

WF, SP-F BOEs Gather Input On Whether to Move Election

By MICHAEL J. POLLACK
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

AREA – New state legislation allows school-board elections to be consolidated into the November General Election, and four Union County municipalities have already pledged to move in that direction.

Last month, Cranford, Linden, Elizabeth and Winfield Park took advantage of the law's opt-in provision. Taking part in the new plan is strictly voluntary and can be achieved by three means: a school board or a government council can pass a resolution that approves the change, or 15 percent of those who voted in the last Presidential election can petition such a move. In the case of Scotch Plains-Fanwood, since they have

a conjoined school board, either the Board of Education (BOE) must move a resolution forward or both governing bodies would have to approve resolutions.

Towns have until Friday, February 17, to notify their county clerk if they wish to make a change.

For school boards that move their elections to November, if the tax levy's year-over-year increase is limited to 2 percent, there is no vote on the annual school budget tax levy; voters would decide on school-board candidates and any proposed cap-over-ride referendum. School budgets for districts that move elections would still go through introduction and adoption proceedings this spring, with BOEs that exceed 2 per-

cent having to wait until November to see if voters support the additional tax monies.

In Westfield and Scotch Plains-Fanwood, school boards are gleaning public opinion before making a determination.

In weighing the pros and cons, Westfield BOE member Ann Cary listed higher voter turnouts, no risk of program cuts due to budget defeats and an annual savings of close to \$30,000 as reasons to opt in. School boards may actually pay more than usual to keep their elections in April, as fewer towns would be sharing the cost imposed by the county Board of Elections.

Ms. Cary, however, mentioned the potential to politicize board-member candidacy and not voting on the budget as negatives.

"I have always been a proponent of community outreach and voter input," said Ms. Cary, Westfield BOE's Legislation Committee chairwoman. "The change that we are contemplating... is a big change for this community, and I think that we should be thoughtful in our deliberations and our timing. There is absolutely no reason to rush this decision. We have until February 17 to act, so we are within the timeline that the Department of Education has set. I urge members of the public to give us their opinion."

Not all Westfield board members agree with the decision to delay the vote for another week.

Mitch Slater, in an e-mail to the newspaper, said, "For the record, I would not have supported the resolution at [the January 24] meeting to delay the vote until February 7. It made no sense to me to wait, if a bipartisan [state Legislature] approved it already... It's not our job to get political." Mr. Slater was not in attendance at the January 24 meeting when the BOE voted 7-1 (David Finn was the dissenting vote) to delay the decision.

In an earlier e-mail, he said he "strongly supported" the move to a November election. "Whatever savings the district can garner with this move, as well as increasing voter turnout, is a win-win for all taxpayers."

In Scotch Plains-Fanwood, after hearing enough enthusiasm for moving school-board elections from April to November, Board of Education President Trip Whitehouse called for a special meeting on Thursday, February 9, that will decide the issue.

The most vocal opponent of the move, Betty Anne Woerner, said she was "really torn," calling her quandary "Solomon-like." She noted that there

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WF Chief, Bldg. Inspector Discuss Safety of Buildings

By LAUREN S. BARR
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD – Following the devastating January 22 fire that destroyed Clyne & Murphy, along with five other businesses on South and Westfield Avenues, and last year's fire that destroyed Ferraro's restaurant many questions have been raised regarding the safety of Westfield's buildings.

According to Westfield Fire Chief Dan Kelly, there are a lot of older buildings in the town, which do not have alarms or sprinkler systems. He said that when buildings are altered or renovated for new tenants "then it has to be retrofitted to the current codes."

Fire code regulations are set by the State of New Jersey and vary based on the size of the building, its use and occupancy. According to Chief Kelly, "a lot of older buildings are grandfathered" and are held to code under the standard during the time in which they were built. He told *The Westfield Leader* that state code changes based on state or nationwide fire statistics.

Chief Kelly said that the January



YEE HAW... This year, the Washington School Show's couples' number featured a good old-fashioned hoedown as parents square-danced in blue jeans and checkered shirts to "Turkey in the Straw" last weekend during "Roadsters & Jokesters," the school's 65th annual show.

Photo courtesy of Charlie Bowman

County, Westfield PD Officials Probe Fatal North Avenue Accident

By SUZETTE F. STALKER
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD – Union County and local authorities are continuing to investigate a multi-vehicle accident that occurred in Westfield last week, in which one pedestrian was killed and another seriously injured.

Union County Prosecutor Theodore Romankow reported that the chain of events began the evening of January 25 when Patricia Currie, 68, of Scotch Plains apparently grazed a pedestrian while driving through the intersection of North Avenue and Tuttle Parkway at about 6:05 p.m. as the man was crossing the street.

According to Mr. Romankow, Ms. Currie immediately stopped and assisted the pedestrian. As she attempted to lead the man across the street, a Chevy Cavalier operated by a Westfield resident struck the pair. The man and woman landed several yards away on North Avenue with injuries, Mr. Romankow stated. The driver of the Cavalier stopped at the scene and later was transported to a local hospital for observation.

Mr. Romankow stated that a second vehicle, a GMC pickup, almost immediately afterward struck Ms. Currie, which resulted in further injuries to the victim. She was taken to Overlook

Medical Center in Summit, where she was pronounced dead. The male victim was transported to University Hospital in Newark for treatment of his injuries.

John Holl, communications director for the prosecutor's office, told *The Westfield Leader* Monday that all aspects of the case remain "under investigation at this point" and that no charges had been filed.

Mr. Holl said the accident was being

addressed as a joint investigation between the Union County Prosecutor's Office, the Westfield Police Department and the Union County Sheriff's Office.

He noted that while the Homicide Task Force of the prosecutor's office was involved in the investigation, it did not automatically mean that the case was being treated as a homicide.

"All factors are being considered

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Berman Gets Probation For Role in Bid-Rigging

TRENTON – Former business administrator for the Westfield School District was sentenced January 27 to one year of probation for accepting \$13,000 in windows and doors from a contractor he recommended be hired by the school district, Attorney General (AG) Jeffrey Chiesa announced.

Berman, 55, of South Plainfield, was sentenced by state Superior Court Judge Joseph Donohue in Union County. Berman pleaded guilty on October 24, 2011 to an accusation charging him with third-degree conspiracy to make false representations for a government contract, authorities said.

He was required to forfeit his positions as business administrator and board secretary for the Westfield School District. He was also ordered to pay a \$6,000 penalty into the state's Anti-Trust Revolving Fund for anti-trust enforcement efforts.

In pleading guilty, Berman admitted that he accepted the window glass and doors installed at his home by Metropolitan Metal Window Company from 2004 to 2008. He further admitted that, as business administrator, he issued written recommendations that the Westfield Board of Education appoint Metropolitan as

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KLONDIKE KIDS... Westfield Scouts, led by Steve Huber, participated in the 57th Annual Watchung Mountain District Klondike Derby held this past Saturday in the Watchung Reservation.

Greg Ryan for The Westfield Leader

Westfield Mayor, Mr. Kasko Engage In Heated Exchange

By LAUREN S. BARR
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD – Public safety was the topic at Tuesday night's Westfield Town Council meeting following the fatal pedestrian accident on North Avenue last week, with the meeting becoming heated and needing to be briefly adjourned.

Mayor Andy Skibitsky began the meeting by saying that because the "Union County Prosecutor's (office is) in the midst of a very thorough investigation," he was not going to comment directly about the accident. He offered prayers for the family of Patricia Currie, who was killed, and for David Kervick, who is still hospitalized.

The mayor said, "drivers and pedestrians are responsible for each other's safety." He urged drivers to put down their cell phones and not to drink and drive, and pedestrians to use crosswalks and make sure they are wearing clothing visible to drivers.

North Avenue resident Ted Ritter said that he was "pleased to hear the mayor's comments... highlighting safety" but asked the council to re-

new its commitment to public safety. He said that when he walks or rides his bicycle to the train station each day, it's a "crap shoot," and that you "take your life in your own hands just walking to the train station." He said that more lighting and striping is needed in the area of North Avenue and Tuttle Parkway, where the accident occurred, and that it "really doesn't cost that much money."

Greg Kasko approached the microphone to once again speak on the topic of the pedestrian light on Central Avenue and traffic accident information he has been examining. He criticized Councilman Sam DellaFera for commenting on the light, after he admitted he had never used it. "I would think as a representative of the people, you would have made your way down there in the last couple of months," Mr. Kasko told him.

Mr. Kasko then said that approximately 11 years ago there was a fatal pedestrian accident in the vicinity of North and Tuttle, and that the intersection was then listed among the "hot spots" that the town was examining. According to Mr. Kasko, the

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ORDER OF MERIT... At the Westfield Council meeting Tuesday, Bob Farris receives a proclamation from Assemblywoman Nancy Munoz and Assemblyman Jon Bramnick following his receipt of the Commanders Cross and Order of Merit from the President of Poland.

Lauren Barr for The Westfield Leader



SWEARING IN... Westfield Rescue Squad officers, pictured left to right, Kim Adams, Ron DeVelde, Suzanne Hutchinson, Jonathan Delano, Jeanne Gladis, Sue Lagano, Reid Edles and Dan Sullivan, are sworn into office by Westfield Councilwoman JoAnn Neylan at the squad's annual awards dinner held Saturday night at the Renaissance Woodbridge Hotel.

Paul Lachenauer for The Westfield Leader

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Correction

In last week's story on the Westfield Board of Education meeting, the items listed as cons were pros on moving the school election to the date of the November General Election.

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