

Officials Assure Westfield That Town Is Prepared In Light of Newtown

Dear Friends, We are all unfortunately too well aware of the incident last Friday in Newtown, Connecticut. There are no words to describe the pain we all feel for the Newtown community, and the loss of innocent children and the adults who died while protecting them.

A loss of this magnitude, undertaken in such a manner, is unspeakable.

And while our thoughts and prayers go out to that community, it is also understandably human nature to think of our own vulnerabilities in circumstances such as this. As caring human beings, we want to protect our children and educators at all times and in all of our schools.

It is for that reason that we wanted to reach out to all members of our community to remind and reassure everyone that the Westfield Public School District, in collaboration with our Town's public safety professionals, and County and State authorities, has long had a comprehensive emergency plan in place, which is reviewed and practiced on a regular basis with our students, our educators, and the administration of each school building in the District.

And while our Superintendent of Schools undertakes an ongoing dialogue with our Chief of Police to ensure our plan remains current and viable, the Superintendent was in immediate contact with the Chief last Friday to ensure we were taking every immediate precaution in the near term. Our police professionals and school authorities, most of whom are parents themselves, have our children's and educators' well-being at the forefront of all deliberations and action plans.

Earlier this week, a joint meeting was held between the Town and the School District to discuss emergency preparedness in light of this recent tragedy. In attendance were Mayor Andrew Skibitsky, Public Safety Committee Chairwoman JoAnn Neylan, Police Chief David Wayman, Deputy Fire Chief David Kelly, Town Administrator Jim Gildea, Board of Education President Rich Mattessich, Board of Education Vice President Rosanne Kurstedt, Superintendent Dr. Margaret Dolan, and four members of the School District's Emergency Management Team, Mike Weissman, Jeanette Munoz, David Duelsks and Jim DeSarno.

Many good points were raised during the meeting, which is intended to be the first of many such meetings during which the Town and School District will continue to ensure our safety protocols remain appropriate and balanced. And although the safety protocol itself is maintained in a confidential manner, we do want to remind you of certain procedures that are currently in place and other actions that have been considered:

Dr. Dolan has spoken with every principal and reviewed safety procedures for all ten buildings. Some immediate steps were taken to secure all sections of all buildings. Staff and parents have been understanding of these changes, even when they make everyday arrivals more difficult. Remaining concerns or questions are being compiled with suggestions coming from principals, staff and parents. These suggestions are being investigated and will be reviewed with law enforcement.

Counselors have been at every school in the District to provide support and information to help teachers and students in dealing with their thoughts for those in Newtown, and in discussing their understandably heightened concerns for personal safety.

A few days before the Connecticut tragedy, the School District's Emergency Management Team met and had planned for security audits at every school building in the District to be undertaken in collaboration with the Police and Fire Departments. This Emergency Management Team meets on a monthly basis to ensure best practices are in place, and will make this meeting with Town officials a priority in January.

Members of law enforcement have always worked closely with officials from all of our schools and are very responsive and cooperative to issues that arise from time to time throughout

the school year. Members of law enforcement both from Westfield and Union County have also come and worked with and trained our principals and other professionals. The police also use our buildings to conduct their own trainings so that they are familiar with each building should an emergency situation arise. The New Jersey Department of Education has also provided training for all principals. The School District's nurses also have participated in specific training regarding crisis management.

Members of the Westfield Police and Fire Departments have overseen the various drills that are conducted in our schools and have from time to time helped to implement their suggestions for improving protocols.

We utilize doorway cameras with a two-way intercom in our schools and visitors have to be "buzzed in" for the door to open. We are looking at this protocol at each school building in the District to ensure that consistent practices are followed across the District. This has resulted in some immediate changes and we are considering additional actions in this regard.

While unfortunate, we must note that access to our school buildings will be a little more time consuming and cumbersome, and, perhaps, a little less friendly. We ask for your understanding in that regard and will note that all school personnel have been required to follow the "buzz in" process noted above. It is, and unfortunately needs to be, the accepted norm that we no longer prop open a door for convenience, or hold open a door out of kindness to others. While that has always been the policy, human nature is such that we want to be kind to each other by helping others in. Access to school buildings will have to be our exception and an area of zero tolerance.

School district staff is required to wear nametags. Visitors to the school are required to immediately report to the principal's office to sign in and to receive a visitor's badge which they must wear prominently while visiting the school and return upon their departure. This is another area where our practice may have become more lenient for convenience and one, which we will require going forward.

We are undertaking a review of our existing emergency alarm systems and communication methods in the event of an emergency. We already have some ideas for improvements, which will require research and follow up. That will occur in short order.

We are fortunate to have experts in public safety living within the Westfield community who have already volunteered to work with us as we continually review our safety protocols. These individuals come from various law enforcement backgrounds such as the FBI. We look forward to their input and will confidentially reach out for assistance where appropriate.

We always welcome suggestions from the public and we consider every one of them. We will continue the hard work of balancing the benefits of any such suggestion against both the tangible and intangible costs of its implementation. We all understand the unfortunate reality that no system can prevent every act of violence. Our actions will be guided by our concern for our children and educators and we will implement those suggestions that help to achieve their safety in the most appropriate fashion.

These are just some of the activities that are ongoing or that we are considering at this time.

As parents, guardians, and residents of Westfield, we all need to know that the safety of all Westfield students and educators is a top priority. The Westfield Public Schools and the Town of Westfield have a history of working together on crisis preparedness, to ensure the safety of all our citizens. That partnership today is stronger than ever.

With the school break beginning next week, we wish all of you a peaceful time off and a Happy New Year.

Mayor Andrew Skibitsky
Margaret Dolan, Superintendent,
Westfield Public Schools
Richard Mattessich, President,
Westfield Board of Education

Letters to the Editor

We All Have Responsibility to Act Following Sandy Hook Massacre

To fellow citizens and Congressmen:

1. We must look at ourselves and acknowledge that each of us (you and I) have some responsibility for the massacre at Sandy Hook.

2. I accept the following facts:
a. We live in a violent society.

b. We permit, promote and encourage violence through: i. Violent movies. ii. Violent computer games. iii. Violent video games. iv. Violent television. v. Violence preaching. vi. Violent behavior. vii. Permitting our profit making arms manufacturing and distribution businesses to go unregulated.

c. The U.S. is one of the most militant behaving major countries in the world.

d. We neglected or ignore the mental health of segments of our population.

i. We have intentionally cut back governmental budgets, which provided funds to address this problem.

ii. Active uniformed military and veterans are not getting timely help.

3. What should be done: (if you truly believe something should be done.)

a. As individuals:

i. Look at ourselves and our immediate society and try to discover what roll through commission and omission do we play.

ii. Should I petition my neighbors to get involved?

iii. Should I petition my governmental representatives to be pro-active by (?)

(1) Enforce laws and regulations.

(2) Chastise officials who aid, apologize or rationalize violence.

(3) Speak non-violence.

(4) Insist that my Congressmen enact legislation or be voted out of office.

(5) Demand the President lead by proposing legislation and enforcing laws.

iv. Boycott companies that manufacture, finance or support abusive firearms.
v. Make sure your investment portfolio (in stocks directly or through funds) do not include stocks or bonds in those companies that are involved in the abusive firearms industry.

b. As an institution or as a representative of an institution:

i. In the past religious institutions played a roll, but to a large measure they have become irrelevant. (That opinion is based on the major decline in attendance.) They do a good job after a disaster, but before one they have lost their way in preventing violence. Historically, they all have aided and abetted violence (in the name of God) without true acknowledgment (to my knowledge).

ii. Representatives (Congressmen and Senators) are aware of violence, but either they believe in violence or are being unduly influenced by special interests. There can be no other reasons.

iii. Consider indicting governmental officials as "aid and abettors" to a crime for their non-performances.

iv. I respect our Constitution and amendments with rights to own a gun and freedom of speech. It's beyond me that with all our government's brains they can't enact legislation that protect those rights, but limit the extreme violence.

v. Enact legislation that defines sports firearms from abusive firearms (i.e., automatic and semi-automatic guns, high powered and soft point bullets).

vi. Revoke those laws that go beyond protecting the right to have firearms or to have freedom of speech. We do have some laws that limit freedom of speech ("incorrectly yelling fire in a theater").

vii. The firearms industry is in interstate commerce. Under federal law the Congress can enact laws that can be enforced throughout our country.

4. Do Something Constructive.

Ralph Steinhart
Westfield

Country Run Amuck; Shootings, Violence

Dear Congressman Lance, This letter is about free education due all US citizens. However, our country has run amuck.

Mass shootings, violence, and other atrocities have been occurring in our public and private schools almost weekly. Isn't it time that our government secured the rights of our little citizens (and for all people) to education and life? The only way to begin to curb this violence is to pass gun control laws that stop people from getting these weapons of mass destruction.

As my Congressman, I expect you to stand up and lead the way in getting these laws passed! The time has come for you to make a difference in Congress.

Ellen Gottdenker
Mountainside

NRA Gets An F, Absurdity of Views

The Sandy Hook tragedy has no doubt made all of us grieve for the families whose lives have been permanently scarred by this terrible event. That the NRA bears indirect responsibility by always seeking 300 percent of what is really necessary to protect the legitimate rights of gun owners is so obvious it barely needs saying.

Fortunately Wayne Lapiere, the NRA's spokesman, highlighted the absurdity of their views more eloquently than any critic.

What wasn't obvious to me until recently is that Congressman Leonard Lance is rated A- by the NRA. Although I've always believed tighter gun control to be in our interests, it's now clear to me that it needs to be a priority.

Every one of our loved ones and us endures the risk of being the random victim of a shooting every day.

I hope Congressman Lance will regard his NRA rating as a Scarlet Letter carrying with it great shame, and will conduct his affairs accordingly.

The only grade worth receiving from the NRA is an F.

Simon Lack
Westfield

Tested Once Again, County Looks Forward to 2013

Between the global economic meltdown of 2008 and a series of natural disasters culminating in Hurricane Sandy, Union County has seen its share of crises over the past four years. We have also been touched by the sorrows borne by communities not so very far away; here in New Jersey, the devastation of shore towns by the storm, and in Newtown, Conn., a human tragedy from which no real recovery is ever possible.

While our hearts and minds reach out in sympathy, we can also look inward and prepare ourselves for the challenges ahead. And as this year comes to a close, there is cause for renewed hope in the future.

One cause for optimism has been the growth of new relationships all across the spectrum of our community. In this regard, Hurricane Sandy illustrates just how strong these ties have become.

The aftermath of the storm left an extremely hazardous situation in Union County that could have led to widespread, tragic results. Instead, injury and loss of life were minimal. For that, full credit is due to the countless thousands who exercised patience and perseverance, and who attended to their neighbors' well being.

A vital hub of the response effort was the countywide Regional Evacuation Center, for which the Township of Cranford provided its recreation center and personnel. Because they stepped up, a safe place to stay was guaranteed for anyone in need.

The Evacuation Center involved all levels of community engagement, starting with advance planning by county and local officials. Fifty Union County Medical Reserve Corps volunteers were at the ready to staff the Center, often taking leave from their jobs or shuttling straight between work and volunteering.

The Salvation Army played a critical role, as did the Red Cross, three dozen people who individually volunteered, and many volunteer employees from county and local offices. Even the children pitched in, many through school and Scout groups.

Hurricane Sandy also engendered a new growth of cooperation between county and local elected officials. That

included daily briefings during the aftermath and an after-action conference, and we intend to build on these new lines of communication.

Another kind of relationship has been illustrated by our new Union County Means Business initiative, which was supported by leaders in the business, academic and non-profit spheres. Built around a series of networking events, Union County Means Business has forged new partnerships that benefit the entire economic environment. It has been a heartening demonstration of the "we're all in this together" outlook that I have always cherished as a lifelong Union County resident.

This has been the pattern throughout these past four years. These crises have bound us more closely to each other. We are learning and adapting to new economic circumstances and a new environment, in which expecting the unexpected is the new normal.

From what I have witnessed this year especially, the residents of Union County are more than equal to any challenge that lies ahead, and we are a stronger community than ever before.

With that in mind, I wish you all a happy holiday season, and best wishes for the coming year.

Alexander Mirabella
Freeholder Chairman

Recycle Christmas Paper This Year

All of the wrapping paper that we receive is just that, paper. It all can and should be recycled: the toy and gift box packaging; Christmas cards and envelopes; plastic wrapping around our gifts.

Plastic comes from oil. Maybe we can reduce our oil use, dependency, cost and carbon imprint! You can bring the Styrofoam packing to the Cranford Recycling Center or Storo-Pak in Springfield. There is no reason for our Christmas week garbage to increase in any way.

We pay for garbage by weight and volume. If we reduce the amount, we pay less for it in taxes and become more environmentally responsible.

Bill Nierstedt
Garwood

DWI Charges?

Call The Criminal Defense Lawyers at

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We Have Three Former Prosecutors

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JANUARY 2013 EVENTS
AT THE WESTFIELD MEMORIAL LIBRARY
550 East Broad Street, Westfield 908.789.4090 www.wmlnj.org
Hours: Monday-Thursday 9:30 am - 9:00 pm Friday and Saturday 9:30 am - 5:00 pm Sunday 1:00 - 5:00 pm
Closed Monday, January 21 for Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr Day

PROGRAMS FOR ADULTS (Check website for all registration information)

1/4	1:30 pm	TGIF! Best of World Cruises (video)
1/7	7:00 pm	"Film Noir"-Talk by Chris Messineo
1/8	10:00 am	Computer Class: Beginning Word
1/9	7:00 pm	Story Slam-Tell your New Year's tale
1/10	7:00 pm	Computer Class: Photo Editing w/Gimp
1/11	1:30 pm	TGIF! History of Radio (video)
1/12	2:00 pm	FrostKings-Jazz and Blues Band
1/14	2 & 6:30 pm	Foreign Film: Best Exotic Marigold Hotel
1/16	7:00 pm	"Music in Films" Talk by Allen Cohen
1/18	1:30 pm	TGIF! Paul Cezanne (video)
1/25	1:30 pm	TGIF! Wilma Rudolph (video)

PROGRAMS FOR CHILDREN (Check website for more programs & sign up info)

1/4	3:45 pm	Chess Club for Kids some exp. needed
1/8, 15, 22, 29	10:30 am or 1:00 pm	Fun for 4's and 5's Storytime
1/9, 16, 23, 30	10:30 am	Time for 3's Storytime
1/10, 17, 24, 31	10:30 am	2's on Thursday Storytime
1/11, 18, 25	10:30 am	Little Listeners' Storytime up to 23 m'ths
1/13	10:30 am	Grupo ñ Spanish Language Storytime
1/16, 23, 30	3:45 pm	LEGO K Club (kindergarteners only)
1/18	3:45 pm	Creative Dramatics (kindergarten and up)



Your link to Jewish community

Get connected to the Jewish community in Union County...

J Connection is here to help.

THE MOTHERS CIRCLE

FREE Resources.
Education. Events.

Answering Your Jewish Children



A Program for Fathers of Other Religious Backgrounds
www.AnsweringYourJewishChildren.org

Mothers Circle, for non-Jewish moms raising Jewish children, is a free educational program empowering non-Jewish mothers to create Jewish homes. Explore Jewish holidays, practices, rituals and ethics.

Tuesday, January 8, January 22 and February 5 • 9:15 AM

Answering Your Jewish Children is a series which provides non-Jewish fathers, whose spouses/partners are Jewish, with practical information and guidance to help them raise Jewish children. Discuss answers to the "big" questions that children ask about life, death and God, holidays and rituals and Jewish values and ethics.

Tuesday, January 8, January 22 and February 5 • 7:00 PM

Both Programs Free!

at the JCC of Central NJ
1391 Martine Avenue, Scotch Plains

J Connection is a partnership between the Jewish Community Center of Central NJ and local synagogues and is funded by a grant from the Jewish Federation of Greater MetroWest NJ.

For more information and to register, contact Randi Zucker, J Connection Director, at 908-889-8800 x253 or rzucker@jccnj.org.
www.jccnj.org