

# THE WESTFIELD LEADER.

Ad Populos, Non Altius, Pervenimus

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WINTER HAS SPRUNG?...These beautiful yellow daffodils are weighed down by a snowfall which surprised residents early Sunday morning.

## Demolition Slated Soon For House Damaged In Heating Oil Spill

By LAWRENCE HENRY  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

The Westfield Town Council has approved an application to demolish a house on Everson Place which was damaged five years ago by a 400-gallon basement heating oil spill, according to Third Ward Councilman Neil F. Sullivan.

No specific demolition date has been set since the application, which was approved several weeks ago, has not yet been passed to the town's Building Department for permits.

Valerie Salone of the Building Department said the town expects to receive that application "within a few days."

The demolition, when it occurs, will bring to a close a five-year dispute over responsibility for the original oil spill. McDowell's Oil Heat, Inc., of Westfield, spilled the oil during an early fall refill of the house's fuel oil tank in 1995.

Homeowners Burton and Nancy Michaels settled their \$2.5 million lawsuit against McDowell's and the Utica Mutual Insurance Company, the insurer of McDowell's Oil Heat, in June of last year.

Prudential Insurance Company, carrier of the Michaelses' homeowner insurance, and MacArthur Fuel Oil, who were also named in the suit, apparently did not participate in the settlement. MacArthur

took over the McDowell heating oil service contract after the spill. Mr. Michaels, reached at his employer, Statistical Research, Inc. of Westfield, would not disclose amounts and terms of the settlement, other than to say that Utica Mutual bought the house.

"They've literally put a gag order on me," he said. "We settled with the (Utica) insurance company, let's put it that way. Under normal conditions, I'd scream from the rooftops, but I can't do that."

Mr. Michaels said he and his family plan to continue to live in Westfield.

They have lived in rental housing since the oil spill, and continue to do so.

They may buy a condominium or a townhouse, Mr. Michaels said. The house on Everson Place stands empty, as it has for five years. A sodden Yellow Pages lies on a walkway. A wooden swing and trapeze set in the back yard has worn gray in the weather.

Visible in a garage window, a pair of golf spikes and a basketball net hang unused from a nail. There is no discernible smell of oil — a smell that had troubled neighbors after the original spill.

"I hope they tear it down soon," a neighbor said. "It's been an eyesore for years."



SPRING IN THE SNOW...Despite a dusting of snow, these tulips manage to show their bright hues of red and yellow near the train station in Westfield.

## Voters to Decide Fate of \$57.2 Mil. Budget During School Elections on Tuesday

By PAUL J. PEYTON  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

Westfield voters will go to the polls this Tuesday to decide the fate of this year's proposed school tax levy of \$48.2 million to support a spending plan of \$57.2 million. An additional \$994,000 in taxes, bringing the tax levy to \$49 million, was previously approved by voters as part of a referendum in December of 1998.

If the tax levy passes, the impact for Westfield property taxes will be \$157 a year on a home assessed at \$174,000, the average assessment in town. The budget calls for a 9 cent increase in the school tax rate, from \$2.63 to \$2.72.

In the past few years the school tax rate has risen between 5 and 8 cents

per \$100 of assessed valuation. In the early 1990s, school tax hikes ranged from 13 to 18 cents. Last year's increase was 7 cents.

In addition to property taxes, which account for 86 percent of the budget, state aid of \$3.8 million and \$2.1 million of surplus funds also help support this year's spending plan.

The surplus, or free balance, as it is commonly referred to, is money appropriated but not spent from the previous year, along with unanticipated revenues. This year, the school board used \$2.1 of a \$3.9 million free balance.

State mandates do not permit districts to hold onto more than 6 percent of their total budget in surplus. The district received just under \$1.1 million in federal and state grants

and used \$994,401 in miscellaneous funds, such as rental income from the Union County Educational Services Commission for the former Lincoln School Building and attendance fees for athletic fees. The largest segment of miscellaneous revenue is \$480,000 from investments.

The total budget represents a 4.47 percent increase over last year, or 1.47 percent over the state-mandated 3 percent cap. The district sought and received an "enrollment growth adjustment" from the state Department of Education.

If a school levy fails at the voting booth, the budget is turned over to the Town Council, which can either keep the budget as is or slash the amount to be raised in taxes. The school board can then appeal that

decision to the state Department of Education.

Since 1982, all but five school tax levies have been approved by voters. The most recent defeated school budget occurred in 1994.

In addition to taxes, the district has received \$3.8 million in state aid — an increase of \$156,000 over last year.

School officials and Board of Education members have emphasized that this year's budget addresses two critical areas — the enrollment spikes now in the district and the district's deficiencies in the area of computer technology for teachers and students alike.

Officials have said the district has experienced a 14 percent enrollment

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## Westfield's Michael Kessler Runs Unopposed As Five Candidates Battle for Three Open Seats

By MICHELLE H. LePOIDEVIN  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

The campaign trail for seats on the Westfield Board of Education, as well as whether to give a red or green

light to the school board's proposed \$57.2 million budget are issues which will reach culmination when voters head to the polls next Tuesday, April 18, to let their voices be heard.

Three seats for three-year terms are being sought by incumbents Anne L. Riegel, Dr. B. Carol Molnar and Thomas Taylor, as well as newcomers Peter W. Billson and Kimberly Rhodes. A one-year term is being sought, unopposed, by incumbent Michael J. Kessler.

Looking back at her experience during the campaign, Mrs. Riegel told *The Westfield Leader*, "I am thrilled with the outpouring of support I've received from the community."

The candidate is particularly concerned with keeping the board focused on finding a solution to the

enrollment crunch at the high school, continuing to craft a curriculum to improve the education of all children in the district, and keeping technology a top priority in the district.

Mrs. Riegel has served on the school board for the past six months, after being appointed to fill the vacancy left by Ginger Hardwick's resignation.

A graduate of the Wharton School of Business at the University of Pennsylvania, Mrs. Riegel holds a Bachelor of Science Degree in Finance and Marketing. She also received a Master of Business Administration degree in Finance and Accounting from Columbia University, New York City.

Her work experience includes financial positions at Equitable Capital Management and Citicorp Invest-

ment Bank, both of New York City, where she performed investment analyses of companies for debt investments and mergers and acquisitions.

Mrs. Riegel has been assigned to the Finance, Long Range Planning and Curriculum Instruction and Programs committees.

The candidate, who moved to Westfield seven years ago, first became active in the 1994 bond referendum effort which addressed space shortages caused by increasing elementary enrollments. In 1998, she was appointed to the Citizens Advisory Committee on Capital Projects, which reviewed projects for the bond referendum passed later that year.

Mrs. Riegel is now in her fifth year on the Jefferson Elementary School

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## May 1 Marks Next Cycle Of Pool Reg.

By KIM KINTER  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

The Westfield Recreation Department, located at the Municipal Building on East Broad Street, will be open Tuesday, April 18, from 7 to 9 p.m. to take pictures needed for Memorial Pool membership cards.

The department extended its hours during March, this month and in May to handle the registration of pool memberships.

No more pool memberships, however, will be available for sale again until Monday, May 1, when memberships will be open for sale to everyone, including all Westfield residents and those who live outside of the town. Openings for 1,800 individuals will be available.

Beginning April 13 and continuing

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## Publisher's Note

This edition of *The Westfield Leader* has been mailed to every resident in the Town of Westfield and in the Borough of Mountainside to inform voters of the issues and of the candidates for the School Board and School Budget elections this Tuesday, April 18. Similarly, *The Times of Scotch Plains-Fairwood*, our sister newspaper, has been mailed to everyone in those communities. We urge all to vote.

We're pleased to provide everyone within this issue our 28th annual edition of *This Is Westfield*. We like creating it and hope you enjoy reading the publication.

Also on display in this issue are profiles and releases of the candidates for the Seventh Congressional District and U.S. Senate for the June 6 Primary Elections.

Look for the candidates discussing their views on TV 34, 35 and 36. Research their positions and see up-to-date voting results on the Internet at [www.goleader.com](http://www.goleader.com). Our towns have good government and great candidates seeking office. Celebrate and thank them all, win or lose.

We also use this edition to present ourselves to those of you who are not subscribers. I believe good newspapers help communities, and that's what we're trying to do. Please join us and subscribe.

-Horace R. Corbin, Publisher



LET'S GO FLY A KITE...To celebrate "Spirit Days" at Franklin Elementary School in Westfield, students decorated and flew kites during a sunny afternoon. A school parent anonymously donated a kite for every child. Pictured above are third graders as they try to get their kites off the ground.

## Angels of Fire Rally for Families Of Deceased Firefighters in Area

By DEBORAH MADISON  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

The Angels of Fire, a motorcycle group of 26 firefighters from various Central New Jersey Towns, isn't your typical gang of black leather jacketed, Harley-Davidson bikers. Besides fighting fires and riding their Harley's together, the Angels of Fire have formed a social club that organizes charity events to raise money for the families of deceased firefighters.

Their maiden charity ride, scheduled for May, will be dedicated to the family of Scott Garber, a Westfield Fire Captain who died of a heart

attack last June at the age of 41 at his home in Fanwood. Captain Garber was promoted to the rank of Captain in February of 1999.

Captain Garber was an advocate for the widows and orphans of young firefighters who died while off duty. As Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the State Firemen's Mutual Benevolent Association (FMBA), Captain Garber lobbied for legislation that would allow the families of firefighters who died before they retired to receive the same pension benefits as the families of those who died after retirement or while in the line of duty.

Current legislation does not allot full pension benefits to the families of those who die before retirement or those who die while off duty. A good friend of Captain Garber's, John Fiorino, a Westfield firefighter, died of heart attack at age 39, while off duty, on vacation in March of 1998.

Because he was not retired and did not die in the line of duty, his widow and three children were not entitled to full pension benefits.

New legislation was signed into law in January, reported William Lavin, President of the Firemen's Association, thanks to the lobbying

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# School Board Election Edition 2000

Special Coverage Begins on B-6



CYAN YELLOW MAGENTA BLACK