

Cranford and Princeton Garage Mistakes are Lessons for Westfield

Two recently built and municipally funded garages, one in Cranford and the other in Princeton, are now burdened with debt, delays, unanticipated design changes and lawsuits.

I'm sure that many people have seen the development in Cranford. While the garage is open, the retail and apartments have not yet been completed. Originally expected to open this past September, they are quite delayed and their major tenant, Elizabeth Arden Red Door Spa, has pulled out.

The Cranford Chronicle reported on May 1 that the parking rate structure for the entire Township of Cranford was changed to standardize the rates throughout town. You may have seen ads from Cranford offering commuter permits, but to date, 30 of the 100 spaces are still available.

The biggest change in Cranford is at the on-street meters. While the cost is 25 cents per half-hour, the same as Westfield, the time limit has been reduced to just one hour. If you need to park for a longer time, you are now forced into a surface lot or the garage.

In Princeton, the May 1 edition of the Princeton Packet reported that four years after signing the contracts, Nassau HKT (NHKT, the developer Westfield was to use) and the Princeton Borough Council are back at the table working on the "final details" of the project. After two years, the Princeton garage still does not have permanent Certificate of Occupancy because the lower level never opened due to continuous flooding. The plaza outside the garage is still not complete and the pergola has not yet been installed.

Additionally, there have been lawsuits

from subcontractors who were not paid. The borough council is seeking reimbursement for its attorney's fees from NHKT. NHKT has only paid the borough \$237,600 in land lease payments instead of the expected \$739,700. NHKT has only paid \$188,448 in payment in lieu of taxes (PILOT) instead of the contracted \$1,200,000. One half of Princeton's \$2,000,000 escrow account was spent on payments to subcontractors and improvements to the garage.

Phase Two in Princeton, another mixed-use building to be built on an adjacent parking lot, cannot begin until the above has been settled. While revenue from the garage has increased, it's nowhere near the originally expected return. To that end, they have raised the rates at the garage to \$1 per hour for each of the first four hours and it jumps to \$1.50 per hour for each hour after that (9 a.m. to 9 p.m., Monday through Saturday).

As one of the Princeton borough councilmen, Roger Martindell said, "Public scrutiny I think is important because of the delays. We need to (finalize the agreement) in a relatively public way so people feel like they're getting a square deal and not being sold down the river."

In November 2004, by a more than three to one vote (10,636 to 3,104), Westfielders voted down the parking referendum. WECARE asks that the mayor and council, as well as the Downtown Westfield Corporation, continue the parking reforms. Some of the projects are:

1. Merge Lots 1 and 8 (behind East Broad Street stores between Prospect and Elm Streets).
2. Close Lenox Avenue between Central and North Avenues and expand Lot 7 into that area.
3. Install proper signage throughout the town and in the lots.

Let's not let history repeat itself in Westfield. We certainly don't need a garage on South Avenue. Parking in the permit spots is free on Saturdays and Sundays, yet the lot is not filled on those days. If the people won't use it when it's free, they certainly won't pay to park. Let all the parking reforms go into effect and let's see what the results are.

Jeffrey Messing
WECARE Westfield

Newlyweds Should Update Status

AREA—"The IRS advises the soon-to-be married and the just married to review their changing tax status," said IRS Spokesperson Gregg Semanick. Newlyweds should change names and addresses as well as update their withholding via Form W-4. They should consider itemizing deductions, select the right tax form and filing status.

Susan Brandt McCrea, Esq.

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Letters to the Editor

Treat Us Like the Journalists Hi's Eye Entrusts Us to Be

Editor's Note: The following is a copy of a letter to be published as an editorial in *Hi's Eye*. Westfield High School's student newspaper, tomorrow.

"You're not journalists," Superintendent Dr. William Foley told a *Hi's Eye* reporter during a recorded interview about the decision to review *WHS Blue Devil News*. "You're not journalists, you're not broadcasters, you're learning." Dr. Foley continued: "We do have to exercise some discretion. We do have to provide some direction."

WHS Interim Principal Dennis Fyffe echoed Dr. Foley's sentiments in a later interview. "I'm an educator, so I know there are things that no student can reasonably know, in terms of board, [town] council relations, for example, I wouldn't expect any student in high school to have a real good sense of how that works and what that means."

These may sound like perfectly reasonable comments, but for students who have spent two years learning how to be student reporters and a full year as practicing journalists, these words are a reminder of the gap between what we learn in school and the work we will do in "the real world" some day.

The statements reveal the administration's attitude toward *WHS's* student journalists and the student body in general. Though Foley and Fyffe stress the importance of "learning," they fail to recognize that the best way to promote growth is through empowering students, not stifling them with words or actions.

The administration's view of student journalists was captured in the May 2 *Westfield Leader* article "Fyffe to Review Student Broadcasts, Sparks Censorship Debate." The article read: "*Hi's Eye*, *WHS's* weekly non-censored newspaper, in an April 20 news article said Foley was not in favor of prior review, but the superintendent told *The Westfield Leader* that was a 'misinterpretation.'"

This characterization of the reporting in *Hi's Eye* directly undermines the work of this story's reporter, editors and advisers as well as the reputation of the paper as a whole. Upon the *Hi's Eye* article's

publication, Foley never raised any objections to how his ideas were interpreted. He also failed to clarify to *The Leader* exactly what "misinterpretations" he believes occurred. In fact, *Hi's Eye's* transcript of the interview with Foley leaves little room for misinterpretations:

Hi's Eye: So, you've asked Mr. Fyffe to review the broadcast show now. What are the things you expect he will be looking for?

Foley: No I haven't asked him to—
Hi's Eye: Oh, you haven't? I was misinformed—

Foley: No, I want the teachers who are involved with it, along with the students who are producing, to review it.

Hi's Eye: So now it's just—

Foley: No, I don't want Mr. Fyffe, now, I mean at least not yet, but I want it clear that that is an option, and I want everybody to be aware that policy is there. You need to know that, so does *Hi's Eye*, that it's there.

Foley's accusation that *Hi's Eye* "misinterpreted" his point could have a chilling effect for *Hi's Eye* reporting. Student journalists at *WHS* pride themselves on credibility, accuracy and trust, but a comment such as Foley's undercuts this reputation. If subjects of the original *Blue Devil News* story felt they were wronged or misrepresented in some way, they have every right to respond by writing to the show or appearing on air. If Foley felt he was "misinterpreted" by *Hi's Eye*, we would encourage him to write a letter to the paper and clarify his position publicly or object to any inaccuracy he finds in the reporting.

There is no question in our minds that Foley and Fyffe may be in an uncomfortable political position based on the reporting of *Blue Devil News* or *Hi's Eye*, nor do we doubt they believe their decisions were made in the interest of educating students. However, if they expect these students to take reporting seriously, then we hope that they will work with us in the tradition that has been in place for 73 years and treat us as the journalists we know we are.

Hi's Eye Staff
Westfield High School

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District 21 Legislators Comment On County Public Records Fees

We believe all levels of government should be committed to transparency in spending, so that taxpayers can truly understand how their tax dollars are being used. That is why we are very concerned about recent reports from the Union County Watchdog Association that the County of Union might be hampering access to expense vouchers incurred by county employees by charging a newly instituted service fee to provide such records.

Under Title 47 (Public Records), immediate access is ordinarily granted to budgets, bills, vouchers, contracts, including collective negotiations agreements and individual employment con-

tracts, and public employee salary and overtime information. We encourage the Watchdog organization to challenge the legitimacy of this fee for service practice by bringing a complaint before the Government Records Council.

Equally important, we ask that the county work cooperatively with the citizens it serves in a spirit of greater accountability and accessibility.

Sen. Thomas Kean, Jr.
Asm. Eric Munoz
Asm. Jon Brannick

Public Invited May 16 To County Art Exhibit

UNION – The Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders will recognize local artists and present awards at a reception on Wednesday, May 16, for the Sixth Annual Exhibit and Contest for County of Union Employees and their relatives. The reception and awards ceremony will begin at 5:30 p.m. at the Elizabethtown Gas Company, Liberty Hall Center, 1085 Morris Avenue in Union Township. The public is invited.

For further information, contact the Union County Office of Cultural and Heritage Affairs, 633 Pearl Street, Elizabeth, NJ 07202. Telephone (908) 558-2550 or e-mail: culturalinfo@ucnj.org.

Petix Speaks Against Censorship

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

dize. When Dr. Foley chastised the student for affirming the truth about channel 36 being a propaganda machine, he was trying to justify his compliance with the wishes of the mayor and the instructions of the board of education president. I do not think he ever dreamt that censorship would become a public issue.

Knowing what the mayor and the board of education president wanted, the superintendent then conducted a meeting with first-year broadcast journalism advisor Warren Hynes and interim principal Dennis Fyffe. The result (Surprise! Surprise!): "We decided the broadcasts should be reviewed at several different levels." There is nothing stated or implied in any of Mr. Hynes' comments that can lead one to infer that he agrees with this new censorship. His public statements indicate quite the contrary. If he admitted that prior review was warranted, he would also be admitting his inability to follow and enforce the guidelines of journalism he teaches to his students.

Mr. Fyffe is another story. Recently hired, he cannot be expected to know or appreciate the unique 73-year tradition of free speech and free press at Westfield High School. His indifferent attitude toward censorship is to be expected; however, since his attitude is common among administrators in most school districts: teach students to admire the freedoms granted to them under the constitution, but make sure that they do not practice them at school. As in any business, the major function of a temporary employee is to fulfill his employers' expectations, not to advocate positions that might upset the hierarchy. Mr. Fyffe is certainly living up to his employers' expectations. When asked to review (i.e., to censor) the students' programs, he courageously met with student reporters and then stated confidently, "I think they understood my concerns and where I am coming from." Ironically, he went on to say, "Our primary role here is education, and that's what this is here." Yes, Mr. Fyffe, a teacher and principal's role is education.

When, in this age of timidity and political correctness, an administrator embraces the censorship of students who exercise their constitutional right to state their opinions, that administrator is teaching students that their ideas are welcome only so long as they conform to those of the majority and those in power. Great educators encourage students to have the courage of their convictions and praise adolescents for their willingness to withstand the disapproval of the most powerful authorities in order to express their beliefs and considered opinions. Instead, in this case, the interim principal wants to ensure that the "tone" of the broadcasts is appropriate. I guess one means making certain that students say nothing controversial. I am sure that Mr. Fyffe is pleased to have the full backing of Dr. Foley who agrees with "the principal's decision" to review and approve all future broadcasts, since Dr. Foley is the one who required the interim principal to do so in the first place.

When the broadcast journalism curriculum was written, it was understood that the rules of journalism that apply to the *Hi's Eye* would also apply to broadcast journalism. That assurance includes no prior administrative approval before the broadcast. All student journalists at Westfield High School are required to be as accurate as possible and are prohibited from making statements that are libelous or slanderous. Students in the broadcast program train with their *Hi's Eye* colleagues for the first two years, but opt to present the news through a different medium in their senior year. Their skills are no less honed than their counterparts who produce the *Hi's Eye*. The amorphous and unsubstantiated claims by Mrs. Riegel, Dr. Foley and the interim principal that there might have been inaccuracies in the reporting of the controversial broadcast is just a red herring: an excuse to justify their decision to censor.

Dr. Foley is refreshingly candid when he admits that the difference between *Blue Devil News* and the *Hi's Eye* is that "TV-36 has a completely different audi-

ence." Expressing oneself within the school is all right because only teenage kids, high school teachers and a few parents read the newspaper, but let's keep it "in the family." Apparently, the superintendent does not want responsible, trained students to investigate and report important town issues or comment on elected government officials on a municipal cable station. They might just hit upon a truth that will rock somebody's boat.

Mrs. Riegel's comments – "student's are doing a great job" and "I'm hoping Mr. Fyffe won't feel a need [for prior review]" – are paternalistic and insult the intelligence of the student reporters. Translation of Mrs. Riegel's gratuitous comments: I support your efforts as long as you don't get too involved in serious issues, offer unpopular opinions or offend anyone beyond the walls of the school. Mr. Fyffe's assertion that "once we go through this, I think everyone can relax. I can't imagine content I'd object to." is disingenuous. Translation: Once this becomes less of a public issue and as long as you keep the program vanilla, I won't object.

Sometimes, seemingly small issues help define individual people, institutions, societies. The call for censorship is one such issue. For more than 70 years, the Westfield community has told its children, through its board of education's policies and practices that it believes in the unencumbered exchange of ideas and thoughts in its classrooms and in its school sponsored media. After experiencing a rigorous journalism program, generations of Westfield High School students have been encouraged not only to get the facts right, but also to form opinions and voice them publicly, particularly through the *Hi's Eye*. Indeed, the school system regularly boasts of the *Hi's Eye* and all it represents to prospective homebuyers and others. It is sad, therefore, to witness the ease with which an offended politician was able to manipulate the two individuals charged with ensuring the integrity of the educational system. The board president (and by extension, all the board members, none of whom publicly objected to the new censorship) and the superintendent of schools, the educational leader responsible for ensuring the integrity of the educational program by making decisions that are always in best interest of students, merely snapped to attention and did the mayor's bidding. Further, the superintendent is supposed to defend the good practices of his teachers, i.e., to trust Mr. Hynes' judgment and, most importantly, to make certain that the teachers and administrators of the district do everything within their power to encourage students to become strong thinkers who are unafraid to voice their ideas and opinions publicly.

During the years I worked with this superintendent, he often spoke of his legacy. Over the course of the next months, I am certain that his many positive contributions to the school district will be (and should be) cited. Unfortunately, Dr. Foley's legacy will also be clouded by his complicity in the death of free speech at Westfield High School.

An eternal optimist, I believe that under new leadership the board of education will understand the wisdom of rescinding the order to the interim principal to review (censor) future *Blue Devil News* programs. I urge the great Westfield High School faculty, whose silence on this issue to date has been surprising and alarming, to express their feelings to the community and board of education. I also urge Westfield High School students and alumni who have benefited from the tradition of freedom of expression, as well as parents and citizens in general, to make their feelings known. If people do not use their franchise to convince the board to change, everyone in Westfield will get a government and school district that they deserve. Everyone, that is, but future Westfield High School students. They deserve better.

Robert G. Petix
Scotch Plains

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