

Reprint of Letter Mailed to County Residents Re. Certified Deed Copies

Editor's Note: The following is a reprint of a letter received by certain Union County property owners offering to provide a certified copy of one's property deed for \$79.50. The letter has prompted a notice from Union County Clerk Joanne Rajoppi urging residents to avoid paying an excessive amount for a document readily available from the county.

National Deed Service, Inc.
1201 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW - Suite 300
Washington, D.C. 20004
Phone 800-634-7126
www.nationaldeed.com

RE: UNION COUNTY CLERK DOCUMENT [document number]
Our records show that property deed document [document number] recorded [date] indicates your ownership interest in the property located at [address]. At the time you purchased your property, a deed was prepared that shows the title was transferred to you. This deed was recorded by the Union County Clerk. The U.S. Government Federal Citizen Information Center website recommends that property owners should have an official or certified copy of their deed. If you don't already have this important document, you may obtain one now. This document provides evidence that your property was transferred to you. To obtain a certified copy of your deed, complete the order form below and return it in the enclosed postage paid envelope with your payment of \$79.50 which includes postage and handling or fill in the credit card information below and either mail or fax your order to 800-682-1707. Due to the large number of transactions, this will be your only notice of our service. All orders will be handled promptly.
National Deed Service, Inc.

National Deed Service, Inc. is not affiliated with any government agency. Many government records are available free or at a nominal cost from government agencies.

* Below the letter text, an order form requests payment information and includes a section in which an individual can write his or her credit card number with expiration date to mail back to the company.

Deed 'Scam' Letter

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sin, New York and Pennsylvania. He does not serve Connecticut.

Mr. Isaacson said his letter includes a disclaimer that reads: "National Deed Service, Inc., is not affiliated with any governmental agency."

"It's really a service (for people) who don't have a copy of their deed," Mr. Isaacson said. He said "independent contractors," who research and obtain certified copies of documents for him, obtain records. Mr. Isaacson said he buys mailing lists for potential customers from another company.

"There is nothing criminal involved, but it is, nonetheless, price gouging," Ms. Rajoppi told *The Leader*, noting she had inquired about the legality of the letter to Union County Counsel Robert Barry.

She said residents can easily access and obtain records by going on the clerk's website or by writing or calling her office at (908) 527-4787.

Neil Sullivan, president of Westfield Mortgage and a former Westfield town councilman, said he can gain access to property records and print them for an entire town "in a few minutes," utilizing a number of websites such as the county clerks' websites in Union and Middlesex Counties.

"So, it's not that difficult to get or produce," Mr. Sullivan said. "The data is all out there and it is all public."

Union County Prosecutor Ted Romankow said his office has assigned an investigator to the case to look at the

legality of NDS's operation, including whether the company pays New Jersey's 7-percent sales tax.

"We are looking into this thoroughly," Mr. Romankow said.

Assistant Prosecutor William Kolano, assigned to the case by the prosecutor's office, said the mailing is "probably not in any violation of any criminal laws in New Jersey."

He said Ms. Rajoppi's action to bring the matter to the public and the news media's attention has helped make residents knowledgeable.

United States Postal Service spokesman George Flood said in an e-mail to *The Leader*, "The overwhelming majority of direct marketers are legitimate business people. Unfortunately, there are isolated con artists, who will prey on unwitting victims."

"Accordingly, U.S. Postal Inspectors investigate any crime in which the U.S. Mail is used to further a scheme - whether it originated in the mail, by telephone or on the Internet. The use of the U.S. Mail is what makes it mail fraud."

He said anyone who feels he or she may have been victimized in a fraud scheme that involves the U.S. Mail can submit a Mail Fraud Complaint Form to the U.S. Postal Inspection Service. Forms are available online at usps.com/postalinspectors or by calling the Inspection Service's Newark office at (973) 693-5400.



Nathan Lawrence for *The Westfield Leader*

HISTORIC CEMETERY...The Westfield Planning Board on Monday night approved the burial grounds of The Presbyterian Church in Westfield near the corner of East Broad and Mountain Avenue as a site for historic designation. The cemetery was started in the 1720s and includes the graves of Westfield founders, Revolutionary War soldiers and Civil War veterans.

WF Planning Bd. Supports Cemetery Historic Designation

By NORDETTE N. ADAMS
Specially Written for *The Westfield Leader*

WESTFIELD — The town's planning board Monday night approved The Presbyterian Church in Westfield's request for review and recommendation of its application for historic designation of its cemetery.

The cemetery, formally called The Burial Ground of the Presbyterian Church in the West Fields of Elizabethtown, is located at 125 Mountain Avenue.

Dave Rogers of Kimball Circle presented the request and told the board that the cemetery has approximately 1,125 graves.

"Many of the original residents and town founders like Scudder, Hetfield and Quimby, some of the names you see on town streets, are buried in the cemetery," he said.

The burials date back to the 1720s, which is before the official founding of Westfield, and includes the soldiers' graves from the Revolutionary War, French-Indian War, War of 1812 and the Civil War, said Mr. Rogers. According to WestfieldHistory.com, the burial ground also includes the unmarked graves of slaves.

Another historic feature of the cem-

etry is stone carvings by Ebenezer Price, said Mr. Rogers. Mr. Price was a renowned stonecutter of the period who was also active in the church and, according to the history website, died in 1745. He is buried in plot no. 277. Stone cutting is considered to be an American folk art.

Board president Vincent Wilmt asked Mr. Rogers the number of Revolutionary War soldiers buried in the cemetery. Mr. Rogers said he'd have to verify the exact number, but he believed it to be 71.

He said that designation of the cemetery as historic would be a "benefit to the town, the town's history and the church's history." The board unanimously approved the request.

Prior to the founding of Fairview Cemetery in 1868, the Burial Grounds of the Presbyterian Church was Westfield's main cemetery. Limited by space, use of the church cemetery declined.

In an interview following the meeting, Mr. Rogers told *The Westfield Leader* that new burials allowed in the cemetery will be confined to those who can prove they have a plot deed. "I only know of one," he said, "and the owner's not interested."

Westfield Council

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As per the new measure, once a demolition is approved at a council meeting on a Tuesday, "the next day, Wednesday, the authority will be given to the building department, which will be able to give a form that the builder and property owner would have to serve upon those people to receive notice."

"Notice would arrive through personal service or certified mail. Once the applicant is able to prove that he or she has given notice, the building department will then count three business days. At the end of the three days, they will be able to issue the permit," Mr. Foerst added.

The notification contents would include the date of the council's approval, town official information, contact information for the property owner and contractor and the estimated date of the demolition.

He added, "This is going to have a huge impact on letting the neighborhood know what's going on. It will make our neighborhoods safer and take away the shock factor that exists."

Third Ward Councilman David Haas asked, "Could we extend notification beyond neighboring properties?"

Town Attorney Robert Cockren said, "The courts have looked at a number of the cases where municipalities have sought to impose more onerous requirements than the state statute permits in the area of zoning and, generally, those are struck down."

Second Ward Councilwoman Vicki Kimmins said, "neighbors who do get the notice can make copies and distribute them around the neighborhood."

Scotch Plains Mayor Martin Marks and Township Manager Tom Atkins have contacted their Westfield counterparts, Mayor Andy Skibitsky and Town Administrator Jim Gildea, about

Board of Ed.

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Ms. Mammen responded, "I don't think we have the luxury to wait, because that is just saying that we are not going to meet the [state and federal curriculum] standards. If we can be creative with getting the resources, that's great. If we can't get anything, then we will take a step back."

Board member Richard Solomon commented on the importance of concentrating the technology curriculum on younger students. "For me, fifth grade is the priority," he said.

Board member Julia Walker disagreed, saying, "With sixth-, seventh- and eighth- graders, I think we will get more bang for our buck... They're ready. They can be moved along more quickly."

Pam Friedman, a computer teacher at Roosevelt Intermediate School, agreed that there should be more technology curriculum for middle school students. She said, "There are sixth-graders who can have a computer class the first marking period, nothing for seventh grade, and somehow not get into an eighth-grade elective. These students go into high school having taken their last computer class in the first marking period of sixth grade."

Mr. Cullen responded, "I think intermediate is important, but I think elementary is equally important."

He said, "I really urge you to keep the grade levels together and move them forward concurrently. Because if you do it in phases - well, it's like the 'Sophie's Choice' of technology."

extending the use of the Lamberts Mill Road conservation center to Scotch Plains residents again this year. Last year's agreement, in which the town sold 26 permits to Scotch Plains residents, kicked in around July.

"From our perspective, it's a very easy and worthwhile program to make a few dollars... I recommend keeping it. With a full year, we might have much more usage," Mr. Gildea said.

Westfield Third Ward Councilman Mark Ciarrocca said, "Scotch Plains is very anxious to do it. We're charging Scotch Plains twice what we're charging Westfield. It has a positive impact on Westfield taxpayers. It's a benefit to Scotch Plains residents. In my mind, it's really a win-win (situation)."

"I would disagree with Councilman Ciarrocca. In my mind, it's a win-lose (situation)," Mr. Foerst replied. Mr. Foerst touted how "shared services can save us money in the future," but said it has a "negative and disproportionate impact on my residents (in the fourth ward), who are going to feel the traffic impact, who are going to see the shrubs on their streets."

Fellow Fourth Ward Councilman Tom Bigosinski suggested a "trial" period, where the practice could be continued with Scotch Plains, but instead of issuing 300 permits, the town would accept 100 to 150.

Mayor Skibitsky said that anything "significantly" less than 300 wouldn't "be a fair trial," and recommended allowing 300 permits for this year alone. Both fourth ward councilmen said they would not support the measure.

Kasko

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(Bernard) Tracy, the council, the PBA, Mr. Kasko and his rep."

Mr. Gildea said Mr. Kasko would "still be working for the town. He will retire later this year. He will continue to be here until that time. I can't share too much about that. He'll be working for the town."

Concerning a financial settlement and obligation, Mr. Gildea said, "I can't say. There is a financial piece of this. It's very fair for both sides."

The disciplinary hearing carried a recommendation, which Mr. Gildea said "is part of the agreement, but will not be carried out, assuming all performance measures will be agreed upon between Kasko and the Town of Westfield."

In terms of the "performance measures," they include handling "all outstanding issues" of the disciplinary hearing, the lawsuit against the town and Mr. Kasko's agreement to submit a letter of retirement "that is irrevocable."

When asked of Mr. Kasko's duties, powers and status, Mr. Gildea responded, "He will remain as an employee until his retirement."

The Leader has filed an Open Public Records Act (OPRA) request to the Town of Westfield in regards to copies of the settlement agreement, all related documents, correspondence, e-mails, hearing officer and expert reports, meeting minutes and taped sessions, in addition to all costs to the taxpayer.

The Leader made calls to Mr. Kasko's attorney, Anthony Pope, Mr. Kasko and Mayor Andy Skibitsky, but none were returned as of press time.

POLICE BLOTTER

Westfield

Saturday, January 27, a Union resident reported that his motor vehicle was damaged through criminal mischief while parked in a municipal lot behind businesses along East Broad Street. The passenger side mirror on the vehicle was removed and the driver's side mirror was broken.

Saturday, January 27, Christopher Hopke, 35, of Cranford was arrested at Gallows Hill Road and Fairacres Avenue for allegedly driving while intoxicated. Hopke was released to a responsible individual.

Sunday, January 28, Davidson Seide, 21, of Elizabeth was arrested during a motor vehicle stop at South and Windsor Avenues on an outstanding Elizabeth criminal warrant with \$100 bail. He was released on his own recognizance per the Elizabeth Police Department.

Sunday, January 28, a resident of the 200 block of Watchung Fork reported that two flower planters situated in her front yard were damaged as a result of an apparent act of criminal mischief.

Sunday, January 28, Jeffrey Velez, 31, of Kenilworth was arrested during a motor vehicle stop in the 700 block of North Avenue on a contempt of court motor vehicle warrant issued by Kenilworth. Velez also was cited for operating a motor vehicle with a revoked driver's license. He posted the \$282 bail on the warrant and was released.

Monday, January 29, an East Broad Street business reported that a basement area was unlawfully entered. Nothing was reported missing, but a door and handle were damaged.

Monday, January 29, Charles Newsome, 21, of Elizabeth was arrested following a motor vehicle stop at East South and Windsor Avenues. He was charged with possession of a prohibited weapon, described by police as a gravity knife, and with hindering apprehension for allegedly providing police with a false name and age.

Newsome also was wanted on an outstanding Elizabeth traffic warrant for \$380. Released on his own recognizance per the Elizabeth Municipal Court on that warrant pending a future court date, he was released with summonses on the Westfield charges with a February 5 court date.

Tuesday, January 30, Jennifer L. Terry, 27, of Linden was arrested at Central and Lenox Avenues on a motor vehicle warrant issued by the Westfield Municipal Court. She posted the \$225 bail and was released.

Wednesday, January 31, David Napiorski, 23, of Westfield was arrested at Westfield police headquarters on an outstanding Scotch Plains traffic warrant with \$120 bail. He was released on his own recognizance per the Scotch Plains Police Department.

Wednesday, January 31, Gerald Thompson, 42, of Westfield was arrested at Plainfield police headquarters on open criminal warrants from Westfield and Middlesex Borough with bail amounts of \$500 and \$43, respectively. He was committed to the Union County jail on default of bail.

Wednesday, January 31, Emily Smythe, 23, of Westfield was arrested in Scotch Plains on an outstanding Westfield criminal warrant. She was released after posting \$500 bail.

Thursday, February 1, Colin Faust, 19, Evan Pantano, 19, Nicholas Johnson, 19, and Scott Steinbrecher, 20, all of Westfield, were arrested for alleged possession of less than 50 grams of marijuana.

The four, arrested after being stopped in a motor vehicle operated by Steinbrecher at East Grove Street and Grandview Avenue, were transported to Westfield police headquarters and later released with summonses pending their court appearance.

Thursday, February 1, a resident of South Avenue, West reported an unlawful entry into her motor vehicle and the subsequent theft of a Motorola Bluetooth headset, a cellular telephone charger, multiple compact disks and \$2 in coin change. The vehicle was parked in her driveway and unlocked at the time the break-in occurred.

Thursday, February 1, Stephanie Gabriel, 41, of Westfield was arrested at Westfield police headquarters on an outstanding Fanwood traffic warrant for \$500. She was released after posting bail.

Thursday, February 1, Alyson Mannino, 30, of Westfield and David Saez, 28, of Queens, N.Y. were arrested in the 200 block of Orchard Street for alleged possession of less than 50 grams of marijuana. Saez also was held on two open criminal warrants from Paterson with a total of \$652 bail. He was committed to the Union County jail on default of bail, while Mannino was released with a summons.

Friday, February 2, Kenneth Harmon, 27, of Plainfield was arrested for alleged possession of cocaine and alleged possession of less than 50 grams of marijuana. Stephanie Johnson, 26, of Plainfield also was arrested for alleged possession of

Clarification

By MICHAEL POLLACK
Specially Written for *The Westfield Leader*

WESTFIELD — Westfield Police Benevolent Association (PBA) Local No. 90 President Leonard Lugo said local salaries and increases mentioned in last week's front-page article "weren't reflected properly."

He said, when calculating the percentage that officers' salaries will rise, 2009 numbers must be factored in differently.

That year, according to the contract, "holiday pay will be incorporated into the base salary," Mr. Lugo said.

Officers' pensions are calculated by their base pay.

Calling Westfield a "dinosaur" in terms of its holiday pay policy, he said it is a "way to increase an officer's pay, but save the town money and lower the officer's pension contribution."

He said holiday pay is calculated by taking the officer's hourly rate, multiplying it by eight (hours) and then 13 (days).

"It's an item already paid for," he said. "Now, it's part of pensionable pay (starting in 2009)."

In addition, beginning in 2007, salaries incorporate the addition of a clothing allowance of \$625, which used to be received separately from base salary and not pensionable.

Officers will earn yearly raises of 3.5 percent, 4 percent, 4.5 percent (broken into two 2.25 percent halves) and 3.75 percent for the final year.

Erratum

On the front-page photograph last week depicting U.S. Attorney Christopher Christie, Joe Starkey was mistakenly identified as Bill Sanders. We regret the error.

WANTED



Courtesy of Berkeley Heights Police Detective Sergeant Stephen Stamer

BANK ROBBER...Video tape captures robbery in action last Saturday at the Commerce Bank in Berkeley Heights. The middle-aged, white male of average build is believed to be same person responsible for ten recent bank robberies in the region. The robber wears a hat, blends in the crowd, is polite and exits in three to four minutes.

less than 50 grams of marijuana. Both were arrested during a motor vehicle stop at North Scotch Plains Avenue and Drake Place and both were released on their own recognizance.

Sunday, February 4, David Rudnicki, 28, of Westfield was arrested and charged with shoplifting \$12 in candy from an establishment in the 1200 block of South Avenue. He also was charged with criminal mischief after he allegedly kicked and shattered the mug shot lighting system at Westfield police headquarters. Rudnicki was released on his own recognizance on both charges.

Monday, February 5, Jose Funes, 26, of Cranford was arrested during a motor vehicle stop at Springfield Avenue and Unami Terrace on an outstanding Fanwood traffic warrant. He was released after posting \$250 bail.

Scotch Plains
Wednesday, January 31, a resident of Donamy Glen reported that someone threw a rock at the house and broke the front window.

Thursday, February 1, a resident of Greenville Road reported someone smashed the windshield of his vehicle while it was parked in front of his house.

Friday, February 2, an employee of a South Avenue business reported receiving terrorist threats from an unidentified person demanding money over the phone.

Friday, February 2, a Mountain Avenue resident reported that someone threw a rock through his windshield.

Friday, February 2, Dejon Williams, 33, of Newark was arrested following a motor vehicle stop for an outstanding warrant out of Union County.

Saturday, February 3, Cornelio Cojun, 25, of Plainfield was arrested for wrongful impersonation. According to police, the suspect stole the Social Security number of an unidentified victim and obtained a job under the victim's name. Police said Cojun failed to pay income tax on the income earned. The suspect is being held on \$15,000 bail.

Fanwood
Thursday, February 1, Kathryn J. Connelly, 24, of Hewanhook, was arrested on an outstanding warrant out of Fanwood after a field investigation.

Friday, February 2, Carlos M. Garland, 35, of Somerville, was arrested and charged with DWI after a motor vehicle stop on Martine Avenue. Hew was released to a responsible adult.

Saturday, February 3, Dominique C. Ellis, 19, of Plainfield, was arrested for DWI after a motor vehicle stop on South Avenue. She was released to a responsible adult.

Saturday, February 3, Elijah D. Trammell, 19, of Plainfield, was arrested on outstanding Plainfield warrant after a motor vehicle stop.

Sunday, February 4, Francesca L. Albano, 19, of Scotch Plains, was arrested and charged with possession of a controlled dangerous substance after a motor vehicle stop.

Tuesday, February 6, Kevin M. Coleman, 48, of Plainfield, was arrested on an outstanding Union County Sheriff's body warrant after a motor vehicle stop on South Avenue.

Mountainside
Thursday, February 1, Charles A. Hilliard, 40, was arrested at the Irvington Police Department and charged with an outstanding warrant out of Mountainside in the amount of \$730.

Friday, February 2, Hodis Jackson, 42, of Summit was arrested and charged with resisting arrest, eluding police and possession of drug paraphernalia. According to police, Jackson was stopped for a motor vehicle violation in Scotch Plains and fled the scene when police approached the vehicle.

A pursuit by Mountainside police ensued ending in Hodis losing control of the vehicle after striking a curb, police said. Hodis exited the vehicle and a foot pursuit occurred with police taking Hodis into custody, police said. Hodis' wife and two infant children were passengers in the vehicle during the pursuit, but were uninjured, police said.

Saturday, February 3, a contractor working on a vacant house on Knightsbridge Road reported that \$2,950 worth of tools were taken from the job site sometime overnight.

Sunday, February 4, Adham M. El-Sherbeini, 20, of Plainfield, was arrested following a motor vehicle violation for failure to wear a seatbelt and charged with driving with a suspended license. He was also charged with an outstanding warrant out of Berkeley Heights for \$81, police said.

Sunday, February 4, a resident of Robin Hood Road reported that someone broke into the home and stole approximately \$10,000 worth of jewelry.

WFD Assists Families

During Cold Spell

WESTFIELD — Westfield Fire Chief Dan Kelly reported that the department has assisted three families left temporarily homeless due to this week's cold spell.

Chief Kelly told *The Westfield Leader* that four adults and a child residing at a two-family home in the 300 block of South Avenue were assisted until repairs could be made to the building's heating system.

Firefighters, the municipal health department and the Westfield/Mountainside Chapter of the American Red Cross helped relocate a family in the 500 block of Trinity Place due to frozen pipes.

Chief Kelly also serves as the town's emergency management coordinator.



David Samsky for *The Westfield Leader*

COUNTY GREEN...Taking a moment out from the St. Patrick's Day Parade fundraiser celebration at the Kenilworth Veterans Hall Tuesday night, from left to right, are: Westfield resident Kay Felter and friends Doreen and Tom Cooke.

SP Charlie Brown's

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week's hearing was far less emotional than the earlier Omnipoint hearing, when several neighbors raised concerns about the health risks of the radio waves emanating from the antennas.

Last week, Kenneth Foster, who has studied the possible medical and health risks from radio frequencies, said the level of radio waves reaching the ground and any persons in the area would be minimal and "well below" established guidelines. His brief testimony was allowed even though federal regulations and court rulings forbid municipal land use boards from

using the possible health-risk factor as a reason for denying applications for placement of such antennas.

Frank Pazden, a professional engineer, said company representatives would likely visit the support building, which will be enclosed by a locked fence, about once a month.

Peter Tolischus, a professional planner, said that particular tower was chosen from among a handful running through the easement that parallels Terrill Road because it was the best location from which to improve cell-phone reception. A tower to the north, he said, was located in the midst of wetlands, while a tower to the south was located much closer to homes.

Recreation

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likely for three to four days, the result of the need to connect a new power substation across the railroad tracks into a manhole on Lamberts Mill Road.

He also said that the parking area would be paved with processed road millings, creating a lower cost and more porous surface, so that it would contribute less to runoff problems.

On another matter, a heated exchange took place between board of education representative Richard Solomon and other board members. It settled down after it was explained that user fees could be used for BOE fields based on petitions by user groups or even the school board.

The intent of the application of user fees was also clarified for Mr. Solomon as being for maintenance and equipment, but not for capital projects.

New playground equipment has been installed at Windsor Park and at Tamaques Upper and Gumbert Fields, and will be installed at Mindowaskin Park during the first week of March.

Bank Robber

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Mountainside, given its location on Route 22 and proximity to major arteries, such as Route 78, Mountain and Springfield Avenues.

Meanwhile, "measures are being taken" by the Fanwood Police Department to protect banks and catch the robber should he strike in the borough, according to Detective Eugene Chin. He declined to specify his department's actions.

"We are trying to catch this guy. He is very annoying and you can quote me on that," said Eileen Walsh, a spokeswoman for the county Prosecutor's Office.

She urged anyone with information to call Union County Crimestoppers at (908) 654-TIPS (8477). A reward may be forthcoming for information "leading to arrest and indictment" of the suspect. The anonymous tips hotline operates 24 hours a day.