

Majority, Minority Reports Issued on Salaries For Mountainside Mayor, Council Members

By KIMBERLY A. BROADWELL
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

MOUNTAINSIDE—A discussion of findings from a special committee created by Mountainside Mayor Robert Vigilanti regarding whether the governing body should receive salaries was held during the Mountainside Borough Council's November 9 agenda setting meeting.

Mayor Vigilanti read the report, submitted by Committee Chairman George Serio, which included a recommendation to establish a \$2,500 salary for the mayor and a salary of \$1,500 for each of the council members. The salaries are annual rates, with no salary range and no monthly miscellaneous expense reimbursements.

The committee also recommended that all future raises for the mayor and council should be done in ordinance form and that the public should be given the opportunity to address the mayor and borough council about the new salary recommendation.

Finally, the committee recommended that the salary question should be put before voters as a referendum during a future election.

The committee, appointed by Mayor Vigilanti, was given the job of making suggestions to the governing body on the issue of salaries.

It was formed after a petition signed by 400 Mountainside registered voters rescinded an ordinance adopted last February. That ordinance changed the manner in which governing body members are compensated for expenses.

The rescinded ordinance would have given a \$1,500 per year salary for council members and \$3,000 per year for the mayor. Currently, Mountainside elected officials receive \$1,200 per year in unvouchered expenses.

According to borough records that date back to the early 1970s, each member of the council received \$45 per month up until 1998 when this stipend was changed to reimbursement of unvouchered expenses.

Commenting about the report, Mayor Vigilanti said that he recommended the committee's suggestions and a public discussion of them should be part of the January council meeting. He noted that it would be better to schedule the public discussion after the council finishes work on the upcoming budget.

Councilman Paul Mirabelli added that he thought separate public meetings solely on the salary issue should be conducted in January so that an entire meeting can be dedicated to discussing the issue.

He also noted that it would give the borough time to advertise the meeting in the borough's newsletter, as well as on Channel 35, the borough's local cable television access channel.

Mayor Vigilanti then mentioned that there was a minority report, submitted by salary committee member Louis Thomas. A copy of that report was given to all council members.

In his report Mr. Thomas stated, "I cannot join in the majority report, which the committee has presented to the mayor."

His report, which was submitted to *The Westfield Leader* by Mr. Thomas, stated that he did not agree with the committee's practice of barring the press from its salary meetings or with its collection of salary data from other towns.

In his findings, Mr. Thomas stated, "the analysis of salaries and benefits paid by towns of comparable size and population is meaningless. Other towns may have a tradition of paying their councilmen and mayors. The elected officials may have campaigned on this issue and won the opinion of their voters."

Mr. Thomas also stated that he wanted public hearings concerning the salary issue and stated that the public should have been invited to the committee's meetings in which the proposed council salaries were discussed.

In other business, there will be second readings and public hearings during the Tuesday, November 23 council meeting on an ordinance that combines the Planning Board and Board of Adjustment, and on a related ordinance that provides for

the Planning Board to assume the duties of the Board of Adjustment.

The ordinances passed on first reading in September.

Officials have noted that combining these two boards will expedite paperwork and save the borough money.

Finally, it was announced that the

winner of this year's Mabel Young Good Neighbor Award will be announced at the Tuesday, November 23 council meeting.

The award, which was started in 1983, is given yearly to recognize the efforts of a citizen on behalf of the Borough. Last year's recipient of the award was Bart Barre.

Man Gets Four Years In Theft by Deception Of Luxury Automobile

WESTFIELD — A 33-year-old Pennsylvania man who leased a Mercedes Benz from a Westfield financing firm and then sold it was sentenced to a four-year state prison term on November 12 in Elizabeth.

Authorities said Stephen Williams of Solebury, Pa., was given a prison term consecutive to the four-year term he is serving for violating his probation on a theft by deception conviction from an incident in Howell Township in Monmouth County in February of 1994.

Williams, who was employed as the owner and manager of a classic car dealership in Lambertville at the time of his arrest on the theft from Westfield in June of this year, was told by Superior Court Judge Walter R. Barisonok that he seemed to show "no remorse or empathy" for his victim.

Williams appeared before Superior Court Judge John Triarsi on September 1 and pleaded guilty to third degree theft by deception. He admitted leasing a 1994 two-door E-320 Mercedes valued at \$50,100 after submitting phony federal income tax forms which showed he earned more than \$100,000 annually, when

in fact his income was around \$20,000.

"Here is a highly intelligent man who tragically used his talents to swindle more than one victim with his clever con artist schemes," said Assistant Prosecutor Alan Silver of the Special Prosecutions Unit. The case was investigated by Sergeant Steven Siegel, he added.

After sentencing, Williams was returned to the Midstate Correctional Facility in Wrightstown in Burlington County. He has five previous convictions for similar offenses dating back to 1994, said Executive Assistant Prosecutor Robert P. O'Leary.

As part of his sentence, Judge Barisonok ordered Williams to pay \$8,000 restitution for damages that occurred after he traded the Mercedes to a private citizen in Pennsylvania in exchange for another luxury car.

Mountainside BOE Reviews Test Scores

By SONIA V. OWCHARIW
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

MOUNTAINSIDE—The Mountainside Board of Education heard a presentation November 9 by Chief School Administrator, Dr. Gerard Schaller, and guidance counselor Barbara Komoroski concerning the school district's strategy for dealing with test results from the IOWA, GEPA (Grade Eight Proficiency Assessment) and ESPA (Elementary Student Proficiency Assessment) tests.

The IOWA Test of Basic Skills, administered in April, is designed to measure students' progress and growth in the following areas: mathematics, reading, language arts and sources of information such as map and diagram reading and reference materials.

The IOWA provides a comprehensive measurement of skills in a number of significant areas, including vocabulary, reading, spelling, capitalization, work-study skills and mathematics concepts, as well as problem solving and computation.

The test supplies information about basic skills to parents, pupils and the public in terms of how well a program or curricula is benefiting students and where improvements may need to be made.

Standardized testing, for the most part, is a diagnostic tool, according to Dr. Schaller.

The ESPA, which tests language arts literacy, mathematics and science, was administered to all fourth-grade students in May. Individual student profiles indicate areas of strengths and weaknesses.

The GEPA was given in March to eighth graders. Ninety-eight percent of the students who took the GEPA test scored at either proficient or advanced proficient levels, according to Dr. Schaller.

During discussion of the test scores,

board members felt it still takes too long for the district to receive the results and that the content of the tests do not give a clear enough picture of the individual student's problem areas or how the district should act.

Once test results are finalized, each student is given a profile to identify any problems they may have. Teachers are then asked to focus on these areas and list strategies to be used in helping the student make progress.

A follow-up is expected to be done in January to assess if students have improved in their problem areas. In addition, comparisons will be made between this year's test results and those of the previous year, according to Dr. Schaller.

The next Board of Education meeting will be held on Tuesday, November 30, at 8 p.m. in the Deerfield School Media Center.

AARP Announces Date For Holiday Luncheon

WESTFIELD—Westfield Area Chapter No. 4137 of the American Association of Retired Persons will hold its Annual Holiday Luncheon on Monday, December 6, at noon at The Westwood in Garwood.

Luncheon Committee Chairwoman Marie Stock is presently taking reservations for this event and may be reached at (908) 925-2536. A full luncheon will be offered to members with a choice of entrees for \$14 each.

Musical entertainment, including a line-dancing session, will be provided by Ted O'Connell, who has performed around the country as well as on cruise ships.

The next regular meeting will be held on Monday, January 3, featuring a program on the Immigration and Naturalization Service.

For further information, please call Hazel Hardgrove at (973) 376-3348.

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