



**LET'S DO LUNCH...**Bulletin Editor Roseleen Flaherty, left, and Woman's Club of Westfield President Delores Geisow, right, discuss the auction that will be part of the 58th Woman's Club of Westfield Scholarship Luncheon. The luncheon will be held at Baltusrol Golf Club in Springfield on Wednesday, October 18. More than 30 gifts donated by Marie Gray, friend and benefactor of Woman's Club, along with many gift certificates donated by local businesses, will be offered for raffle. For more information, contact the Woman's Club of Westfield, P.O. Box 2428, Westfield, NJ 07091.



**WELCOME WAGON...**New teacher to the Westfield public schools, Kelly Molnar, welcomes her first-grade class as they assemble with their parents outside of Franklin School. Ms. Molnar, who comes to Westfield with experience teaching in the private school sector, is one of 27 first-grade teachers in the Westfield elementary schools.

## First Grades Experience Record Enrollment in WF

WESTFIELD—The Westfield public schools opened their doors with the highest first grade enrollment since the 1970s, with 545 students in 27 classrooms, according to Westfield school officials.

Four of the six elementary schools have five first-grades, including Franklin, Wilson, Jefferson and Tamaques, officials said. "At this time last year, we enrolled 363 kindergarten children into the district," said Superintendent of Schools William Foley.

"That means that an additional 182 children in that age group have now entered the Westfield public schools as first graders. The impact this has on our elementary schools cannot be minimized," Mr. Foley said.

"To make room for these first graders we have had to advise parents of incoming kindergartners that their children might have to be placed in one of our six elementary schools with available space, not necessarily the one closest to their home," he added. "Even with this course of action, resulting in a high number opting for private kindergarten, we have lost our music and art rooms in all but one of our elementary schools because of growing enrollment."

Supporting the recent recommendation by the Citizens Advisory Committee on Enrollment (CACE), Mr.

Foley said a centralized kindergarten would relieve the overcrowding at the elementary level. "By renovating Lincoln School into a kindergarten for the whole town as well as provide space for pre-school disabled classes there, we would free up space in our six elementary schools," he said.

"We will present this proposal to the public in a referendum on January 23," he added, "to accommodate our growing community of young learners."



**HOLY KICK OFF...**Holy Trinity Interparochial School kicked off the first full week of school with a mass celebrated by Monsignor Joseph Masiello. Pictured with Monsignor Masiello are sixth-grade students, Andrew Newman and Peter Iannelli.

## SP Man Teaches in Japan, Helps Orphans in Vietnam

By LINDA B. CONDRILLO  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

SCOTCH PLAINS — If considering working in a foreign country, one might want to talk to Josh Bernstein, who recently returned to his Scotch Plains home after spending nearly a year teaching English to Japanese children in the remote village of Asagiri.

Sipping on green tea in Westfield Starbucks, Mr. Bernstein, who is a 2001 graduate of Gaucher College, recently spoke with *The Westfield Leader* and *The Times* about his "life-changing experience."

Learning about the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Program through his older brother, Mr. Bernstein took advantage of what he considered a "once-in-a-lifetime opportunity" to work for JET, an organization that invites university graduates from overseas to participate in international exchange and foreign-language education throughout Japan.

The salary certainly sounded impressive—more than \$3 million a year, though of course that was in Yen and worth about \$32,000 in U.S. dollars. However, considering housing costs are subsidized and roundtrip tickets are gratis, that would be plenty to live on and travel modestly on school breaks.

Mr. Bernstein told the newspaper, "I was looking for an adventure." Admitting that language was often a barrier, he noted, "I had to gauge things on body language and facial reactions and getting answers in very subtle ways. Because of that, I think I've become much more in tune with communication that's not expressed verbally."

Keeping in touch through his online blog, [www.jewinjapan.com](http://www.jewinjapan.com), allowed Mr. Bernstein to share his experiences with friends and family back home. He traveled on school breaks to Korea and Tokyo and later to Cambodia.

Along with the obvious notations of big differences in culture and food (ask him about the fried dog or boiled intestines, or a milk shake with the blood of a live snake from the night markets of Taipei); by the time he returned, voluminous pages of detailed journal entries from his many excursions were chronicled, and hundreds of photos posted on his website.

At an English teacher's conference, Mr. Bernstein became aware of an organization called Papyrus, a group that supports educational projects in developing countries and disaster-relief areas.

The prospect of combining adventure travel and social action sounded exactly what Mr. Bernstein was looking for during the spring break. Soon he found himself trekking across Cambodia in 100 degree temperatures to volunteer at the Sangkheum Center, an orphanage for Cambodia's orphaned, abandoned or abused children.

It was there he met the Cambodian Children's Fund (CCF) founder, Scott Neeson, formerly a film executive from Los Angeles. Mr. Neeson is now the executive director for CCF, which he established in 2003 and lives year-round in Phnom Penh.

He founded the CCF to aid the most impoverished of Cambodia's children. Cambodia's history has been tragic, with the loss of an estimated 2.5 million lives (nearly one-third of the population) during Pol Pot's brutal reign in the 1970's, foreign incursions and civil war. Millions of land mines remain active today and are spread throughout the country.

Mr. Bernstein's photos on the Cambodia portion of his blog describe the awful reality. After a trip through the garbage dumps where Mr. Neeson recruited students for his school, Mr. Bernstein wrote about a girl of six or seven:

"Her father will not send her to school because he wants her garbage-picking income. When they get a bit older, girls her age are often sold to pimps for around \$30. Rape and abuse are also very common. Life is bleakest for poor females in this country."

However, one entry on his blog, entered prior to the trip, made a difference. Announcing the upcoming service project where he would work on the construction of a new residence at the Sangkheum Center, Mr. Bernstein made an appeal to friends and family and set a personal goal to raise money for the project. They came through and the \$1,000 goal was met.

After the trip to Cambodia, it was back to work in Asagiri for Mr. Bernstein, where he found the most relaxing place to be was at his local onsen (hot spring bath), a stark contrast to the orphanage. He remarked, "I visited approximately 30 onsens throughout Japan. One was between two mountains in the town of Aso, where the water was nearly scalding, bubbling up from a volcano."

Mr. Bernstein admitted he practically became a fixture at one onsen in particular in Asagiri. To his surprise, the group of regulars threw him a going-away party on his final visit. "I walked out of the changing room and they were all lined up. They all clapped and shook my hand. It was very touching. I'll miss that."

There are other things that Mr. Bernstein will miss besides the hot spring baths—the students of course, the peaceful surroundings and his host family, who told him he must come back one day, but not until he has a wife and child in tow. "It could be awhile," added Mr. Bernstein.

For now, the stacks of handmade goodbye cards from his students and the pictures on his website tell a thousand words, at least.

To learn more about opportunities for work in Japan through the JET program, log on to [www.jetprogramme.org](http://www.jetprogramme.org).

### Matthew Renart Makes Grade 11 Honor Roll

WESTFIELD—A student's name was inadvertently omitted from last week's fourth marking period honor roll for Westfield High School.

The list should have reflected that Matthew Renart made the 11th Grade Regular Honor Roll.



**CHILD SUPPORT...**Scotch Plains resident Josh Bernstein recently returned from a stint in Asia, teaching English to Japanese children. Above, during a spring break, he volunteers at the Sangkheum Center, an orphanage for Cambodia's orphaned, abandoned or abused children child.



**GRACEFUL...**Lucy Banta of Westfield dials author Anthony Doerr to begin her book club's private interview with him regarding his latest novel, "About Grace."

## Westfield Book Club Wins Interview with Author

WESTFIELD—Earlier this month, at a Words and Wisdom Book Club in Westfield, the members participated in a private phone interview with Anthony Doerr, author of "About Grace," a novel that was named a *Washington Post* Bookworld best book of the year.

Lucy Banta, recording secretary for the book club, which was formed in 1998, won a contest that enabled all 11 members to receive complimentary copies of the novel and speak to the author himself.

The telephone interview took place at Mrs. Banta's Westfield home where she and her 10 book club friends, who have known each other for 15 to 20 years, learned about the source of inspiration for the novel, which centers on an Alaskan meteorologist's gift of premonition.

They discovered that Mr. Doerr, who also writes a science column in the *Boston Globe* and was once a professor at Princeton University, drew upon much of his science back-

ground for the novel. Recalling a book about snowflakes he read as a child, which is actually mentioned in "About Grace," he admitted to the book club members that, like the main character, he also has a deep appreciation of nature.

Following the theme of snowflakes, Barbara Kemps, a craft enthusiast, presented each of her fellow book club members with a handmade chocolate snowflake.

In addition to Mrs. Banta and Ms. Kemps, the other members of the book club are: Joan Burns, Margie Coltrera, Kathy Fitzpatrick, Marianne Flood, Chris Molloy, Beth Gillin, Debbie Kendrick, Lee Kivetz and Lorre Korecky. The club meets approximately 10 times a year and has read more than 75 books thus far.

As the interview came to a close, Mr. Doerr told the women, "I am thankful that you support reading and I think the resurgence of book clubs in America is wonderful."

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