

# The Westfield Leader

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## Class of 1998 Has A Lot to Celebrate As Westfield Finishes 'Road to Harvard'

Graduates...Blow your horns. Parents...Get out your checkbooks.... Your sons and daughters have officially concluded their public education in the Westfield and Scotch Plains-Fanwood school districts. So it's off to college...or the Jersey Shore for now.

This year's graduates have achieved a great deal of accomplishments: In Westfield, five Westfield High School (WHS) students have been named National Merit Finalists. Also, 104 students of the class have been inducted into the National Honor Society - accounting for more than a third of the class.

Another 22 students have been selected as Edward J. Bloustein Distinguished Scholars by the Garden State Scholarship Program of the New Jersey Department of Education. This distinction requires that students rank in the top 10 percent of their classes and have a combined Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) score of 1260, first, second or third in their class by the end of their junior year. Four of these students achieved a perfect score on the SAT.

We would like to point out the accomplishment of WHS senior George Wu, this year's recipient of the Mort Pye Award from the Star-Ledger. He will attend Northwestern University on the full scholarship in the fall. George scored a 1590 on the SAT, including a perfect 800 in the verbal section. Graduate Thomas Olsen scored a perfect 1600 joining a select group of 545 students from a pool of 1.8 million students nationwide who took the test.

At tonight's graduation the top female and male students will be announced. WHS does not use the titles valedictorian and salutatorian.

At SPFHHS, 18 seniors have been recognized as Bloustein Distinguished Scholars. Another 14 seniors have been named National Merit Commended students. Another three students have been commended in the National Scholarship Program.

During tonight's commencement exercises, Joyce Chen and Sheri Weinberg will be recognized as class valedictorian and salutatorian, respectfully. Class President is Adam Baumwall.

While this year is one of praise for our seniors, it is also one of sadness and change in the two school districts. Twenty-five public school members are retiring. The list includes both districts' Assistant Superintendents, Dr. Robert C. Rader and Dr. David Rock, WHS Assistant Principal Frank Scott, Assistant Business Manager Jean Poquette.

Among the teachers leaving the district is WHS Head Golf Coach Joe Soviero. He amassed a record of 196-23-1 in his 14 years as coach of the Blue Devils. Fourteen teachers with a combined 352 years of experience, an average of 25 years per staff member, are retiring. Also, we would like to mention Charles Soriano, an English teacher at WHS the past seven years and the advisor to the *Hi's Eye*, the student-run newspaper. He is headed for a department chairmanship at Bernards High School and he will be sorely missed by this school district.

In Scotch Plains-Fanwood, Dr. Terry Riegel, Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School Principal, is retiring after 35 years at the high school, the past 26 as Principal. He began in the district as a Social Studies teacher in 1963. Joining him in retirement is his wife, Arlene, a long-time math teacher at SP-FHS. Mrs. Riegel has been with the district for 29 years. Gene Schiller, SP-FHS Athletic Director, is retiring after 16 years. He is a former varsity head football coach with the Raiders. The combined years (for all retirees) in Scotch Plains-Fanwood is 192 years.

The conclusion of the school year in Westfield has also been marked with the conclusion of the countless hours put in by the Westfield School District Strategic Planning Council.

In May, meetings of the council's effort drew to a close with a weekend retreat at the high school after seven months. The effort included hundreds of volunteers, countless report drafts and e-mails. Many devoted committees met each week in their homes and elsewhere over the months of work.

"The more I learn, the less I know," as Yogi Berra was supposed to have said. This is exactly what Horace Corbin, Publisher of *The Westfield Leader* and *The Times of Scotch Plains and Fanwood* and a member of the Westfield Strategic Planning Committee, said he felt after months of intensive involvement with strategic planning and "The Road to Harvard." But what was made clear is that it is imperative to formulate a view and contribute to the future of our children's education. This is strategic planning.

After the wrap-up event of the strategic planning group, most participants quietly departed. When one woman asked Mr. Corbin what he thought, he responded, "Hmm...I need to reflect." She replied, "I

know exactly what you mean. I feel the same way." It was a time for introspection.

Each issue dealt with by the committees pulsed to the top priority only to be overwhelmed by the next issue. So, with some hesitation, we will attempt to present Mr. Corbin's thoughts about the strategic planning experience. But "caveat emptor" (buyer beware!)

Picture, if you will, a simmering bouillabaisse spiced with passion — and an enticing aroma. Dip in a spoon and fetch up many morsels that speak of funding, ethnicity, handicap accessibility, technology, citizenship, family involvement, world competition, values, security, accountability, home rule, state and court dictums and freedom of speech. If you want more, drop your ladle into the cauldron and you still will not hit bottom.

Therefore, as with any complex subject, the only way to understand it is to break it down into its small and manageable components; then review the parts and try to put them back together so it makes sense. Let us take a taste of some of the issues.

The State of New Jersey Department of Education and the state court system would seem to micro-manage our local education system and this attempt at control appears to be increasing. Perhaps, seeking equal opportunity for all is a well meant effort, but do we really want dictators about how we and our neighbors should run our schools, what we teach and how we spend our funds? This would drive us into a state of mediocrity. Ideally, we want to work together to achieve excellence — not mediocrity.

Let us turn to the oft-used term "technology," meaning computers, which is not an end in itself but merely a tool. The first as yet unanswered question that comes to mind is, "Is the use of computers the best way to educate our children or is it just an expensive distraction from the many fine teaching methods currently employed?"

And if "technology" is useful — why, how and how much? It is not enough to answer, "As much as we can get." We need to consider what can be achieved with how much "technology" and find a balance long before we reach a point of diminishing returns on our technology investments. Will endless planning outdate our system before we even start?

Political correctness. In an age of "political correctness" there are trendy words and concepts flowing freely. Some suggest we rid ourselves of books from the library because they are no longer acceptable or "appropriate." Is this worrisome? Do we intend to rewrite history? Are we submitting to media blitzes and hype? Can we help our children focus on quality and depth and avoid the shallow and glitzy? Also, somewhere in the strategic planning mix is the teachers union. It is an important part of the picture.

The good news is that the education system is very sound and the roots are deep. Achievement is high. Our professionals and students are remarkable. There is no sign of major structural damage. We can build on what we have. Yes, we have rising expectations and face new challenges and changing conditions. However, with hard work and energy the outcome can be outstanding and our children will thrive and be happy.

Exactly what you choose to do about education and our children is up to you.

Here is what this newspaper, over the next year, will do.

We plan to keep the community informed through interviews with the state Department of Education and Teachers Union. We will publish weekly articles from regional education professionals and run a contest about computer use in our local education system. We will listen, seek and publish.

Also, remember that kids need time to be kids — even though they already attend the "Harvard" of school districts.

The class achievements we have listed above not only represent personal achievements but also, the efforts of our teaching staff. While both districts will save money on salaries and benefits — given the seniority of retiring staff members — it is important that both districts look to hire teachers who continue to instill in our children a sense of accomplishment, responsibility and leadership in the same way that Dr. and Mrs. Riegel and Mr. Schiller have done in Scotch Plains-Fanwood or that Dr. Rock, Mr. Soriano, and Coach Soviero have accomplished in Westfield. Let's keep the road open to Harvard...or Kean University and Union County College, for those students staying home in Union County. After all, an education is something no one or organization can ever take away...Go get em' Class of '98.

## POPCORN™

### The Truman Show: Society As Big Brother

By Michael S. Goldberg

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



**4 popcorns**  
 Move over brother. Big Brother, that is. You have company. So make room on that couch in the television room...for the rest of the world. Around the globe, everyone is glued to the boob tube.

Peeping Toms all of them. Fanatically moored to *The Truman Show*, folks from all walks of life have become passive participants in one of the cruelest hoaxes ever perpetrated. The high concept premise makes for a mesmerizing movie experience, sparkling with entertaining wit, philosophical conjecture and eloquently delivered social statement.

All in the name of entertainment, which begets ratings, which beget advertising dollars, the line between viewer and voyeur has become unconsciously blurred. The first child "adopted by a corporation," Truman Burbank (Jim Carrey) was specifically acquired by TV honcho/visionary Christof (Ed Harris) to be the unwitting star of the 24-hour soap opera that bears his name.

Nowhere has it been truer, literally, that all the world's a stage. That observation by the bard echoes ironically, reverberating with near ominous glee as we watch Mr. Carrey's brilliant depiction of Truman, a classical movie sad sack of the Chaplin school. Only now, experiencing an epiphany at age 30, has the insurance salesman come to suspect that his idyllic existence in the picture-perfect hamlet of Seahaven is bogus.

Thus, when a stage light crashes to the street, though he has no way of knowing the fixture dropped from its perch high atop the world's largest dome, Truman is skeptical of an immediately issued radio report about an airplane losing its landing light.

Christof, an apt name for a TV producer with a god complex, fears not his only begotten protagonist's sudden uneasiness. In developing the world's most popular television show over the last 30 years, Harris's wonderfully sinister puppeteer has navigated technology's prodigal son through most of life's passages. Christof allows a rare interview on the subject, the obsequious reporter thankfully noting that the TV mogul jealously guards his privacy. A retrospective is broadcast specifically on Truman's near discoveries, a sick tie-in to make further hay of his crisis of fate.

One flashback uproariously documents an interloper jumping out of a gift-wrapped present many Christmases ago, blurring "It's all phony, Truman."

Director Peter Weir smartly flits through a lazy Susan of the same familiar oglers to offer a humorous survey of viewer reaction at each dramatic turn: a pair of young barmaids expound on the show's lore at a Truman theme bar while patrons make bets on a possible outcome; two maiden aunts ensconced on a couch nervously clutch at pillows; riveted to the screen, parking attendants encourage patrons to fetch their own cars; and a Japanese family sees *The Truman Show* as an entertaining way to learn English.

Strutting his stuff with a heretofore unseen subtlety and knowing compassion, Jim Carrey marvelously fleshes out the sort of hypothetical being for which there can be no real example. Just as Peter Sellers ingeniously embodied a character raised by television in "Being There," or how Jeff Bridges materialized into what a transplanted extraterrestrial would really be like in *Starman*, Carrey's babe in the woods is precisely what we'd expect of a naïf whose entire life has been whimsically pre-ordained by a passel of television script writers. An Oscar nomination seems quite likely. And a supporting Academy nod for Harris should be in the offing, too.

Among the other performances, Laura Linney is terrific as Meryl, the wary wife-actress who becomes fretful of recent changes in her normally docile Truman. While there are no commere-

cial per se, Meryl's adeptness at pointing up the ubiquitous product placements is devilish fun. Noah Emmerich is terribly convincing as beer-drinking, blue collar Marlon, Truman's best friend since childhood; Christof uses the pal's acquired trustworthiness to assert control whenever Truman exhibits what Orwell referred to in "1984" as wrong thinking. And in a small but emotionally symbolic stint, Natascha McElhone is effective as Lauren, the college infatuation who was written out of the script when her true sympathies threatened to tip off the buffaloed young innocent. He has carried a torch ever since.

Doubtless there are inconsistencies in the false world of Seahaven. And you can poke holes if you wish to deny yourself a good time. Just the idea of 5,000 cameras planted throughout the dome, including one in Truman's pencil sharpener at work, seems far fetched. And there's no mention of how this brave new world has been allowed to blatantly violate Truman Burbank's fourth Amendment right to privacy.

But once you decide to buy in, you're part and parcel of the never ending conundrum: art copies life; life then copies art; and on and on it ping-pongs, until our every decision is a consensus manufactured by our perceived reflections in the television screen.

An ingenious, hilariously thought-provoking story complimented by tight-on performances, inspired direction and a highly likable hero, *The Truman Show* is what they had in mind when they first said there's no business like show business.

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*The Truman Show, rated PG-13, is a Paramount Pictures release directed by Peter Weir and stars Jim Carrey, Laura Linney and Ed Harris. Running time: 104 minutes.*

## Being a Motel Manager Isn't a Happy Lifestyle

By Louis H. Clark

The late great "On the Road" man, Charles Kuralt, once said, "If you're looking for a good restaurant when you're traveling, drive around until you find a place without a cutesy name which is filled with local cars." It's too bad he never said anything about motels.

Motel food, after half a lifetime of traveling and eating, is, at best, mediocre. It all depends upon whether they have a cook or a microwave. Sometimes it's best to have the microwave.

But there is a change in the modern motel scene. More and more women are traveling on business and staying at motels.

The men usually sit on the side in solitary splendor reading the evening paper. The women gather together in clumps and talk in those eagerly polite tones women use when they don't really know who they're talking to very well.

A restaurant manager in a motel I frequent at least 12 times a year, bemoans this change.

"They don't drink," he moaned to me



BY JO & JOHN JACOBSON

## HUNKS: Hunks Are Hunky Dory

Like cats, certain words seem to lead many lives. Different generations adopt these multiple-use words to which they apply their own pet meanings. Hunk is an excellent example of a multiple-use word that not only leaps the generation gap, but the gender gap, as well.

Currently, a hunk is a term used by a woman to describe "a man who is pleasing to her eyes." While the idiom seems to be of recent vintage, Eric Partridge places the origin of this particular definition in Australia during the 1920s.

At that time it had the sense of a "big man" and was probably influenced by the expression, "a hunk of beef." But hunk had also been used by men to describe "a good looking woman." It survives today in the idiom, "a real (fine) hunk of woman," making this a truly bi-gender word (you read it here first).

Hunks also had an ethnic identity and at one time referred to "foreign laborers working in the United States." This use of the word was undoubtedly influenced by Hungarian immigrants, who were called hunks.

The words hunk or hunks have still another origin, but with much older credentials, having been derived from an old Dutch term, hunky dory, popular in New York City during the Dutch occupation. Hunky dory meant "fine or pleasing;" hunky stems from the Dutch word honk meaning "goal, good retreat, or safe place." Dory also meant "good." The words hunk or hunks are condensed versions of hunky dory and are still in use today.

All of the above suggest the following car-bumper prose: "I Honk For Hunks."

one evening when it was particularly slow.

"But what about those glasses of white wine I usually see?" I asked.

"Even that's only once in a while," the manager groaned. "They do it at home so they'll look sophisticated. Here one little drink lasts a whole meal. How can I keep up profits?"

"And the food they eat — salads made to the exact specifications with the dressing on the side. So they won't even eat that much. If you knew the amount of salads we have to dump, it would make you cry."

He shrugged when I asked, "How about a husband and wife eating here?"

"He will order a chop or a piece of steak. She'll have, what else, a salad. And a man with his wife tips very low. It's tough to keep waitresses nowadays."

"How about children?"

"Please," he held up his hands. "It's only in the ads that we welcome them with open arms. The spillage they cause!"

So to paraphrase Gilbert and Sullivan, "A motel restaurant manager's job is not a happy one."

## Letters to the Editor

### Diner Site Should be Rehabilitated To Preserve Quality of Downtown

I write in response to several recent letters in this newspaper regarding proposed development of the Excellent Diner site. As all know, the Excellent Diner site had lain fallow for many years. For many months, I have personally pleaded with the owners of the site to take action on this eyesore. Having

no desire to remove another property from the tax rolls, I have always preferred that the site be developed commercially.

However, given the choice between continuing to tolerate the abominable state of this property versus preserving open space and restoring some of the breathing room and small town intimacy of downtown Westfield, we must choose the latter. I believe that it would be a mistake to do nothing, especially in light of the downtown revitalization occurring all around the site and, additionally, the council's recent passage of a commercial and residential property maintenance code.

Some have criticized the council's unanimous support of setting aside \$100,000 for the possible acquisition of the site and the rehabilitation of it into a "pocket park." What must be understood, however, is that it was only after the council included this funding in its 1998 budget that the owners of the site have finally moved to develop the site themselves. Thus, despite the criticism, we have been successful in removing this unacceptable eyesore from our central business district.

There are as many reasons for doing nothing as there are those who will be critical of nothing getting done. This council preferred to take action, and for that we should all be thankful.

Thomas C. Jardim  
 Mayor  
 Westfield

### Sex Education Viewed As Reason for Decline In Nation's Morality

No one should be surprised at the collapse of morality as seen in school shoot-outs, broken homes, domestic violence, pornography and soaring teenage pregnancy rates.

For more than 20 years, schools have included sex education (the mechanics and "how to" in the reproductive process). Since these massive programs began, sexual activity has increased.

What did we expect? Surely not virtue, reverence and respect. As their elders keep promulgating birth control and abortion, and wasting class time and tax dollars on a dead end, we have only ourselves to blame for the violence all across our land.

America will continue to get inferior results as long as we devalue the sanctity of human life.

Julianne B. Carl  
 Westfield

### Family Life Curriculum Was Based On One-Sided, Biased Information

On June 12 I hand delivered my critique of the Westfield School System's Family Life Education curriculum to Superintendent of Schools Dr. William J. Foley. The following is the letter I wrote to Dr. Foley:

In light of the fact that the Westfield Board of Education refuses to include the input of parents whose views are not aligned with those of the education bureaucracy, I look forward to your demonstrating the open-mindedness and common courtesy of giving strong consideration to incorporating these recommen-

### Funds for Diner Site Could be Better Used At Mindowaskin Outlet

In regard to the use of the previous Excellent Diner site, which has been vacant for some time since the diner was shipped to Germany, I strongly feel that such a plot should not be made into a mini park. It just would not fit into that area and be of real value to Westfield.

It would be much better to utilize the \$100,000 that has been included in Westfield matching municipal funds towards the purchase price of this property, and instead use such funds to repair the overlook at the dam on the Mindowaskin Park outlet.

The concrete overlook at the park is beginning to depreciate badly and is falling apart, and it is going to have to be redone; therefore, the town should appropriate money to build a new overlook.

In my opinion, the Excellent Diner should never have been removed from this property. But since the diner is gone, a better use of the lot would be to expand the municipal parking lot which abuts the property.

I believe that using this lot for additional parking along with the value of putting money into the overlook at the dam on the Mindowaskin Park outlet, would both be of value to Westfield, and I hope that it can be done.

H. Emerson Thomas  
 Former Mayor  
 Westfield

Kathleen Hintze  
 Westfield