

Just a thought ...
The difference between gossip and news depends on whether you hear it or tell it.
■ Anonymous

Norwalk

The Hour
NEWS HOTLINE
354-1062

TUESDAY, APRIL 3, 2007

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NEWS BRIEFS

City DPW schedule for Good Friday

NORWALK — The City of Norwalk Department of Public Works has announced that there will be no garbage pickup on Friday, April 6. Friday's garbage will be picked up on Saturday.

There will be citywide recycling on Friday. The transfer station on Crescent Street will be open on Friday and Saturday. The yard waste disposal site on Smith Street will be open on Friday and Saturday.

St. Paul's to hold parish conference

NORWALK — St. Paul's on the Green will host "Doing Church Differently" from 9 a.m. to 4:15 p.m. on Saturday, April 21. The conference is geared for parishes seeking vitality and growth. There are 25 parishes registered as of March 30 for a total of 125 participants, representing the Episcopal Dioceses of Connecticut, Newark, New Jersey, and Massachusetts.

Library will hold hip-hop workshops

NORWALK — On Tuesday, April 17, during spring break, the South Norwalk Branch Library will offer two hip-hop freestyle workshops. Children in grades 3 to 5 are invited to the 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. session. Middle school students are invited to the 7 to 8 p.m. session. This program is for kids who like movement to music. Instructor Austin Daily and his assistant will begin the workshop with a short performance. Students are then taught basic hip-hop free-style skills, break dancing, party moves, waving, robotics, party line dances, vocabulary of skills and some history of the hip hop culture. No dance experience is necessary to participate.

Registration is required. Call 899-2790 ext. 3 for more information, or to register.

Veterans' Committee expands float prizes

NORWALK — The Norwalk Veterans Memorial Committee has announced expanded prizes for the best floats in the annual Memorial Day Parade, to be held this year on Monday, May 28.

The theme of the parade will be, "Honor Our Veterans-Support Our Troops," and the floats that best exemplify this theme will be awarded cash prizes. First prize will be \$500; second prize, \$200; and third prize, \$100. As was done last year, the prizes will be presented at the American Legion Hall at 60 County St. within an hour of the conclusion of the parade. Winners will be notified in the parade marshaling area at Veterans Park before the parade launches at 9 a.m.

In past years, only the schools were eligible for this competition, but this year any civic organization is eligible to compete for the awards.

In addition to Norwalk Public Schools, the Side By Side Charter School and All Saints Catholic School are also eligible to compete.

Government today

- Public Works Committee of the Common Council Public Hearing (E. Rocks Renumbering) followed by a regular meeting, 7:30 p.m., DPW Conference Room, City Hall

Blogging bishop offers high-tech heavenly help

By JILL BODACH
Hour Staff Writer

NORWALK — When thinking of the Catholic Church, the words Internet and blog probably don't come to mind. Words like history, tradition and ritual are more likely associated with this branch of faith. But Diocese of Bridgeport Bishop William Lori is trying to change that.

Lori has created a blog that includes a Question and Answer section, message board and photographs. The bishop is hoping that Catholics throughout the diocese will make a leap of faith and visit his site. Lori said he is trying to bridge the history and traditions of the Catholic Church with the modern means of communication used by those of all denomina-

tions. "The Catholic Church blogging? Absolutely," Lori stated on his Web site (www.bishoplori.org). "After all, none other than Pope Benedict has urged that 'we must use the modern methods of making ourselves be heard in a reasonable way — or better yet, of making the voice of the Lord accessible and comprehensible.'"

The goal of the blog is to communicate, Lori said. "Important to members of the church to use means that are available to us and one that has opened up in recent years is blogging, and I think that it's an appropriate way for the church to convey the Lord's message," Lori said.

Lori's first blog topic is about Holy Week. Lori said he

knew it was a "predictable" choice for a first blog topic, but he thought it was an important one.

"A lot of people are thinking about their faith right now and since there is that heightened consciousness about their faith, I thought it was an appropriate time to launch the site," Lori said.

The Internet may just become another way that leaders of the Catholic Church reach the masses and spread their message to them.

In 2005, at a Council of European Bishops' Conference, Archbishop John Foley highlighted the importance to the Church's mission to encourage the use of "new media" such as the Internet. Comparing the



A screen shot of Bishop William Lori's Weblog.

Hour graphic

See BISHOP'S, A4

In the groove



Hour photo / MATTHEW VINCI

Thomas Sarvaides on the drums Monday with the West Rocks Middle School jazz band rehearsing for the upcoming Fairfield-West Rocks jazz concert.

Local officials urge preparedness during National Public Health Week

By JILL BODACH
Hour Staff Writer

NORWALK — What items are necessary in order to have a fully stocked "shelter in place" kit to sustain a family of four for three days? If you don't know the answer to this, you aren't alone. The National Opinion Survey to Determine Levels of Preparedness for a Public Health Crisis, which surveyed 925 adults, showed 27 percent claimed to be prepared for a public health crisis, but only 14 percent of those said they actually had a three-day supply of food, water and medication on hand. The survey also found that 46 percent of the public has not pulled together a Disaster Supply Kit.

This week, during National Public Health Week, local health departments are hoping to educate members of their communities about preparing for natural disasters, epidemics and pandemics, as well as severe weather emergencies," said Tim Callahan, health director of the Norwalk Health Department.

"Communities need to prepare for emerging, rapidly spreading disease as well as educating them about the services provided by health departments. "After 9/11, the roles of health departments changed as public health officials became required to create emergency preparedness plans.

"This is new to public health

departments in general because these responsibilities were previously left to state emergency preparedness departments and local police and fire departments," said William Mooney Jr., a sanitarian and one of the emergency preparedness planners at the Norwalk Health Department. "Since 9/11, we now have to know how to set up clinics, prepare mass vaccinations and educate people about what to do in case of a pandemic or epidemic."

According to the National Opinion Survey, the term "public health crisis" does not resonate with people, although there is a concern about the events that might lead to one.

See LOCAL, A4

Local man arrested on drug, gun charges

Police say Kory Thomas was wearing a shirt cheering two murder suspects when arrested

By NOELLE FRAMPTON
Hour Staff Writer

NORWALK — A local man, wearing a T-shirt encouraging two teenage murder suspects to "keep your heads up," was arrested Friday for allegedly carrying crack cocaine and a loaded pistol without a permit.

Kory Thomas, 22, was wearing a shirt that bore pictures of Victor Smalls and Jimmie Kave Jr., suspects in a brash midday killing on March 22, and the words of encouragement when he was arrested at 11:05 p.m. Friday, said Norwalk Police Special Services Division Officer Mark Suda.

Thomas gave police a New Haven address but Suda said

he was born and raised in Norwalk and lives here still, with prior charges for drugs, assault and failure to appear.

When division officers stopped to break up a large crowd in the South Norwalk area of South Main Street and Raymond Street, Thomas started walking away and several officers saw him toss away a bag of 5.5 grams of suspected crack, packaged for street-level sale, Suda said.

Police said they stopped and searched him to find a fully-loaded .45 Colt pistol in his waistband, with a bullet in the chamber.

Thomas, who goes by the street name "Snowball," was

See DRUG, A4

Couple drops ethics charge against Carbone

By PATRICK R. LINSEY
Hour Staff Writer

NORWALK — A former Norwalk couple withdrew an ethics complaint against city zoning official Anne Carbone, whom they had accused of unfair retaliation, an attorney for the couple said Monday.

The development came a scant 48 hours before Carbone's case was to be considered by the city's Ethics Committee.

Carlos and Diane Diez filed an ethics complaint against Carbone, chairwoman of Norwalk's Zoning Board of Appeals, in December 2006, alleging she used her city position to prosecute a zoning violation. The Diezes said they were targeted by Carbone after they chose not to renew a real estate contract with her.

Carbone had been employed by Coldwell Banker Residential Brokerage until early December. On Dec. 6, the day *The Hour* first reported the Diezes' complaint, sources alerted this newspaper that Carbone no longer worked for Coldwell Banker.

Since December, Carbone has continued as chairman of the ZBA.

Michael Coffey, Democratic chairman of the Common Council's Ethics Committee, could not confirm whether the complaint had been withdrawn. If the complaint is withdrawn, the committee will decide how to proceed with the case, Coffey said.

"It's still on the agenda Wednesday night," he said. "The committee will discuss what our future action will

See ETHICS, A4

Donations help center solve transport woes

By MAX HADLER
Hour Staff Writer

NORWALK For the past seven months, the acclaimed programming at the George Washington Carver Community Center has served many Norwalk youths but languished in unrealized potential, unable to reach kids who have had no way to reach the building at 7 Academy St.

With the support of the James Fitzpatrick Trust, the Heidmar Corporation, Noroton Presbyterian Church, and a \$5,000 discount from Maritime Motors, the Carver Center recently resolved the problem by purchasing a 12-passenger van.

The center hit an unexpected snag at the beginning of the school year, when a number of middle school students who had previously depended on Norwalk Public School resources to participate in the center's after-school programs were shut out of the transportation lottery.

In years past, the center relied on its students' good luck in the lottery and never considered alternatives. Participants in the center's Youth Development Program ran out of luck this year and were left stranded, not invited onto school buses and not permitted to board city buses.

"Parents of sixth-grade students didn't feel it was safe for their kids to use public transportation on their own," said Janene De Souza, director of development at Carver. "We've had students who have wanted to come and they've been unable to since September."

Pending parent permission slips and a handful of legal issues, students will now be able to ride to the Carver Center at no charge to them or the center. The van will also be available for other transportation needs when not in use for after-school programming, De Souza said.

The Carver Center's Youth Development Program prepares middle school students for high school through mentoring, academic advising and peer counseling.



Hour photo / MATTHEW VINCI

Carver Center program participants, from left, A.J. Frierson, T.K. Smalls, Ray Rodriguez, Patrick Francis, Jonathan Boykin, Denzel Riddick and Raquon Calhoun pose with the center's new 12-passenger van.

Van providers, food gatherers surgeon winners

It is supposed to be spring, but the weather is anything but springlike. Chilly temperatures may require a coat to cover that Easter finery and the Easter Bunny might need to borrow Santa's sled.

Don't laugh. We have had snow on Easter Sunday in the past, and 25 years ago Friday we had 4 inches of snow dumped on the area.

Don't put the shovel away — just in case.

Despite the chilly temperatures, we warm to our weekly task of scanning the horizon in the Greater Norwalk area and beyond to make our weekly presentations to the good, the bad and the otherwise.

Bouquets to those organizations that saw a local need to help some youngsters and stepped up to the plate.

In the past, some middle school students had been able to rely on the public schools for transportation to the George Washington Carver Center to participate in its after-school program.

Space on the buses was limited by a lottery and this year a number didn't make it, thus were unable to participate in the program.

Enter a number of organizations — the James Fitzpatrick Trust, the Heidmar Corp., the Noroton Presbyterian Church and Maritime Motors. The latter offered a \$5,000 discount that allowed the center, with the help of the others, to purchase a 12-passenger van.

It's good news for those sixth-graders who avail themselves of the Carver program. It is designed to help them make the transition from middle school to high school.

Bouquets to the members of St. Jerome Parish who didn't forget the hungry at this holiday time of the year.

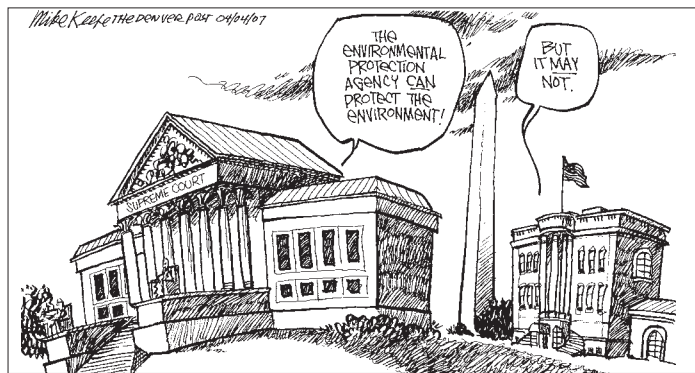
The parishioners augmented their usual monthly food collection with a special effort recently and managed to collect two tons of food for distribution to various community agencies. Among the beneficiaries of the parish collection are the Christian Community Action Food Pantry, the St. Vincent dePaul Society and the Mid-Fairfield AIDS Project.

Parishioners spent several hours sorting and packing the 4,000 food items donated by about 800 members of the parish.

A bouquet to a Westport resident who has been named chief of general surgery recently at Norwalk Hospital.

Dr. Alan Meinke came to this specialty naturally as the son of a surgeon. As well as directing the surgical program at the hospital, he also is an instructor there as well as at Yale University's School of Medicine graduate surgical program.

As a transplant from Michigan, he recently commented that most Norwalkers don't know just how good Norwalk Hospital is. We do.



Norwalk students to pay the price if reasonable solution is not found

ANOTHER VIEW

Salvatore Corda
School Superintendent

On March 29, in a memorandum to the Common Council, Board of Estimate, and Board of Education, as well in a piece in the press, Mr. Hamilton responded to my proposal to use undesignated fund balance as a means of preserving the proposed tax increase approved by the council and still satisfying the needs of the Board of Education as "fundamentally flawed" for several reasons.

First, Mr. Hamilton makes this claim because he contends that we would operate our 2007/2008 budget as if we had the additional \$3.2 million dollars. Obviously he has chosen to disregard my assertion that we would do all we can to minimize when I said, "Be assured of our firm commitment to continue to pursue every available means to effect savings and to limit staffing to the absolute minimum number necessary. Agree to meet with representatives from the school district, administrators and the board's Finance Committee monthly to review our expenditures so you have assurances that we are keeping that commitment." What would be gained if we chose to ignore this in our efforts to build a collaborative and trusting relationship with the Board of Estimate or the Common Council?

Second, Mr. Hamilton says, "There is no basis whatsoever to believe anything other than the Board of Education will be back for a special appropriation of \$3.2 million sometime before the end of the school year." I would suggest there is no factually based basis for such an assertion. Neither Mr. Hamilton nor I can say with certainty what will happen that would mitigate the need to request \$3.2 million. How can he assume our final staffing needs when I don't know them yet and will not until early June? It is certainly possible that we may need fewer staff. How can he assume that our estimates for fuel oil will, or will not, materialize, or that adjustments might not be possible in special education tuition costs, or that health insurance costs may not be as high as budgeted? The fact is he cannot. In the last four years we have been able to return a surplus to the city. Why should we assume that we would not be able to do so in the future? That, of course, is not a certainty. None of this might happen and we might, indeed, need to come for a special appropriation. My point is that the needs of the students ought to be a sufficient reason to take the chance that we can minimize the extent of the increase where a special appropriation might be minimal or, in the best of cases, unneeded. My point is that, in a worse case scenario, we can access the significant unappropriated surplus the city has accumulated without impacting the tax rate which is what the Common Council wanted to do in the first place.

Third, Mr. Hamilton describes the purposes budgets serve. I've been building budgets for more than 30 years. I would argue that the budget, the financial plan to meet specific goals, is being used for that exact purpose: meeting specific goals in a fiscally responsible way. Suggesting that we are adopting a fraudulent budget that we intend to exceed is simply untrue. I would note that the city projects a budget it believes is accurate, but then builds in a "contingency" fund, usually in the neighborhood of \$2 million dollars, just in case the expenses are higher than anticipated. Does the city engage in a fraudulent practice by budgeting certain appropriations and then adding a contingency, just in case? Of course not. A contingency of a reasonable proportion is a wise practice. The city builds in a contingency between \$1.5 and \$2

million dollars on anticipated expenses of about \$113 to \$115 million (the non-board of Education part of the budget) but does not make any allowances for a contingency on a school budget of \$136 - \$140 million. Why? Because our "contingency" comes from the action of the Board of Estimate for a special appropriation. My request of the Board of Estimate is, in effect, to create a contingency for the Board of Education by agreeing to honor a request for a special appropriation, to the extent it becomes necessary, in the same way that the city builds in a contingency for city expenses outside of the Board of Education. There is no subterfuge. We are very clear on what may or may not, be necessary.

Fourth, Mr. Hamilton expresses concern about his future plans given the impact of a potential special appropriation for the Board of Education that could, in his judgment, reach \$3.2 million. He says it will impact the level of unappropriated surplus he intends to use over the next two years. In four years, the unappropriated surplus was permitted to grow from \$13 million to \$28 million and now, all of a sudden, he has a plan to decrease that unappropriated surplus down to \$20 million in two years? How? He is going to use \$4 million of it in 2007/2008 and another \$3.5 million in 2008/2009. There will be no fund balance used in 2009/2010. This means in 2009/2010 there will need to be some other offset in revenue, or some reduction in expense, or some increase in the Grand List to offset that loss or the 2009/2010 budget is going to start off with a \$3.5 million increase before anyone begins making any budget proposals. I'm not so sure this is the wisest use of fund balance opportunity.

Fifth, city revenues increased by 12.29 percent in 2006/2007. In 2007/2008 they are projected to increase by 5.19 percent. Yet, Mr. Hamilton's financial projections (used as an argument against cutting expenses) for additional funds for the educational needs of the students) assume that revenues will only increase by 2.4 percent in 2008/2009 and will actually decrease by 6.66 percent in 2009/2010 (because there is no fund balance that will be appropriated). Furthermore, the financial statement provided by Mr. Hamilton indicates that the Grand List increased in 2006/2007 by 14.28 percent and increased again by 12.29 percent in 2007/2008. However, it will increase by only 1.25 percent in both 2008/2009 and 2009/2010. What is also interesting to note is that there is no mention of any potential of fund balance from the operating budget in 2008/2009 or 2009/2010. Does it not seem odd that in prior years there was a substantial fund balance (that's why the unappropriated surplus is so high) and now there is no mention of it? Is the city going to spend every last dollar in each of the budget years? Do these numbers make sense?

I also take exception to Mr. Hamilton's assertion that, "The budget problems that the Board of Education is facing were [sic] principally the results of relying upon budgetary one-shots (some might refer to them as budget gimmicks) to balance their budget for FY 2006-07." The judgment in this comment is that it is the Board of Education that is responsible for this problem. The fact is we were prepared to return \$2 million to the city at the end of last year, but we worked with the Board of Estimate, at my re-

quest, to use these funds available on a one-time basis to reduce the current year's increase. Furthermore, I advised the Board of Estimate and the Common Council and the Board of Education in January of last year that using those funds would put us in the exact place we are now. We all agreed to do it. We all walked into this with our eyes open. We supported this decision then and we support it now. But to blame the Board of Education for this situation, when it was not our request or our idea to use those funds, is bordering on the dishonest. We wouldn't be where we are now if, as planned, we had returned the \$2 million and requested the Board of Estimate to increase this year's budget by 3.99 percent.

Finally, Mr. Hamilton says that there is a potential solution outside of my proposal. Mr. Hamilton says if the state increases education aid, then the Board of Estimate could make a special appropriation to the Board of Education in the amount of that aid instead of adding it to the city's surplus. If I am understanding this correctly, it is not wise or honest to provide a special appropriation that would maintain the proposed tax rate and eliminate the need to cut educational programs that means accessing part of the \$28 million in unappropriated surplus that already exists, but it is wise and honest to do so if the state (and nobody knows if this will happen) gives the city additional educational aid which would otherwise add to that unappropriated surplus. Potentially providing a special appropriation from the existing \$28 million in unappropriated surplus will be "disastrous" but would otherwise go to increase that unappropriated fund balance would not. With all of this, it would still require the Board of Estimate to take an action approving a special appropriation.

One last thought. Our job is to provide the best quality educational program we can to the young people of this city. We make our recommendations for staffing and program based on the expertise we have accumulated over decades of work in schools and school systems. We are producing results. The budgetary increase we are requesting, given last year's collaboration with the city, is in no way unreasonable. Look around at our neighboring districts and ask if our staffing levels are less or greater than theirs. You will see they are less. Look at our neighboring districts and ask if our budget is less or greater than theirs. You will see they are less.

I think I offered a reasonable solution to this problem. One where everyone gets what they want. The details can be addressed. If we know there is access to a special appropriation if necessary, we can continue to make sound educational decisions. There is no incentive for us not to be as fiscally responsible as we can if there is no access, then we will have to make hard choices that, in retrospect we may look back on and say, "This was unnecessary." The question is to what extent do people want to address this issue and what are they willing to do to work toward a solution. Alternatively, we can do nothing and understand that it will be the kids who pay the price when reductions have to be made. I can assure you, any reduction in service, whether it is administrative, teaching, athletics, or other support, will have an impact on the programs we provide our students and the work we do with and for them.

LETTERS

Donations will help find cure for sickle cell

To the Editor:
Please allow me the privilege of directing a piece of correspondence to the Southern Regional Sickle Cell Association through the medium of this column.

A little over a month ago, many people from this area gathered in the Community Tabernacle of Deliverance Church, Stamford. We came together in support of the Mann and Curtis families in the homegoing celebration of their loved one, the late Chrystal Lynne Mann. While rejoicing in the truth of our sacred scriptures that she is in the care of God, we were yet saddened because Chrystal was only 22 years old.

One of the speakers paying tribute to Chrystal was Alex Knopp, former mayor of Norwalk. In commenting on the brevity of her life due to Sickle Cell, he challenged us to honor her memory by doing something tangible to counter this illness which particularly affects African-Americans.

Our congregation is pleased to respond to his challenge. A copy of this letter is being sent to the Southern Regional Sickle Cell Association, Bridgeport, along with a financial contribution.

We hope that this small gesture will encourage others to do the same. I am optimistic that with the support of our community to this fine organization, they will be able to make a dent in fighting this disease which takes the lives of so many of our young people prematurely.

Thank you for allowing us to honor Chrystal's memory this way.

Rev. Dr. Jeffrey A. Ingraham
Calvary Baptist Church
Norwalk

Y members should think about decision

To the Editor:

A recent letter to the editor listed all the fine community service work credited to members of the Westport YMCA. The writer represents these people as unanimous in their support for relocating the Westport Y to the Mahackeno site.

From personal experience, I can tell all those unnamed referred to in this letter that community service, for all its good intentions, is fleeting. You are often remembered, not for the numerous small decisions that each in their own way contributed to making a difference, but for your one larger, more important decision.

How ironic it may be, that for all their fine work to help make Westport a better place to live, it is likely to be overshadowed by just one decision. These are the very people that will be responsible for eliminating an estimated 15 acres of pristine forest in Westport. They are also likely to be remembered for constructing a new 100,000-plus square foot YMCA in a AAA residential area near Exit 41 of the Merritt Parkway with all its potential traffic implications.

Hopefully these people will be secure in knowing that they made the best decision, not just for the YMCA membership, but also for the future of the Westport/Norwalk area.

Take a good look at Exits 39-40 off the Merritt Parkway in Norwalk. Once the trees are cut down and the controversial septic system is installed, there is no turning back. Seldom are there second chances to reconsider misplaced, inappropriate development.

To all the well-intentioned members of YMCAs, how will you be remembered?

Richard Lowenthal
Norwalk