

In State-of-Town Address, Mayor Decries The ‘Politics of Fear’

By MICHAEL J. POLLACK
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD – In addition to the usual sentiments expressed in his State-of-the-Town address given on Tuesday, Mayor Andy Skibitsky used his speech to decry a “politics of fear” that he felt plagued the last election cycle.

The mayor recounted the many challenges faced by the town over the last year, from a blizzard, multiple multi-alarm fires, a hurricane and an earthquake. He said these events

tested the town’s mettle, and the public’s patience, as everyone encountered inconveniences. Some residents’ grievances were aired directly to the mayor’s office, and Mayor Skibitsky told the public about one particular caller.

After logging a complaint about debris pickup, the caller asked, “why the town let Ferraro’s burn to the ground?”

The caller said that a candidate told her, during the fall campaign, that the town “let Ferraro’s burn to the ground

because of ‘cuts to the fire department.’”

The mayor said he was “extremely disturbed by the emergence...of the politics of fear and alarm.” Without identifying the offending party by name, he said that anyone attempting to win by “creating a crisis,” where none exists, “is doing a grave disservice to our community...there is absolutely no justification for any campaign to practice fear-mongering.”

The mayor went on to detail the long-established system of mutual aid, whereby 21 local municipalities work together to share resources, especially during emergencies such as the Ferraro’s fire.

“That is why, when you see a picture of the Cranford ladder truck in Westfield, as certain campaigns included in their literature, it is not cause for alarm,” he said.

In the case of the Ferraro’s fire, the mayor said, there were six Westfield firefighters on duty when the call was received after midnight. The battalion commander on duty assessed the situation and called for mutual aid. In total, there were 21 Westfield firefighters at the scene battling the blaze, as well as 22 other departments and almost 100 total firefighters, he continued.

“The extent of the damage was the result of the building construction, lack of sprinklers, ignition source and the intensity of the fire when first discovered, not because the ladder truck was not the first truck on the scene,” the mayor said.

Following the meeting, the lone Democratic council member, David Haas, told *The Westfield Leader* he was “disappointed” in the mayor for using his address to send a “political” message; since the remarks occurred in the speech, “the opposition had no opportunity to discuss the issue.”

“We can have legitimate, different opinions about the budget,” Mr. Haas said. “I hope everyone can respect the opinions of others, and we can come to our differing views without being political.”

Mr. Haas acknowledged that the ads to which the mayor referred were

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8

Former WF Resident Killed Serving as Park Ranger

WESTFIELD – Mount Rainier Park Ranger Margaret Kritsch Anderson, 34, the daughter of a Westfield pastor and Scotch Plains resident, was shot and killed in the line of duty on New Year’s Day by a gunman who drove his vehicle through a park checkpoint.

According to national news accounts, Mrs. Anderson blocked the road in the Washington state park with her patrol vehicle to stop the vehicle driven by Benjamin Colton Barnes, 24, identified as an Iraq War veteran. At that point, Barnes reportedly jumped from his car and opened fire on the armed ranger before she had a chance to react.

Barnes’ body was later found in the park face down in an icy creek following a massive police manhunt involving over 150 officers. He was wearing only a T-shirt, jeans and one sneaker, according to news reports. Barnes reportedly was given a misconduct discharge from the Army after he had been charged with driving under the influence, as well as improperly transporting privately owned weapons. He is also a suspect in shootings that critically wounded four people at a Seattle, Wash., party.

Mrs. Anderson was the daughter of the Reverend and Mrs. Paul Kritsch of Scotch Plains. Rev. Kritsch is the pastor of Redeemer Lutheran Church in Westfield.

According to her wedding announcement, published in *The*



Greg Ryan for The Westfield Leader

NEW YEAR’S DAY TRADITION...The 30th annual Hangover Run at Tamaques Park in Westfield, hosted by the Cranford-based Central Jersey Road Runners Club, had a record number of runners on New Year’s Day. There were over 1,000 runners from the region. The first runner crossed the finish line in just over 15 minutes.

WF Board of Education Interviews Seven Candidates for Open Seat

By KIMBERLY A. BROADWELL
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD – Westfield Board of Education members interviewed seven candidates Tuesday evening during a special meeting aimed at finding a replacement for the open seat on the board. The appointment will be from January 2012 until the board of education elections in April, where a total of four seats will be open. The four-month term is being filled after ex-Board President Julia Walker resigned in November.

Each candidate was asked to make an opening statement, including why he or she wanted to be on the board and what they thought the vision of the Westfield school system should be. In addition, each candidate was asked the same three questions, including what their thoughts are on achieving success

for all students, what could be done to help the schools in a time of limited resources, and how they have resolved conflict between committee members on any previous jobs, boards or assignments.

The first to be interviewed was Robert Whitehead, who stated that he was a partner in the Westfield-based construction firm Cornerstone Associates. Mr. Whitehead noted that he had 34 years of management development experience. He told board members that he has a degree in chemical engineering and that he and his wife moved to Westfield 19 years ago. He said his two sons graduated from Westfield High School and that his daughter received a diploma from Mount Saint Mary Academy.

Mr. Whitehead said he was drawn to the position because he wanted to “be a good citizen and step forward to help.” He also stated, “I am so happy to see so many like-minded individuals who also came forth.” He noted that he has been a scout leader for 13 years, mentoring many young men to achieve their Eagle Scout badge.

Also interviewed was Gretchen Ohlig, who noted that she was a past president of the Jefferson El-

ementary School PTO; that she had been appointed to the town’s planning board and that she had served as president of the board of trustees for the Education Fund of Westfield. Ms. Ohlig has three children in the Westfield public schools and also was part of the Strategic Planning Committee for the district.

In her interview, she stated, “I am incredibly grateful for a wonderful experience in the Westfield schools.” She also stated, “My professional training as an attorney will help me to problem solve in a rational way.” She added, “My personal vision for students I would suspect is the same for all Westfield parents – to produce good citizens who act with integrity and service.”

Candidate Lucy Biegler told the board that she was interviewing for the position because she wanted to “give back to the community.” She has been a teacher and part of the education system in Secaucus for the last 25 years. She also noted that she currently serves as a literacy coach and member of the Intervention Referral Team in Hudson County. She added that she was an advocate for children with special needs.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8



Paul Lachenauer for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD COUNCIL...The Westfield Town Council held its reorganization meeting Tuesday night. Pictured, from left to right, are: Councilman David Haas, Councilwoman Jo Ann Neylan, Councilman Frank Arena, Mayor Andy Skibitsky, Councilman James Foerst, Councilman Keith Loughlin, Councilman Mark LoGripio and Councilman Sam Della Fera. Missing from the photo is Councilwoman Vicki Kimmins.

CF Seeks DEP Hearing on Birchwood Application

By FRED T. ROSSI
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

CRANFORD – Cranford officials say they will seek to have the state Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) hold a public hearing on an application filed by the Birchwood Avenue developer so that township residents can voice their opposition to the proposed development of several hundred housing units.

At a special meeting of the township committee last Thursday, where the agenda called for mostly routine end-of-year bill payments and budget fund transfers, several residents turned out to ask about the status of the proposed development, which is opposed not only by many residents but also by municipal officials who fear that flooding would be exacerbated by any development on the property. Last month, a judge ruled that the development, which calls for 360 housing units to be built, could go forward. In opposing the development, the township is instead seeking

to turn the property into a retention basin in an effort to mitigate flooding on nearby streets.

S. Hekemian Group submitted an application to the DEP last month for a permit to perform various preliminary work on the Birchwood Avenue site. More recently, Daniel Aschenbach, then the mayor, met in Trenton with DEP officials to discuss the development, in particular the local opposition, and to request a public hearing on the application. At last week’s committee meeting, Mr. Aschenbach said it was “very, very important” that such a hearing be held. Daniel McCarthy, in his final days as township attorney, said at last week’s meeting that a formal request for a public hearing would be filed with DEP. He said he had received numerous telephone calls and e-mails from residents opposing the permit and the development.

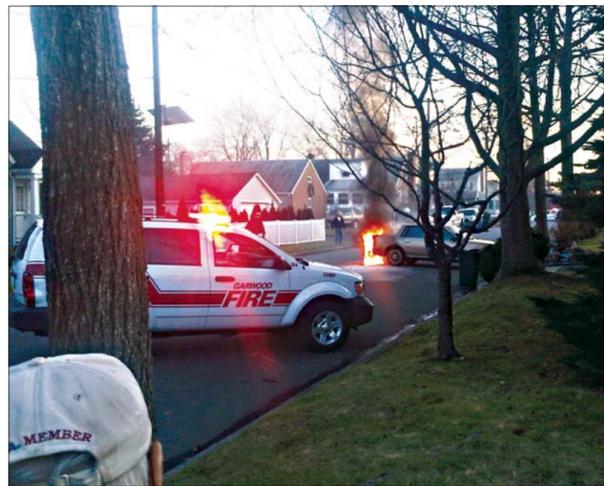
In other business, at the township committee’s final meeting of 2011 – prior to the Republicans retaking

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8



Paul Lachenauer for The Westfield Leader

SWEARING-IN CEREMONY...Westfield Municipal Court Judge Brenda Coppola Cuba receives the oath from Appellate Judge Douglas Fasciale at the Westfield Council reorganization meeting Tuesday night.



Courtesy of Tom Sloan

QUICK THINKING...Garwood and Westfield Police and Fire Departments responded to Maple and Fourth Streets in Garwood on December 31 to extinguish a vehicle fire and prevent further property damage.

PAGE INDEX

Regional	2-3	Education	13
Editorial	4-5	Sports	9-12
Police	6	Real Estate	9-11
Community ...	6-7	Classifieds	13
Obituary	14	A&E	15-16



EXTRAORDINARY PROFESSIONALS

Whether Your Real Estate Needs are Local, National, or International
Your Move is Our Move and We’re Ready to Assist You Every Step of the Way.

Westfield - West | 600 North Avenue West, Westfield | 908-233-0065 | www.coldwellbankermoves.com/westfieldwest



George Kraus
Branch Vice President



Snap this QR code with your Smartphone to visit our Web site

