mr. Gildea and alleges that he "has direct evidence that refutes [Mr.] Gildea's fabrications during the DCR fact-finding."

When reached for comment Monday, Mr. Gildea said, "I have a different version, of course." He said the "complaint" lacks "proof" as to the allegations made against him, which he said are "kind of malicious." He said even if Mr. McMeekan had become a WFD volun-

teer, there was no guarantee he would have been named a paid member.

The town has 35 days to respond to the complaint. Mr. Gildea said the matter would be turned over to the Suburban Joint Insurance Fund, of which Westfield is a member, to review for eligibility of legal representation by the Fund's attorneys.

Mr. McMeekan seeks a "judgment in the full amount of the principal sum due with all unpaid interest and advances," as well as court costs, attorney's fees and "any other relief the court deems equitable and just."

DWC

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Mrs. Cronin said the parking token program, through which patrons can receive free one-hour parking from businesses, has been successful. She said 11,000 tokens have been sold thus far.

The County of Union Department of Engineering and Public Works has rejected a proposal from the town for a pedestrian safety barricade outside the Rialto Theater on East Broad Street.

The rejection letter, from County Engineer Thomas Mineo, stated, "The location of this fence will have the result of trapping any pedestrians crossing mid-block or disembarking from vehicles in the travel-way of a very busy street." Board members argued that the county misunderstood its proposal.

"What they're saying doesn't make sense," said Mr. Martone, adding that the barricade is "meant to prevent that from happening."

"I think that this was a great idea and everybody seemed to be in favor of it," he said.

"We've got to push back," Mrs. Cronin said.

Mr. Arena suggested having a county representative view the space where the fencing would go. DWC board members said they plan to pursue the issue.

The board also discussed upcoming holiday events. Mrs. Cronin said more than 100 holiday events would occur "in and around" downtown.

In other business, the board approved a signage grant for Panoply, a new custom drapes and home furnishing store at 411 South Avenue.

POLICE BLOTTER

Westfield

Tuesday, November 14, Gail D. Fialkowski, 24, of Springfield was arrested at Springfield Avenue and East Broad Street and charged with driving while intoxicated (DWI) after police responded to a report of a motor vehicle accident. There were no injuries. Fialkowski later was released to a responsible adult.

Wednesday, November 15, Jennifer Star, 23, of Westfield responded to Westfield police headquarters to satisfy an outstanding motor vehicle warrant from Fanwood. She was released after posting \$250 bail.

Wednesday, November 15, Cornelius Quirk, Jr., 59, of Westfield was arrested at Prospect and East Broad Streets and charged with DWI after he had been detained by other unknown motorists. He later was released to a responsible individual.

Thursday, November 16, after being stopped for motor vehicle violations, Christopher Weber, 37, of Westfield was arrested at the south side Westfield train station lot and charged with DWI and refusal to submit to an Alcotest. He was committed on default of bail.

Thursday, November 16, Charisse Y. Jones, 37, of Newark was arrested at Plainfield police headquarters and pursuant to a contempt of court criminal warrant issued by Westfield. She was transported to Westfield police headquarters, processed and released after posting \$75 bail.

Thursday, November 16, Elaine Reeves, 23, of Elizabeth was arrested and charged with shoplifting for allegedly under-ringing merchandise for a value of approximately \$2,000 at a store in the 200 block of Elm Street. She was issued a summons and released.

Thursday, November 16, Rudy Guerrero, 25, of Woodbridge was arrested and charged with DWI and refusal to submit to an Alcotest following a motor vehicle accident at South and Central Avenues. There were no injuries. Guerrero later was released with summonses.

Fanwood

Monday, November 13, police said they recovered a vehicle on Helen Street stolen from a Manalapan resident on November 8. According to police, the vehicle was processed for prints and released to the owner.

Tuesday, November 14, Michael G. Giuliano, 31, of Edison was arrested and charged with an outstanding Ridgefield Park warrant following a motor vehicle stop on Terrill Road.

Wednesday, November 15, Daniel C. Batista, 27, of Elizabeth was arrested following a motor vehicle stop on South Avenue, which revealed and outstanding warrant out of Hillside.

Wednesday, November 15, Chad C. Warner, 26, of West Orange was arrested at the Fanwood Post Office following a field investigation, which revealed an outstanding Milltown warrant.

Wednesday, November 15, Marcia J. Jenkins, 25, of Plainfield was arrested after a North Avenue motor vehicle stop revealed outstanding North Brunswick and Franklin Township warrants.

Thursday, November 16, Raymond L.

Parker, 28, of Linden was arrested on an outstanding Union County Sheriff's Department non-bail warrant following a motor vehicle stop on Patterson Road.

Thursday, November 16, Sherry T. Collins, 29, of Orange was arrested following a motor vehicle stop on LaGrande Avenue, which revealed an outstanding Newark warrant.

Thursday, November 16, Kristin J. Buturla, 27, of Fanwood was arrested following a field investigation on Gere Place for an active Plainfield warrant.

Thursday, November 16, Isaac L. Davis, 26, of Plainfield was arrested following a motor vehicle stop on Terrill Road, which revealed an outstanding South Plainfield warrant.

Friday, November 17, Steven D. Cooper, 23, of Plainfield was arrested following a motor vehicle stop on North Avenue for an outstanding Union warrant.

Saturday, November 18, Kyle D. Harvin, 30, of Westfield was arrested for numerous warrants out of the Essex County Sheriff's Department, the Union County Sheriff's Department, Scotch Plains, Plainfield and Middletown following a motor vehicle stop on Martine Avenue.

Sunday, November 19, Kathryn Connelly, 24, of Scotch Plains was arrested and charged with driving while intoxicated (DWI) following a motor vehicle stop on Terrill Road at 2:04 a.m.

Sunday, November 19, Karynn M. Simpson-Borom, 48, of Scotch Plains was arrested following a motor vehicle stop on South Avenue and charged with receiving stolen property and displaying fictitious plates on her vehicle. An additional charge of hindering apprehension is pending.

PBA Contract

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than what we've done with any other contract at this point," he said.

He said a preferred provider organization (PPO) is "at least equal (to), if not better" than a traditional insurance plan.

"The cost for the police department's health insurance plan is \$1.1 million this year," Mr. Gildea said. "The town is underwriting the cost of \$5.8 million in salary and wages."

Mr. Lugo said because of the "pension holiday" in 1998, when towns stopped paying into the police and fire pension system at the recommendation of the state, the town is "trying to turn around and blame that cost on the employee."

"They (the town) were very tight-lipped," he said. "Where did that money (saved on pensions during the pension holiday) go? They just took that money and used it elsewhere."

According to a copy of a contract between neighboring Springfield and its PBA as approved in 2003, starting officers made \$28,993, with officers making \$76,000 after seven years and detectives earning \$78,410. Salaries for police officers in Fanwood range between \$45,000 - the starting salary - and \$96,346 for the rank of captain.

Mr. Lugo said the community has reacted positively towards the PBA's petition drives for support.

Yet, he said, "they (town officials) are taking the winds out of our sails."

Although he hopes for a settlement, Mr. Gildea said if there are not "fruitful negotiations" on December 20, the two sides might be heading towards binding arbitration.

Property Tax Reform

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22, Linden), whose district includes Scotch Plains and Fanwood, determined that the state's retirement systems have an "\$18-billion unfunded liability," with State Health Benefits Program expenditures currently at \$3.6 billion annually, a number that is expected to double by the year 2010.

"A key focus of our committee was eliminating the abuses of the retirement system that harm both taxpayers and honest, hard-working public employees," Mr. Scutari said. "To that end, we developed several reform measures designed to curtail the 'padding' and 'tacking' that create significant unfunded liabilities and threaten the pension system's financial stability."

The Joint Legislative Committee on Public Employee Benefits Reform has recommended that part-time employees, legislators and full-time appointed officials be removed from the state pension and placed into some type of contribution program.

The Joint Legislative Committee on Public School Funding Reform estimated that in 2007, more than \$10 billion of New Jersey's \$30-billion budget "will be allocated to support pre-school through grade 12 education." The panel recommends that school funding should be "based equally on a district's relative property wealth and income."

Westfield Superintendent of Schools William Foley told *The Westfield Leader* that his biggest concerns are an increase in

the power of county superintendents over local district budgets and a change in how state aid is calculated to focus on the wealth of a community. He said Westfield would stand to lose all of its \$4 million in aid.

"I tell Westfield parents this could have an enormous impact on Westfield... This is fairly serious stuff," Mr. Foley said. He added, "these recommendations could be enacted as early as December."

Mr. Foley said rather than changing the state funding formula, he would support a "broad-based" statewide property tax.

Assemblyman Jon Bramnick (R-21, Westfield) said the four committees failed to address what Republicans feel is the biggest problem in Trenton - spending. He told *The Leader* the state's tax system should be changed "based on public policy," not politics.

"I have very grave concerns that most of the recommendations are politically based," he said.

Mr. Bramnick said he would like to see "forensic accountants" review spending of state departments. He said New Jersey taxpayers would be more likely to understand tax increases if they felt their government was being run efficiently.

"But they (taxpayers) know it's (tax dollars) being wasted," he said.

When asked if the GOP would develop an alternative plan, Mr. Bramnick said Republicans have already unveiled a proposal that would cut taxes "by billions." "That's our plan," he said.

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It's the time of year when we count our blessings and give thanks.

Needle Point Homes wishes to acknowledge and thank those who have been part of our team during this past year. It's the spirit of cooperation that makes us all winners.

We wish everyone a happy and healthy holiday season.

Steve Needle



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