

# The Hour


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**Sports**

Syracuse earns a shot at top-ranked UConn in Big East tournament.



Thursday, March 9, 2006 Vol. 135 No. 68 The Independent Voice of Our Community for 135 years [www.thehour.com](http://www.thehour.com) **50¢**

### Local / A3



Norwalk seniors get cooking in the do-it-yourself kitchens of CookIndinners.com.

### Steppin' Out / B1



Folk favorite Janis Ian takes the stage at Quick Center this weekend.

### Makeover / C2



Hour makeover contest winners get the final touches.

### Editorial / A6

Citizens concerned about the Nordan development deserve a second hearing.

### Calendar



Check out The Hour's new online community calendar for events in your area. Go to [www.thehour.com](http://www.thehour.com).

### Weather / A2



Rain likely today, highs in the mid-40s. Tonight mostly cloudy, lows in the upper 30s.

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## Mann up for NEON's top position

By PATRICK R. LINSEY  
*Hour Staff Writer*

NORWALK — NEON's board offered state Rep. Joseph Mann its top job Wednesday night — on a temporary basis.

The Norwalk Economic Opportunity Now board of directors offered Mann the title interim executive director after a sometimes contentious and twice closed-door meeting.

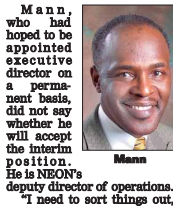
If Mann, D-140, accepts the board's offer, he would serve in an interim capacity, while the

"I need to sort things out."

State Rep. Joseph Mann in response to NEON's offer for executive director position

board considers him and other applicants for the position.

He would replace Michael Callis, who resigned in January.



Mann, who had hoped to be appointed executive director on a permanent basis, did not say whether he will accept the interim position. He is NEON's deputy director of operations.

Mann said after the meeting, declining further comment.

The board went into executive session twice in the meeting to discuss personnel matters. Each time raised voices could be heard down the hallway from the meeting.

After the first executive session, the board voted to approve a draft settlement agreement to release Callis from his contract with the organization.

In a second executive session, the board apparently dis-

cussed whether to offer Mann the position on an interim basis.

Upon resumption of regular session, the board debated the length of the interim executive director's term. Board member Herb Grant requested a minimum of six months.

"That is not what we discussed," complained board Chairman and Common Councilman Carvin Hilliard. "Let's

See NEON, A7



Tychelle Gordino, 17, and Nisacq Montford, 17, of the New Haven-based Youth Rights Media organization talk about their documentary, "Book 'Em: Undereducated, Overincarcerated," during a discuss school suspensions with community leaders and members of the BMHS Senators Community Foundation Wednesday.

## Validity of suspensions challenged

Youth Rights Media documentary questions effectiveness of out-of-school suspensions

By NOELLE FRAMPTON  
*Hour Staff Writer*

NORWALK — Nisacq Montford knows what it's like to be misunderstood in school. Because she was shipped from home to home in foster

care, she got in trouble at her school because she was often late and had a hard time completing homework.

School teachers and administrators failed to ask about the root of her problems and assumed she was just a negligent kid, Montford, 17, said.

Eventually she wound up in what she and others call the "School to Prison Pipeline." She was ousted to an alternative high school for problem kids in her hometown of New Haven, a step, she said, toward juvenile court and even prison.

Montford is not in prison, but she said many students with her circum-

stances could be because there is a direct connection between school suspensions and jail in New Haven and across the nation.

Now a high school senior enrolled in adult education classes, she joined other members of Youth Rights Media, a New Haven-based nonprofit youth advocacy organization that visited Brien McMahon High School Wednesday to screen their documentary "Book 'Em: Undereducated, Overincarcerated" to a classroom filled with more than 40 people.

See YOUTH, A8

## Y kicks off two fund-raising campaigns

By HAROLD F. COBIN  
*Hour Correspondent*

NORWALK — Money donated to the YMCA is used for more than purchasing sports equipment, maintaining the pool and paying the staff. It also enables Robert Ruther to attend three months of summer camp, as his mother explained while fighting back tears Wednesday night to an audience in the main gym.

"He's a loving, caring little boy," said Sus Czel of her 9-year-old, who loved summer camp from the time it began to the time he left.

Czel, a working mother whose husband is disabled, said that three years ago she approached the Y's CEO and executive director, Debbie Greenwood, saying she could not afford to send him to camp.

Greenwood obtained a scholarship for Robert, said Czel, enabling him to spend the last three summers in activities with other kids. Otherwise, she said, "He'd be sitting home watching TV, and that's the worst thing for a kid."

Czel spoke during a program kicking off the Y's annual fund-raising drives, the 2006 Strong Kids Campaign and the 2006 Annual Giving Campaign, attended by about 40 supporters and staff members.

Greenwood asked the supporters in the gym to help solicit donations for items shown on a wish list for the facility, with the goal of raising \$125,000.

The Giving Campaign is being led this year by Barry Belardinelli of Norwalk Bank and Trust.

Belardinelli said membership dues and support from the United Way do

not cover the cost of running the facility, necessitating appealing to the community for money and equipment.

Belardinelli said raising \$125,000 was achievable, and the organization should strive to surpass that amount.

"I think it's a great organization and I think we've got a really good future ahead of us here," Belardinelli said.

The program began with a ribbon-cutting ceremony celebrating the restoration of heating and air conditioning in the main gym of the West Avenue facility, thanks to a \$30,000 donation. A separate donation paid for painting it.

To make a contribution, contact Timothy Buzzeo, the Y's financial development director, at (203) 866-4425, extension 885.

See SPEEDERS, A7

## Residents: Slow down or get ticket

Strawberry Hill residents urge police to step up enforcement for speeding

By ROBERT KOCH  
*Hour Staff Writer*

NORWALK — Residents urged police to crack down on speeders during a public forum on Strawberry Hill Avenue traffic safety held at City Hall Wednesday night.

"I've seen almost no enforcement, and I don't know how anything is going to change without some enforcement," said Lee Fleming, who lives on Strawberry Hill Avenue. "I don't see people getting tickets for passing on the right or crossing that line. I see none of that stuff and I'm there all day."

Fleming was one of nearly two-dozen residents to attend the public forum sponsored by the Eastern Norwalk Neighborhood Association.

Laurel Lindstrom, association president, described Strawberry Hill Avenue as "a main thoroughfare or corridor." As such, the association has fought for traffic calming measures to curb speeding along the busy roadway. Its efforts have resulted in yellow reflective material being placed on signs in school zones.

At the forum, residents urged police to issue more speeding tickets and the city to install a traffic signal at Strawberry Hill Avenue and Tierney Street.

Answering questions were Mayor Richard A. Moccia; Police Chief Harry W. Rilling; Director of Public Works Harold F. Alford; city Traffic Engineer Fred Ehraghi; and David Park, street representative for the neighborhood association.

The forum comes as the city prepares to reintroduce Slow Down Days — set for March 20 to March 27. Park asked residents to create



Hour photo / HAROLD COBIN  
Debbie Greenwood, CEO and executive director of the YMCA at West Avenue, announces Wednesday night the kick-off of the annual YMCA Strong Kids Campaign to raise funds for sports and maintenance equipment.



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# Speeders beware on Strawberry Hill Avenue

From A1

and display signs during that slow-down. "The reason why we're here is because I asked the (police) chief, through the neighborhood associations, to reinstate the slow-down week," Moccia said. "We are going to have extra patrols out there, we are going to have extra enforcement out. But I will tell you we're not going to tell anybody where they're going to be and what days."

The forum was arranged for residents to share their concerns with city officials—and for officials to explain what's being done. At several points, however, Rilling defended his

department's enforcement record against charges by residents. "I live on Newtown Avenue, and my wife has been rear-ended twice. I've had a pet run over," said Richard Lowenthal, who lives on Newtown Avenue. "I've been there 17 years and I've never seen a police unit."

Rilling said Norwalk police issue roughly 4,000 tickets annually—nearly a dozen tickets daily. One officer, he said, issues 40 to 50 tickets a month. While people can disagree on whether that number is sufficient, to say that police are not enforcing the law is incorrect, Rilling said.

"(Curbing speeding) begins with us. It begins with everybody in this room driving

responsibly wherever you are," said Rilling. He said motorists often obey posted speed limits in their neighborhoods while speeding elsewhere in the city. "People just don't seem to be willingly obeying the law."

Rilling and other officials at the forum identified a three-pronged approach to halting speeding: Enforcement, education and engineering.

On the engineering and education fronts, the city took a big step forward last year by hiring Eshraghi and a traffic maintenance person, bringing the city's traffic management department to five persons.

Eshraghi said the city will boost signage around Norwalk High, Naramake Elementary and Nathan Hale Middle

schools to ensure that motorists are aware that they are entering schools zones.

"We have to educate people. There is a sign here and you have to care about it," Eshraghi said. "Strawberry Hill Avenue from Westport all the way down to William Street ... is going to be a school zone."

Alford has requested \$30,000 in his 2006-07 capital budget submission for traffic calming measures on Strawberry Hill Avenue. Those measures might include curb extensions, textured patterns at intersections and narrowing the roadway at key locations. Overall, he is seeking \$725,000 over the next five years to move forward with a traffic management plan for the city.

# NEON offers Mann top position

From A1

not play games."

The board eventually compromised on a minimum 60-day-maximum one-year-term as interim director.

"I'm trying to put pressure on us as a board to make a decision as soon as possible," said board member David Washington, speaking in favor of the minimum 60-day term.

The position has already been posted for two weeks, Hilliard said, both on the Internet and within NEON and in accordance with the organization's bylaws. He said the NEON has received multiple applications for the position.

The applications will be reviewed by the organization's human resources department, Hilliard said, which will make recommendations to the board's executive committee.

If Mann does accept the position, he said he will likely not seek re-election as a state representative. The Hatch Act of 1939 prohibits some "local employees" from running for office under a

political party if their employer takes federal money.

If Mann does not seek re-election, NEON board member and District A Councilman Richard A. McQuaid did not rule out running for state representative in the 140th district.

McQuaid, a Republican, said he ran against Mann in 2002 and lost by "600 or 700 votes" in the traditionally Democratic district.

Asked whether he'd run again for the seat, McQuaid turned the question to Mann. "I think Joe has done a good job, and I'd rather wait until Joe made his decision. I would discuss it with my party and my family," McQuaid said. "I've always wanted to run for a state rep seat, but it's real premature."

Staff writer Robert Koch contributed to this report. Staff writer Patrick R. Linsey can be reached via e-mail at [plinsy@thehour.com](mailto:plinsy@thehour.com).

# Reputed Gambino leaders reject plea deal

By MATT APUZZO  
Associated Press

NEW HAVEN — The reputed leaders of the Gambino crime family rejected a plea offer Wednesday that would have headed off a New York trial and the testimony of an FBI agent who prosecutors said infiltrated the Mafia family, an attorney said.

Arnold "Zeke" Squitieri, who allegedly served as Gambino boss, and Anthony "The Genius" Megale, who prosecutors said was the family's No. 2 man, were among dozens of people arrested in the New York mob sweep last year.

Federal prosecutors offered a plea deal that included a wide range of prison sentences of up

to 15 years for nine defendants in the case, said Stephen Seeger who represents Megale.

The defendants had until Wednesday to accept the offer and Seeger said it was rejected because all the defendants couldn't agree. He said he expects some defendants, including Megale, will continue negotiating before trial.

Squitieri's attorney, Gerald Sharpe, had no comment on the negotiations and said he was preparing for the May 8 trial.

The U.S. attorney's office in New York had no comment Wednesday. Documents on file in New Haven, where Megale faces up to 6 1/2 years in prison on a related case, also describe the negotiations.

Prosecutors say Squitieri, Megale and other defendants made millions of dollars through extortion, loan sharking, illegal gambling and other crimes during the past decade.

Megale, 52, of Stamford, was Connecticut's highest ranking gangster, prosecutors said. He pleaded guilty in October to racketeering conspiracy in Connecticut but denies being the Gambino underboss.

An FBI agent in the New York case posed as a mobster and helped make hundreds of

secret recordings, authorities said. He was so convincing, the FBI said, he was considered for Mafia membership.

Attorney John L. Pollok, who represents reputed Mafia captain Alphonse Sica, said Wednesday morning that plea negotiations have been difficult because prosecutors insisted all nine defendants take the deal.

Megale's attorneys are trying to negotiate a deal in which his sentence could run concurrently with whatever he receives in Connecticut.

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