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## In Mali, Africa, Women Will be the Agent of Change

By Kate Lechner in Mali

Bara, Mali, in West Africa, is my new home. Since leaving Westfield for college, this mud house will be the first place I can settle for longer than 9 months. Bara is on the edge of the Sahara desert, 70km southeast of Gao City in the Gao region, with a population slightly above 6,000. The village straddles the Niger River, which floods annually to water the rice fields that feed the community. The people grow rice and vegetables, raise livestock and fish the Niger. There are large shops with food, fabrics and livestock. Market day is Tuesday. The village has a school through 9th grade and a health clinic. Telephone wires run along the national highway, a two-lane paved road smaller than Rahway Avenue in Westfield. I know of fewer than five landlines. Cell phones are much more popular and service is more reliable than I expected. Electricity and running water haven't made it to Bara yet, but there are a few families with televisions they hook up to car batteries.

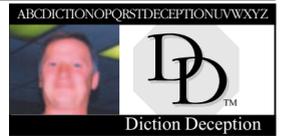
I remember feeling cheated having to live for two years in dorm rooms without a sink, now the nearest faucet is a two-hour bus ride away. Ditto for flush toilets. Bara has a village chief, identifiable by his largest-in-town turban, a mayor, a community health board, a superintendent, a veterinarian and several mosques. Mali is a Muslim nation, and people in my village ask why I do not pray five times a day. Adults wear loose-fitting "boubous," covered from ankle to neck. Women wear head wraps, and men wear turbans. Despite the national motto, "One people, one goal, one faith," referring to a national identity comprised of many distinct ethnic groups with a shared desire for development and devotion to Islam, the French colonial presence is still felt. Schools break for Christmas and Easter. People joke that Islam is better than Christianity — joking is a huge part of Malian culture. Friends here assure me that "as long as a person works for good, that is enough for God." As Mali is the third poorest nation in the world, the government is receptive to outside assistance, the people are peaceful and there is a strong international aid presence.

The Community Health Center where I work recently took part in a national

vaccination campaign. The effort was supported by the government of the Republic of Mali and sponsored by the World Health Organization, UN organizations, US and Canadian initiatives and smaller non-governmental organizations. Children ages 0-5 years were vaccinated against polio and German measles, treated for intestinal worms, given a dose of Vitamin A to prevent night blindness, and provided with insecticide-treated mosquito nets — all free of charge. At the Bara clinic alone, over the course of four days, approximately 2,165 children and 59 immediately postpartum women were reached. Health workers were compensated at a rate of approximately \$1 per 55 treatments administered and also worked on weekends. It was a great display of what can be achieved by dedicated organizations and service providers.

Of course, there are improvements to be made, and the blame should not be immediately placed on Africa. In Bara, we ran out of Vitamin A and the polio vaccine on the second day. We had to tell people to return the next day while we waited for supplies to arrive. The mosquito nets simply never arrived. Because the entire staff was working on the campaign, preventative health care for many took precedence over curative care for a few. Two sick infants and one injured elderly man were sent away without consultations because the health technicians were too busy. The midwife, however, was able to deliver a baby during the rush. Interestingly, out of 2,165 kids, a male relative accompanied only three of them. Women brought the rest. Since moving to Mali, I have seen that women purchase and prepare food, get water, clean their yards and homes and care for the ill. As a health education volunteer, seeing that women are responsible for the preventative health care of the family as well, I am now able to better focus my efforts.

Together with the people of Bara, I am working to teach how to avoid illness and the action to take when prevention is not enough. Undoubtedly this will need the support of men, but when it comes down to it, women have the power to improve the health of their families and their village. Women will be the agents of change.



Diction Deception

Below are four arcane words, each with four definitions — only one is correct. The others are made up. Are you sharp enough to discern this deception of diction?

If you can guess one correctly — good guess. If you get two — well-read individual. If you get three — word expert. If you get all four — You must have a lot of free time!

All words and correct definitions come from the board game Diction Deception.

Answers to last week's arcane words.

1. Plessor — A small hammer with a soft head
2. Pleurenchyma — The cellular tissue which is the chief constituent of wood
3. Delenda — Things to be blotted out or erased
4. Tylarus — One of the callous pads on the underside of the toes of birds

### DILANIATION

1. A tearing in pieces
2. In zoology, having no joints
3. Pulling back or retreating suddenly
4. A turning or veering off course

### HAMADRYAS

1. Minced chicken or veal, mixed with eggs and bread crumbs in the shape of a ball
2. Dog-faced ape
3. A green vegetable pigment
4. Solidified; hardened

### HALLUX

1. A small spike or elongated cluster of flowers in grasses
2. A nerve cell connected with other nerve cells
3. The great toe
4. A flying squirrel

### THALLASSIC

1. Readiness of mind in managing operations; mental adroitness
2. Pertaining to the night
3. Apathetic; disinterested
4. Of the sea or ocean

See more letters page 9

Letters to the Editor

'Best of the Best' Missed a Few

We found Bruce Johnson's article in last week's *Westfield Leader* about the "Best of the Best," the three sport athletes at WHS quite interesting. It takes tremendous dedication to participate in a sport each season of the school year.

Unfortunately, Mr. Johnson overlooked our daughter, Erin Allebaugh (class of '93). Erin participated in field hockey, basketball and track for four consecutive years at Westfield High School, earning ten varsity letters. She earned first team all-state honors in field hockey (the team was state runner-up) as a senior. As a senior, Erin was voted most valuable player in all three sports by her teammates.

Erin never missed a practice in any sport during her entire career. That alone was quite an accomplishment. As you can tell from this letter, we are very proud of her and are a little disappointed that Erin's name was overlooked in Mr. Johnson's article.

Tom and Carol Lee Allebaugh  
Westfield

Bruce Johnson's Note: It always happens that somebody is overlooked. She is quite deserving, not just a proud parent's complaint.

Community Thanked For Food Drive Help

Our thanks to all who so willingly gave to the recent food drives held by Garwood Knights of Columbus Council 5437. Fourteen food baskets were distributed in November and again in December. These baskets included non-perishable food, supermarket gift cards, milk, butter, sugar, eggs, bread, potatoes, fruit, paper products, laundry detergent and a box of candy. Turkeys and hams were donated along with meal gift cards and pumpkin pies. Nine boxes of non-perishable food were donated to St. Joseph's Social Services Center in Elizabeth.

Sincere thanks go to Lincoln School in Garwood for collecting the non-perishable foods, to all Knights of Columbus members and their families who supported this campaign through their donations of food, money and time and to all other community members for their support of our annual food drive. Health and happiness to you in the New Year.

Nick Basso and Jack Leary  
Garwood K of C

Track is Largest Participation at WHS

In response to Bruce Johnson's column on three season athletes, I was disappointed at his evident disdain for three season track athletes. Track has always been under-recognized which is ironic because not only does it boast the largest amount of participation among WHS students, it has enjoyed a substantial amount of success. It also probably costs less per capita than the overwhelming majority of sports offered at WHS. Certainly, the WHS track programs have produced a substantial number of nationally-ranked athletes. All of whom were omitted from Mr. Johnson's list. Strangely even the very successful athletes were left off Johnson's list, I suppose due to the track stigma. I guess a lot of people do not see the differences between the cross country and track seasons. I do know that each season requires as much practice as any other varsity sport. The lack of consideration demonstrated by Mr. Johnson, an expert of WHS sports, seems to suggest that he does not understand the challenges of our sport. He, like many others, seems to minimize the success enjoyed by WHS Track.

Rose Driscoll  
WHS '08

## Unaffiliated New Jersey Voters Continue to Be Disenfranchised

It's hard to believe it will be all over in less than a month. We've said it before — although there are 300-million people in the United States, by the time most New Jerseyans have a chance to vote for President, they will only have a choice between two candidates.

According to an MSNBC report, in New Hampshire, many voters chose their candidate on the day of the primary. A state that boasts a large Independent-voting contingent — 45 percent — New Hampshire's citizens could vote in either party's primary and choose to do so at, literally, the last minute, without becoming a Democrat or Republican.

While caucus/primary rules change on a state-to-state basis, one basic credo should be consistent nationwide — the more people who feel empowered to vote and make a difference, the better. Unfortunately, in New Jersey, because of a system that only promotes the two major parties, that philosophy has been purposely rendered null and void.

Many Independent voters in Iowa and New Hampshire, regardless of party, sounded the sentiment that America is at a crossroads — politically, economically and socially. No matter where one stands on the issues that comprise these sectors, one thing is certain — your voice cannot be heard if the political bosses have rendered you silenced.

In New Jersey, on February 5, when more than 20 states will cast their votes, more than half of eligible New Jersey voters will be left out in the cold.

An AP story released last Friday, "Most N.J. Voters Can't Vote in the Primary," puts the phenomenon in clear terms. It states, "Voters who aren't registered with any political party — almost 60 percent of all voters — cannot cast ballots in the February 5 primary. The only way these unaffiliated voters could participate would be if they choose to shed their Independent status and join a political party on primary day."

The AP story quotes Brigid Harrison, a political science and law professor at Montclair State University, as saying, "The political parties in New Jersey tend to be relatively strong, and it's in the parties' best interest to have party loyalists select the nominees."

Pardon us? The parties' best interests? What happened to elections being anything but a public refer-

endum to decide who best represents the citizenry of the United States?

When more than half of New Jersey's registered voters — 2.7 million unaffiliated out of 4.8 million — can't help decide the fate of the country, something is wrong. Simply put, any process that limits the public's participation in elections should be viewed as borderline-criminal.

We call on legislators of both parties to do away with the "closed" nature of the New Jersey Primary process.

Sure, "undeclared" voters can vote if they decide to associate themselves with a party. However, many voters choose to remain "undeclared" because, fundamentally, they are opposed to the two large political machines and feel there must be more than two viable choices and parties.

Despite what spinsters and pundits would have you believe, Americans are a diverse bunch with diverse concerns. The percentage of Americans who describe themselves as Independents has increased from 28 percent in 2000 to 32 percent in 2007, according to polls conducted by *The New York Times* and CBS News.

However, isn't it amusing that — while Americans, through new-media sources, begin to think for themselves and receive a plurality of views and insights — in some cases, the public cannot vote without compromising their political beliefs, having to choose column A or column B.

Do the politicians believe that enough people would use their Independent status to hijack an election? Obviously, in places like New Hampshire and Iowa, their political parties are comfortable enough with the concept that, for the most part, anything goes. And what happened in Iowa? Two purported "men of the people" triumphed over the wealthy and party-ordained. A relative political neophyte from Illinois, Obama, beat the Clinton machine, and a Southern Baptist minister handily defeated the wealthy and influential Romney.

In New Jersey, whether for President, senator or Governor, as more voters become unaffiliated with political parties, might "none of the above" be the strongest contender?

## Lame-Duck Legislature Lays Another Batch of Rotten Eggs

As the 212th New Jersey Legislative session slithered to an end Monday night, amidst a fiscal crisis in the state caused by widespread and longstanding wrong-doing, ineptness, greed, cronyism, crimes, unbridled spending, pay-to-play, reckless indebtedness and party politics above all, judges and prosecutors were given double-digit raises, a 5-percent tax was imposed on ticket sales to the new arena in Newark, tolls were added to Route 440 and the controversial school-aid legislation, with at least \$532 million in additional spending (unfunded), was passed.

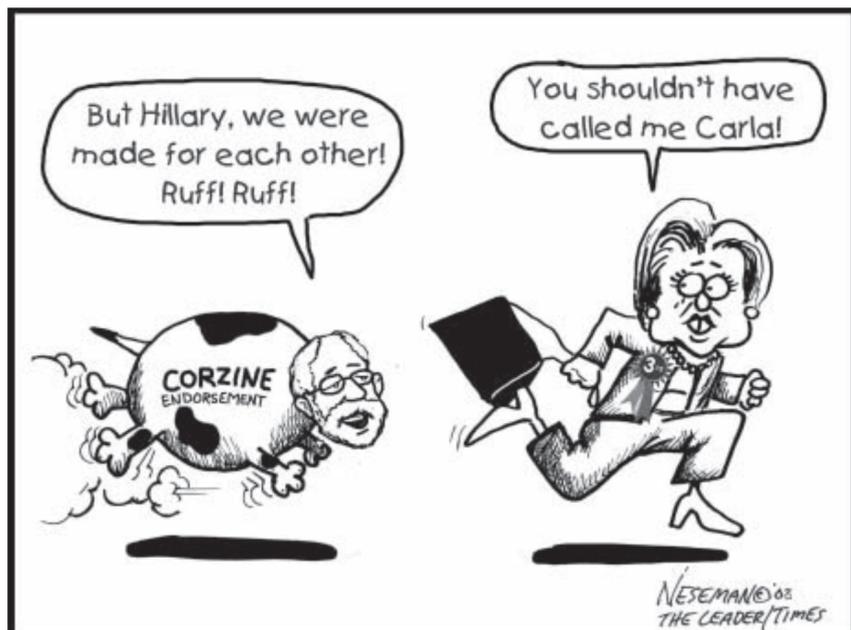
What price, honor? — It's \$20 million in Senator Martha Berk's case (R, Burlington County), as she sold out for a Christmas-tree deal at the last minute to change her vote, enabling the school-aid legislation to pass.

We're not sure of the scope of the total damage that was done Monday night, as the details are not yet public. Matters are further masked by even more insidious initiatives by Governor Jon Corzine as outlined in his "State of the State" address Tuesday.

With the public being fed smoke and mirrors, double-talk and hidden details, the Governor now intends to sell the Parkway and Turnpike — calling it asset monetization.

We don't know how much more of this the public can stand. Although there is a record changeover of legislators this year due to resignations, retirements and jail sentences, the new shows are filled with more of the same. The public is outraged, but the gerrymandered voting districts keep the voters without choice.

We'd love to be proved wrong.



## Letters to the Editor

### Westfield PTO Urges Letter Writing Campaign over School Aid

The presidents of Westfield Public Schools' PTO's, in conjunction with the Board of Education, urge Westfield parents and taxpayers to write to our state officials on pending legislation that would adversely affect our town.

A draft legislative bill was made public on the eve of the holiday season, with the first public hearing held on December 27. The proposal includes the minimum amount of state aid for Westfield, although other "wealthy" districts are positioned to receive as much as ten times more. A major component of the plan would cut two thirds of Westfield's current special education state aid. If this legislation passes, Westfield would lose millions of dollars.

Special education programs are mandated by law and should be fully funded by the state. This proposal will not give tax relief to Westfield residents, although tax relief was an original objective of the Governor's plan.

Board of Education President, Ginny Leiz, Vice President, Julia Walker and Superintendent of Schools, Margaret Dolan, met with the PTO presidents to inform us of the impact of this proposal on Westfield. Dr. Dolan shared the discussions that occurred at the 11-hour hearing in Trenton that she attended during the holiday break. She and the board also have been in ongoing contact with our state legislators and the Commissioner of Education, but our state officials need to hear from you. The vote on this proposed legislation is being rushed through the lame duck session, and is (was) scheduled for Monday, January 7.

Write to the following representatives and officials today: Governor Jon Corzine: www.state.nj.us/governor, (609) 292-6000; Senator Richard Codey, sencodey@njleg.org, (973) 731-6670; Senator Tom Kean, senkean@njleg.org, (908) 232-3673; Assemblyman Jon Bramnick, asbramnick@njleg.org, (908) 232-3673; Assemblyman Eric Munoz, asmmunoz@njleg.org, (908) 918-0414. Thank you for your prompt attention to this urgent matter.

Have a happy and healthy New Year.

Joseph Hill, Music Director  
MS Comm. Presbyterian Church

Cindy Gallagher for the Westfield  
PTO Presidents and Board of Ed.

### Festival of Lessons Was A Big Success

As music director of the Community Presbyterian Church of Mountainside, I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to the choir and all those who made our third annual Festival of Lessons and Carols a huge success. I have spoken with many of the patrons personally and I know that they have once again enjoyed this Christmas concert.

I look forward to working with the choir on our upcoming concert of Handel's Messiah scheduled for Good Friday, March 21 and wish to again invite not only the congregation, but also friends and neighbors. Further information may be obtained by calling the church office at (908) 232-9490.

As my first year on the Scotch Plains Township Council has come to an end, I would like to thank all of you who conveyed to me your well wishes, guidance, suggestions, support, encouragement and most importantly friendship throughout my freshman year.

I am pleased to share with you several initiatives and positions I took this past year that were faithful to my campaign promises to stabilize taxes, improve our township's infrastructure and create a more open government, including the following:

Successfully pushing for a lower municipal tax increase than had been originally proposed and being the lone holdout for an even lower tax increase;

Delivering on my promise to create

### Think of Iowa Dem. Caucus as Milestone

When we look back at last week's Democratic caucuses in Iowa, we will see it as a milestone in American history.

Today, caught up in choosing a candidate, partisans will focus on who won and who lost. In the long run, America won. For the last 40 years, we have struggled with the issue of the role race plays and/or should not play in American politics. Not all the things that happened during this interval should make us proud.

Last week in Iowa, a Presidential selection process was completed with candidates of diverse backgrounds, races and sexes competing with each other in a state not known for its diversity of population. Yet, the result of this process does not appear to have been significantly affected by these differences.

We should not think that the struggle is over for achieving a nation of complete equality. But let us stop for a moment to appreciate what did occur.

Dick Samuel Chairman  
Scotch Plains Democratic Committee

### Councilman Glover Recaps 2007, Discusses 2008 Initiatives

and install a new state-of-the-art township website, scotchplainsnj.com;

Promoting a proper and more permanent restoration of the roof at the department of public works building that had been in disrepair for over a decade and cited as being unsafe by a State agency;

Introduction of a resolution for a professional evaluation of our dated firehouse's facilities/living quarters addressing our valued volunteer firefighter's long-standing requests and efforts to make much needed improvements and upgrades to them;

Advocating the use of more of our Open Space Trust Fund tax dollar reserves to finance our planned turf field, thereby, lowering future significant township bonding/debt and tax burdens on our citizens.

As we begin a new year, I am looking forward to serving our community again, working on many issues that can benefit our entire township, foremost of which will be stabilizing our municipal taxes. Last year, with the help of excellent advisors in both the legal and accounting areas, I was able to make suggestions that resulted in lowering the initially proposed tax rate increase.

Based on the financials I have seen thus far, I am hopeful that there will be no need to raise the municipal portion of our property taxes this year, which was a goal I set for your council at the passage of our 2007 budget.

We all need to be mindful that within our great township there are citizens, neighbors, friends who would be very appreciative of any tax relief we can deliver. Accordingly, our number one objective this year should be not to raise taxes and even consider possibly lowering them some. I am hopeful that the council will work toward this.

In closing, I wish you all a happy and healthy New Year.

Councilman Kevin Glover  
Scotch Plains

Deadlines  
General News - Friday 4pm  
Classifieds - Tuesday 12pm  
Ad Reservation - Friday 4pm  
Ad Submittal - Monday 12pm