

Message from the Mayor: A New Beginning

Well it has been quite an eventful summer here in Westfield. As I write this column, we just experienced Hurricane Irene. Once again, though we had some damage and certainly some of our citizens were affected with property losses and evacuations, it could have been a lot worse. And speaking of Mother Nature, how about the East Coast Earthquake, this year's Blizzards, and a Tornado. Someone mentioned to me the other day that all we need now is Mt. Tom to erupt. I'm all set with Mother Nature. How about some nice Fall weather for all of us, we deserve it.

Congratulations to Mr. Patrick Berry and the Westfield News staff. I have had a number of occasions to speak to Mr. Berry and I believe he's right on with his plans for the News. And as the subject of a fair number of pulse line comments, I like his policy there as well. My mother always told me, if you don't have anything nice to say about someone, then...(I'm sure you know the rest.) Being in public life, we all get that our records are fair game, but at times the callers were out of line or blatantly incorrect. And in fact, I started this column to help set the record straight. I would always give people this example, what if you were a visitor to Westfield, and picked up the old WEN on a Tuesday, Thursday or Saturday...at times you'd be left with the feeling that this city was the worst place on the planet to live. So clearly, some editorial intervention was needed. But that's only my opinion. As part of Mr. Berry's changes for the paper, he has requested that I do a twice a month column. That's fine with me. So here goes the first effort in this new format.

Now for some pulse line tidbits:

There have been many calls concerning the collector's office. There is still an ongoing investigation by the Federal government. As additional information becomes available I will let you know.

The new school...our project has been submitted to the Massachusetts School Building Authority for approval on August 19, 2011. A vote to accept or reject the project will come later in September.

July 12, 2011, Bags on the trees...these bags are referred to as Gators. They keep the trees watered. The employees fill them on a regular basis. See this link for further information...<http://www.treegator.com>.

July 12, 2011, Bike Trail status...The latest on the trail is that all phases have been fully funded for completion of the engineering and design work. We are still about a year away from completing all of the design work. Financing for the Northern Leg over the Westfield River is scheduled for funding on the MADOT funding schedule for 2014. The middle leg through town does not have a funding source for construction yet. The southern leg, from Southwick to Big Y, has most of the design work done. We have been notified by state authorities that there may

be up to 2 million dollars available for construction on the Southern leg. One million of which we may be able to access this calendar year.

Once we have verification that that is the case, it is my intent to put out to bid the leg from the Southwick line to the Tin Bridge - stopping at the bridge.

July 12, 2011, a caller called in about city zoning and the hot dog vendors. Over the years, there have been a number of businesses that have been given a city license for one thing or another. And sometimes, licenses were given when they should not have been. Years ago, we corrected the issue of unpaid tax liabilities and license holders. Many had slipped through and were allowed to be licensed or relicensed. So a few years ago, we passed a city ordinance that required all obligations to the city paid and proved before a license would be granted. And it works like a charm. Many businesses had the bad habit of using the city as a bank if you will, knowing we were slow to demand collections. That doesn't happen anymore. Well, with zoning, the process was manual and subject to mistakes. I am proud to say, at my direction, the city permitting and code enforcement activities have gone electronic. And the new system is catching applicants with liabilities prior to issuance of permits. So the issue with the hot dog vendors, which received permits and licenses to operate under the old manual system, should not now happen. You expect better performance from your city and so do I.

July 20, 2011, Traffic Signals at Arnold, Elm and Franklin replacements. As you know we are getting new signals with both the Main/Broad and Great River Bridge projects so it only seemed logical we would do something with the other signals. Later this year, we will begin what I call the Elm Street Connector Reconstruction Project. We will improve the corridor between the two projects by laying in new water piping, curbing and new sidewalks in many locations. Also after July 1, 2012, we will, dig out the pavement under the rail trail overpass and lay in a new road in that section. That will give us more than fourteen feet of clearance throughout the width of the road. Then we will mill and pave the corridor. So sometime in August of 2012, the entire corridor from the Veterans' Bridge to the Great River Bridge will be new. While we are doing this we will be upgrading the signal lights so they can be controlled. The good news is that this project should not disrupt traffic to the extent of the other projects as we will be only cutting the road open to lay the piping, and not fully ripping out the road except under the bridge. The sidewalk and curb work should not impact traffic to any great extent.

I would like to congratulate the Babe Ruth organization for putting on a great tournament. And a special thank you to the Wheelmen and the Voc-Tech/WHS all stars. It was a great game. 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.

I would also like to take a moment to express my condolences to the family of Police Officer Kevin Swords. I got to know Kevin when I was a teenager in town when he was a young patrolman. And over the years as a city councilor and as my instructor at a citizen's police academy. To me, his outgoing and friendly nature and larger than life personality made him one of our finest police officers. We all will miss him very much.

I also taped a new TV show a few weeks ago. Tune in to see the two businesses featured this month. Here's a hint – animals and fruit. 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. And you can now view all the past episodes at www.vimeo.com/channels/201443#26073645

Also check out our new website <http://www.cityofwestfield.org> and our newsletter, "Around the Whip City."

And to our school children, welcome back and good luck this year.

As always if you have any questions call or email me at 413.572.6201 or mayor@cityofwestfield.org.

Respectfully,
Dan Knapik, Mayor