

Westfield Police Detective Alleges Sexual Harassment by Ex-Chief

By PAUL J. PEYTON
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD - A Westfield police detective has filed a sexual harassment lawsuit against the town, the Westfield Police Department (WPD) and former police chief Bernard Tracy. The detective, Sandra Chambers of Plainfield, has been employed by the WPD since 1995.

The six-count lawsuit, served on Westfield on December 14, alleges that "during a two-year period, Chief Tracy regularly called Detective Chambers at home, during non-working hours and late into the evening" and that Mr. Tracy invited Detective Chambers "to call him on his personal cell phone."

Mr. Tracy retired from the department in September 2005 and accepted a job with the Linden Public Schools

as a school security officer.

Detective Chambers admitted that she and Mr. Tracy had been friends, and that then-Chief Tracy invited her to attend a convention in 2003 with him in Washington, D.C., paid for by the police department.

"While at the convention, Detective Chambers worked very hard to make contacts that would benefit the Westfield Police Department," Detective Chambers alleges in the suit. "While at the convention, Chief Tracy commented to Detective Chambers and others that she was not spending enough time with him, and he felt that she had 'abandoned' him."

The detective alleges that the former chief "intimated that he was hopeful that while they were at the convention, he and Detective Cham-

bers could become even better friends."

After spurning his advances, Detective Chambers claims the former chief's "demeanor toward [her] was decidedly cool and distant," and that he "limited" his contact with the detective after the convention.

The third count of the lawsuit, which alleges sexual harassment, states, "[Detective Chambers] was treated differently because she would not engage in inappropriate sexual conduct with Chief of Police Bernard F. Tracy."

In March 2005, then-Chief Tracy suspended the detective and attempted to have her terminated following an internal affairs investigation as to whether she reportedly fixed a parking ticket for her son. Detective Chambers, who spent most of the year on paid suspension, was then the subject of a disciplinary hearing.

As reported by *The Westfield Leader*, a hearing officer found her guilty on five of seven charges of the ticket fix and for lying about it during a police department internal investigation. She was suspended for 15 days without pay.

Detective Chambers was found guilty by hearing officer James Damato of official misconduct, neglect of duty, "illegal reduction or deletion of a parking summons for personal gain, conduct unbecoming of a police officer and using her authority to influence or modify the action of another officer." Two charges of false swearing were dismissed.

She alleges in the lawsuit that the real reason Mr. Tracy had her suspended "was because she would not engage in an inappropriate quid pro quo relationship with Chief Tracy."

During Detective Chambers' disciplinary hearing, her attorney, Hassen Abdallah, questioned Mr. Tracy: "There is an allegation that at some point you had a relationship with Detective Chambers and as a result of what she would not do, you began to retaliate against her. And the purpose of bringing this action against her is to retaliate because she wouldn't do what you wanted her to do."

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Councilman Caruana Denounces Recent Nativity Figurine Thefts as Hate Crimes

By MICHAEL J. POLLACK
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD - In its first conference session of 2007, the council discussed the rash of recent thefts and the "confusion" over Christmas tree removal.

First Ward Councilman Sal Caruana addressed the recent thefts of nativity figures from area Roman Catholic churches.

Calling the acts - which occurred at St. Helen's and Holy Trinity Churches on New Year's Eve and January 2, respectively - "hate crimes," he related the incidents to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s insistence on "the importance of respect and tolerance in the fight for equality."

He added, "Taken together, these acts appear to be premeditated acts of religious hatred. Under state law, any vandalism of a religious institution carries the presumption of bias and automatically becomes punishable as



TREE TROUBLE...A pile of discarded Christmas trees sits in the parking lot of Tamaques Park in Westfield on Sunday, despite a sign noting that trees should not be dumped there. The conservation center was not open on Sunday, causing residents to dump trees outside. See related notice below.

Benjamin B. Corbin for The Westfield Leader

Westfield School \$9.4-Mil Bond Referendum Sparks Debate

By NORDETTE N. ADAMS
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD - Westfield voters will head back to the polls on Tuesday, January 23, for a special election on a \$9.4-million education bond.

One part of the bond proposal requests \$6 million to renovate Lincoln School at 728 Westfield Avenue so it may serve as an early childhood learning center. The center would house all of the town's kindergartners and disabled pre-kindergarten students.

In an interview with *The Westfield Leader*, Westfield Public Schools Community Relations Coordinator Lorre Korecky cited a legal mandate to provide educational opportunities for disabled students at the pre-k level and the disadvantage of such students' present location at Edison Intermediate School.

"Right now, we have young children going to the same school with teenagers. We would like to place those young children in Lincoln," she said.

Referring to Westfield's burgeoning school population, bond supporters say centralizing kindergarten classes would free classrooms in el-

ementary schools and enable elementary schools to keep class sizes to no more than 25 students - the size encouraged by Westfield schools policy.

The change would make classroom space available for dedicated art and music rooms at the elementary schools. Currently, most Westfield art and music teachers operate from carts, traveling from classroom to classroom, Ms. Korecky said.

The Lincoln School building most recently housed Hillcrest Academy, an alternative high school for Union County. Ms. Korecky said that while the building was adequate for high school students, it would be inadequate for the education of pre-k disabled students and kindergartners.

Westfield Schools Superintendent of Schools William Foley told *The Leader*, "If we use it for a kindergarten, it will house five-year-olds. You have to make different types of facilities, including bathrooms, sinks and an elevator. That building, right now, is running an old steam heat system. We will add air conditioning and make it a good facility. We can't ask (Westfield parents) to put kids in the

school (in its present condition)."

Some bond opponents object specifically to asking Westfield parents to send a kindergartener to a school that may not be in the child's own neighborhood. They argue that centralizing kindergarten classes is counter to the neighborhood-school model.

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Thieves Target Nativity Scenes

By SUZETTE F. STALKER
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD - Multiple local Roman Catholic churches have reported the theft during the holiday season of nativity figures from outdoor displays on parish grounds.

The Westfield Police Department received a report on December 31 that a three-foot baby Jesus figure, hand-made of synthetic waterproof material, was removed from a crèche in front of St. Helen's Church on Rahway Avenue in Westfield.

On January 2, the Holy Trinity Church of Westfield reported the theft of its infant Jesus statue from a manger scene on its property. The church is located in the 300 block of First Street.

Authorities confirmed that the Holy Trinity statue later was discovered smashed on the property of the Dooley Colonial Home on Westfield Avenue in Westfield.

In addition to those removed from the Westfield churches, four statues were reported stolen from a crèche on the front lawn of St. Agnes Church on Madison Hill Road in Clark, including the figures of Mary, Joseph, Jesus and one of the wise men.

There are currently no suspects in any of the cases.

The Westfield Town Council Tuesday night, at the suggestion of Third Ward Councilman David Haas, decided to formulate a resolution both honoring Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and denouncing the acts as "hate crimes" after First Ward Councilman Sal Caruana read a statement condemning the thefts.

"As a councilman, my hope is that the individual(s) responsible are apprehended and prosecuted to the full

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Fred K. Lecomte for The Westfield Leader

NOT ENOUGH...Blue Devils senior guard Mike Venezia takes a foul shot at Thursday's game against rival Scotch Plains-Fanwood Raiders. He scored 19 points, but Westfield fell, 63-57, in double overtime. See story on page 11.

Officials: UC Not Favored For Pilot BOE Consolidation

By CAROLINE KOELLHOFFER
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD - Union County is not slated to be picked as part of a proposed bill for a countywide school district pilot program, state elected officials revealed at Tuesday night's board of education meeting.

Senator Tom Kean, Jr. and Assemblyman Jon Bramnick of Westfield, and Lynne Strickland, executive director of the Garden State Coalition of Schools, appeared before the BOE to report on the status of this proposed bill.

"The bill is not dead yet, but the possibility of the potential for Union County seems to be far removed," said Ms. Strickland.

Mr. Kean said, "I have received a response from the senate side that [the bill] would not be amended to include Union County at this time. But all that would need to change is one or two words and Union County could be included."

He expressed his opposition to the proposed bill, going on to say, "Not once has the public been given the normal opportunity that they would have on any other bill, in any other process, to come before senate committee or assembly committee, to testify about their opinions on these bills. It is the wrong way to make policy."

Mr. Kean asked the board and the public to get involved in the process. He said, "We have to work on a bipartisan basis. I am urging the residents of Westfield, Scotch Plains and Fanwood to not only e-mail the Gov-

ernor (Jon Corzine), the Senate President (Richard Codey) and the Assembly Speaker (Joe Roberts) about their opinions, but also to e-mail your friends and relatives throughout this state, so that they can contact their representatives to express their dissatisfaction as well. This needs to be a grassroots movement if we are going to save our schools."

In other business, the board discussed the proposed bond referendum to be voted upon on Tuesday, January 23. Business Administrator Robert Berman presented a review of completed projects under past bonds and noted that the largest job left to be completed under the \$21,495,000 bond passed in 2000 is the renovation of the air-conditioning system in Westfield High School's auditorium, cafeteria and music room for an estimated price tag of \$950,000.

Superintendent of Schools William Foley said, "It is important to note that all the projects were completed below the cost that was estimated. So we did what we said we were going to do for a little less than we thought it would cost. I think we can say that our track record with bonds has been good."

The board discussed the possibility of altering the existing schedule by closing schools on election day in November and making changes to the four-hour days used in the fall for curriculum preparation and parent-teacher conferences. The board will discuss the matter further at next week's meeting and vote on the topic.



Greg Ryan for The Westfield Leader

LISTENING INTENTLY...Elizabeth Mayor Chris Bollwage, left, and New Jersey Governor Jon Corzine observe proceedings at Sunday's Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders reorganization meeting. See story on page 2.

Christmas Tree Disposal Notice

Westfield Schedule

WESTFIELD - Town Administrator James Gildea told *The Leader/ Times* that "Christmas trees may now be brought to the Conservation Center (on Rahway Avenue) due to the new winter schedule."

All decorations, lights and wiring must be taken off trees prior to dropping them off at the Conservation Center. Accordingly, Christmas trees are not to be deposited in Tamaques Park as in past years. Christmas trees will not be picked up by the Town of Westfield curbside.

The Westfield Conservation Center will be opened every other (alternating) Saturday: January 6 and 20, February 3 and 17, March 3 and 17, between the hours of 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., weather permitting.

For further information, call (908) 789-4100 ext. 600 or see the town website: westfieldnj.gov. In addition, regular updates will be broad-

cast on TV-36. This is the second year of this new system in Westfield.

Scotch Plains Schedule

SCOTCH PLAINS - Township Manager Tom Atkins told *The Leader/Times* that the Department of Public Works will pick up Christmas trees from curbside beginning on January 16, 2007 and should be completed in seven days thereafter.

Mr. Atkins also noted, "Residents can also drop off their tree at the Department (of Public Works) on Plainfield Avenue, if they would like, any time before January 29, 2007. Obviously, we would prefer business hours but we handle the others too. Business hours really keep things more orderly and potentially avoiding the dropping off/dumping of other stuff too. We really only say drop off if they miss the program the week of the 16th."



GAINING GRANT...Rep. Mike Ferguson (R-7th, New Providence) presents a \$69,417 check per a federal grant to the Mountainside Fire Department to replace a backup generator. Pictured, from left to right, are: Mountainside Mayor Robert Vigilanti, Rep. Ferguson, fire official George McGrath, Fire Chief Neil Williams and Deputy Chief Kenny Lawrence.

Benjamin B. Corbin for The Westfield Leader

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