

## Westfield, Conrail Agree On Furthering Quiet Zone

By MICHAEL J. POLLACK  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD—At the conclusion of the Westfield council's sole August meeting, Mayor Andy Skibitsky formally signed an agreement between Consolidated Rail Corporation (Conrail) and the town, authorizing Conrail to perform the work necessary to establish a quiet zone at the Rahway Avenue grade crossing. The quiet zone would ultimately mitigate the effect of train noise in the area.

Effective June 2005, the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) required that locomotive horns be sounded at all public grade crossings 15 to 20 seconds

before entering a crossing. A pattern for blowing the horn lasts until the train clears the crossing.

However, new rules also provided the framework for towns to establish "quiet zones," in which either the horn use is either curtailed during nighttime hours or altogether. Quiet zones can be formed provided that certain safety measures are in place and the crossing's accident rate meets FRA standards.

Westfield is seeking to create the first 24-hour quiet zone in the state after the aforementioned ruling.

In a quiet zone, though an engineer is relieved of any obligation to sound the horn, he is permitted to use his discre-

tion if an emergency arises, or if an animal or person is in danger.

Conrail, which owns, operates and maintains the line, must install constant-warning time devices and power-out indicators to meet the safety requirements established under the FRA rules. The warning device adjusts for the speed of a train and causes the gates to close when the train is a certain time away from the crossing. The indicators tell the engineers that the gates and bells are not working and that they should blow the horns.

The council went into executive session mid-meeting to discuss the contract negotiations with Conrail. Upon returning to the dais, Public Safety, Transportation and Parking Committee Chairman Mark Ciarrocca said the town "finally" has its agreement. Westfield is the first town to get this far in the process, and Mr. Ciarrocca thanked Town Attorney Bob Cockren, Town Administrator Jim Gildea and Assistant Town Engineer Kris McAloon for their efforts dealing with "not the most cooperative folks."

Mr. Ciarrocca warned that it could take upwards of nine months before the equipment comes in, and the work would take 18 months to finish. Once all work is complete, the town would apply for the final quiet-zone designation.

Mr. Ciarrocca said the quiet zone would "significantly improve the quality of life" for those living near the railroad crossing.

Mayor Skibitsky also touted the work of Mr. Cockren in navigating a "convoluted, Byzantine process." Towns are now asking for Westfield's advice in establishing quiet zones. The mayor called the agreement with Conrail a "big step in creating a much-needed quiet zone."

Mr. Ciarrocca also spoke of improvements to occur along the Central Avenue corridor. Pedestrian-activated lights at crossings near Clover Street, Cambridge Road and Belmar Terrace are planned. Lights on Sycamore Avenue, Grove Street and Park Street will also be upgraded. Because Central Avenue is a county road, county engineers are working on the designs, which should be completed by the end of this month. Mr. Ciarrocca said the project is "well underway," and construction should be done by next summer.

Plans to establish a dedicated left-turn arrow for cars turning from Central Avenue onto South Avenue and heading west might need more time because of the complexity of the intersection, according to Mr. Ciarrocca. The corridor should be "significantly enhanced" by the start of the 2009-2010 school year.

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## Stender's Campaign Finds Strong Local Support

By LAURA MORTKOWITZ  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

*Editor's Note: The Westfield Leader spent the day with Assemblywoman and Seventh Congressional District candidate Linda Stender last Thursday and will be doing the same for Republican candidate Leonard Lance.*

AREA – A visit to a local pharmacy, a diner, Overlook Hospital and a Democratic picnic in Summit are all in a day's work for Assemblywoman Linda Stender, the Democratic candidate for Congress from the Seventh District.

Mrs. Stender has been meeting with local business owners, showing her support and talking to them about the issues they find most important.

Robert Riedinger, owner of Devine's Pharmacy in Edison, greeted Mrs. Stender outside with a welcome sign situated just inside the doors to his pharmacy.

"Healthcare is a big [issue]," said Abby Curran, campaign adviser for Mrs. Stender. "Over 41 million are not insured, and many more are underinsured."

Mrs. Stender expressed her preference to local pharmacies, and their personal service and touch, over the larger companies.

"I'm a big supporter of community pharmacies," she told Mr. Riedinger. "CVS is just not the same. It doesn't meet the same kind of need."

Mr. Riedinger expressed his own concerns over healthcare companies that take advantage of their customers and his desire for one federal plan that would take care of everyone, a



Ben Corbin for The Westfield Leader

IN WITH THE OLD, OUT WITH THE NEW...Construction continues to turn this 1870's home into a museum. The Reeve's house restoration will be entering 'phase two' in the coming months, which will focus on internal repairs. See story below.

## Muhlenberg Closing Increases Births at Trinitas and ER Intakes

By CHRISTINA M. HINKE  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

AREA – Pregnant women who would have normally had treatment at Muhlenberg Regional Medical Center's OB/GYN services have shifted to Trinitas Hospital, as of June 30, a plan that was introduced by Gary Horan, chief executive officer of Trinitas, when it was originally proposed to divide patients to three or four different hospitals. It was reported that Trinitas would see an expected 800 additional births per year, and Dr. Kamran Khazaei, chairman of the OB/GYN department at Trinitas, told *The Westfield Leader* on Monday that this number is approximate.

As of Friday, 41 deliveries have occurred at Trinitas, according to Rudine Smith, president and chief executive officer of The Plainfield Health Center, a community clinic for residents of Plainfield that is working in collaboration with Trinitas. The six midwives at the health center do rounds at Trinitas to help cover shifts, and the center is recruiting to fill one or two more open positions. Trinitas has two part-time midwives and four that are full time.

"The transition has gone relatively smooth," Ms. Smith said. "The staff is happy with the hospital and patients have echoed the same sentiment." She said she was not sure if there was an increase in the number of pregnant

women at the clinic, but she said, "I didn't see a decrease, that's for sure."

"We need to increase the number of MDs. We need two to three more MDs to be able to adequately provide care," Dr. Khazaei said.

He said about five nurses came over to Trinitas from Muhlenberg. The hospital also increased its equipment and adjusted its clinic on Jefferson Avenue in Elizabeth to handle increased deliveries.

Trinitas has 20 post-partum rooms and "we have an extra floor that has opened up. It has a capacity for another 20," Dr. Khazaei said.

The hospital's maternity floor has two operating rooms, seven laboring rooms and three triages equipped to perform deliveries.

Pregnant women who call 911 will not necessarily get dispatched to Trinitas, but transported to the nearest hospital.

As far as other transportation, Solaris and The Plainfield Health Center are finalizing a voucher system with cab companies, where the health center's maternity patients could receive rides to Trinitas.

According to Fanwood Volunteer Rescue Squad President, John Oatis, women in labor that his squad transports would most likely go to Overlook Hospital in Summit.

He said in the last two years the squad has slowly taken patients to Overlook, which takes about 12 to 15 minutes, instead of the six-minute drive time to the Plainfield hospital. Trinitas is even further away. Recently 50 percent of all calls were sent to Muhlenberg, where just two years ago it was at about 75 to 80 percent, Mr. Oatis said.

As of August 1, according to the letter Senior Vice President and Chief

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## Mayor Says Petition Drive Dishonors Volunteers

By JOHN MAGUIRE  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

MOUNTAINSIDE – Mayor Robert Vigilanti took offense at Tuesday night's borough council meeting to a petition filed in opposition to the borough's planned first annual Volunteer Appreciation Day set for Saturday, August 16 at the community pool.

At the outset of the meeting, the council took time to discuss the petition signed by 111 individuals in opposition to the planned event. The petition objected to the borough closing the community pool for a day so that volunteers could be honored with a barbecue and a day of fun.

"I am very upset that a small group of people led this drive to dishonor what was intended to be a small 'thank you' to those who volunteer their time for the community," Mayor Vigilanti said.

After 113 years, Mayor Vigilanti said it was time the community showed their appreciation for those who donate their time to make Mountainside a great

place to live. "The total cost for the event will be less than \$1 per household," he added.

Frank Masella, director of the borough's recreation department, said the date was chosen because it is traditionally one of the slowest times of the season at the pool. He stated that the average attendance for a Saturday in August is typically around 400 people – much less than a peak summer Saturday.

Calling the petition into question, several of those in attendance alleged that 43 of the individuals who signed the petition were not residents of Mountainside. It was also noted that invitations had already been sent out to the event making any cancellation difficult at this stage.

"We will go forward with the event," the Mayor stated after none of the council members present objected. "(The) petition was received, discussed and shot down," Borough Attorney

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Michael Pollack for The Westfield Leader

ALL QUIET ON THE WESTFIELD FRONT...Flanked by Town Clerk Claire Gray and Town Attorney Bob Cockren, Mayor Andy Skibitsky, following Tuesday's council meeting, signs an agreement with Conrail, authorizing the company to install necessary safety devices before the Rahway Avenue grade crossing can be considered a "quiet zone."

## Reeve Committee Updates Council on Project's Status

By MARISA STOTTER  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD—At last week's conference meeting, the Historical Society of Westfield gave an update on the renovation of the Reeve House project.

The society plans to restore the 1870s Italianate-style house to its original architecture and convert it into a museum. While money for the home's restoration has been raised, nearly a half-million dollars is needed to cover the cost of an adjacent carriage house.

Karrie Hanson, chairman of the building design committee project, gave an update on the restoration of the house since the project began one year ago.

The Reeve House, located at 314 Mountain Avenue, has been fully painted, and a security system has been put in place. Plans are currently being drawn up for gardens and landscaping and an architect has been hired to restore the original structural design of the house.

Over the last few months, asbestos abatement, mold remediation, removal of oil tanks, soil remediation and roof repairs have taken place, in addition to the exterior carpentry and painting work.

According to Ms. Hanson, the project will continue into "phase two" in the coming month. This part of the project will include internal repairs such as electrical and plumbing work.

Following completion of the Reeve House restoration, the Historical Society will begin construction of a humidity-controlled archive building on the property. This building, modeled

in the style of a carriage house, will contain the society's archives and records.

Bill Shepherd, head of the Reeve House Project's financial committee, presented a breakdown of the project costs.

According to Mr. Shepherd, the restoration of the Reeve House will cost a total of \$800,000. The construction of the carriage house will cost \$500,000. Mr. Shepherd said \$870,000 has already been raised to cover the restoration of the Reeve House.

Mr. Shepherd said the Historical Society has applied for a number of grants to pay for the construction of the carriage house, and plans to launch a fundraising campaign in Westfield to raise funds for the project.

Second Ward Councilwoman JoAnn Neylan asked Ms. Hanson and Mr. Shepherd if the Reeve House, upon completion, would be rented out to the public for use. Ms. Hanson said that the Historical Society is considering making the property available for hosting private functions and walking tours.

According to Ms. Hanson, the society's new slogan, meant to energize membership, is "Meet me at the Reeve House. Meet me on the porch."

The Reeve House was deeded to the Town of Westfield in 1985, from Ralph and Edgar Reeve, the only descendants of the Reeve family. The deed was contingent upon the agreement that Edgar Reeve would live the rest of his life in the house and that the town would use the property only for charitable, municipal or other public non-profit purposes.



Laura Morkowitz for The Westfield Leader

CAMPAIGN TRAIL...Assemblywoman Linda Stender (LD-22, Fanwood) of Fanwood and candidate for Congress talks with Jack McGreevey, right, father of former Governor and former Woodbridge Mayor James McGreevey, and Jeff Moon in the Reo Diner in Woodbridge. Mrs. Stender was campaigning throughout the Seventh Congressional District.



Katherine Vowell for The Westfield Leader

HOW SWEET IT IS...The band 11:11 performs with Jennifer Wright from the group Terraplane at Tuesday's jazz night in Westfield. With only a few weeks left in the summer, residents are taking advantage of the remaining performances.

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