

The Westfield Leader THE SCOTCH PLAINS-FANWOOD
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 Boroughs of Mountainside and Garwood
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Towns Should Follow Summit's Lead; Attend Freeholder Meetings

Union County Freeholder meetings are generally not well attended. Representatives from the Union County Watchdog Association and our reporter are the only regulars. But last week that changed when four Summit City Councilmen came to ask the freeholders to do what they could to reduce the county budget. Summit residents pay the highest county property tax among the 21 towns in Union County at \$3,600 per home compared to the average Union County homeowner who pays \$1,700.

We applaud the efforts of the Summit council members and the dignity in which they addressed the freeholders. While we expect the county budget to be tighter this year under the leadership of County Manager Al Faella and Freeholder Chairman Al Mirabella, we do not foresee anything close to a flat tax as sought by Summit. In recent years, the county tax on towns has jumped on average between \$12 and \$14 million per year and totaled \$291.2 million in 2011.

In our opinion, it is going to take a lot more than Summit to put pressure on the county to curtail spending. More towns are going to have to start attending these meetings and communicating regularly with freeholders and county officials. At least Westfield Councilman Frank Arena made an effort years ago to attend county meetings, but after being at one county budget meeting back then, he has not returned.

When budget hearings begin in the next month or so, a strong contingent of elected and/or municipal officials should be at these meetings. This will show the board the real concern that is out there at the municipal level.

In addition to attending meetings, we believe towns should offer assistance in reviewing county budgets to see where reductions can be made. In the 1990s when the board was in Republican hands, a few town administrators reviewed the budget to make recommendations to the board. The GOP board started to reduce the increase of the tax. When Democrats took over, then county manager Michael Lapolla was able to produce several budgets in a row where the tax levy was either flat or reduced. If it happened 10 years ago, it can be done again.

One of the points raised by the Summit councilmen was that the city does not have a representative on the Freeholder board. If Freeholder Dan Sullivan from Elizabeth, who was named interim executive

director by the Union County Utilities Authority (UCUA), is hired as the permanent UCUA director and resigns from the freeholder board, we encourage the county Democrats to select a Summit resident to fill the seat. Perhaps former Summit Mayor Jordan Glatt (Democrat) will agree to serve.

To our knowledge, no decision has been made as to who might be chosen as the next UCUA director. We're not sure if advertisements are being made to solicit the most qualified individual. We're not sure either if the qualifications for the position have even been outlined.

Republicans ran Summit candidates for freeholder in 2010 and 2011, but they did not win seats. In our opinion, no town should have more than one representative. Currently the nine-member freeholder board has representatives from seven towns in Union County (Elizabeth, Plainfield, Roselle, Linden, Union, Cranford and Fanwood). Elizabeth and Union each have two representatives. Shouldn't Westfield and Summit be represented as they are the two highest taxed towns?

We believe the county is being forced, and will do so, to tighten its belt to reduce the property tax burden in our communities. Shouldn't those that pay the taxes have a role in the deliberations?

Letter to The Editor The Behavior of a Few Adults Is Embarrassing at Council Meetings

To my fellow Westfielders, I have lived in Westfield almost all of my life and chose to raise my children here. I often attend Council meetings because of my continuing interest in the town. Our Mayor and Council are elected to represent us, the residents. The treatment they received at the Town Council Meeting on Tuesday, January 31 was nothing less than a total disdain and repeated lack of respect for them and all the citizens of Westfield.

At the meetings, the public is encouraged to express their comments and opinions on any subject of their choosing. This is not meant to be a dialogue, but is simply a forum for public input. There are some who disregard the parameters. The conduct of certain individuals this evening was again verbally abusive and showed a complete lack of decorum. I respect their right to express their concerns, but the continuing interruptions, shouting from the gallery and attacks on integrity go beyond anything reasonable or acceptable.

As a resident of Westfield, I was embarrassed to see my fellow citizens treat our town in this manner. I commend the Mayor and Council for their patience during the attacks and interruptions. Thankfully, Cub Scout Pack 172 had received their recognition and left before having to witness the behavior of these adults.

Robert Burslem, Westfield

Letters to the Editor

Ex-BOE Officials Showed Unethical, Unprofessional, Unscrupulous Behavior

On January 26, *The Westfield Leader* reported that last year, Mountainside's top three school officials formed a private educational consulting business and kept their venture secret from Mountainside's Board of Education. The three are: Mary Beth Schaumberg, president of the board until May 10, 2011, and a member of the board until her resignation last September; Dr. Jeannette Baubles, chief school administrator until her contract expired last November and previously a candidate to continue in that position, and Thomas A. Conroy, curriculum coordinator and a school administrator until his resignation last June.

The current board members learned of the trio's hidden agenda only after Dr. Baubles left the system in November — and [they] were appalled.

I believe that these three behaved in an unethical, unprofessional, and unscrupulous manner by concealing their plans and actions from the board and the community. Formation of a business in itself isn't wrong. But while the three were doing that, they owed their educational responsibilities and their honesty entirely to our school system. They created reprehensible conflicts of interest for themselves and — without it knowing it — the Mountainside board.

I write to you as a long-time resident of Mountainside and a former member and president of our Board of Education. I don't expect any action to be taken against the three. But their reputations must be held accountable in the public eye of Mountainside, and their business's clients should know what kind of advisors they are paying.

At its January 24 meeting, the board amended its ethics policy to be more specific about disclosures required in such circumstances. Here are some significant dates:

April 15, 2011: The Internet domain name shapingeducationalexcellence.com

is registered. This is the name of the business-to-be, also to be known as 'SEE.'

April 27: School board and budget election; May 10: Mrs. Schaumberg seeks re-election as president, is replaced, and remains on the board. Also on May 10, Shaping Educational Excellence LLC is registered as a company with the New Jersey Department of the Treasury. The registration is signed by Dr. Baubles, Mr. Conroy, and Mrs. Schaumberg.

June 14: Mr. Conroy's resignation is accepted by the board.

June 30: Dr. Baubles's contract expires. She accepts an interim agreement to continue as chief administrator until November, while the board seeks a replacement.

Sept. 6: Mrs. Schaumberg announces her resignation from the board.

Nov. 3: Dr. Baubles leaves the system.

The website for SEE, showing its elaborate planning and organization, is shapingeducationalexcellence.com. Dr. Baubles is president of the company. Mr. Conroy and Mrs. Schaumberg are vice-presidents. All three are listed as co-founders. Their e-mail addresses are shown.

The questions to be put to these persons include: When did you begin to talk about and plan this business? Why didn't you tell the Board of Education and the community about your intentions? Why did you continue in your public positions while doing this? Why did Dr. Baubles talk to the board about renewing her contract at the same time she was forming secretly this business? Why was Mrs. Schaumberg as a board member involved in these contract talks as, in effect, an employer, when Mrs. Schaumberg intended to become subordinate to Dr. Baubles in the business?

Scott R. Schmedel
 Mountainside

April 15 Is A Holiday for Those Who Work In The Hedge Fund Industry

I read the letter from Bob Saunders [last week] trying to make the case that the rich really don't get all the breaks and instead we should call April 15 "Rich People Appreciation Day." However, Mr. Saunders missed something in his analysis.

Hedge funds, like Bain Capital where Mitt Romney made hundreds of millions of dollars, do not pay the 35 percent corporate tax rate at all. They only pay 15 percent. They get special treatment, otherwise known

as a break. So while my company pays 35 percent tax on profits, these hedge funds just pay 15 percent on the hundred of millions of dollars they earn. And then Mitt Romney pays 15 percent on what's left while I pay 30 or 40 percent.

Seems to me that April 15 is already a holiday for those who work in the hedge fund industry, it just isn't for the rest of us.

John Dencker
 Westfield

Maintain Accountability by Keeping School Budget Elections

In a democratic system of government, we value the 'voice of the people.' We hold this tenet to be so fundamental, we not only privy the public to our government's finances and records, but sometimes even allow the peoples' voice to be heard by granting them the opportunity to directly vote on their government's finances.

The people of Westfield currently have this right every April when they are allowed to vote on the school budget; however, a new resolution being considered by the Westfield Board of Education would take this right away from voters. While the board of education has continually packaged switching election dates as a cost saving maneuver, in reality it serves as a means to decrease public awareness and influence about board spending.

The resolution currently being considered by the board of education would not only move the election to November, but also eliminate any public vote on budgets that raise the tax levy up to 2 percent. The concept of moving the election to November is indeed a novel one and I applaud the primary proponents' intent. Surely this would produce administrative cost savings and greater turnout. Re-

gardless, my primary objection to the proposal rests in the elimination of any public vote on a school budget within state guidelines. This resolution simply creates too many tradeoffs; the ends fail to justify the means.

While there are certainly benefits associated with moving the election date to November, the benefits suggested are not enough to justify a sacrifice to democracy. The April school board elections still remain the principle method for voters to express their approval or dissatisfaction with the proposed school budget. While some suggest that public budget hearings remain, these alone are not sufficient. These hearings remain under the control of the board and are an inaccessible recourse for many voters. The budget vote stands as the only primary check to ensure fiscal accountability of the school board. It would be irresponsible of the board of education to hastily eliminate this vital check on democracy.

Instead I urge school board members to retain a sense of voter accountability by maintaining full budget elections.

Corey Lipschutz
 Westfield

Please Attend Scotch Plains Council Meeting on Tuesday, February 21

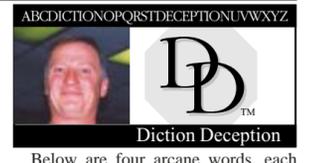
The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Tea Party commends the Scotch Plains Town Council for passing a resolution supporting Senator Michael Doherty's Fair School Funding Plan. Senator Doherty has introduced a constitutional amendment, which if passed, would give the students in Scotch Plains and Fanwood more state school aid. According to the Senator's website, our school district would

receive nearly \$39 million more in state school funding, providing welcome tax relief for residents of our community. It is a win-win proposition.

We are pleased that Mayor Nancy Malool has asked Senator Doherty to present his plan at the February 21 Town Council Meeting. We encourage residents to attend to learn more about this important legislation and the positive impact it would have for our town. The meeting will be held at 7:30 p.m., on Tuesday, February 21 in the municipal building at 430 Park Avenue in Scotch Plains.

Passing a resolution sends Trenton the message that we support the Fair School Funding Plan; however, there is still more to do to make this a reality. Please see spf-teaparty.org/ Home and learn what steps you can take to bring this to fruition.

Maria Sumanski
 Scotch Plains



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. Ninut — The magpie
2. Paynim — A pagan or heathen
3. Execration — Cursing
4. Crepuscular — Pertaining to twilight; glimmering

- SIFPLEMENT**
1. A hissing or whistling sound
 2. A separation or passing through
 3. The use or repetition of the letter s
 4. A formation of new flesh in a wound; a cicatrix

- CATAPHRACT**
1. A horseman in complete armor
 2. A puma; a cougar
 3. A powder formerly used for sprinkling the body
 4. Inflammation or a mucous membrane; especially of the nose or throat

- IMPUTRESCIBLE**
1. Vile; evil
 2. Not subject to corruption
 3. Not capable of being measured or weighed
 4. Wanting; needy

- URTICARIA**
1. Bacteria causing inflammation of the urinary tract
 2. A parasitic infestation of the intestines of Bears
 3. Hives
 4. Wild strawberries

See more letters on page 5 and page 16

Letters to the Editor

Don't Cut WF Firemen Beyond What Is Needed

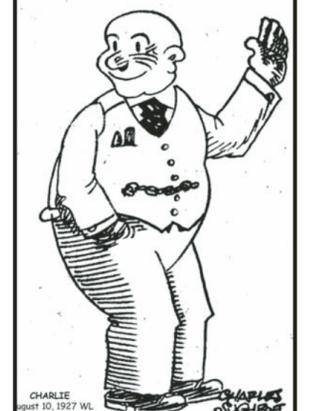
On December 27, 2010 (yes) around 10 p.m. with the wind gusting above 40 miles per hour blowing the snow from the almost 30-inch snow fall, the fire alarm at the Westfield Imaging Center went off. The town was still almost impassable, but the Westfield Fire Department and approximately a dozen other fire departments responded. The potential for a multi-building wind swept fire was great. The professionalism of the responding firemen under the conditions was outstanding.

They removed the door without wrecking it, entered the building, went to the second floor and observed a broken gas line to a roof HVAC unit shooting fire toward the sky. They then climbed a regular ladder from the ice and snow covered Elm Street sidewalk, shut off the gas and put out the fire. The fire ruined the HVAC unit. The firemen carefully handled the situation while causing minimal extra collateral damage. They certainly did not go wildly chopping up the place! A potentially explosive situation was helped, as there was snow on the roof. And, the gas torch was away from the nearby second floor. That was luck but the rest was highly professional firefighting.

With the three subsequent, highly publicized fires in 2011 and early 2012, we must be sure that our fire department has not been cut back to where they can't reasonably protect us. That is for others to evaluate objectively and factually. Surely the insurance companies will raise every Westfield property owners' premiums if they determine our town's fire protection is less than in the past. Remember the cumulative increase in every policy could far exceed the savings from cutting the fire department's essential budget items, should that be fact.

Tim Harrington
 Madison

GUESS IT COULD MAKE SOME SENSE TO VOTE NOT TO VOTE



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LD-21 includes Westfield, Mountainside, Garwood, Summit and Cranford.
 LD-22 includes Scotch Plains, Fanwood, Plainfield, Clark and Linden.

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