

Candidate Forums

Eight Candidates for Four Seats on Westfield Town Council Participate In Candidate Forum Sponsored by *Leader* and League of Women Voters

By MICHELLE H. LePOIDEVIN
Specialty Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

WESTFIELD — Eight Westfield Town Council candidates were given the opportunity to state their platforms and answer questions during a special forum co-sponsored by *The Westfield Leader* and the Westfield Area League of Women Voters last Wednesday evening in the Council Chambers.

Republican First Ward Councilman Gregory S. McDermott faced Democratic challenger Marilyn Gulotta and Second Ward Councilman Matthew P. Albano was challenged by Democratic candidate Joseph Stoner.

Republican Third Ward Councilman Neil F. Sullivan faced Democratic challenger Claire Lazarowitz, while Republican Fourth Ward Councilwoman Janis Fried Weinstein took on Democrat Schuyler Quackenbush.

The debate questions, which were not available to the candidates prior to the forum, were crafted by Westfield residents, members of the press and the political parties. The areas of interest were devised by the League of Women Voters.

Eight questions were asked along party lines, with one candidate from each party given an opportunity to respond. Individual questions were asked of each candidate. Four "yes" and "no" questions were asked by reporters from Westfield High School's newspaper, the *Hi's Eye*, and each candidate was given the opportunity to supply a closing statement.

Publisher of *The Leader*, Horace R. Corbin, was the moderator for the event, while Scotch Plains resident Bonnie Ruggiero of the League of Women Voters timed the candidate's responses.

What follows are the questions and a synopsis of their responses, including direct quotations, to what may very well be the issues voters will consider before going to the polls next Tuesday, November 2.

Party Questions:
The Leader: What is the role of the political party in Westfield's elections and government? How does the party work at the local level and how does it relate to its hierarchy at the county and state level? How do the two parties (Democrat and Republican) interact in conducting government? What are the benefits and chal-

lenges that result?
Mr. Albano: "The role, as I see it, of the GOP is to promote good government, to attract candidates who can serve in the best interests of the community. I do not think it is good for one party to completely control, such as the Freeholders of this county." Mr. Albano called for a blend of the two parties.

Mr. Stoner: "I don't think that needs rebutting. I think the purpose of the political party is to build a support system for developing candidates." He referred to the past control by the GOP, which comprised the council over past years.

Leader: In your opinion, do we have good government in Westfield? During the past year, there have been charges that some appointments and voting have been motivated by special interests such that good government was impeded. Do you believe this to be true? What measures do you suggest be taken to ensure that Westfield has the best government possible?

Mr. Stoner: "Indeed, we do have good government in Westfield, there's no doubt about it." The Common Cause Chairman said that he feels there was an "unfortunate situation in the past year where there was a manipulation in terms of awarding contracts" for services. He referred to the benefits of the Common Cause Ordinance.

Mr. McDermott: The candidate stated that an example of good government can be found by looking at what the Town Council has done over the past year. "Good government stems from individuals working together with the goal" of improving the Town of Westfield.

Leader: With the proposed expenditure in excess of \$4 billion at Newark International Airport for expansion and improvement, what should Westfield's government body be doing to make sure airplane noise above the town is limited or lessened?

Mr. Sullivan: The candidate asserted that the council must work with and encourage all surrounding communities and New Jersey's leaders to work with FAA for an ocean routing flight plan that would take airplane noise and flights away from residential areas. He called the problem "a quality of life issue." Mr. Sullivan pointed to the council's successful campaign for banning train

whistles for a better quality of life in town.

Mr. Quackenbush: Cooperating at the county and state level must be accomplished, according to Mr. Quackenbush. He stated that this can be accomplished by rotating flights with various communities over the course of the year at various times of the year. He believes it is the role of the council to find the best solution to the problem.

Leader: How do you balance spending versus responding to all the desires for services? Is there a priority list that can be prepared and made available to the public? Can this be kept up to date to assist with long range planning and budgeting? What are some of the top priorities?

Mrs. Gulotta: "There has to be a set of priorities. There is no community in the world that has unlimited spending." She stated that better communication with citizens will help arrange a priority list of their needs, while considering the amount of money the council can spend.

Mrs. Weinstein: The candidate outlined projects such as improved public safety, renovated parks, fields and ballfields, which have been necessitated by the community and worked on by the council. She said the council has managed a "balance in spending," especially with the Public Works Department regarding road repair.

Leader: Do you foresee expanding Westfield's participation in shared services programs? Are there ways for the school systems and the towns to join forces and increase efficiency. What other shared services opportunities do you think might be possible?

Mrs. Weinstein: The incumbent pointed to the council's shared services relationships between the

Westfield Board of Health other communities in the area, the county, Westfield Board of Education and the Public Works Department. She added that she would like to see a sharing between the town's library and smaller towns, similar to the sharing of the Westfield tax collector with Mountainside. She would like to work with the school board in maintaining and sharing parks and ballfields.

Ms. Lazarowitz: "It is very important to have shared expenses. This is the future of local government." She believes the town could get involved with cooperative buying with other towns. She noted that shared services is "an important part of town government."

Leader: How can Westfield modernize and apply technology to improve operations? It has been suggested that the Internet might be a useful tool for the town to conduct business with its citizens such as with licenses and permits. The TV station has also been suggested as a potential new tool to improve services and to reduce costs. What do you think are some of the areas of opportunities for the use of technology?

Mr. Quackenbush: "I definitely agree that the opportunity either by the services provided by the Internet is vast and the information provided by TV-36 is enticing." He believes that using TV-36, but basing it at Town Hall, would be an important forum to bring the community together. He believes the communication of TV-36 during the water emergency was effective, and is a type of media that can be built upon. He also believes the town should provide services over the Internet.

Mr. Sullivan: The incumbent sees the Internet as a wonderful tool for

delivering "outstanding customer service" to our community. He also stressed his work over three years to renew the town's contract with Comcast and works as Council Liaison with the town's Media Advisory Board to improve the use of the TV-36. He called the Internet a "vast untapped resource" and feels Westfield is behind the curve of other communities in delivering government to the town via the Internet.

Leader: Given the announcement of the retirement of Edward A. Gottko, the current Town Administrator, please describe the job of administrator and what qualities you will look for in selecting the new town administrator.

Mr. McDermott: The incumbent stated that the position is "extremely important in the Town of Westfield" and will require a stable professional who can effectively guide the council and serve as a manager of the entire town and its departments. He said that a candidate for the position will need to be a "tremendous manager" with "tremendous skills and reputation" to lead the council into the next century.

Mrs. Gulotta: The candidate called the role of Town Administrator "the major professional executive" of the town. "We need to vote for the best person for the job."

Leader: The determination of the special improvement district (SID) gives a district an advantage for grant approval and tax-relief consideration. Should the SID concept be applied to Central Avenue and the other corri-

dors of Westfield?
Ms. Lazarowitz: "Absolutely. We do need this very much in the Third Ward." She believes that Central Avenue is the gateway to Westfield and called for a balance of these areas throughout the town. The candidate added that it is "extremely important" to put money, effort and time into renovating these gateways to the town.

Mr. Albano: Mr. Albano pointed to North Avenue, South Avenue and Mountain Avenue as other "key gateways" to Westfield, along with Central Avenue, which deserve attention. "Let's expand the boundaries to these areas," he said of the SID. He pointed to the recent receipt of a county grant to improve the streetscape, lighting and plantings throughout the town.

Individual Questions:
Leader to Mr. Quackenbush: The Fourth Ward contains Tamaques Park and The Memorial Pool, which are important to all citizens of the town. The Recreation Department has proposed a major expansion of the Memorial Pool Complex and has proposed parking modifications at Tamaques Park. What are your views of these initiatives and of other similar ones proposed at other parks by the Recreation Department?

Mr. Quackenbush: Although he supports the renovations at Memorial Pool and Park, he does not support the extent of the Commission's proposal. He believes that the Commission "could have communicated

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Paid for by "The Committee To Elect Phil Wiener" to Scotch Plains Township Council, Harvey Marks, Treasurer, 2143 West Broad ST. Scotch Plains New Jersey, 07076

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