

The Westfield Leader

— Established 1890 —

The Official Newspaper of the Town of Westfield
Legal Newspaper for Union County, New Jersey

Member of:
New Jersey Press Association
National Newspaper Association
Westfield Area Chamber of Commerce
Periodicals - Postage Paid at Westfield, New Jersey
P.O. Box 250 • 251 North Avenue, West
Westfield, N.J. 07091

Tele: (908) 232-4407 • E-mail: editor@goleader.com • Web: www.goleader.com • Fax: (908) 232-0473

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to the offices of the newspapers at
P. O. Box 250, Westfield, New Jersey 07091

Published every Thursday by Watchung Communications, Inc.

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SUBSCRIPTION PRICE

One-year - \$28 • Two-year - \$52 • Three-year - \$76 • One-year college (September to May) - \$20

The Scotch Plains - Fanwood TIMES

— Established 1959 —

Official Newspaper of the Borough of Fanwood
and the Township of Scotch Plains

Member of:
New Jersey Press Association • National Newspaper Association
Scotch Plains Business & Professional Association
Fanwood Business & Professional Association
Periodicals - Postage Paid at Scotch Plains, New Jersey

P. O. Box 368
Scotch Plains, N.J. 07076

State Must Stop Grabbing Revenue from Our Towns

The State Legislature's joint committees looking into reducing the property tax burden have met all summer. Yet, last week, municipalities got a surprise when they discovered that the state not only raised the sales tax by 16.7 percent but also expanded the goods and services to which the tax applies. Sales taxes are now imposed on municipal parking, commuter and employee parking permits, pay stations, and pool and golf memberships.

The state already dips heavily into parking-ticket revenues and most other fines. When one pays a parking ticket in Westfield for \$20, the state takes \$11.50 of it. Regardless of what the state says, the money is absorbed into the general fund to offset its uncontrolled spending and political doles.

The state takes a slice of almost everything. It just upped its slice of the revenue from municipal raffle permits. The state's decision to grab municipal revenue is a hidden tax that has a big impact at the local level.

It's ironic (and disheartening) to hear the state say in July that it is doing this for property-tax relief. The effect is just the opposite, giving little credence to the rhetoric of our elected officials.

Town governments are viewed as the "bad guys" in the eyes of the property-tax payers. By law, towns are the tax collectors, which gives them the bad rap. However, towns must give the boards of education about 65 percent of the property tax money and the county about 20 percent. What's left over is used to run municipal government. Matters are worse now that the state has slithered into the municipal revenue extraction game.

Town governments now have the difficult task of increasing fees to make up for the lost revenue per the expanded sales tax. Residents will likely come to meet-

ings or call to complain about fees being increased. Call the Governor instead. How can legislators seriously talk about reducing property taxes when they provide less aid while taking more municipality-generated revenue?

The County of Union does not seem to know yet how the expanded taxes will affect its operations. The county's golf courses charge user fees, not memberships, which are not included in the sales tax, according to county officials. However, the county's public pools may be included in the sales tax. Officials are still trying to determine the impact.

In Westfield, the parking sales tax is a big number, \$100,000, as proclaimed by the council last week. In Mountainside, the tax is only about \$105 per year. But, Mayor Robert Viglianti notes the bureaucratic burden of collection. Fanwood and Cranford must deal with the new tax as they have sizable train station parking operations. We're not sure how school systems will be affected.

The expanded sales tax has hit many businesses too for the first time; including limousines, massages, tattoos, information, investigations, security, burglar and fire alarms, landscaping, computer databases, downloads, weather alerts and credit reports. Interestingly, legal, engineering and accounting fees were left untouched.

The State Legislature's joint committees - budget, public schools, constitution reform and citizens property tax convention and public employee benefits - need to evaluate the impact "hidden taxes" are having on towns. In our opinion, local government revenue sources must be untouched by state politicians.

Given all of this, Governor Jon Corzine just announced talks of selling the New Jersey Turnpike. If it's a good deal for Goldman Sachs, how can it be good for the citizens of New Jersey? When will this financial folly end?

Letters to the Editor

By Andy MacDonald, Fanwood GOP Council Candidate

Fanwood Redevelopment Redux Thoughts and Questions

Pictures, posturing and promises, but no real progress. This seems to be the status of the Downtown Redevelopment Plan ("DRP") under the Mahr Administration. I have lived in town 29 years, have served on council and have almost 10 years on the planning board. My running mate Rich Alber and I have reviewed what has been happening and believe that assessment shows some disturbing conclusions.

The DRP was, and still is, considered one of the best strategies for downtown revitalization. New and attractive construction in Fanwood's core downtown retail area, resulting in a pedestrian-oriented shopping environment, is one of the objectives of redevelopment. When Colleen Mahr and Donna Dolce campaigned for mayor and council in the fall of 2003, they promised that they would do a better job managing the DRP. Now that three years have passed, it is time to assess what has actually been accomplished.

The borough's current DRP does not differ drastically from the plan approved under the previous administration. The same four streets surrounding one downtown block (South, Martine, LaGrande Avenues and Second Street) comprise the downtown redevelopment area. The major change made by the Mahr administration was to change from a single-developer concept to a different approach, allowing anyone to be a developer for any property.

To date, Mayor Mahr has designated three of the individual owners as developers to essentially develop their own properties. These designations were made as far back as the spring of 2005. There has been no construction with respect to these sites. And there have been no sealed finalized plans submitted for approval.

Finalized plans are essential because they provide detailed information about the foundation, water and sewer lines, electrical heating, plumbing, sheet rock and all the components needed to complete a project. Without this definitive information, construction permits cannot be issued and construction cannot begin.

The mayor and council are the Redevelopment Agency. They are responsible for developing this one square block. Sure, there has been other development done around the borough. As a member of the planning board, I have voted for most

of those projects. The mayor and council, as the Redevelopment Agency are responsible for the development of the one square block, while the planning board is responsible for making certain the proposed plans presented for consideration meet zoning codes and other legal requirements. The planning board is not responsible for the concept and development of a property or in picking the developer.

I voted for two of the three proposed projects for the downtown area submitted to the planning board. The one I voted against was the Station Square plan. I did so because I believe the density requested for that size property is too high. I personally feel that the setback from the road of only six feet and the proposed height of three stories (a la the Dunkin' Donuts building, but higher) is not in keeping with the borough.

I have also voted for many of the projects currently under way or finished around Fanwood. All of these projects were not the responsibility of the mayor and council as is the DRP. The private businesses that have moved forward with these projects should be commended.

If these projects can move ahead, what's wrong with the mayor and council? They still cannot get any development of this one square block off the ground.

When I decided to run for borough council, this was one issue I considered important and needed to understand the why of it. I feel the frustration of 30 years of "same old-same old" most of the longer term residents feel.

The residents of Fanwood deserve answers from Mayor Mahr and Councilwoman Dolce. Where is the construction of a mixed-use multi-level structure of stores and residences along 222 South Avenue? In the June 2006 issue of *The Fanwoodian*, Mayor Mahr stated, "After more than two years in the planning, the demolition and construction of the borough's first new construction in the Downtown Redevelopment has begun."

The fact is that a fire ravaged buildings on the site a few years ago, which necessitated the demolition she refers to. Demolition that was a life and safety concern, not a "shovel in the ground, start to a project" as claimed by the mayor.

The developer of this property pro-

jected in his original application to the borough that demolition would begin in early October/November 2005. Final inspections and certificates of occupancy were anticipated in September 2006. That time frame has come and gone. Sealed finalized building plans are not even on file yet, so building permits cannot be issued. Construction cannot even move forward until this has occurred.

Where is the construction of residences and stores along 230 South Avenue? In October 2005, the mayor promised that there would be construction on this site by May 2006. Another building season has passed. Valuable ratables, which could help decrease our tax burden, are being lost. The only picture here is a lack of progress.

Former SP Police Chief

Writes of Depositions

In the September 21 edition of *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times*, you detailed the conclusion of the lawsuit against the township by four Scotch Plains police officers. As [Scotch Plains] Police Chief during the initial incident, I was also named in the suit. Although the suit never made it to trial, I had to sit through hours of deposition testimony by various individuals associated with the suit.

One of those depositions was from former [police] Lieutenant Neil LeStrange, who is now a Democratic candidate for the township council. I believe that the residents of Scotch Plains and *The Scotch Plains Fanwood Times* would be interested, and in some cases disturbed, to read the under-oath testimony of Mr. LeStrange. Now that he is a candidate to lead this town on our government body, I feel that it is important for the residents of this town to be enlightened so that they can make an informed decision on Election Day.

Now that this case has been settled, the depositions in this matter are now public documents and are available for public scrutiny. In particular, I would draw your attention to his testimony regarding his attendance at the "Good Old Boys Rally," -a four-day event participated in by members of various law enforcement personnel, particularly on a federal level. It was an event with derogatory racial overtones and had received national press coverage back in the nineties.

Chief Thomas F. O'Brien - Ret.
Scotch Plains

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Letters to the Editor

Parent Questions Security at WHS, Edison, Roosevelt Schools

Let me begin by stating that I, myself, have gone through McKinley Elementary School, Roosevelt Intermediate School and Westfield High School. I've lived in Westfield all of my life and I can't believe what I see each day progressively getting worse.

I've been one of the many viewers tuning in this past week and listening as newscasters report school shooting after school shooting. What's the latest count, three schools this past week alone? Insane.

Wonderful safety changes have been made to my child's elementary school - McKinley School, that were due in part to 9/11, I'm sure. However, I see that neither the middle schools nor the high school is nearly as safe - At all. Does the high school even have an on-site detective, now that Det. Allen has retired?

You can walk into either Edison or Roosevelt Intermediate Schools and not be questioned. The back doors, as well as the gym doors are hardly ever locked. Westfield High School is an absolute joke as far as security goes. Front doors, back doors, loading dock... You name it, they're almost always open. After the Columbine disaster and the many tragedies like that followed, why is that still the case? Last year, a former 'troubled' student was allowed into the high school to spend the day with a friend, due to the fact the student's school (another town) was not in session. The student did so without the needed and pre-authorized note from home. The student walked the halls the

entire day calling people names and such. When I called the vice-principal - Mr. Tenant - last year, he assured me that the high school was doing away with the "bring-a-friend-to-school" policy altogether. Wait, it gets better. This year, a fight broke out due to the same lack of security; a visiting student from another town came into the high school and started a fist-fight with one of our children.

Does it take a true act of violence to get someone's attention? Is everyone so under the impression that "it" simply doesn't happen here. Someone needs to wake up and smell the coffee before something actually does happen, and on a grand scale. The fact that we are one of the only schools around here that still has an open-lunch policy is still beyond comprehension. Who is responsible for the children when they are off campus? What if, God forbid, someone were to get hit by a car as they crossed a street? Who is held accountable? Who is held accountable for the children who come in from other areas to eat lunch with our kids? Does anyone have a grand picture of all that goes on? I don't think so.

Even the paraprofessionals who former Principal Robert Petix was trying to warn about seem to be most incompetent. Granted, the high school is the most densely populated school and it must be hard to keep track of everything; but, these are our children, our future.

Francesca Sabino
Westfield

By Linda Stender DEM Candidate for Congress Action Needed on Stem Cell Research

Seventh Congressional District candidate Linda Stender and Rep. Diana DeGette visited the home of a local teen afflicted with diabetes on October 4 to call for the expansion of stem-cell research.

Mrs. Stender and Rep. DeGette - the author of legislation to expand federal funding for research on embryonic stem cells vetoed by President George W. Bush this past summer - visited the home of John McBride and met with his daughter, Michelle. Michelle has diabetes. Her family said they support embryonic stem cell research.

"The biggest obstacle to furthering stem cell research and potentially life saving science is an administration and a Republican Congress that is beholden to the extremists in their party who play politics with science," said Mrs. Stender, the Democratic candidate for Congress in New Jersey's seventh district. "A majority of Americans recognize that stem-cell research is a vital step in the development of lifesaving medical treatments that could unlock the cures for diseases like diabetes, arthritis, Parkinson's and Alzheimer's."

According to press release from the candidate, "An expansion of stem-cell research is important because federal policy is outdated and creates arbitrary obstacles to important medical advancements. The current narrow policy on the

Boy Scout Reminder: Care for Our Flags

My name is Tommy Hogaboom, and I just want to write *The Westfield Leader* and say what a disgrace the American flag over at the Westfield American Legion Post #3 is. As an Eagle Scout, my project was on the WWII monument; and to see the veterans let the flag go like this is a disgrace.

I have tried to contact Ralph Douglas and Charles Townsend - and even my father - about it, but yet no one seems to care.

I was hoping this letter would make things right.

Tommy Hogaboom
Westfield

By David Valian Fanwood DEM Council Candidate Development Not Limited Downtown

I read with interest a recent article by Ted Ritter about downtown Fanwood. The article accurately expressed Mayor Colleen Mahr's commitment, and that of the Fanwood Borough Council, towards downtown redevelopment in Fanwood. I appreciate that the redevelopment is extremely important, but this administration has not limited itself to the downtown projects.

If you get a chance to explore Fanwood, you will see the beginnings of the redevelopment process throughout the downtown area as mentioned in the article, and you will feel the excitement it is generating. But don't stop there. Notice the rebuilt Dunkin Donuts, and the new sidewalks, lights and railings near the train station. Notice the improvements at the library, and at the recreational building in

Introductions are Courtesy, Not Matter of Fanwood Politics

My name is Linda Caminiti, and as a proud Fanwoodian and as an independent not affiliated with either political party, I was surprised and saddened to see a former mayor using my name in his letter to the editor last week to make a very small point in his party's election campaign.

Yes, I volunteer my time, and that of my family as well, to work at Fanny Wood day, and have done so for many years. Beyond my serving on the committee all year, my primary role as master of ceremonies on the day of the event is to announce the events, interview people in the crowd and generally cheerlead.

Even though it is a huge time commitment, I am proud to have been a part of an annual event, which has brought much joy and even a little revenue to the town. My philosophy, as all who know me will agree, is to accentuate the positive. I regret that my enthusiasm in a brief four-sentence introduction for an accomplished Fanwood resident, Linda Stender, was perceived "with disgust" by Ted Trump.

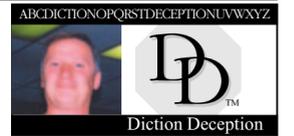
Yes I was proud that a local Fanwoodian and a fellow woman was a candidate for an important governmental position, and that's why I introduced her the way I did. I would also have been proud to introduce our current representative to Congress, in a similarly positive way, if he had attended the event.

Linda Caminiti
Fanwood

'Government Reform Thoughts' at goleader.com

Since the beginning of the year, *The Westfield Leader* and *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times* have government reform thoughts at goleader.com and a feedback form is provided for the public to comment.

This week's reform thought is: Officials in New Jersey state government are discussing requiring towns and school districts to merge and turn over local functions to county government as a way to reduce cost and lower property taxes. Long-term, this may be beneficial. However, we believe that this would result in



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. Platyheric - Having a flat or broad sacrum
2. Haematophilina - Blood-sucking vampire bats
3. Hakeem - A Moslem doctor
4. Bekah - One half a shekel

MECONOPHAGIST

1. An opium eater
2. A sleepwalker
3. A person who talks in his sleep
4. A speed reader

HEPATOLITHIASIS

1. A tearing in pieces
2. Savageness of manner; fierceness
3. Gallstones
4. A flattened state or condition

INTEGUMENT

1. An outer covering of a body or plant
2. The lower world; Hades
3. The rotten heart or body of a tree
4. Burial; interment

PANSOPHY

1. A loud outcry of blame or rebuke
2. Universal wisdom or knowledge
3. Abundance
4. An enduring conflict

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Letters to the Editor

Fanwood Mayor Mahr Responds to GOP

With respect to the inaccurate statements made by the local GOP candidates concerning the hiring of T&M Associates, the following is an outline of how the borough conducted itself.

Fanwood does follow the State of New Jersey's Pay-to-Play law - this became effective January 1, 2006. The State of New Jersey does allow municipalities to award professional services without public bidding. However, in keeping with my administration's commitment of open and transparent government, the Borough of Fanwood solicited Request for Proposals (RFP's) in 2005 to administer the TDR program in Fanwood.

The guidelines for the entire TDR program were established by the State of NJ Department of Community Affairs (NJDCA). Two firms responded to the RFP's - Schoor DePalma and T&M Associates. The borough, after careful review of the proposals, selected T&M. The amount of T&M's contract has always been in line with the amount of grant money Fanwood receives from the NJDCA. The NJDCA is the one who is overseeing this pilot program as well as the other five being conducted throughout the State of New Jersey.

Since we began this program, status reports are required to be submitted to NJDCA for their review. In addition, Fanwood has a NJDCA official who has been assigned to our project. This official attends all our public meetings, sits in on our conference calls, updates the mayor and council and offers valuable assistance throughout the entire process. As with the award of any grant, there are checks and balances.

With Fanwood having received historic levels of grant monies - \$2.1 million over the last three years - we are more than familiar with this process. To insinuate that there is no oversight or that this mayor and council are not taking the appropriate measures in hiring professionals is extremely misleading. I would strongly urge any candidates who say they wish to serve our community to make sure that they have the correct facts prior to fanning the flames of political rhetoric. Our residents deserve better.

Mayor Colleen Mahr
Fanwood

Campaign Trick is an Old Bamboozle

A column by Paul Peyton in your October 5 edition includes an item, accepted at face value, that the Republican National Senatorial Committee is "preparing for the possibility that the Democrats may attempt to switch from Robert Menendez to another candidate." I could have just grinned and ignored this, but something a little more serious is at stake.

This ploy by the Republicans is the standard mischief and disinformation of Senate campaigns. Strategists will try to imply that a candidate is so weak that he might have to drop out. Of course, this is nonsense. In fact, it is such an old trick that I was shocked to see it is still used.

More surprising than the Republicans trotting out this hoax is the way that your columnist seems to have accepted it hook, line and sinker.

Whether you support Senator Menendez or not (I do, enthusiastically), no honest observer can claim that the Democrats have ever considered pulling the rug out from under one of their strongest candidates in any senate race this year. Senator Menendez has run an extraordinary campaign and will continue to serve New Jersey as a great senator.

I'm afraid you were bamboozled by an old trick.

Steven Gorelick
Westfield

