

UC Freeholders Moving Ahead With Privatization at Runnells

By PAUL J. PEYTON
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

COUNTY – The Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders is continuing to privatize operations at Runnells Specialized Hospital in Berkeley Heights in an effort to reduce an \$11-million operating deficit.

At last week's agenda meeting, the board considered a resolution for tonight's regular meeting for a one-year, \$8.4-million contract with Gaithersburg, Md.-based Sodexo, Inc. to take over dietary and house-keeping services. The contract, according to the agenda, would save the county a little over \$2 million. The

proposed contract offers an option for an additional two years through December 31, 2015 and a second option for 20 months, extending the contract through August 31, 2017.

On a draft agenda available online July 11, the contract under consideration was for the full five years at a cost of \$33.3 million.

The freeholders approved a \$1.9-million contract in April to Genesis ElderCare Rehabilitation Services, Inc. of Kennett Square, Pa. for privatization of Runnells' occupational, physical and speech therapy services. It is anticipated that contract will save \$376,000 while also producing \$1.5 million in additional

revenues for the county.

The total budget for Runnells per the 2012 county spending plan is \$36.9 million.

In other business, a resolution was on Thursday's agenda for a \$250,000 settlement of a lawsuit brought by Stephen McGuire, president of the Union County Policemen's Benevolent Association, Local 250, against the county. Mr. McGuire had filed a civil suit in March of 2011 alleging that his First Amendment rights to free speech were violated when he was suspended without pay for five days for an e-mail he sent November 2, 2010 to his membership.

"The e-mail discussed an arbitration concerning the Union County Prosecutor's Office's policy of reimbursing officers for their fuel costs," according to Federal District Judge Faith Hochberg's denial of a motion by the county to have the case dismissed.

PBA 250 had won that arbitration award involving additional fuel requests for five officers for commuting expenses.

"Plaintiff (McGuire) contends that his suspension was retaliation for his union activities," according to Judge Hochberg's summary judgment decision.

The Prosecutor's Office contended that Detective McGuire's e-mail was in violation of the General Rules and Regulations for professional conduct and loyalty and found him in insubordination resulting in the suspension.

The county freeholders have authorized \$110,000 in legal costs to outside law firms to represent the Prosecutor's Office in the matter. Prosecutor Theodore Romankow and Robert Buccino, chief of detectives, and the Prosecutor's Office itself were named as defendants in the case.

Judge Hochberg had scheduled the trial to start June 12 at the U.S. Federal Courthouse in Newark.

Mr. McGuire had sought dismissal of the disciplinary charges, reimbursement for lost pay and benefits, payment of legal fees and compensation damages.

In freeholder-sponsored resolution

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Horace R. Corbin for The Westfield Leader

FINGER LICKIN' FOOD...The LeMarmorito Society of Cranford, an international cooking society comprised of all men, held its annual barbecue at the home of Rich Humphrey in Westfield on July 14. Member Bill Drejka of Grillbillies Barbecue manned the grill.

MS Bd. Hears Proposal for Day Care Ctr. On WF Line

By SARA MAGNOLA-TANER
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

MOUNTAINSIDE – During its July 12 meeting, the Mountainside Board of Adjustment heard an application from Robbie G. LLC and Primrose Schools seeking several variances, including a use variance, for the proposed site plan and development of a new daycare facility at 1038 Springfield Avenue.

Primrose currently has 250 schools in 15 states across the nation, including a location in Warren. The development company, which also is the landowner, is working with a Primrose School franchisee to build the facility in accordance with the company's specifications. The franchisee then plans to lease the property from the development company, and run the operation.

While there were several expert witnesses present at the meeting to give testimony, including two engineers and a professional planner, the franchisee was not in attendance. Stacey Laskis of Robbie Lane, the property directly behind the proposed daycare site, was present at the meeting. She told the board that she had

come to an agreement with the development company that trees would be put up to create a screen behind the properties.

Gray Greiner, director of development at Primrose Schools, told the board that Primrose facilities are licensed by the state as childcare operations.

"We do have teachers, but we do not give tests or report cards," Mr. Greiner said. "For school-age kids there is only before and after care. Parents can drop the kids off and then Primrose will bus them to and from the local schools."

The age range of students at the center would be six weeks to 12 years old, with a very small percentage of the students being made up of school-age children, according to Mr. Greiner.

Board Attorney Vincent Loughlin explained to the applicant that based on Mr. Greiner's testimony, he determined the proposed operation was fully a daycare facility and not a school, and therefore the use variance was not needed, since it is considered "good use."

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Alex Taner for The Westfield Leader

NEW DAY CARE CENTER?...Four experts are sworn in by the Mountainside Board of Adjustment regarding the application for a new day care center on Springfield Avenue.

Birchwood Site Plan Hearing Set for August 8-9 in Eliz.

By FRED T. ROSSI
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

CRANFORD — A public hearing to review the site plan being submitted by Cranford Development Associates LLC for the Birchwood Avenue development will be held on Wednesday and Thursday, August 8 and 9, at the Union County Courthouse. And township officials, past and present, voiced their displeasure at Tuesday night's township committee meeting, not only about the venue for the hearing but also the timing.

Cranford Development Associates is proposing to build 360 new housing units in what local officials say is a flood zone. Township Attorney Phil Morin said Tuesday night that Douglas Wolfson, a court-appointed special hearing officer, had scheduled the two-day public meeting in Elizabeth even though both Cranford officials and the developer had sought to have the hearing held in Cranford. Mr. Morin added that the Cranford Board of Education had offered the Orange Avenue School as a venue.

Several residents also complained about the venue, saying it will be more difficult for interested residents to travel to Elizabeth and then find parking in advance of the hearing, which begins at 10 a.m. on both days. Mayor David Robinson agreed, saying, "It's a hassle." The mayor also questioned the timing of the hearing, noting that many residents may be out of town on summer vacations



Brooks Crandall for The Westfield Leader

DINING AL FRESCO...Diners enjoying a summer meal cafe-style Tuesday night are treated to a complimentary balloon while they wait for the Sweet Sounds Downtown Jazz Festival to begin.

Judge Rules The Pointe Not Entitled to Snow Removal by GW Borough

By CHRISTINA M. HINKE
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

GARWOOD – New Jersey State Superior Court Judge Karen Cassidy, the assignment judge for Union County, has ruled that The Pointe, a 44-unit age-restricted condominium complex, is not entitled to snow and ice removal by the borough because she deemed that the "area in question was not a road but a driveway not subject to the Municipal Services Act." In her decision, the judge said the area in question, Chestnut Court and Maple Court, "does not provide circulation or access to other roadways" but rather access to The Pointe residents' parking spaces and garages.

"We are disappointed. We feel we are being treated like second-class citizens," Roswitha Metz, a homeowner and also treasurer of the board at The Pointe, told The Westfield Leader.

On March 10, 2011, The Pointe billed

the borough for \$54,524 in snow removal costs for the period of 2008-2010. Since the borough did not reimburse The Pointe, The Pointe responded with a lawsuit filed May 31, 2011. The borough decided to litigate, resulting in hourly charges billed by Borough Attorney Joseph Triarsi summing \$15,655, according to his law offices' bill that was retrieved through an OPRA request.

"That is ridiculous. We are not talking about roads and roads and roads. We were only talking about the middle of the street [of Chestnut and Maple Courts]. It is a minimal amount [of plowing] and for Garwood to spend \$15,000 to litigate – that is absurd," said Ms. Metz.

Since the lawsuit was filed, residents of The Pointe have spoken out at bor-

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Springfield BOA Approves Memorabilia Museum

By P. JUSTIN FAHEY
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

SPRINGFIELD - The Springfield Board of Adjustment Tuesday night took up an application for variances concerning the opening of a museum of pop culture. Harry Cohen of New York City, the applicant for the building, described it as a museum of Americana: "Everything reminiscent of growing up in America," Mr. Cohen said. Currently, the collection is kept in five storage containers – three in Mountainside and two in New York City.

The proposed building will be located at 302 Morris Avenue in Springfield and the empty lot next to it. It will be adjacent to Route 78. Currently, there is a house on one of the lots.

The new building will consist of

four floors; the first three floors will house the museum, and the fourth, which requires a variance, would be an apartment where, according to Kevin Page, engineer for the project, Mr. Cohen could stay on weekends while he runs the museum.

Mr. Cohen intends to open the exhibit to non-profit groups such as Boy Scouts, senior citizens and school groups. Although he will pay taxes on the property, he will not run it for profit and will not charge admission. Admittance will be by appointment only.

An additional variance is required for the height of the building. Due to flooding issues, the building will have to be lifted four feet above ground level and will have a peaked roof rather than a flat roof because, ac-

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P. Justin Fahey for The Westfield Leader

POP CULTURE...Harry Cohen, left, discusses his plans for his pop-culture museum in Springfield following the Board of Adjustment's approval at its meeting on Tuesday.

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Correction

In an article regarding the Westfield Zoning Board in the July 12 edition of The Westfield Leader, the engineer of record should have been identified as Victor Vinegra. We apologize for the error.



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