



CHIRP...The swallows returned to San Juan Capistrano, Calif., on March 19 to read *The Westfield Leader*. Some remained to sing and flit around the beautiful gardens and lily pond at the old mission. They enjoy greeting the visitors like Honey Corbin from Peach Tree City, Ga., shown above.

# WF Residents, Firefighters Call for Increased Staffing

By LAUREN S. BARR  
Specially Written for The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times

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 Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times* that when the first engine arrived on scene they activated 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 the town 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 fund the fire department they would be applauded, and that the council cannot say the town is as safe with six firefighters on duty as opposed to the 10 it used to have.

"Would we be safer if we had one firefighter per household? Absolutely," Councilwoman Neylan responded. But, she said, the problem is the national economy and its trickle down effect to municipalities. "It's not us against you."

First Ward Councilman Frank Arena accused Mr. Blake of having an agenda.

Third Ward Councilman Dave Haas said it was inappropriate for Mr. Arena to discuss anyone's motives. Mr. Haas added that the motives of all the council members are good, but that he feels that the finance committee's meetings should be open so that the actual debates on expenditures are public.

"Oh, we have debate; we don't just go in lock step," Councilwoman Neylan retorted.

WFD Lieutenant Tim Brennan, who spoke as both a member of the department and a Westfield resident, said that the department is "still fast and effective, but no longer fully capable." He said the rescue that was done of a man trapped by fire on Mountain Avenue last year violated several laws and that the department needs more firefighters.

Mayor Skibitsky said if the FMBA was willing to open the contract up for renegotiation, the town could possibly increase the number of firefighters on each shift. Lieutenant Brennan responded that he could not speak on behalf of the union, but when pressed for his personal opinion by Fourth Ward Councilman Jim Foerst, he said, "to a point, yes."

In other business, the council approved a resolution to formalize the agreement between the town and the Westfield Board of Education to make traffic and parking improvements in the area of Westfield High School

(WHS). The board of education approved the same resolution at its May 15 meeting.

The plan includes an expansion of the current WHS parking lot along Rahway Avenue, re-striping of the Armory parking lot to create more spaces, the construction of a pullout for buses on Rahway Avenue, expansion of the parking lot at Edison Intermediate School, new parking restrictions on one side of the street on Dorian Road, Dorian Court, Dorian Place, Shadowlawn Drive, and Nottingham Place, as well as the opening of one side of the street parking on Edgar Road.

Resident David Gibson of Dorian Road expressed some concern that he was not notified of this project, and was especially concerned as to the aesthetics of the new parking lot.

Councilwoman Neylan said special attention would be paid to the landscaping of the parking lot. She said residents in her ward had a similar concern when Temple Emanu-El constructed its parking lot, and the landscaping there makes its lot nearly unseen.

## Parades

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dence Road and the Mountainside Public Library.

Upon conclusion of the opening ceremony, veterans, Scouts, rescue squad, fire department and police personnel, Rotary Club members and community groups will parade toward Deerfield Elementary School. The parade will proceed from Constitution Plaza up to Bridle Path to Wood Valley Road to Central Avenue, ending in Deerfield's parking lot. The parade is expected to end at 1 p.m.

Cranford will hold its parade on Monday beginning at 9 a.m. The parade route runs from Sherman Park, across from the Cranford Methodist Church on Lincoln Avenue, to Memorial Park on Springfield Avenue. The parade will follow Lincoln Avenue south to Walnut Avenue, to North Avenue, to Eastman Street, to Centennial Avenue, to Springfield Avenue to Memorial Park.



GUTEN TAG...Bob Cozzolina catches up on local news in *The Westfield Leader* in front of Checkpoint Charlie in Berlin, Germany. The checkpoint became a symbol during the Cold War, representing the separation of east and west by preventing escape across the city sector border from East Berlin to West Berlin.

## Garwood Council

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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 asked what the borough was doing to correct the issue. Councilwoman Sara Todisco said the borough has a plan in place to remove weed overgrowth along the entire brook on Friday, May 25, and then poison will be set out for the rats.

The council introduced a bond ordinance in the amount of \$340,000 to authorize the 2012 road and drainage improvement project. Councilman Jim Mathieu abstained because he said his employer instructed him to abstain from voting on bonding ordinances.

The borough has signed on with Nixle alert system, where residents can sign up to receive text or e-mail messages for priority notices about public safety issues from the Garwood Police Department.

The council awarded a contract to Nature's Choice Corporation for the removal of brush and mixed yard waste at the quote of \$490 for a 30 cubic yard roll off-container and \$14.95 per yard delivered to the transfer station by the Depart-

ment of Public Works (DPW) for a one-year term beginning Friday, June 1. The council also awarded a contract to Grinnell Recycling to dispose of street sweepings and spoils for one year beginning June 1 at the quote of \$660 per load of a 20-yard cubic yard container.

Ms. Todisco announced that the Memorial Day ceremony will take place at the Knights of Columbus at noon, and that hot dogs and chips will be served. Garwood will take part in Cranford's Memorial Day parade beginning at 9 a.m.

Also on the consent agenda was a liquor license transfer from Little Joe, Inc. – Eric Hirsch, President, to Joseph M. Polyak. Little Joe was a liquor store and bar, now closed, situated next to Kings Supermarket, where GNC is now located. Mr. Polyak was the former owner of Little Joe, which was transferred to a corporation headed by Mr. Hirsch. The corporation defaulted on its deed for the property occupied by Little Joe, and therefore Mr. Polyak resumed ownership.

Councilman Mathieu said in his Library Committee report that registration will begin Wednesday, June 13, for the summer reading program.

## Union County Freeholders

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proved a resolution to procure a vendor to take over dietary, housekeeping and laundry services at the Berkeley Heights hospital. The county is laying off 280 workers, accounting for 10 percent of its workforce, in order to close an estimated \$35-million budget hole.

One hundred-and-fifty of the layoffs are at Runnells in the departments listed above, as well as in physical, occupational and recreation therapy. The freeholders approved a one-year, \$1.9-million contract to Kennett Square, Pa.-based Genesis ElderCare to take over occupational, physical and speech therapy services at Runnells.

During its agenda meeting on Thursday, the board considered items for the June 14 action agenda. Resolutions will be on the agenda to add Roselle Park and Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital at Rahway, as well as South Orange in Essex County, to the list of entities to be serviced by the expansion of Union County's 9-1-1 emergency dispatch center in Westfield.

The county will provide dispatch services for Roselle Park's fire and Emergency Medical Basic Life Support Dispatch Services, for two paramedic units at Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital and for South Orange's EMS. As a result of these shared-service agreements, eight entities will be serviced by the Union County dispatch service. Fanwood, Hillside, Roselle, Scotch Plains and Springfield also have agreements with the county. The new towns joining, including South Orange, were serviced by CenCom out of Overlook Medical Center in Summit. CenCom has said it will close its doors on June 1.

Andrew Moran, the county's public safety director, said that Union County representatives met with South Orange officials on May 16. "They were very impressed with our operation and we spoke to them today [May 17] and they want to go ahead with the shared-service agreement," Mr. Moran told the board.

"The more municipalities we have on it will lower the county's portion in operating the county's dispatch center," Mr. Moran said. Freeholder Chairman Al Mirabella added, "I think it's very good for this county to be taking on some of that dispatching out of necessity for CenCom closing, but (also) to help our municipalities. I think they will realize a savings as well as contribute to the overall operation in the dispatch area."

The board also considered resolutions to enable the county to proceed with the issuing of \$100 million in bonds as part of the refinancing of \$130 million in short-term bond anticipation notes issued July 1, 2011.

"We are taking advantage of current market conditions to implement our long-term financing plans," Finance Director Bibi Taylor explained to the freeholders.

Human Services Director Frank Guzzo said revenue provided to the county through the state's casino revenue tax has plummeted \$273,000 from last year to \$1,082,533. A resolution will be on the June 14 agenda for the county to enter into a contract with NJ Transit to secure the funding

through the Casino Tax Revenue, Senior Citizens and Disabled Residents Transportation Assistance Program Grant. The county uses the funds for its Paratransit program.

Mr. Guzzo said he was hopeful that legislation in Trenton to initiate Internet gaming in New Jersey would move forward.

"It is our belief that if that takes effect that will add much needed dollars to those coffers to provide services for Paratransit as well as other senior programs throughout the State of New Jersey," Mr. Guzzo said.

In the meantime, he said the county is "at that tipping point" where the county is "going to have to start making some very, very tough decisions relative to services for individuals that rely on this service, which are the elderly and the disabled."

He said transportation for chemotherapy and medical services trips would likely be continued while socialization and shopping trip transportation might have to be cut.

"We are looking at every option that we can to avoid reducing services at all," Mr. Guzzo said.

On another issue relative to outside funding sources, Ron Zuber, director of the county's Parks and Community Renewal Department, said the county would receive \$5 million through the Community Development Block Grant, \$846,000 for the county's HOME Investment Partnership and \$421,000 for the emergency shelter grant. All three are through the federal government's Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

County Manager Al Faella said the grants are down 16 percent from last year. "So we may be facing similar choices and difficult decisions to make relative to some of our community development programs as well," Mr. Faella said.

## Choir

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two squads.

"It was my idea to do the fundraiser, having done a similar event years ago at another church," Mr. Berdos told *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times*. "There is strong positive sentiment about doing this again next year. I'm hopeful that we will!"

## CenCom

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municipality BLS units, and will perform emergency medical dispatch 9-1-1 call screening for several other municipalities.

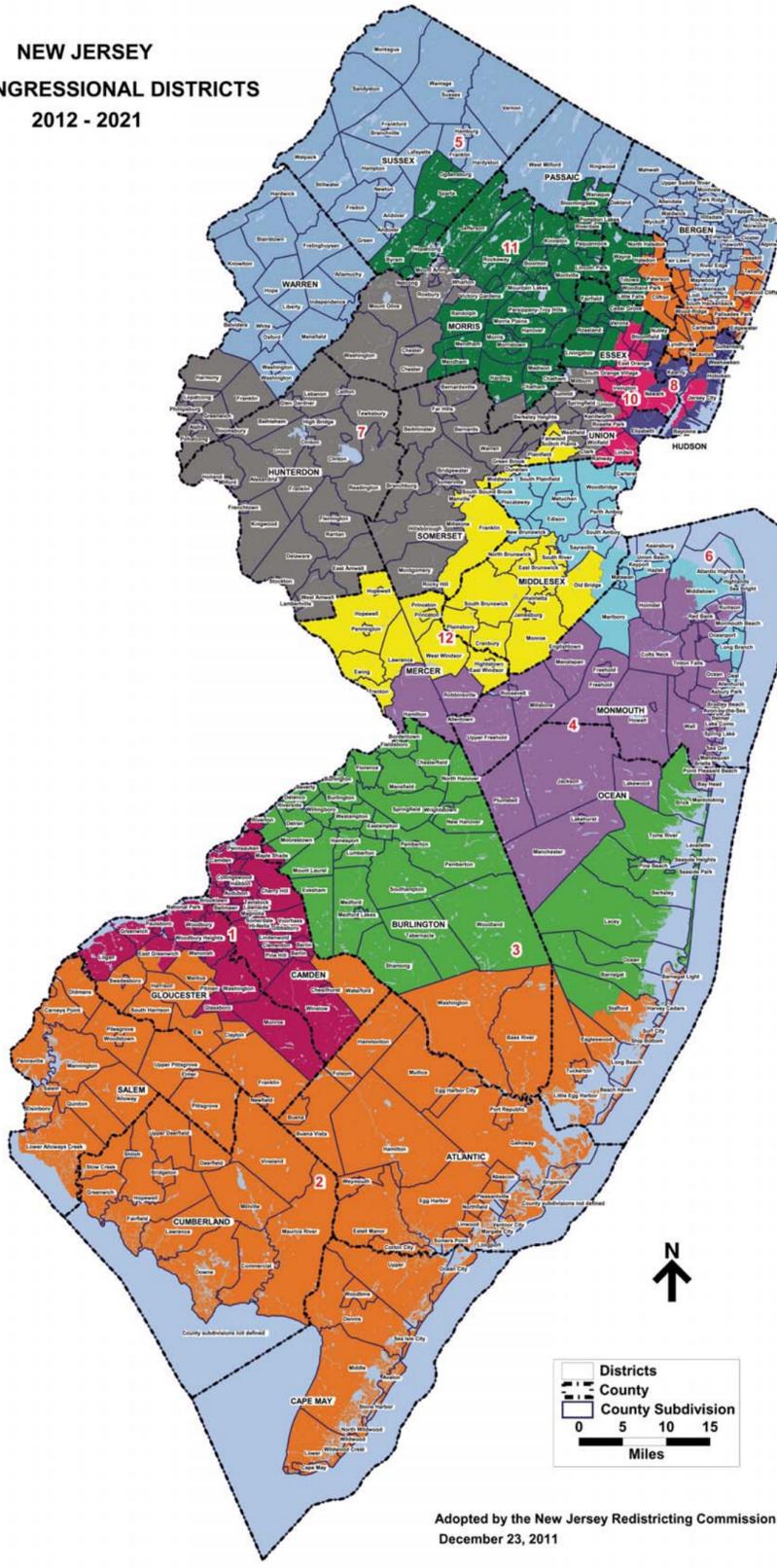
"As part of the agreement, MONOC will also dispatch Atlantic Ambulance's fleet of air medevac helicopters, known as Atlantic Air One, Two and Three. MONOC's own medevac helicopter, MONOC One, will operate cooperatively with Atlantic Ambulance's medevac fleet," according to the release.

Atlantic Ambulance will continue internal, non-emergency dispatch operations, such as inter-facility transport, as well as operating the Patient Transfer Center and proprietary ambulance dispatch, which are 24-hour-a-day, 365 day-a-year operations.



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.

## NEW JERSEY CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICTS 2012 - 2021



Adopted by the New Jersey Redistricting Commission December 23, 2011