

Officials React to Report Citing Towns for ‘Ineligible’ Pensions

By PAUL J. PEYTON
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

REGION – Local towns and state lawmakers this week reacted to a report by state Comptroller Matthew Boxer that 202 part-time municipal officials (none of whom were named) in 57 of the 58 towns surveyed in the report are in the state pension system when they are ineligible. The comptroller said those benefits could result in state-funded pension benefits of \$1.9 million per year.

“(The Office of State Comptroller) found, however, that an overwhelming majority of surveyed local government entities failed to comply with the statutory mandate to determine whether these professionals are inde-

pendent contractors or employees. As a result they have failed to remove ineligible contractors from PERS (Public Employees Retirement System).” Mr. Boxer said in his report. (Please see page 4 for Mr. Boxer’s transmittal letter to the Governor).

While not named in the actual report, a list of the 57 towns that was referred to the state’s treasury department includes Fanwood, Mountainside and Westfield.

“We want to let our residents know that we were well aware of the 2007 pension law reform and that we know that the State of New Jersey is actually the one who actually mandates who is enrolled in the system and in what plan,” Fanwood Mayor Colleen

Mahr told *The Westfield Leader*. She said the borough also was aware of new pension enrollment thresholds that were established in 2007 along with the creation of a new pension plan for new employees and appointments.

“And we followed that in good faith,” the mayor said. “Everything we’ve done, we believe, was operating the way the State of New Jersey thought we should be.” She called any comments that the borough was not operating in good faith “completely incorrect.”

The mayor said Borough Administrator Eleanor McGovern contacted the state comptroller’s office on July 18, when she learned, “That while we were not mentioned in the final report, it was the belief of the comptroller’s office that we had individuals in the pension plan that should have not continued in the pension plan after 2007.”

Mayor Mahr said the borough would work with the state’s pension division, “to understand exactly where our issue is to rectify because we don’t want to have any issue, perceived or otherwise, with how we operate in town.”

“I would hope there would not be rushes to judgment that something was done in a woeful manner (by Fanwood) because that would be not the case,” Mayor Mahr said. “We take this very seriously here and we are going to rectify it... We will work our way through whatever we have to do to make sure that every borough employee is in compliance in whatever system they should be in.”

Westfield Councilman David Haas said he has argued before, “the practice was wrong and unethical long before it was illegal” for part-time professional contractors to be in the state pension system, “because it was creating a huge unfounded liability.”

“You were putting off for future taxpayers hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of dollars in pension obligations to pay for our, at that time, current attorney needs. It was wrong from a financial standpoint and it was wrong because we had a

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WF Residents Complain To Freeholders About Ped. Light

By SARA MAGNOLA-TANER
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

COUNTY – During the public comment portion of their July 19 regular meeting, the Union County Freeholders heard from three Westfield residents regarding the HAWK pedestrian traffic light on Central Avenue.

Retired Westfield police officer, Greg Kasko, said he was advised by a Westfield councilman to “go to the county and complain” about the HAWK pedestrian traffic light, which was installed mid-block between Cambridge Road and Clover Street last year.

“He is quoted as saying, ‘If this was my house, I would go to the county and complain. This is a county road [and] they can do what they want with that light,’” Mr. Kasko said.

Mr. Kasko told the board that back in December, the mayor of Westfield, Andy Skibitsky, had presented the board with a stats sheet containing all of the motor vehicle accidents that happened between Cambridge and Central and Clover and Central.

“I obtained every single one of those accident reports,” Mr. Kasko said. “The [mayor’s] report has false information on it. Perhaps he did not check his facts – I did.”

The board also heard from Maria Carlucci, who lives on Central Avenue near the pedestrian light.

“I have lived [on Central] for eight years and had never seen any accidents,” Ms. Carlucci told the freeholder board. “And now it’s just fright-



Christina Hinke for The Westfield Leader

UNHAPPY CITIZENS...Residents of Garwood packed the Council Chamber Tuesday evening to express their disapproval of a \$3.2-million bond proposal to build a turf field. They argued against undertaking more debt and that the project only benefits a few. The borough has about 4,000 residents. The added debt would average about \$1,800 per property owner. The council nevertheless voted to proceed and a final vote will occur at the next governing body meeting in August.

Westfield Native to Compete On U.S. Olympic Judo Team

By CHRISTIE STORMS
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD – When Joyce and Dominick Delpopolo of Westfield adopted a 2-year-old boy from a small orphanage in Niksic, Montenegro, they had no idea his future would include becoming an Olympic athlete. But next week their son, Nick Delpopolo, now 23, will compete in London after securing a spot on the U.S. Olympic Judo Team in May. He is one of 19 Olympic athletes whose hometowns are in New Jersey.

“Our whole family is very proud of Nick’s achievement; it has been a very long and arduous journey,” Mrs. Delpopolo said.

That journey began at the Cranford

Judo and Karate Center in Cranford, when Nick was 5 years old. He quickly excelled and impressed his Judo coach, Yoshisada “Yone” Yonezuka, who participated in the 1988 and 1992 Olympics himself.

In Nick’s early years attending McKinley Elementary School in Westfield, he also began wrestling in the Police Athletic League (PAL).

His PAL coach, Al Rabinowitz of

Westfield, said Nick’s talents were “very obvious right from the start” with his strong desire to win and work as hard as necessary to achieve success.

Mr. Rabinowitz described a match where Nick’s opponent became injured as the clock was running out...which could have ended the match in Nick’s favor. However, Nick

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GW Council Introduces \$3.2 M. Athletic Complex

By CHRISTINA M. HINKE
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

GARWOOD – The council approved the introduction of a 15-year, \$3,257,000 bond ordinance to construct the Athletic Field Complex (AFC), increasing taxes \$65 on average for a home assessed at \$100,000 on Tuesday night. This tax is in addition to the yearly taxes, which were \$105 per \$100,000 on the average assessed home this year.

Of the \$3.2 million, \$920,055 represents a general obligation bond at a 3.25 percent interest rate, and \$570,916 represents a Green Acres Loan at a

percent interest rate. After interest, by 2028 the borough would pay out close to \$1.9 million for the bond and loan, according to a debt schedule submitted by the borough’s auditor.

In addition, the borough is using \$630,000 of its Capital Surplus and \$42,819 of the Borough Reserve funds to finance the AFC.

The borough also has attained \$1,093,209 in Union County Green Acres and State New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection Open Space grants, as well as a \$29,425 County of Union Senior Focus grant.

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Betsy Burdorf for The Westfield Leader

A JAZZY AFFAIR...Watson, the all-star rock and jazz group, entertains the crowd at the north side train station on Tuesday night at their first concert in the Downtown Westfield Sweet Sounds of Downtown Jazz Festival.

MEA Discusses Contract; MS BOE Honors Students

By DOMINIC A. LAGANO
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

MOUNTAINSIDE – The Mountainside Board of Education (BOE) held its monthly meeting this past Tuesday evening.

Present at the meeting was the district’s recently appointed School Business Administrator/Board Secretary (SBA/BS), Charles Milewski. Mr. Milewski succeeded previous SBA Daniel Saragnese, who had been with the district for the past two years. Chief School Administrator (CSA) Nancy Lubarsky welcomed Mr. Milewski to the district.

During the committee reports portion of the meeting, Christopher Minks, chairman of the Personnel/Negotiations Committee, provided a brief statement on the district’s ongoing contract negotiations with the members of the Mountainside Education Association (MEA). Mr. Minks informed the rest of the board that the MEA had obtained replacement counsel and was ready to proceed

with the negotiating process.

Mr. Minks continued, “We anticipate meeting as a negotiations committee with the new labor counsel so that we can regroup...we look forward to proceeding with the MEA and NJEA (New Jersey Education Association) reps.”

During the public participation portion of the meeting, MEA Negotiation Chairperson Deborah Weiss delivered a prepared statement to the board and the attending public. Ms. Weiss stated she “want[ed] to set the record straight” regarding the recent contract negotiations. “There are rumors that the teachers have been unreasonable at the bargaining table and that we are not interested in meeting with the board or settling the contract. That couldn’t be farther from the truth,” she said.

Ms. Weiss then explained the negotiating process from the perspective of the MEA and the cancellation of a recent arbitration meeting due to

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FAMILY REUNION...Bob and Pat Sheehan recently gathered in Williamsburg, Va. with their first grandchild, Gabriel Francis; their daughter, Christine, and her husband, Paul Villagra. Christine is a graduate of Westfield High School and attended Centenary College in Hackettstown. Mr. and Mrs. Sheehan were 23-year residents of Westfield and were active in church, civic and community affairs. The Sheehans have retired to Port Royal Island in South Carolina. The happy parents reside in Newport News, Va.



Photo courtesy of Doral Family Journal

MAKING THE OLYMPICS...During the Olympic Trials in May, Westfield native Nick Delpopolo, right, defeated rival Michael Eldred, left, to secure a spot on the U.S. Olympic Judo Team this summer. The 2012 Summer Olympics begin tomorrow.

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Eulondia Reese-Turner



Jodi Luminiello



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