

Ferguson to Work Towards Expediting Quiet-Zone Process

By MICHAEL J. POLLACK
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — In what Town Administrator Jim Gildea described as the “very long and laborious process” of completing requirements to establish a quiet zone at the Rahway Avenue grade crossing, Rep. Mike Ferguson (R-7th, New Providence) has agreed to work with all parties to expedite the process.

A June 2005 Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) rule “(provided) an opportunity, not available until (then), for thousands of localities nationwide to mitigate the effects of train horn noise by establishing new ‘quiet zones.’”

In a quiet zone, a train engineer is relieved of any obligation to sound the horn, though he is permitted to use his discretion if an emergency arises or if an animal or person is in danger.

Currently, residents in the vicinity of the crossing, which borders on Houlihan Field, continue to hear train whistles sounded, as Westfield works with the FRA and the New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT) to create the first 24-hour quiet zone in the state after the aforementioned ruling.

Mr. Gildea said, “In late December, as part of the process, we held the required diagnostic meeting.”

At the diagnostic meeting, the team found that Westfield still must establish proper signage before implementation of the quiet zone.

Additionally, constant-warning time devices and power-out indicators must be installed at the crossing by Consolidated Rail Corporation (Conrail), which owns, operates and maintains the line, to meet the safety requirements of the FRA rule.

According to Warren Flatlau, FRA public affairs specialist, the constant-warning device assures

that “irrespective of the speed, a motorist or pedestrian is provided a minimum amount of advanced warning.” Power-out indicators are “fail-safe technology” that assure that if power is lost, a backup battery exists.

After the meeting a comment period began, during which time Mr. Gildea said he received two questions. After that, Conrail supplied Westfield with a draft agreement. The town then put money in its budget to fund equipment to “retrofit” the railroad.

The council then passed its capital budget in June, which appropriated more than \$78,000 to pay for the needed upgrades, and reviewed the draft for Conrail.

“Now, we are waiting for the FRA to update its website,” Mr. Gildea said. “What’s not updated is the section of the website that talks about a quiet-zone calculator, which determines the zone you need, which is based on traffic and train crossing counts.”

Third Ward Councilman and Public Safety, Transportation and Parking Chairman Mark Ciarrocca said, “It’s not that they haven’t accepted our data; it’s just a maddeningly slow process. After the data is posted, there is a 30-day comment period after which we will make improvements as needed. After that, it’s up to Conrail to get the work done.”

Town Engineer Ken Marsh said, “Our data is still with the FRA. We’ve done everything we need to do. We developed a design and refined it based on our meeting with the diagnostic team.”

“There are rumors that it might not happen for a while,” he added. “There’s not much else we can do. I have had experience working with the railroads...it’s a tremendous bureaucracy.”

NJDOT’s Todd Hirt, the diagnostic team leader, said, “There

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RESCUE EFFORT...A Channel 2 news helicopter circles above while Union County HazMat workers prepare to enter HomeCare America on South Avenue in Westfield. Three contractors were overcome by carbon monoxide on July 11, while using a gasoline-driven power washer to remove mold in the basement of the building. The incident is now under investigation by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to see if any workplace violations occurred.

OSHA Investigates After Carbon Monoxide Poisons Three Workers at Westfield’s HomeCare America

By ALLISON GIBBONS, EBONY MCQUEEN and FRED K. LECOMTE
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has launched an investigation into an incident at HomeCare America on South Avenue last week that sent at least three men to the hospital with carbon monoxide poisoning. The men were workers at a South Ave. medical supply company.

Robert Kulick, the area director for OSHA’s Avenel office, confirmed that the agency is investigating the incident.

OSHA was present at the scene, Mr. Kulick said, but could not comment on the status of the investigation.

Mr. Kulick said that, should it be determined that the workers were in the country illegally, the agency would direct that information to the US Immigration and Naturalization Service. However, he said, “our mission is not to determine whether or not employees are illegal” but rather to ensure that OSHA laws are properly followed.

OSHA law protects employees regardless of their status, Mr. Kulick said. Local police and fire departments have concluded their investigations. While the Westfield Police Department has determined that there was no criminal activity involved in the poisoning of the three workers, OSHA will be responsible for determining if any workplace violations occurred, according to Westfield Police Chief John Parizeau.

“There was nothing criminal done. So we’re done (with the police investigation) as far as we are concerned,” the chief said, noting that OSHA will handle questions pertaining workplace safety.

Traffic officer Chris Donovan, who reported a man down and foaming from the mouth, contacted the Westfield police at 12:53 p.m.

The men were using a gasoline-operated power washer in order to remove mold from the basement of the medical supply store. The machine emitted a lethal amount of carbon monoxide, officials said. “When you utilize gas-powered equipment in a dwelling, the exhaust from the engine is not vented properly,” Westfield Deputy Fire Chief David Kelly said.

The first victim, Edwin Vasquez, 20, of Trenton, was transported to Overlook Hospital at 1:12 p.m. Mr. Vasquez was later transferred to Jacobi

Medical Center in the Bronx and released on July 13. While the hospital does not release patient information, a representative did confirm that a hospital has a hyperbaric chamber, often used to treat carbon monoxide poisoning.

The other two workers, Roberto Seel, 33, and David Morales, 27, were transported to Muhlenberg Hospital, according to a copy of the police report obtained by *The Westfield Leader*. All three reside in Trenton.

Rachel Weinstein, manager at HomeCare America, was also treated for carbon monoxide poisoning, as were Rick Kieth and Adrain Perez, employees at Sherwin-Williams.

Mr. Donovan was one of the first on the scene. He said a man in a white t-shirt approached him and told him in broken English about the two men in the basement. After seeing what had happened, Mr. Donovan ran outside and called headquarters.

Jayson Tyree, 22, of Garwood and Benito Tapia, 46, of Roselle Park, also assisted in the rescue as they were getting lunch at the nearby Subway.

“We stopped in Subway, and when we came outside, I saw Benito pointing inside the basement entrance,” Mr. Tyree said.

“Our eyes burned while we were down there,” said Mr. Tapia.

It was after Mr. Donovan returned that Mr. Tyree and Mr. Tapia also began to help, he said, attempting to lift one of the men and carry him out.

“I went down the conveyor belt, grabbed the guy’s arm and shirt, (and) began dragging him out. I believe Jayson might have had his leg at the time, I don’t recall,” Mr. Donovan said.

Once outside, one victim began foaming at the mouth and Mr. Donovan placed him on his side before going back downstairs.

The other victim was being brought up the steps. That man, he said, was also carried out by his arm and shirt and not over his shoulder.

“This is not possible in that basement. It’s too small,” he said.

Mr. Donovan said he was later sent to the hospital and treated. After blood

work and an EKG, he was sent home in good health.

Anthony Samatora, manager of the Sherwin Williams on South Avenue, said the three men who suffered carbon monoxide poisoning had done the same job for him a week and a half before.

“He [the foreman] gave me his card. He runs his own business on the side,” Mr. Samatora said, believing the name on the card was Roberto Rivera.

Mr. Samatora also said that the two other workers, beside the foreman, could not speak English.

Mr. Samatora said he did not get the

sense that any of the workers were unskilled in what they were doing. “Not at all. They were great guys,” he said.

Ms. Weinstein said she heard of the contractors from the landlord of the property, Robert Berenson. He recommended Mr. Mold, out of Tom’s River.

Mr. Berenson, when asked how he heard of Mr. Mold, how many times he had used the company or if he plans to use the company in the future, said, “I’m not going to answer that.”

When contacted at the Madison store, Tom Kriek, owner of HomeCare America, said the company did not hire Mr. Mold to clean the Westfield store.

“We didn’t hire anybody. That was the landlord,” Mr. Kriek said.

When contacted, a representative for Mr. Mold said they were “aware” of the incident. She also said that the men doing the job were sub-contractors.

Man Charged In Car Thefts In Westfield and Garwood

By SUZETTE F. STALKER
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — A 36-year-old Westfield man faces multiple charges after allegedly stealing two motor vehicles Monday afternoon and then becoming involved in accidents in Westfield and Garwood.

According to Westfield Police Chief John Parizeau, Michael Okpych has been charged with stealing a 1989 Oldsmobile Cutlass belonging to a Westfield resident sometime during the day from the south side NJ Transit parking lot in Westfield. He is believed to have used a screwdriver to break into the car.

Chief Parizeau told *The Westfield Leader* yesterday that police were called at about 5:23 p.m. to the scene of a motor vehicle accident on the 800 block of Boulevard. Okpych, traveling southbound in the stolen car, allegedly struck a northbound 1999 Mitsubishi, after which he fled the scene southbound on foot.

The driver of the Mitsubishi, Westfield resident Kelly Picaro, 25, and a passenger reportedly suffered minor injuries and were transported by the Westfield Rescue Squad to Overlook Hospital in Summit.

Captain Leonard DiStefano of the Garwood Police Department said that at about 6 p.m., Okpych allegedly broke into and attempted to steal a 1986 Oldsmobile from a lot opposite a business on the 100 block of South

Avenue. The vehicle’s owner is a Westfield resident employed at the business.

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SIDS Likely Cause in Death of Baby Boy

By PAUL J. PEYTON
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — A 10-week old infant boy died Tuesday of what is believed to be Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, Westfield Police Chief John Parizeau reported yesterday.

Police responded to a home on East Broad Street at 10:25 a.m. Tuesday. The Westfield Fire Department, Volunteer Rescue Squad and Atlantic Health paramedics also responded to the scene, Chief Parizeau said. The chief said firefighters handle medical calls when the rescue squad is understaffed.

The chief said the baby was being cared for by “a woman that watches a few kids” and not at a childcare center.

“It looks like a SIDS death,” Chief Parizeau said. “In a situation like that we notify DYFS (Division of Youth and Family Services)” to review the case.

An autopsy was being conducted at press time by the Union County Medical Examiner’s Office at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey in Newark.

“It doesn’t appear to be anything but a SIDS death unfortunately,” Chief Parizeau said. “This is one call you don’t want to go on.”

DWC Looks Forward To Race, Potter Event, Jazz

By WAYNE BAKER
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD — The board of Downtown Westfield Corporation was updated on three upcoming events at Monday night’s board of directors meeting.

The Downtown Westfield 5K, commonly known as the Pizza Run, will be held next Wednesday, July 25, at 7 p.m. The Harry Potter scavenger hunt is ongoing, and will culminate this Saturday, July 21.

Two Sweet Sounds Downtown jazz nights have occurred on Tuesday nights, with the weather cooperating for both. The jazz plays on through August on Tuesdays, with Wednesdays utilized in the event of rain.

Sherry Cronin, executive director of the DWC, reported that entries for this year’s 5K race are at about 1,000, similar to last year’s race. She said sponsors this year include Horizon Blue Cross and Blue Shield, Verizon Fios, Lord and

Taylor, and Shop-Rite. Additionally, many sponsors from within the district are involved in this year’s event.

The race will significantly affect traffic on the north side of town for about an hour, with portions of Mountain Avenue closed briefly, and Elm Street closed for a more extensive period, affecting its intersections with Dudley Avenue and East Broad Street. Quimby Street will be closed for most of the evening.

The Harry Potter scavenger hunt involves 29 merchants. A party celebrating the release of the seventh and final book, “Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows,” will be hosted by the Town Book Store at 10:00 p.m. on Friday, July 20, with the midnight release of the book highlighting the event.

Scavenger hunt participants can continue their efforts through 5 p.m. on Saturday, when entries are due. Scavenger hunt winners will be se-

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WALKING IN A LUGGAGE WONDERLAND... Beth Budnick for The Westfield Leader
 Westfielders stroll through the on-street displays outside American Shoe Repair & Luggage during Thursday’s sidewalk sale in downtown Westfield.

Cranford Township Reviews Flooding and Cell Tower

By CHRISTINA M. HINKE
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

CRANFORD — Township resident Cindy Gallagher opened the Cranford Township Committee workshop meeting on Monday night by voicing her concerns of the persistent flooding issues on West Holly Street.

She said that the area has flooded twice since the Nor’easter that occurred earlier this year. The heavy rains that occurred after the storm

resulted in loss of vehicles and property and she noted that raw sewage backs up in to her own basement.

“For many years we’ve constantly been promised that this project will be done,” she said regarding the Orchard Brook project that has been considered over the last 15 years but was not included in this year’s municipal budget.

“What’s being re-evaluated is what funds are allocated to it,” Mayor

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SUPER McMANSION...The new home under construction in Westfield on Mountain Avenue represents the building boom of large homes in the town. This home above has over 50 windows on the front side.

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