

Westfield Public Schools Begin Year With New Superintendent

By MICHAEL J. POLLACK
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD - Westfield's nine public schools opened yesterday, September 5, with new Superintendent Margaret Dolan at the helm.

Westfield schools will open their doors to approximately 20 more students. They opened last year with 6,060, according to an October 15 enrollment report, and boast an estimated 6,080 students at the start of 2007.

Elementary-school enrollment will rise by 30 this year, with retiring Superintendent of Schools William Foley stating last Tuesday that "second grade, with 566 students, and fourth grade, with 499 students, are our biggest cohorts."

School/Community relations director Lorre Korecky told *The Westfield Leader* that "some schools are bulging at the seams."

She said that 20 Wilson School kindergartners who live in the "Gardens" section of town will attend Franklin Elementary School, while 21 Jefferson School kindergartners will go to Tamaques School.

While the change will only affect Jefferson children this year - they will

return to Jefferson for first grade - Wilson kindergartners will continue at Franklin through the fifth grade.

Ms. Korecky, noting that the "Gardens" are in close proximity to Franklin, said, "historically, they've gone to Franklin. In the last 10 years,

a centralized kindergarten system and [dedicated] art and music rooms [at the elementary schools]," she added.

The \$9.4-million bond, which passed by a 2,763 to 2,144 count earlier this year, will fund the new kindergarten arrangement at Lincoln School, among other things. This September, crews will remove old wrapping around piping to address asbestos at the school, located on Westfield Avenue.

By October, "you will see signs of renovation," including the installation of new windows, according to Ms. Korecky.

In 2006, the board of education opted not to renew the lease of Lincoln School to Hillcrest, operated by the Union County Educational Services Commission (UCESC).

Ms. Korecky said that presently, "Kindergarten teachers are meeting with the architect, Dr. Foley and (business administrator) Bob Berman about how to situate the classrooms - from [finding a spot] to place coats, the color scheme and where to place carpeting."

She added, "By next year, [space constraints] shouldn't be a problem."

Ms. Dolan told *The Leader* that the happenings at Lincoln School are "very exciting...what an opportunity." She said the early childhood learning center would house pre-kindergarten, kindergarten and specialized programs.

However, the new superintendent said all elementary schools may not be able to house dedicated art or music rooms immediately after moving younger students to the Westfield Avenue school.

Westfield schools are "heading in the direction [of having dedicated rooms]," she said. "[The new arrangement] will help alleviate overcrowding."

This summer, according to Ms. Korecky, restoration of outside brickwork and masonry at Roosevelt to replace cracked parapet walls continues. "The building is 80 years old," she said.



David B. Corbin for The Westfield Leader
PRACTICING PUNT PROTECTION...The Westfield High School football team works on punt protection during practice on August 24. The Blue Devils, who finished 6-4 last year, will open the regular season at Linden tomorrow at 7 p.m.

they must have shifted back and forth at least two times."

"Zero elementary schools have space for a dedicated art and music room," with Washington housing music classes in an outdoor trailer, she said.

"The shift is dramatic at certain schools, such as Wilson. It's part of the impetus for the district to look for

State, Local Election Campaigns Kick Off

By PAUL J. PEYTON
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

AREA - The Labor Day Weekend is the traditional kickoff of the fall election campaign season. Statewide, voters will elect representatives to all 120 seats of the legislature; all terms expire this year. Locally, Westfield, Fanwood, Garwood, Cranford and Berkeley Heights will decide governing body races. Kenilworth and Summit will elect mayors.

In Fanwood, first term Mayor Colleen Mehr is currently unopposed in her re-election bid; former GOP candidate Patricia Lindsey dropped out of the race two weeks ago. Republicans have until Wednesday, September 19, to file a replacement candidate for the November ballot. Mountainside Mayor Robert Vigilanti, a Republican, is unopposed in his quest for a sixth term.

Westfield, which changed from two-to-four-year council terms in 2003, has races in each of the town's four wards. In the first ward, Republican Frank Arena will face attorney Ross Katz, a Democrat, in the battle to fill the seat which Republican Peter Echausse will vacate. Mr. Arena, a sales executive with an information technology company and the brother-in-law of former Mayor Greg McDermott, ran unsuccessfully for county freeholder in 2004.

Republican Second Ward Councilwoman Jo Ann Neylan, a former prosecutor in Brooklyn, faces a challenge from Democrat Bruce Regenstein, a former district attorney in New York who now heads his own firm. The third ward race pits incumbent Republican Mark Ciarrocca, an attorney in Union, against Democratic challenger Matt Sontz, a lawyer who also holds a degree in mechanical engineering. In the fourth ward, retired Macy's executive Lenore Scurry, a Democrat, challenges incumbent Republican James Foerst, an attorney in Millburn.

Republicans hold both a 6-2 council advantage and the mayor's office.

In Fanwood, Democrats seek to hold a 6-0 command on the borough council.

Incumbent Katherine Mitchell, a nurse, seeks re-election and was to have run alongside incumbent Joseph Higgins. Mr. Higgins resigned from the council two weeks ago and will not run in November; former councilman William Populus has replaced him on the current body and has confirmed he will run on the Democratic ticket. Former borough police chief Anthony Parenti and Joel Stroz, a corporation litigation attorney, are running for council on the GOP ticket.

Republican Mountainside Councilman Glenn Mortimer, a realtor, and his running mate, Jeffrey Wass, a member of the borough's planning board, are unopposed for seats on the borough council; there is no Democratic ticket.

Stephen Napolitano joins incumbent Charles Lombardo on the Democratic ticket for Garwood Council. They face Republicans Anthony Sytko, a law student who came within 25 votes of a council seat three years ago, and Dennis Clark, a supervisor/dispatcher with a medical courier. Republican Councilman Victor DeFillippo is not seeking a second term. Democrats hold a 5-1 edge on the council plus the mayor's seat.

Among other municipal races in the county, Kenilworth Mayor Gregg David, a Democrat, faces a challenge from GOP Councilwoman Kathi Fiamingo. Summit Mayor Jordan Glat, the first Democrat to serve as mayor in the city's history, will face Councilman Michael Vernotico, a Republican, in his bid for re-election.

In Cranford, where the GOP took a 3-2 edge on the governing body last year, Democrats George Jorn and George McDonough seek to hold on to the Democratic seats, while Republicans Mark Smith and Marcia Garcia seek to give the GOP a 5-0 majority.

In countywide races, Democratic Sheriff Ralph Froehlich faces challenges for the post he has held for 30 years from Republican Peter Lijoi of Summit, who the sheriff defeated

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Benjamin B. Corbin for The Westfield Leader
WELCOME BACK...Parents wait with their children to send them off to their first day back to school yesterday at Franklin Elementary School.



Benjamin B. Corbin for The Westfield Leader
RAISING THE ROOF (AND THE REST OF IT TOO)...After a stop-work order halted construction on a Sinclair Place home in June, officials determined that the structure's foundation is "in the wrong spot," Town Administrator Jim Gildea told *The Westfield Leader* at the time. To bring the house into compliance with the site plans as approved by the planning board, the owner/developer of the property must lift the house off its original foundation, move it about 18 inches to the right and rotate the house at an angle; and separately move the garage in a similar manner. Workers have dug a hole to the right of the house to eventually accommodate the new basement foundation that will be re-formed.

FRA Approves Westfield Quiet Zone, Could Still Be 1.5-Year 'Backlog'

By MICHAEL J. POLLACK
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD - The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) has approved Westfield's quiet zone at the railroad crossing on Rahway Avenue, Fourth Ward Councilman Jim Foerst announced at Tuesday night's town council meeting.

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

During his code review and town property committee report Tuesday night, Mr. Foerst said the FRA has placed Westfield's data on its website - "a very big step in the process."

Calling Westfield "pioneers," he said, "Our legal team has been teach-

ing Conrail the nuances of the ordinance, and we're showing them how to do it."

In terms of what remains, he said the town must give one final notice to the freight rail users - CSX Intermodal, Conrail and Norfolk Southern.

"Once we give that final notice, they cannot object. They can only give us comments," he added.

Simultaneously, Mr. Foerst said, the town must enter into an agreement with Conrail for them to perform the necessary work to enhance the grade crossing in addition to receiving an estimated cost.

"They've provided us with a very cursory, basic agreement," he said. "When our legal counsel reviewed that, they felt it was not sufficient to protect the interests of the citizens of the Town of Westfield. The town has sent back its request for changes...Once we get that agreement in place, we're satisfied," he added.

Third Ward Councilman Mark Ciarrocca praised the work of Town Attorney Robert Cockren. "I understand that some towns have hired

consultants and spent - the number I hear is - \$150,000 and not gotten to where we are.

"Bob and his attorneys...have done a Yeoman's effort to get us further than anyone around," Mr. Ciarrocca added. "And, I'll bet you it was for a significantly less cost."

Mr. Foerst said the council must pass a resolution authorizing the mayor to enter into the agreement in addition to an ordinance designating the area as a quiet zone.

He said, "We're at the final piece the town can do. We ask for our citizens' patience." Because of the paucity of vendors that make grade-crossing apparatuses, he said, there could still be a "six-to-18-month backlog."

In other business, next week the town will address 11 resolutions authorizing the chief financial officer to refund taxes related to pool memberships.

As Town Administrator Jim Gildea explained, the town will refund money accrued through a 7-percent sales tax, which was repealed July 1.

The town, which collected \$57,000 and sent \$18,000 to the state, will

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Benjamin B. Corbin for The Westfield Leader
SCHOOL'S IN...Westfield High School students venture into the building yesterday for the first day of school.

Revised Preservation Law Advances at WF Town Hall

By WAYNE BAKER
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD - The new historic preservation ordinance the town council is considering continues to move forward. Talking about the impact of tear-downs and remodeling of homes on the character of Westfield, town planner Judy Thornton said, "If we don't do something, we'll lose [the character of town]."

As described in the proposed ordinance, "The character, lifestyle and very quality of life in the Town of Westfield depend in great measure upon the town's protecting this heritage of the past."

Ms. Thornton said, "Being designated doesn't mean your home is frozen in time. It is important to keep these homes viable for modern living."

The proposed ordinance was the result of "flaws and weaknesses" in the current one, which Ms. Thornton said she discovered when the town hired her

last year. She said homes could gain protection under the ordinance as either a single site or as a district.

She cited two examples of how a single site might be selected - the first being an extraordinary historic incident occurring there, the second as a single historic home among other historically insignificant homes. An example of this would be a 150-year-old farmhouse surrounded by modern tract homes built on the former fields of the farmhouse, she said.

Ms. Thornton said a protest petition signed by 20 or more percent of a proposed district's homeowners (a single site amounts to a one-home district) means the town council must achieve a "super-majority" of two-thirds of the council, rather than a simple majority of greater than 50 percent. Additionally, she said, council members would need a "compelling" reason to override a property

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Martin Sweeney for The Westfield Leader
CATCH A COLD(WATER CREEK)...Coldwater Creek, a women's clothing and accessories store, has opened its Westfield branch at the corner of Central Avenue and Elm Street, in the building that formerly housed Express.