

DWC Closes Year With Holiday Programs, Planning

By WAYNE BAKER
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

WESTFIELD — Much of the discussion at the December 18 board meeting of the Downtown Westfield Corporation centered on updates of holiday promotional programs and on planning for next year.

WF House Sustains Fire Damage in Rear

By MICHAEL J. POLLACK
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

WESTFIELD — A two-alarm fire Tuesday morning caused extensive damage to a home at 965 Central Avenue in Westfield.

Fire Inspector Lieutenant James Ryan, Jr., who was first to arrive, reported "heavy fire conditions in the rear" of the single-family dwelling.

Chief Kelly said a husband, wife, mother-in-law and full-time health care provider lived in the residence.

Chief Kelly added the Westfield/Mountainside American Red Cross chapter relocated the four adult occupants.

He said the fire, which took 45 minutes to bring under control, is under investigation but there "doesn't appear to be anything suspicious."

He said the house could be rebuilt, but it would take months. He added that no firefighters sustained injuries.

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The next board meeting of the DWC will be held at 7:30 p.m. on Monday, January 15.

resulted in the higher-than-anticipated costs. She also reported that the tokens distributed in the goodie bag of the "Photos with Santa" program resulted in some positive feedback.

The board also voted to adjust its sign grant to Panoply proportionally downward to account for the cost reduction in choosing a less ornate sign.

The board has begun to plan for next year's programs. A consensus said that the DWC's two "big" programs, the Sweet Sounds Downtown jazz concerts and Downtown Westfield 5K Run would continue.

Diane Barabas, a director, said it was "unfortunate" that the unusually warm weather affecting the area now wasn't present when the DWC ran its outdoor movie programs in October.

Directors brainstormed concepts for promotions next year, and during discussion, Joe Spector of the Leader Store said that much of the value of TV-36 was being "squandered through underutilization."

Ms. Cronin said that the Town Bookstore would move across East Broad Street. Mr. Martone commented on the appeal of a bookstore moving into the former site of the Carnegie Library.

There is a possibility that the space vacated by the bookstore will be combined with the space formerly occupied by Häagen Dazs, directors said.

Ms. Cronin said that a representative of Main Street New Jersey would visit her later that day, and she requested input from the board on points to discuss.

They also mentioned issues with local governments. Issues ranged from operational matters like the town's leaf collection coinciding with the holiday shopping season and causing "a few hiccups" in services to downtown litter pickup and emptying of on-street trash barrels.

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Michael J. Pollack for The Westfield Leader
FIRE FOUGHT...Westfield Fire Chief Dan Kelly inspects a home's charred remains after a Tuesday morning fire. The two-alarm blaze at the back of 965 Central Avenue required mutual aid from several other towns. According to the chief, one elderly female was transported to Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital at Rahway, but all four occupants are safe and the Westfield/Mountainside Chapter of the American Red Cross has relocated them.

Bramnick Addresses 'Dangerous' School Bill

By MICHAEL J. POLLACK
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

WESTFIELD — State Assemblyman Jon Bramnick (LD-21) attended Tuesday's special council meeting and spoke about issues affecting Westfield — from the 7 percent pay station sales tax to control of public schools.

On the subject of school control, he called Assembly Bill A-8 "one of the most dangerous bills probably ever to face Westfield school systems."

The bill, he said, would "allow county freeholders to participate in a pilot program" for a county administrative school district.

Mr. Bramnick said "the concept is to employ a 'super superintendent' and eliminate the local administration and, long-term, to save money."

He added, "Union County is not in that bill. The bill did not pass because there was bipartisan opposition."

He added, "The goal is to have a 'super' superintendent to save money and run the system more efficiently. The problem is...the farther you take the decision away from the people, the bigger the problem (becomes)."

He added, "The biggest mistake they (Trenton) will make is if they mess with the kids. People can pay

higher taxes, but don't mess with the kids."

On a separate matter, Mr. Bramnick said he and fellow Assemblyman Eric Munoz had introduced a bill to repeal the 7 percent sales tax on parking pay stations. At this point, Mr. Bramnick said he lacks a Democratic co-prime sponsor but said, "it makes no sense to tax the pay stations and not tax parking meters."

In other matters, last week, the council deferred a resolution to demolish 835 Highland Avenue in order to confirm two items on the town's internal checklist of safety, health and welfare issues.

Tom and Beth Mellina wished to demolish their house. However, Ed and Tracy Dugan of 330 Hillside Avenue claimed they would be negatively impacted if the council approved such a measure.

The Dugans, whose sewer and water lines run under the Mellinas' home, were concerned that when the demolition occurs, the lines might be crushed, causing damage to their property.

Town Administrator Jim Gildea said, "We needed to confirm that the water line that served the Dugans' home could be shut off separately from the Mellinas' home, and the sanitary sewer line also could be capped off separately during the demolition process. The engineering office confirmed both issues."

Mr. Mellina said, "Both Ed (Dugan) and I had a discussion on Saturday. We decided to grant a 10-foot easement off the side of the property...and run a new pipeline to the Dugans' home, as well as providing them with a water line that runs out to Hillside Avenue, and I have agreed to incur the cost of both projects."

Mr. Dugan told The Westfield Leader and The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times after the meeting that the Mellinas and builder Steve Needle reacted "very quickly to a very difficult and unusual situation, and provided a very amicable outcome to hopefully put an end to any concerns about the water and sewer lines...They went above and beyond, and did the right thing."

Community Commentary Looking Back 10 Years After Leaving Office



by Garland C. "Bud" Boothe, Jr.
Former Westfield Mayor, 1992-1996

December marks a decade since I completed five years as your mayor, after 12 as councilman. I have had much time to reflect on the good, mistakes, the progress or lack thereof, during my tenure, and I would like to share those thoughts.

The most important thing accomplished, which took many months, was getting the council to adopt unanimously and bipartisan creation of the Downtown Westfield Corporation, notwithstanding significant opposition throughout the process by some merchants and some friends.

I appointed the first board in fall 1996. The appearance, low vacancy and varied stores and other downtown results speak for themselves.

Probably the longest lasting: insisting that NJ Transit must build a new underpass at the station, replace a long, literally stinking, tunnel, use standing seam roofs on the platform roofs, and decorate the underpass, which led to Stacy Farley's ceramic tiles. Westfield's negotiating position was enhanced by the fact we, not the railroad, own the station and parking lots — a tribute to the wisdom of the 1954 council.

Biggest regret: not being more effective in getting the planning board to even consider compromise for a somewhat larger ShopRite than the 24,000-square-

foot area (size of the Elm Street Stop and Shop), and getting the applicants to budge from their 85,000 minimum. But after two-and-a-half years of hearings, the board members had their views, which I could and would not try to forcibly change — and most had an illusory hope that ShopRite would quit instead of moving a hundred feet to an all-Garwood 85k store.

Most fun: 1994 Bicentennial — 200 events, 16 of them snowstorms and blizzards...yes, in retrospect but not at the time, fun.

Wish I had done more with: the bifurcated state of TV-36, which is and must be licensed to the Town of Westfield, not the board of education or anybody else. Fortunately, my successors are working on this now to produce programming work more representative of the quality and talent in this community.

Most hated phrase: When someone in state government in Trenton says, "Westfield is a wealthy community," therefore which follows is grief to us. The "wealthy community" approach overlooks the significant population of land-poor seniors and others who are living on modest pensions and Social Security. So when a program cuts out a community because of high community income, the latter group suffers in tax bills.

Headdresses Part of Culture For Women In Thailand

Editor's Note: Mary Snauffer of Westfield is serving a two-year assignment with the Peace Corps in Thailand. She is writing a firsthand account of her experiences in this column for The Westfield Leader and The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times. Her columns appear periodically.

Here in the south of Thailand, the village I live in is made up of 30 percent Muslims and 40 percent Buddhists, with a sprinkling of Christian missionaries. Temples and mosques dot the town.

The Muslim prayer calls are broadcast five times a day by speakers. I can hear them wail throughout the town. The sound bounces off the mountains, which jut up, enclosing the village in a protective, natural embrace.

I go running most mornings at dawn because it's the only time the weather is bearable. While I run, I often pass clusters of Buddhist monks draped in orange robes collecting rice from the villagers. Islam and Buddhism comfortably coexist here.

At night, I'll wander the market amid girls and women in their headdresses. Thais take great pride in their outer appearances, and there is no exception with the Muslim woman's veil. They are elaborately embroidered in flowers that match their skirt or pantsuit.

I have been reading about disturbing trends in Europe that I find both trivial and discolored. The Dutch government has announced that it is seeking to ban the Muslim veil in public places. In Britain, Jack Straw noted that the veil "separates people" and discourages integration. In Rome, the Vatican has declared that veiling shows disrespect for local cultures.

What America has over any country in the world is diversity. Of course, there are exceptions, but I'd like to believe the majority of students who go through the American public school system come out ahead because of their tolerance and acceptance of diversity.

After all, there was never a forest with only one species. Diversity is a natural,

healthy part of life. I don't understand the current discussions entangled under the veil. To ban the veil would be to impede on a woman's right to choose.

I believe many in the West downplay the role of tradition in people's lives. There are families in my village who have been rooted here for as many generations as they know. Their lives are based around tradition. If a woman chooses to wear a veil, it may be because her mother wore one and her grandmother and her great-grandmother — that should be the end of discussion. Transforming the veil into a negative symbol against women's rights is neither educated nor accurate.

If you cringe at veils because you think most of the time it is forced upon a woman from her husband, that a woman under a veil represents a silent, docile slave, let's take a look at teenage girls' outfits in America. There, girls are dressing provocatively at younger and younger ages because the media tells them if they do they'll get boyfriends, which, the media goes on to illustrate, will grant them fulfillment. In my opinion, the media is enslaving teenage girls all around us.

Still, there is something about the veil that is uneasy for a non-Muslim, Westerner to take in. I taught a 15-day English camp last April for high-school students from around the province. We gave the students English names for fun. Jen was one of my favorite students. She was smart, witty and good-natured. The students dressed casually for the camp. I didn't know who was Buddhist and who was Muslim. I bumped into Jen several months later in town. She was in a full headscarf, and it caught me off guard. I suddenly felt sorry for her.

"Mary!" she cried, running up to me. As she hugged me, I saw her mother and sister standing behind her smiling, all in headscarves. She was happy. What on earth, I thought, did I have to feel sorry for her about?

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