

## Message from the Mayor: Tornado, Graduation and the 4<sup>th</sup> of July

June 1, 2011, a date we will all remember in Westfield and Western Massachusetts. At approximately 4:15 in the afternoon, the largest natural disaster to strike Westfield since the Great Flood of 1955 touched down in the Munger Hill section of the city. We now know that the tornado left a path of destruction 39 miles long and at times a half mile wide. We are very fortunate in Westfield.

At this point we know that the tornado damaged approximately 250 homes, destroyed or damaged over 10,000 trees, destroyed a few dozen power poles and a countless number of automobiles. And the clean up, though officially it ended on July 1, has generated nearly 100,000 yards of tree debris. We still have a long way to go, as we now will work on restoration through the summer and the fall.

I would like to publically thank all of the men and women of our city work force and the legions of volunteers and mutual aid responders that helped with our recovery. From the moment the storm passed, everyone went to work to get our city back on its feet. And of course the resilience of our citizens that came outside after the storm passed only to see the devastation throughout their neighborhoods.

Within an hour of the initial report, the sounds of chainsaws could be heard throughout the area. I witnessed first hand the residents checking on their neighbors and starting their cleanup. And most impressive to me, when I was talking to citizens who just suffered great damage to their property, was their optimistic outlook and their willingness to help their neighborhoods. Westfield is made great by the strength of its neighborhoods.

The first week in June is also graduation week in our city. Our three high schools graduate nearly 500 students in two nights. Amazingly, it all went off without a hitch on Thursday and Friday night. Thanks to all the employees that made that happen. And to the graduates, you certainly will have something to talk about at future reunions. Good luck to you all.

Now for some pulse line tidbits:

There have been many calls concerning the collector's office. There is an ongoing investigation. Further information will be provided to the public when the investigation reaches its conclusion.

The new school...The process of building a school is incredibly complex. In order to secure funding at the state level a number of preliminary steps have to be achieved. So one more time here it is in short form; the site needs to be secured, meaning that the city must have under ownership enough property for a building site. Ashley Street was selected due to its close proximity to Abner Gibbs, the school that was identified by the school department as being in need of replacement. This is a downtown school. Additionally, the site was formerly a school site and is owned by the city. It is the largest piece of property we own in the downtown that could be used in a cost effective manner. The city had originally planned for a 400 student school that would be consistent with the other buildings in the district. However, the Juniper Park, enrollment reduction was a driving factor for a larger school as it was expressed to us by the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA), that funding for a second new school would not be likely for a very long time.

Additionally a district wide space and needs analysis and enrollment projection had to be accomplished, the results of which we recently obtained. An owner's project manager and architect have to be hired. The architect then works with the district on the school layout and then a submission of all this information needs to be presented to the state later this summer. Though we have opted for the model school building, which means that this building has been built in another district, there are many aspects of the interior and the exterior that will need to be negotiated with the state

prior to the final project submission. The MSBA board of directors is scheduled to vote on this project later this fall. It is not a guarantee that the project will be voted favorably. And certainly as a city, we are doing what is required to do in order to get the project in front of the board. And lastly, there will not be dozens of buses going to this school.

And to the June 2 caller who believes in the "old boy network;" I would simply say that maybe you don't like facts getting in the way of tall tales. As for the funding for the clock, again, this caller implies the funding could have been used by this city for something else at this time. That would be incorrect. The decision to buy the clock was made prior to my arrival. Perhaps the caller should have attended the public hearings years ago and voiced their opposition. And as for the scripted answers I give, well again, that's the facts as I know them and I guess in the end, believing in sinister conspiracy theories makes for better coffee shop talk. I will once again throw out the invitation, if you want to know what's really going on in town, stop by, call or email, I will tell you what I know. No spin and no tall tales. That's not my style. I tell it like I see it.

I would like to put in a plug for the Babe Ruth New England Regional Baseball Tournament that will be coming to our own Billy Bullens Field July 29 through the weekend and into the first week in August. On July 28<sup>th</sup> we are arranging an exhibition game featuring the Westfield Wheelmen and a team consisting of WHS and Voc-Tech players. Right now the game is scheduled to start at 7:30. I hope to see you there.

In the coming days, you should soon be hearing more about our own Westfield High School Band. The Band has been invited to participate in the "Band of Pride" tribute in Times Square, NYC on November 10, 2011. This tribute will be honoring those lives lost in the 9/11 tragedy. Westfield lost three of its own that day and it is a great honor for our band to represent us at this tribute. If you are interested in sending a donation to help defray the cost, they can be mailed directly to Westfield High School Band, 177 Montgomery Road, Westfield.

The city has recently established a Tornado Recovery Gift Account. We have had our first donation already and many offers of future donations. If you would like to help out in the recovery, please send a check to:

"The city of Westfield-Tornado Gift Account"

Att'n: Mayor's office

59 Court Street

I would also like to thank the Rotary Club for taking over the city's fireworks event. From what I saw and heard, it was a great time. Thank you also to Corey and the Knightsmen and all of the volunteers, sponsors and vendors. And to you our citizens, thank you for coming out to celebrate our nation's birthday.

I also taped a new TV show a few weeks ago. Tune in to see the two downtown businesses featured this month. Here's a hint – music and message. Also, Jeff Daley our city advancement officer, will soon be taping another show of his own highlighting one of our manufacturing businesses. My show can be seen on Channel 15, Sundays at 4PM, Wednesdays at 8PM and Thursdays at 10AM and 10PM.

As always if you have any questions call or email me at 413.572.6201 or [mayor@cityofwestfield.org](mailto:mayor@cityofwestfield.org).

Respectfully,

Dan Knapik, Mayor