

The Westfield Leader

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

Member of the New Jersey Press Association • Member of the National Newspaper Association • Member of the Newspaper Guild • Member of the International Brotherhood of Newspapermen

THE TIMES

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

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

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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.

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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

Time of Community Individualism Versus the Role of Regionalism

New Jersey citizens must staunchly believe in local government. Otherwise, why would this small state have more municipal governments, of more different forms, and more school districts than any other state in the country? Is it because regionalism has failed us at times? Or, is it because there are just certain things we want our way that are unique for our neighborhoods?

In western Union County, some difficulties with regionalism have occurred. As example, Berkeley Heights, Mountainside, Springfield, Kenilworth, Garwood and Clark have discontinued their regional school district agreement. Mountainside and Berkeley Heights are staying together at the high-performing Governor Livingston High School. Springfield finds itself on its own at Jonathan Dayton High School. Clark and Garwood share Arthur L. Johnson High School. Kenilworth sought independence and has reopened David Brearley High School. In this identity struggle, these communities must sort out the impact on their property taxes. Clark residents, for one, face a sizable property tax increase. The long-term effects for the other communities will only become known with time.

There are successful examples of community individualism. Westfield, Summit and Scotch Plains/Fanwood residents seem more satisfied with the organization and performance of their school systems. Westfield has a very high performing system — one of the highest in the state. Scotch Plains/Fanwood is excellent and seems on the rise. Summit is good, too. In Westfield, regional busing of elementary school children just wouldn't be acceptable. Westfielders want their children walking to their neighborhood schools. Wealth is not the sole predictor of community school system success. Although Summit has an edge with the highest median income in the county, the community seems to be slightly under-achieving in its school system compared to its potential. Garwood, with more modest family incomes, does very well in school test scores.

Ironically, success at the local level has its price. As communities prosper, state aid is reduced and the local property tax burden rises. Coupled with this, successful communities pay more income and sales taxes to the state. To many, this seems counterproductive to the spirit of free enterprise and individual initiative. New Jersey Supreme Court rulings seem to be a contributing cause of this when they override the

legislature and dictate the course to the executive branch. In this instance, there's concern that the court system is extending beyond its envisioned constitutional authority.

Cooperation by communities on a regional basis has success stories too. Summit, Westfield, Springfield and others have a collective purchasing organization for procuring municipal insurance. This has saved hundreds of thousand of dollars. Joint efforts by police, fire and rescue squads are other great examples. There seems to be more opportunities for common good. One creative possibility heard recently was a proposal for joint promotion of downtown business and social events between Cranford, Westfield and Scotch Plains. As a regional draw in this concept, people could shuttle at no charge on the train system to attend various events throughout the "Tri-Towns."

So, there is a case for "regionalism" in certain circumstances, with our spirited population base of up to 200,000 people out of the half million in the county. Perhaps this works best as a starting point where each community can maintain its individualism without outside dictums, such as from courts or from institutionalized bureaucracy. Then, communities may find more satisfying ways to work together and to join with county and state efforts.

Each can keep its personal flavor with the recognition that we all need each other.

As the year 2000 approaches, time isn't standing still in the accelerating dynamics of our communities in Union County. And time isn't the computer clock that comes to mind. It's not "will the trains keep running, the lights stay on and our bank accounts balance upon that midnight transition?" because most of us must defer dealing with this challenge to the skill of our technicians.

Instead, we should focus on preparing for that moment, seeking imaginative or thoughtful ways to share with our friends, not to become lost in the crowd.

At this instant, we enjoy a respite from the forces of this tumultuous century. But for our region in Union County, people are energized in enhancing their communities and investing in their vision for life today and for tomorrow. And often, it's the seemingly little things that mean the most; smiling to a stranger on the street, letting that car in ahead of you in a traffic jam, or truly considering a different point of view.

Letters to the Editor

Town Voters Need to Use Civic Duty And Vote for Westfield School Budget

I urge the citizens of Westfield to exercise their civic duty on Tuesday, April 21, and vote in the annual School Board and Budget election. This year we have an uncontested election and hope that this does not lull the voter into thinking there is no urgency. On the contrary, a vote in favor of the school budget is vital if we are to maintain the standards of excellence in education our town so prides itself on.

Please vote "yes" for the school budget on April 21.

Anyone out of town or likely not to make it home in time to reach the polls should consider applying for an absentee ballot from the County Election Board. Registered voters may obtain absentee ballot application forms at the Town Clerk's office. Mailed applications must be received by the Union County Election Board by April 14.

Applications in person at the Union County Election Board may be made up until 3 p.m. on Monday, April 20.

Susan Yates
Westfield

Residents Attendance at Zoning Bd. Meeting Could Influence Outcome

At the March 5 meeting of the Scotch Plains Board of Adjustment, a first phase of a presentation was made in order to try to gain permission for the Park Place Restaurant to construct a 12,000-square-foot building for a Drug Fair in a residential neighborhood.

The attorney representing the Park Place Restaurant was obviously surprised and flustered by the size of the turnout of the south side residents opposed to this plan. Rather than first starting with his presentation, he addressed the crowd, telling them that Letters to the Editor and public opinion did not count in matters like this. He said that the only thing that counted would be his presentation to the board and their reaction to it.

Clearly he thought that the matter was restricted and that public opinion

did not count. It is a shame that we increasingly see, in all levels of society, a demeaning of, or lack of sensitivity to, public opinion.

There will be another meeting on this matter before the board on Thursday, April 23, at the Scotch Plains Municipal Building, at 7:30 p.m. The public will be given the opportunity to give their input.

Since the majority of the residents of the south side of Scotch Plains are opposed to a Drug Fair in our residential neighborhood, let us show all the participants in this matter how potent public opinion can be.

If you feel strongly about this, your presence at this meeting could have a profound influence on its outcome.

Marc Friedenberg
Scotch Plains

Scams Can be Avoided By Using Local People With Good References

It just goes to show that bad news sells. Because every spring, there is a news bulletin on home improvement scams, as reported in your March 26 edition, that puts the homeowner at odds with local reputable tradespeople. In every occupation there are bad apples, and home improvement is no exception.

With the amount of work being done in this town, it is not unusual that some "rif raf," do work in this town. In your own words, the out-of-state builders are, "up six fold." But the solution is quite easily remedied — by supporting and using experienced local trades people with qualifying references — problem solved.

Peter Davidson
Westfield

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Fiorino Family Thanks Westfield Community For Loving Tribute

We would like to thank publicly all the firemen, family, friends and community who paid such a wonderful tribute to our son and husband, John Fiorino, who passed away on March 30, and to so many people who waited in long lines at the Dooley Funeral Home.

We thank you from the bottom of our hearts. We could not be more proud of John.

Joseph and Eleanor Fiorino
Allison Fiorino and Children
Westfield

POPCORN™ The Newton Boys: A Regular Bunch of Bank Robbers

By Michael S. Goldberger

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



2 popcorns

Opening scene: Texas, 1919 - Two brothers horse around the corral, literally. As dirt poor as they are handsome, they nevertheless delight in their open air freedom and the joyously macho rite of horse breaking. A third, older man, obviously away for a long time, nonchalantly sidles up and joins in this bucolic celebration of brotherhood.

Older brother: How was the war little brother?

Younger brother: It was O.K. How was jail?

Older brother: Glad to be out.

That's as good as the dialogue gets in director Richard Linklater's would-be splashing account of the real-life bank robbers for whom this film is named. What's worse, you'll have to wait for the closing credits to completely appreciate the romantic magnitude of the tale he tries to tell.

Then, finally, you are treated to the movie's most fascinating five minutes — live footage achieving a sense of historical poignancy otherwise elusive in *The Newton Boys*. The filmmaker never does settle on the right stance between fact and fiction.

Supposedly the most successful bank robbers in American history, these Prohibition-period purloiners aren't painted in the typical, desperado tones of the era. Their claim to fame? They never "kilt no one." Think of it as *Bonnie and Clyde* light.

At first blush, the attention to realism would seem like a novel plus. But ordinariness can be a dramatic liability if you don't have something interesting to say about it. Warmly portraying his workmanlike roustabouts as just plain old folk, director Linklater (who co-wrote the script with Claude Stanush and Clark Lee Walker, based on Mr. Stanush's book) seems unable to get beyond his subjects' plainness. Audiences will not share his curious awe.

Yet there is nothing ordinary about their physical appearance. Here, realism takes a back seat to the box office realities of Hollywood. Hence, we are left to surmise that the bandits looked like Matthew McConaughey (Willis), Ethan Hawke (Jess), Skeet Ulrich (Joe), and Vincent D'Onofrio (Dock). Betcha one would have looked like Leonardo DiCaprio if they could have afforded him.

Dressed to the nines once they start making their high-powered withdrawals from Texas through the Midwest, the boys grin, preen and romp like suddenly successful musicians in a rockumentary. Ah, what camaraderie in splitting up the take. The brothers that steal together stay together. And oh, the fast cars. Like a cream-yellow 1919 Studebaker convertible. But time out. They do have their petty differences, just like Ringo and John did in *Hard Day's Night*, or sisters Jan and Marsha in *The Brady Bunch Movie*. The film also proves that even shallow people have moments of introspection. For instance, little Joe is really "agin" stealing.

And some even have secret ambitions. Like McConaughey's Willis. The ring-leader, he rationalizes it's insurance companies who are the country's real predators. Why, robbing banks merely relieves those corrupt giants of their ill-gotten gains. And it just may be a way for Willis to attain his idea of honest respectability — affording him the oil well he presumptuously feels he deserves.

Since they are neither heroes nor anti-heroes in the classical sense, it is difficult conjuring any real sympathy for these men. Willis, justifying his criminality, launches into whining diatribes about his dirt poor roots. As if society owes him that oil well. In short, the brat is a bit off.

But Linklater fails to pursue this clinical case of covetousness. Brothers Jess and Dock aren't quite so complicated, so you don't feel that bad when the director just dismisses them as well-dressed drunks along for the ride. Other potential subplots suffer. Like the hardly explored affaire de coeur between McConaughey's

character and an attractive cigar stand girl, Louise Brown (portrayed with hardly any verve by Julianna Margulies).

In the olden days, everything was sepiatic, or so the purposely subdued light in *The Newton Boys* would lead you to believe. But despite some obvious tricks and limited angles, production designer Catherine Hardwicke's artful take on the 20s, just as they start to roar, helps evoke mood and place in a movie that offers mediocre acting, uncertain plotting, and inconsistent direction.

Curious about the daring protagonist? Then read Mr. Stanush's book.

Otherwise, avoid being robbed by *The Newton Boys* and wait until the video is available. It won't be long. You can bank on it.

The Newton Boys, rated PG-13, is a Twentieth Century Fox release directed by Richard Linklater and stars Matthew McConaughey, Ethan Hawke and Julianna Margulies. Running time: 121 minutes.



FOOL

The court fool had a very "long run." In fact, there is historical evidence that fools provided comic relief in the homes of affluent ancient Romans. Even William the Conqueror (1027-1087) is known to have had a fool in his entourage.

The word fool comes via the French word fol, "foolish person," from the Latin word follis, meaning "bellows." A bellows or windbag was often tied to the fool's wand and was quickly deflated by him at appropriate opportunities to create a sound, politely referred to here, as the "raspberries" or "Bronx Cheer." This same word provided us with these related words: "folly," "follies," and "foolery."

While the word fool is still used in the sense of "to amuse," it also defines "one who is deficient in judgment and sense of understanding." The old court fool had plenty of incentive to amuse his lords and ladies. Failure to do so might shorten his career, if not his life. Perhaps that is why present day comedians say they "died" when the audience does not respond enthusiastically to their jokes.

Reaching Middle Age Can be Discouraging

By Louis H. Clark

There are lots of ways you can tell when you're reaching middle age, with all of them being discouraging. Here are a mere seven of them.

• Your knees crack when you're bending down to fix something. They also creak when you're getting up.

• At the office you used to run up two flights of stairs to Accounting when they questioned your expense account and you arrived, breathing easily. Now you take the elevator.

• When you take a female buyer out to lunch you feel free to order a salad and drink tonic without vodka or gin. When you take out a man you drink only tonic without vodka or gin. Your usual two Rob Routs make you sleepy all afternoon.

• You used to get up at dawn so that you'd get to the links early. After a light lunch you'd come home and mow the lawn. Your son now mows the lawn to "earn his allowance" and you find that your matches with your golfing partners have been pushed back to two o'clock.

• Those poker and bridge games which

used to break up around 2 a.m. are now breaking up at 11:30 p.m. instead. You all have big meetings tomorrow morning.

• Your wife has insisted that you get a fully yearly medical examination. So now at the Ides of March, you, who never used to go to a doctor except when pulled by six Clydesdale horses, find yourself being pulled, pushed, X-rayed in a tunnel called a Cat Scan and being stuck with needles and in general being tortured in the name of your health.

• You are now asked to sit on the board of charitable committees. "After all," they say "you've lived in town for God knows how many years and everyone knows you're honest." In other words they figure you are not agile enough to steal.

The crowning indignity of all — young girls stop you on the street to ask you for directions. They begin by saying, "Sir..."

None of the above applies to women. I have no idea how they know they are approaching middle age, and, I'm not going to ask.

Letters to the Editor

Decision to Put Farmer's Market At South Ave. Lot Irks Commuter

As one of the several hundred Westfield commuters who has been waiting for a parking permit at the Westfield Train Station's South Avenue lot, I am writing to express my dismay at the decision by our town's leaders, in particular First Councilwoman Gail S. Vernick, to locate this year's Farmer's Market in the South Avenue lot.

I have been on the permit waiting list for two-and-a-half years, since the day I closed on my house. When I called the town clerk's office this week to ask about my chances for a spot any time soon, I was told that there is a four-year backlog on the requests for parking. Permits are only now being offered to people who signed up in October 1994. The clerk told me my wait for parking would be at least another year.

If spots in the lot are so scarce, how can the town government allow nearly two dozen parking spaces to be occupied by the Farmer's Market every Thursday from June through October?

If the answer is (as it was two years ago when the market made its debut) that the

lot isn't as full in the summer due to people's vacations, then the town should issue summer-only permits for those waiting on the list. Regardless, the summer logic doesn't hold, since the lot fills up again after Labor Day.

I fear, however, that the answer is that Westfield's leaders aren't particularly concerned with the needs of the town's commuters or don't truly understand the difficulties and daily rigors involved in commuting between Westfield and the city. (Sadly, even NJ Transit executives don't know the horrors of the Manhattan commute, but that's another issue.)

Instead of further restricting parking for Westfield's commuters, town leaders should be doing whatever they can to assist commuters with the Westfield-based difficulties of the commute: the lack of station parking, the lack of safe pedestrian crosswalks from the places where some of us do manage to park (the Watterson Street and Lord & Taylor lots), the lack of a local taxi service (something the town's senior citizens and population-at-large also needs).

Last year, the Farmer's Market was located in a corner of the North Avenue lot, behind the firehouse. As far as commuters were concerned, that spot was just fine. It didn't impact upon commuter parking, and those lucky enough to get home from work before 7 p.m. could even pick up a few items upon getting off the train.

I hope that Councilwoman Vernick, the Town Council and the council Transportation, Parking and Traffic Committee reconsider the decision to locate the Farmer's Market in the South Avenue lot.

And I hope that these town officials will soon follow the lead of Mayor Thomas C. Jardim and Assemblyman Richard H. Bagger and become truly active and interested in helping to understand and solve the problems faced by Westfield's commuters. If they don't, I hope that Westfield's more than 1,400 commuters speak up with their voices and their votes.

Melissa Stanton
Westfield

Sharing Talents and Skills Volunteers Help to Broaden Students' Knowledge

This year, April 5-11 has been designated as Sharing Talents and Skills-In-The-Schools Week. Sharing Talents and Skills (STS) is a volunteer resource service available to all Westfield public school teachers — Kindergarten through 12th grade — for use as a supplement to curriculum.

The volunteers share their collections, careers, hobbies, travels, language skills, and interests with students in the classroom. They are parents, business men and women, civic and religious leaders, health care professionals, retired citizens, etc., who graciously give up their time to share a topic of interest with young people.

Since the program started in 1976, hundreds of volunteers have been added to the list. As STS's third coordinator, I've only been involved in the program for the last six months. In this short amount of time, I have been amazed at the breadth

of talent offered by STS volunteers to Westfield school children.

While I hear regularly from the teachers whose classrooms they visit, I also receive reactions from the presenters who are touched by the students' insightful questions and interest.

If a member of the public has not already volunteered as an STS speaker and would like to do so, please call the Sharing Talents and Skills Office of the Westfield Public Schools at (908) 789-4463.

For those who have already done so, thank you for your invaluable time and knowledge. Your interactions with Westfield students is a wonderful way for them to gain further insight into their curriculum.

Lorrie Korecky
Westfield Public Schools

Community's Support Provides Comfort To Firefighter's Family

This past week we suffered the devastating loss of our brother, John Fiorino. The response and support of the neighbors, friends, Police Department, Rescue Squad and community was extraordinary.

We especially want to thank Fire Chief Paul A. Battiloro, Jr. Acting Captain Daniel J. Kelly and each and every one on the Fire Department. John was so proud to be a part of this group of caring people. It was a tremendous comfort to see how many were sorrowed at his death.

The Lord Jesus has given us his comfort and strength to accept his will in our lives.

Patti Petersen
Joanne Hughes
Westfield

Students and Staff Present Festive Day For Visiting Seniors at High School

Editor's Note: A copy of this letter was sent to Dr. Terry Riegel, Principal of Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School.

We want you to know how much we enjoyed Senior Citizen Day at the high school last Thursday (March 19). From the moment we entered to be greeted by the smiling faces of our young guides, we were taken through a day of fun, friendship, entertainment and great food.

The music by the trio and music teacher was professional in caliber. The games were great fun, the roses that were awarded were beautiful, and even bingo was enjoyable. (I forgot to mention the coffee and pastries when we arrived.)

From the library, we were led to the auditorium to enjoy a wonderful act taken from *Crazy For You*. From the "pit band" to the actors on stage, all were excellent. Scott, the triple threat lead, was great, as were all the rest of the cast. They were

marvelous.

We came back to the library to enjoy a really tasty lunch, which we finished (no doggie bags here).

It would be difficult to mention the names of all those who made this day possible: From you, to the teacher in charge of the day, to the teachers directing the musical, to those in the cafeteria, and, of course, to all those wonderful, talented, courteous and beautiful young men and women.

Special thanks to those who led the festivities in the library, to the musicians, to the actors, singers, and dancers, and to those who fed us and made us feel so much at home.

You can be proud of these young people who showed such loving concern for all of us "Golden Agers." Thanks again for a memorable day we won't soon forget.

Janette Rotella, President
Scotch Plains Golden Agers