

Westfield Residents, Firefighters Call for Increased Staffing

By LAUREN S. BARR
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

WESTFIELD – Following Saturday's house fire on Barchester Way, approximately 20 members of the Westfield Fire Department (WFD) were present at Tuesday night's Westfield Town Council meeting in support of increased staffing.

Saturday's fire call was received at 1:26 p.m. and WFD arrived on scene at 1:31 p.m. WFD's second engine was on a mutual aid call in Springfield at the time of the Barchester Way call and did not arrive on scene until 1:43 p.m.

Fire Chief Dan Kelly told *The Westfield Leader* that when the first engine arrived on scene they acti-

vated the Union County Mutual Aid system and recalled off-duty firefighters. In total, 11 departments responded to the fire, with eight utilized on scene and three covering the rest of the town. Firefighters were in the house for approximately one hour battling the blaze, which began in a microwave, until there was a partial roof collapse and the structure was deemed unsafe.

Westfield Firemen's Mutual Benevolent Association (FMBA) No. 30 President Mike Sawicki introduced state FMBA President Bill Lavin, who spoke to the town council about the need for increased staffing.

Mr. Lavin told the council that this is, "not just a Westfield issue but a

statewide problem." He said that because of the Springfield Fire Department's understaffing, there was only one engine in town at the time of Saturday's fire. He said he knows Westfield has applied for a federal grant that would allow it to hire more firefighters, but he is concerned that with the current staffing levels, the town is running "the risk of having a serious tragedy."

Mayor Andy Skibitsky said that while unpopular, the town's new sewer fee has been instituted, "to insure we could maintain a paid fire department."

Ellen Di Iorio, whose Cumberland Street home was destroyed by fire in September of last year, spoke to the council of the need for more firefighters. She said the fire started in the basement of their home, and blocked them from being able to escape from their bedroom, except from the window. Mrs. Di Iorio said the family lost not only their home, but a dog, cat and two birds. She said if her children, who are now grown, had been across the hall from her bedroom, "they may have lost their lives." She told the council the WFD did not have enough manpower to enter the house, and it was not until the Plainfield Fire Department arrived 15 minutes later that firefighters actually entered the home to battle the blaze.

Councilwoman JoAnn Neylan, who chairs the council's Public Safety Committee, told Mrs. Di Iorio, "thank you for having the courage to come and speak." She said council members all live in town and share the same risks as all residents, adding that the town is not hiring more firefighters because it does not want to. "What we're trying to do is provide the best service with the funds we have," she said.

Resident John Blake said the council has been lessening public safety by not hiring more firefighters. He said the "mutual aid [system] is being used for regionalization" and not for catastrophic events as it was designed for. He said if the town asked each household for an additional \$10 to

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10

The Pointe vs. Garwood Litigation Concluded

By CHRISTINA M. HINKE
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

GARWOOD – Litigation between The Pointe and the borough concerning snow and garbage removal was concluded as of last Friday, after a hearing that lasted about eight months, Borough Attorney Joseph Triarsi said Tuesday at the Garwood Borough Council meeting. Mr. Triarsi said he expects to hear the judge's written decision in about two weeks.

In other business, Councilman Lou Petruzzelli, committee representative for the \$2.1-million Athletic Field Complex, which will replace the Little League field off of South Avenue between Oak Street and Rankin Avenue with a large and diverse field for an array of athletics, said addendums were added after the pre-bid meeting took place. The addendums included clarifying the extent of the environmental work that needs to be undertaken at the site and to set a new date of Thursday, June 7, to receive bids.

During public comment, Richard King asked if it was true that the Athletic Field Complex was being "squashed."

"No, it's not true," Mayor Patricia Quattrocchi said. "Since there was adequate monies to handle construction...the project is going forward."

Albert DeConti, who inquired at the last council meeting about the rat problem on the 400 block of Willow Avenue, where he owns property, said he had met with the health inspector and had resolved his issues with her. He

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10



Lauren S. Barr for The Westfield Leader
SAFETY CONCERNS...Members of the Westfield Fire Department fill the back rows at the Westfield Town Council meeting on Tuesday to show concern over low staffing levels at the Westfield Fire Department.

Freeholders' Budget Vote Moved As Trenton Delays Refinancing

By PAUL J. PEYTON
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

COUNTY – Union County Freeholder Fiscal Affairs Committee Chairman Dan Sullivan announced Thursday that the board's adoption vote on the county's \$483-million budget, originally scheduled for Thursday, May 31, has been moved to Thursday, June 14. He said the move was needed due to postponement of the county's application before the state's Local Finance Board to refinance \$83 million of long-term debt. That hearing was originally set for May 9 in Trenton, but has been moved to Friday, May 25.

"This effectively pushes back the date of anticipation of any revenue the county would realize if the financing plan is approved by the DCA

(Department of Community Affairs)," Mr. Sullivan said in a statement read at the start of the meeting.

He said an amendment to the 2012 county budget per the Local Finance Board action would be introduced at the May 31 freeholders meeting, with a public hearing scheduled at the start of the June 14 meeting prior to the board's adoption vote on the budget.

The Local Finance Board approved the refinancing of \$24.7 million in

bonds from the Union County Juvenile Detention Center facility project and another \$5 million in revenue refunding bonds for the correctional facility project at its April 11 meeting. The board was to have heard the refinancing of \$24.9 million in bonds for the City of Plainfield/Park Madison Redevelopment and \$28 million in outstanding debt for the juvenile detention center projects on May 9. Those applications will now be heard

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10

Teachers Union Appears In Black at Mtsd. BOE Meeting

By DOMINIC A. LAGANO
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

MOUNTAINSIDE – At the Board of Education (BOE) meeting Tuesday evening, Mountainside Education Association (MEA) President Suzanne Jenks told the BOE, "We are here tonight to voice our frustration over not having an [contract] agreement for over two years." Approximately 40 members of the union stood behind Ms. Jenks. Most were attired in black as a symbol of solidarity.

Ms. Jenks continued, "We sat here

two years ago and listened in astonishment as the administration announced, and the board approved, a zero percent increase for all staff in the district. This was the first of several unilateral decisions made by the past administration and Board of Education."

Ms. Jenks said the MEA (Mountainside Education Association) appreciates the current economic crisis in the United States and how it affects the negotiation process. "The association [MEA]

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10



Dominic A. Lagano for The Westfield Leader
CONTRACT NEGOTIATIONS...Members of the Mountainside Education Association appear en masse at the Mountainside Board of Education meeting on Tuesday night to address contract negotiations.

PAGE INDEX

Regional	2-3	Education	9
Editorial	4-5	Sports	11-16
Police	8	Real Estate	11-13
Community ...	6-8	Classifieds	16
Obituary	8	A&E	17-18



Photo courtesy of Christian Burdorf
SORRY SIGHT...Firefighters spent approximately three hours on Saturday afternoon putting out an accidental fire that was believed to have originated in a microwave and ultimately destroyed a two-story home on Barchester Way in Westfield. Several Westfield High School students attempted to control the fire and assisted in removing the two children from the residence before firefighters arrived.

CF Committee Passes Ord. For Birchwood Development

By DELL SIMEONE
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

CRANFORD – After a two-hour long public hearing Tuesday night in which member of the public begged, accused, and challenged the Cranford Township Committee not to amend a supplement to the township's land-use ordinance to create an inclusionary multi-family residence zone, the Committee adopted the ordinance. Committeeman Kevin Campbell cast the lone dissenting vote.

"I have to vote no, this is not meant to be a criticism of my colleagues, but it (the measure) does not meet the statutory requirements of the land-use law," Mr. Campbell said.

Other committee members, especially Lisa Aduabato Nesi, explained the reason the committee had to vote yes before the Committee could appeal the decision by state Superior Judge Lisa Chrystal who ordered Cranford to amend the ordinance to coincide with a proposed development on Birchwood Avenue. Residents living in the Birchwood Avenue neighborhood, who, along with hundreds of others suffered the ravishes of Hurricane Irene

this past summer, rallied against the amendment, showed pictures to the committee of flooded streets, told of days without electricity, and accused the committee of not standing up for the citizens of Cranford.

"Our justice system doesn't work that way. It is not held to public opinion," Ms. Aduabato Nesi responded to the residents.

Township Attorney Phil Morin explained that the ordinance is the first step necessary to bring Cranford Township into compliance with the New Jersey COAH (Council on Affordable Housing)/Fair Share Housing requirements. Judge Chrystal ordered the township to adopt the ordinance on December 9, 2011.

The Cranford Development Group, a subsidiary of the S. Hekeman Group of Paramus, owners and prospective developers of the property known as at 235 Birchwood Avenue, brought a builder's remedy lawsuit against the township, which was vulnerable because it had not met its fair share of low and moderate income housing obligation mandated by the state under the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10



Paul Lachenauer for The Westfield Leader
FLOWER POWER...Gardeners shop for flowers at the Union County Master Gardeners Spring Garden Fair and Plant Sale held Sunday at Trailside Nature and Science Center in Mountainside.

EXTRAORDINARY PROFESSIONALS

Become Part of the Coldwell Banker Residential Brokerage Sales Team
At Coldwell Banker, there are no sales positions... just exceptional real estate careers!



George Kraus
Branch Vice President

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