

The Westfield Leader

The Official Newspaper of the Town of Westfield and the County of Union

— Established 1890 —
Member of the New Jersey Press Association • Member of the National Newspaper Association •
Periodicals — Postage Paid at Westfield, New Jersey

THE TIMES

Official Newspaper of the Township of Scotch Plains and the Borough of Fanwood

— Established 1959 —

Periodicals — Postage Paid at Scotch Plains, New Jersey

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to the offices of the newspapers at
P. O. Box 250, Westfield, New Jersey 07091

THE LEADER
P.O. Box 250
50 Elm Street, Westfield, N.J. 07091
(908) 232-4407 • Fax: (908) 232-0473
E-mail: press@goleader.com

THE TIMES
P. O. Box 368
Scotch Plains, N.J. 07076
(908) 232-4407 • Fax: (908) 232-0473

PUBLISHED EVERY THURSDAY BY WATCHUNG COMMUNICATIONS, INC.

Horace R. Corbin
PUBLISHER

Gail S. Corbin
GENERAL MANAGER

Paul J. Peyton
MANAGING EDITOR

Suzette Stalker
ASSISTANT EDITOR

Joanna B. Marsh
MARKETING DIRECTOR

Karen M. Hinds
OFFICE MANAGER

David B. Corbin
SPORTS

SUBSCRIPTION PRICE

THE WESTFIELD LEADER & THE TIMES

One-year subscription in county	\$20
One-year subscription out-of-county	\$24
One-year college (September to May)	\$16

Retreat Could Give Council Opportunity To Set Long-Term Goals and Objectives

In the interests of bi-partisanship, the Westfield Town Council is considering following the lead of the town's Board of Education by holding a retreat. These sessions, usually held in a hotel conference room, give a governing body an opportunity to do some long-range planning in an atmosphere which is free of politics and where the council can set its goals and objectives for 1998.

Mayor Thomas C. Jardim, who brought the suggestion before the council, wants to hold the session this month at an out-of-town location. A facilitator, the Mayor said, will be brought in to help the council "think strategically, think long term, and think goals."

A former director of the Special Improvement District (SID) in Cranford, and an employee of NJ Transit who has done work in facilitating meetings on the transportation agency's goals etc., have both offered their assistance to the council.

The Westfield school board has held retreats annually for the past 15 years to set its goals and objectives for the new year. The board is holding a retreat this weekend with members of the community to begin work on a Strategic Plan for the school district.

We believe a retreat is a good idea for the council in that our elected officials at the local level can begin a more organized process of deciding what business needs to be brought before the council next year. For instance, a proposal to increase parking permit fees at the South Avenue train station lot and other modifications to address parking problems in town is likely to come up early in the year. A process on how to plan for introduction and a public hearing of this and other planned ordinances and resolutions needs to be addressed by this council.

Also, issues such as the exterior maintenance code, amendments to the liquor laws for restaurants (which was defeated), the shade tree ordinance, etc., have not been planned accordingly. Granted,

the municipal budget process keeps the council busy for the first quarter of the year, but the council was overloaded the past few months working on ordinances regarding cellular towers and zoning in the Westfield Avenue area, both of which were emergency situations, while also writing numerous drafts on the maintenance code and the shade tree ordinances.

A referral list keeps track of all matters (and their status) considered at council conference meetings or through communication received by town officials, the Mayor and council. The list, initiated by Mayor Jardim this year, is a good way to start the planning process at the retreat. This list should be reviewed so the governing body can get a feel for what issues they can get out of the way during the first half of 1998.

With two new council members, Janis Fried Weinstein and Gregory S. McDermott, coming on board, it is important that the 1998 council consider what legislation they are considering unveiling in the new year.

In the long term, the proposal by Councilman John J. Walsh to issue a new bond to tackle improvements for the town's roads over five years is something that should be addressed. The governing body might also want to review the status of town parks or a comprehensive plan to address pedestrian safety in the downtown.

It is our hope that this session will "clear the air" so to speak, and create better communication between Democrats and Republicans in the new year. The appointment process for town officials, paid and non-paid, in addition to boards and council committees, is now underway behind the scenes. It is our hope that an effort by both parties to try to work together while bringing different ideas and new volunteers to the table (in terms of appointments) will result from the retreat.

Fanwood's Plan to Combine Boards Cuts Costs and Need for Volunteers

Come this January, Fanwood will combine its Planning Board and Board of Adjustment into one board which will deal with applications related to land use and property development.

The move represents an attempt by the Borough Council to compensate for an insufficient number of volunteers willing to serve on both boards, coupled with a steady decline in applications which have come before the individual boards in recent years.

There are currently nine people, including two alternates, which serve on the Fanwood Board of Adjustment. The Planning Board also has nine members. The council reported having difficulty in finding enough people willing to sacrifice their time to attend the monthly meetings of the municipal

boards.

The concept of merging the Planning Board and Board of Adjustment, we believe, is excellent — create one board which will have a manageable stream of business and a sufficient number of volunteers available to address that business.

Creating one board will also reduce the amount of time applicants have to wait before being granted a public hearing on their appeals. In addition, the municipality will save money by having to pay for the services of only one board attorney.

The council will vote on the ordinance to combine the boards at its meeting on Thursday, December 11. We expect the ordinance to receive the full support of the governing body, as it did when the ordinance came up for first reading on November 13.

Letters to the Editor

Does Maintenance Code Really Stop Access to Interiors?

In its issue of November 20, *The Westfield Leader* reported that the Town Council had acquiesced to Councilman Norman Norman N. Greco's demand that the property maintenance code not permit access to the interiors of buildings.

Why then, please, do I find in the version of the code unanimously introduced by the council, which civic-minded residents may consult at the municipal building at their leisure, a section, entitled "35.15: Inspections and Access to Premises?"

This and the following items address at length (295 words in all) the topic that was allegedly deleted from the code.

But I find other aspects of the town maintenance code even more alarming, not the least of which is the amount of additional power given to the town administra-

tion, a non-elected official, whom already, in my view, in our town's form of municipal government, has too much power which has been transferred from those we elect.
Caveat emptor.

Ferdinand Gajewski
Westfield

Mr. Trumpp Thanks Voters and Committee Following Council Race

I would like to take a brief moment to personally thank the 1,365 voters who supported my candidacy for the Fanwood Borough Council. Also, I wish to thank the members of the 1997 Fanwood Republican Campaign Committee for their participation and dedication.

I know Councilman-elect Whitaker will be a valuable asset to the Mayor and Council and will be a team player when serving in the best interest for Fanwood.

Dave Trumpp
Fanwood

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POPCORN™

John Grisham's The Rainmaker Working the Loopholes

By Michael S. Goldberg

One Popcorn, Poor • Two Popcorns, Fair • Three Popcorns, Good • Four Popcorns, Excellent



It probably started with Oog. The inherent, confounding ambiguity of human justice, sincerely essayed in Francis Ford Coppola's traditional adaptation of John Grisham's latest tale of legal woe, has been evidenced ever since Oog first stole Grok's pellets. Grok's friend, Nuk, a fellow handy with a sharp rock, told us all about it on the cave walls... and rather eloquently at that. Fellow cave dwellers railed at the news, and were stirred to make laws prohibiting such antisocial behavior.

Several thousand years later, the crime spree goes unabated. Man's inhumanity to man plays like an endless loop. In its very familiar, courtroom drama way, *John Grisham's The Rainmaker* bemoans this sadly perplexing fact of life.

Pitifully, a young man (Johnny Whitworth as Donny Ray Black) with leukemia is dying a gruesome death. A bone marrow transplant just may prevent the profound suffering. But Great Benefit Insurance Company, a sneering corporate titling if ever there were one, routinely declines all claims. The cold-blooded contention? That the lifesaving procedure is "experimental."

Enters the law firm of Sleaze, Opportunist, and Sainly Novice. They're an unlikely troika of legal saviors, but paramount to popular Grisham mythology. The emboldened Davids that perennially fight this author's loathsome Goliaths must be somehow compromised, warmly plagued with human foibles.

The sleaze is Mickey Rourke (yep, he's back, and pretty good at that) as J. Lyman Stone, nicknamed Bruiser, founding partner of an outlandish Memphis law firm-cocktail lounge consortium where go-go girls and barmaids double as legal secretaries.

It is only fitting that barrister Stone's top ambulance chaser and opportunist in residence — Danny DeVito in a very funny turn as spunky Deck Schiflet — hasn't let a little thing like failing the bar exam six times interfere with his law career. Just out of law school and primed for the education of his life is Matt Damon as Rudy Baylor, legal neophyte in training. With no connections to land him a cushy corporate spot, slim pickings lead him to Bruiser's employ. The stipulation is that he hunts down his own clients. Left over from his law project days, the insurance scam is his first case.

Too much of a newcomer to know that such an overextended cliché simply can't work, Mr. Damon's southern legal beagle rises to the daunting challenge whilst exhibiting a fine sense of Faulknerian courtliness. Smartly underplaying while ever true and hackneyed courtroom convention otherwise manipulates Coppola's interpretation of the best-selling novel, *Mary Damon's Rudy* combines a winning innocence with just the right proportion of

humble savvy and native intelligence. Oh, and add a natural penchant for idealism and an attractive dash of righteous indignation, too.

A large and colorful cast of supporting players, some symbolic, others material to the plot at hand, splendidly swirl and integrate as our unblemished champion prepares his case, whimsically inspired by Dickensian Deck's gamely aptitude. Facing their first hurdle early in the doings, Deck and Rudy form an impromptu alliance when the Feds throw the book at their humorously shady boss. Esquire Bruiser takes it on the lam.

In addition to the tragic leukemia case, other prospects for the new law partnership include the dilemma of a battered housewife (Claire Danes as Kelly Riker, a potential love interest who could represent a tragic flaw for the unseasoned Rudy) and the purported fortune of Miss Birdie (Teresa Wright), a widow seeking to disinherit her obnoxious offspring. Soon rooming in her guest house, good citizen Rudy becomes the fine, upstanding son Miss Birdie never had.

Heading-up the Philistines, Jon Voight as Leo F. Drummond, top counsel for the scurrilous insurance firm, exemplifies the Oil Can Harry end of the melodrama's spectrum. Continuing his new life as a character actor par excellence, the former lead's masterfully rendered villain is the epitome of guile, but not without an interesting glint of abiding guilt, evident in the high-priced slyster's disquieted eyes and crumpled jowls. One suspects that long ago he contracted to work this sordid side of the street.

Others who contribute to the character-rich filigree include: Mary Kay Place in an unassuming coup as the sick boy's long-suffering mom; Danny Glover as a sympathetic but nonetheless honest judge; Virginia Madsen as Jackie Lemanczyk, a conscience-racked insurance claims representative; and Roy Scheider in a brief but haunting cameo as Great Benefit CEO, Wilfred Keeley.

Coppola's extravagant legal brief is a surprisingly elemental tale, even sophisticated if you simply judge it by the formulaic script. What's more, it is edited rather shabbily. But those are merely the facts. When it comes down to cases *John Grisham's The Rainmaker* is lovingly drenched with the sort of schmaltzy performances and high-minded intentions that could win over any jury. With lawyers and insurance companies to hate, what's not to like?

John Grisham's *The Rainmaker*, rated PG-13, is a Paramount Pictures release directed by Francis Ford Coppola and stars Matt Damon, Danny DeVito, Mary Kay Place and Jon Voight. Running time: 137 minutes.

A Dentist May Never Be the Villain But Too Many Cars Seen as Trouble

By Louis H. Clark

Talk about addictiveness. Here's a new one I bet you never thought of, and yet it poses a bigger threat than cigarettes — the population of automobiles is growing faster than human beings.

Makes you think, doesn't it? It's true, according to this article I read in a dentist's office, where I tend to read only the most depressing articles since they're a better pain killer than anything the dentist can give me.

Which reminds me. Have you ever read a story where a dentist was a horror, even a villain? I never have. I suppose all the other medical professions are more dramatic. Doctors called out in the middle of the night to deliver a baby — they still use that though most babies born outside of hospitals seem to be brought into the world in taxicabs.

And every mystery now features a psychiatrist who, working for the side that pays the most, is the deciding factor in sending a killer, male or female, to death or a "rehabilitation center." They have drama. Their cars are new and running. They have the money to hire any private investigator they want, and they only want the best.

But the poor dentist, he's at it all. Call him in the middle of a raging toothache, and he'll be a pain killer and see him in the morning, and doesn't even carry a bag with him.

So the dentist can't even be a villain in a story, unless to hit a nerve.

At least podiatrists can be objects of fun, debriding toe nails (that means cutting your nails.) I just wanted to show you how up to date I am on medical terms. But as they say about lawyers, you may hate them, but when

you need a podiatrist, he can be a very necessary person.

But what has all this to do with automobiles taking over the world? Perhaps, we should have let it alone years ago when every car fell apart at 50,000 miles. Now they are all lasting forever and taking over the world. When there are more cars than licensed drivers, we will know the end has come.

HUNG UP!!

Attorney Can Help Protect Afflicted Mother's Assets

By Milt Faith, Executive Director Youth and Family Counseling Service

A distraught daughter writes:

Recently, my mother was diagnosed as having Alzheimer's Disease. She should not be living in her apartment anymore. We are concerned that she not have an accident, nor start a fire, nor totally isolate herself. My brother and I are trying to decide whether she should live with my brother or me. Both of us are married and we all work; we don't get home until dinner time. We have teenage children and I'm sure they would help out. My mother has always been difficult and neither my brother nor I have had it easy with her. She has lots of money and we need to decide about getting her a lawyer. The truth of the matter is that we would feel guilty if we didn't have her live with one of us. It's a toss of the coin. Any suggestions?

Answer:

Put the coin away, get an attorney to legally protect your mother and her assets, and don't ponder whether you or your brother should take mother in. No one would seem to feel comfortable with her living in either home. It would also be a big responsibility to thrust upon the grandchildren. You would do well to focus on obtaining a good assistant care living resource which would take care of mother's needs — medical, housing, social, nutritional, etc. Try to locate resources or call the Alzheimer's Association, North Jersey Chapter, in Parsippany at (973) 316-6676 for further information and direction.

Your assistance to obtain a good appropriate environment for mother is the best expression of love (and alleviation of guilt) you can exhibit. Legal protection for her will help make this possible. Good luck.

An angry mother writes:

This year Halloween became a "Halloween" for me. My husband and I agreed to permit our teenage daughter to have a Halloween party while we were at a concert. She knows our feelings and agreed to limit the number of friends to 10, have no alcohol and keep the music low. She and her friends were to give candy and coins to children when they came to the door for "trick-or-treating."

I don't know what went wrong, but when we came home, we found beer cans hidden in the garbage, the music was blasting away, and the police were at the house, called by neighbors who complained about the noise, the young children who were permitted into the house and the 75 teens who "crashed"



CHRISTMAS Origins, Customs and Related Words Part I

The Christmas celebration, as observed today, is a rich blending of ancient pagan and Christian festivals that traditionally were held in the later part of December. In Part I, we shall examine the origins of some customs, as well as the special words that have become associated with this very important Christian holiday, such as: Christmas, Mass, yule, and jolly.

Prehistoric man had developed strong religious beliefs and customs, many of which were passed on to successive generations.

The pre-Christian Roman civilization observed several pagan agricultural and solar festivals in December. For example, Saturnalia was celebrated December 17-24 and was a time of merrymaking and exchanging of gifts — undoubtedly the forerunner of some of the customs of our present Christmas holiday.

In 274 A.D., Roman Emperor Aurelian selected the pagan festival of Saturnalia as the birthday of the unconquered sun (natales solis invicti) at winter's solstice, when the duration of sunlight begins to lengthen. About 50 years later (336 A.D.), the growing Catholic church in Rome selected the natales solis invicti as the day on which to commemorate the birth of Christ. It was not until the 16th century, however, that the word Christmas was used. Christmas was a re-shaping of "Cristes Maesse." The word Mass is from the late Latin word missa, "liturgy, the mass."

As the Teutonic tribes penetrated Gaul, Britain and Central Europe, they brought Germano-Celtic pagan rites which, in time, merged with the Roman and Christian observations. The Teutonic customs included the yule log, yule cakes, greenery, wassailing and gifts. Evergreen, a symbol of survival, was a part of these pagan rites. St. Boniface, who completed the Christianization of Germany in the 8th century, is said to have dedicated the fir tree to the holy child to replace the sacred pagan oak of Odin.

The word yule comes from an old Norse word, jol, meaning "the yule month, December." Jol, in turn, probably came from the Latin word gelu, meaning "cold." Gelu became geol and finally yule, which was the coldest month in the northern hemisphere. It is from jol that the word "jolly" is also derived, since yule was the jolly time of the year.

The belief that Santa Claus comes down the chimney is from an old Norse legend. The Norsemen believed that the goddess Hertha appeared in the fireplace and brought good luck. Teutonic festivals also had a red-nosed, white bearded, jolly old man, who was a symbol of these celebrations and was presumably the inspiration for our present representations of Santa Claus. In part II, we shall describe the origins of Santa Claus, Kriss Kringle, Noel, Xmas, St. Nicholas and wassail.

Attorney Can Help Protect Afflicted Mother's Assets

By Milt Faith, Executive Director Youth and Family Counseling Service

The party. I resent the policemen's comments that I should have stayed home. Our daughter is honest and we trust her. I did not want to hang around and be overprotective, giving her a message that I don't trust her judgment. I also wanted to attend the concert which cost me a lot of money. What is your opinion?

Answer:

I don't feel this is an issue of trust or distrust. Too often, well-intentioned parties get out of hand and cannot be controlled by a young host or hostess. I feel that a parent or an adult should be home to oversee that all is going well. This does not mean that the adult has to be in the same room during the party. The presence of the adult insures a feeling of security and alerts the guests that they can have a good time without abusing the host's wishes and expectations. If a party is to be limited to a certain number, teens, etc. will not abuse it if they know an adult is home. If a party is to be liquor-free, they will think twice before bringing in or using liquors, etc. And certainly, young children should not be invited into the house under any condition. You could open yourself up to possible lawsuits.

Again, I always recommend that an adult be present at a party despite a teen's protestations that he/she can handle the situation. Group pressure can be overwhelming. I encourage you to rethink your view of this and plan differently in the future. (When I think of the situations I missed when my teenage children entertained!)

A young adult writes:

I have spent most of my life as an accountant. Although I am good at what I do, I now have an opportunity to do the thing I like best: write a sports column for a nationally syndicated newspaper. It will take a lot of time and I will have to cut down on clients, but I feel this is something I've always wanted to do, so it's like it is now or never. Any words of wisdom from anyone in your field to make me feel less anxious?

Answer:

Let your wish come true, particularly if you can retain your work as an accountant so that you are financially able to write. Too often we let these joys go by...Here are some words of wisdom which should be supportive: "If you wait too long for opportunity to knock...you may get too old to make it to the door in time to let it in." The author: Ziggy, the cartoon character!