

News Bulletin

Serving Amston, Andover, Cobalt, East Hampton, Hebron, Marlborough, Middle Haddam, Portland, Colchester and Salem

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All I Want for Christmas Is...

As they've done in years past, members of Marlborough Girl Scout Troop #65220 helped area children get their letters to Santa Claus.

But, before shipping the letters up to St. Nick, the scouts let the *Rivereast* sneak a peek at them. We decided to print some of them in this week's issue, to give our readers an idea of what kids are asking for this year.

Don't worry, we didn't horde the letters, and we are assured they received safe passage to the big man at the North Pole. And while he can't make any promises, Santa told us he'll try to fulfill as many requests as he can. He wishes everyone a Merry Christmas, and so do we.

Here are some of the letters:

Dear Santa,

How are you feeling at the North Pole? How are the reindeer feeling? How is Mrs. Claus doing? How are the elves doing? Are you making your sled big with all the toys? Merry Christmas Santa. I was a good girl at home and in school. I would like an I-pod and a Baby Alive and a computer.

Love, Sanya

Dear Santa,

How are you doing Santa Claus? How is Mrs. Claus? How is Rudolph? How are the elves? How is the North Pole? Santa Clause I am going to put some cookies and milk out for you. You know what I want Santa Clause? I want a computer, a cash register and a real baby.

Love, Zennay

Dear Santa,

I have been a good boy. But I have been a lot bad to Noah. My brother Noah wants a toy baby. I would like a race car, Castle game, drum, big red car, plane.

Daddy wants one more lawn mower. Simba wants a toy.

Love, Dominick

Dear Santa,

How is Mrs. Claus? How are you? How's the weather? How is Rudolph? Santa Claus your sleigh bigger from all of those toys? Are you getting red for Christmas? I've been talking too much but I'm trying my best to stop talking. My mom has a new baby boy Santa. I want an I-pod and a DIY Makeover and a Barbie 3 story Dream house.

Love, Kayeona

Dear Santa,

How are you doing? Are your reindeer fine? I hope you don't get lost. By the way how is your wife? I will leave you some cookies and milk. There are the toys I want, a real puppy, Wii and Moon Sand.

Love, Mia

Dear Santa Claus,

This year I've been a good girl and I think I hope to have one of these objects: A deck of Uno cards, The Sweet Life of Zack and Cotie game boy game, or any Mario game boy game, and if you don't give my sister Melissa a Hannah Montana 2 CD then I would like to have it.

Love, Nicole

Dear Santa,

Do not forget my house this year. I hope to race down the stair on crismas morning. For crismas I won't, well you might think it is funny, but I won't it. I won't a lizerd and lizerd food. If I had a lizerd I would name him/her Liz. Liz the Lizerd.

See you soon, Mary Kate

P.S. I really won't a Lizerd.

Dear Santa,

Is it snowing? Do your reindeer fly? Do you have a red hat Santa? Can I have a Wii game, a spyro game and a sonic leapster?

Thank you Santa.

Love, Samuel

Dear Santa,

I like you, you are very cute. I want you to bring my Bitty Baby. Please, do it Santa! I love you Santa. My behavior has been a little great. So I love your beautiful eyes. And I love you, too. And I love you, love you! It's because I love you is because you are so cute. And I love balloons, too. Merry Christmas & Happy New Year.

Love, Mary

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Dear Santa Claus,
I, Sydney, in 3rd grade and 9 years old, is wish'n top o' the seson to you and your kin. I have been trying to be a "good girl" to deserve the presents on the back of this thing (listed below). How are your renderer? Do yo steel have Rudof? If so, say hi to him from me.

My Wish List: Webkiz seal or golden retriever, hamster or gunia pig, American girl stuff, digtle camra, art stuff, books.

Best wishes, Syd

Dear Santa,
I am Gabriella. I am six yers old. I have tried to be good this year. Some times I am crabby, some times I am good. My ideas are: Penguin Webkin, a kid guitar that is pink, Nintendo DS, some games, a digital camera, I pod. Thank you for thingking abawt me.

Love, Gabby

Dear Santa,
I love you Santa. How are you? Can you be my friend? How is Mrs. Claus? Will you be coming on Christmas Eve?

Okay... now let's start the list. First thing on the list is all the Webkinz in the world except the reindeer because I already have it. I know I'm only 5 years old, but I'd like a real cell phone even though my mom doesn't have one yet. A toy talking parrot would be fun to have. A Dora talking cash register, everything else in the world would be nice to have too.

Baby Alive would be nice because she eats, goes #1 and #2 in a diaper. Just the kind of mess my mom wants to clean up! A real clarinet like Squiward would be nice as well as a real flute. I know I already have a GameGirl but a Ninetendo DS and PSP in the color pink would be just wonderful.

I saw a commercial for moon sand and that looks like fun. Can I have all the colors in the world? I would also like a voice activated diary that my brother can't get into because I will have the secret password. This can also come in pink because that is my favorite color. I would like any SpongeBob items you might have at the North Pole Toy shop. I would appreciate some real jewelry like my mom has. I would really really like a signed picture of you Santa Claus unless no one has ever caught you with their camera. And last but not least, I would like Atantas Square Pantas DVD.

By Janine

Dear Santa,
I was a good gril this year. I hope you get me one these things on the list.

Christmas List: Hannah Matna Gameboy game, Uno attack, Mareo Gamboy gam.

Love, Melissa

Dear Santa,
I hope you are having a wonderful time in the North Pole. Do any of your reindeer have a cold?

Love, Lllah

Dear Santa and Mrs. Claus,
How are you? Are you guys okay? Are the reindeer ready to go? There are only 17 days until Christmas. I'm so excited.

Let's get to the list:
I want a real cell phone, I want an Xbox 360 with Halo 3, I want Rock Star for Xbox 360 or Playstation 2 Guitar Heroes, Call of Duty 4, PSP, Nintindo DS with a Mario Game, KidzBop 11 and 12, Shrek III the DVD, Snowboard game for the TV, Dirt bike game for the TV, Two helicopters that fly ad shoot lasers, I want the Mario/Sonic game for Nintendo DS, The 1998 and 1999 Hess Trucks, Alvin and the Chipmunks game for GameCube

Have have safe trip.

Love, Ross

P.S. Merry Christmas Mr. C and Mrs. C. Try to eat all the cookies we leave for you.

Dear Santa,
How are you feeling? Aand how is Rudolph? How is Mrs. Claus? I am a good girl. How is the weather? I really really want to see you and I want a Bratz doll house and a puppy, a real one, and a computer.

I love you Santa. I will have cookies and milk for you.

Love, Saysha

Dear Santa Clas,
Merry Cristmas and Happy New Year!

How have you been this year? I have been absolutly fine. I want you to bring marbls, a Discover Your World music box and an Illistory kit. You are very very very very very very very very very very kind. My behavior has ben prity good this year. I hope you are doing good this year! Plese write back soon. How are your elfs this year?

Always, Madison

Dear Santa,
I hope you are having a good time at the North Pole. Are your elves making toys good and how are your reindeer?

Love, Leeanne

Area Towns Receive Money

by Sarah McCoy

A class-action lawsuit by 72 Connecticut towns, including Hebron, Marlborough, East Hampton and Portland, against the Connecticut Resources Recovery Authority (CRRA) has resulted in the distribution of \$27.4 million among the municipalities.

In 2003, the towns of New Hartford and Barkhamstead filed a suit against the CRRA in an attempt to recover funds from a faulty loan made to Enron Corp. Between 2003-06, the other 70 towns joined in the litigation. The trash authority had loaned the now-defunct energy company \$220 million, with the 72 Connecticut municipalities underwriting the loan. In 2001, when Enron filed for bankruptcy, the loan repayments ceased coming. Since then, CRRA has recouped approximately \$150 million of that loan through legal settlements.

Hebron Town Manager Jared Clark said the class-action suit against CRRA came about when the trash authority began raising the tipping price for towns to bring in refuse in an attempt to recover monies lost by the Enron investment debacle. "The purpose of this litigation," he said, "was to have distributed the funds that were overcharged to the member municipalities."

In June, the towns won the decision settled by Waterbury Superior Court Judge Dennis Eveleigh. On Monday, the state Supreme Court upheld this decision and required the immediate release of the checks to the 72 towns.

Clark, Marlborough First Selectman Bill Black, Portland First Selectwoman Susan Bransfield, and East Hampton Acting Town Manager Robert Drewry each received FedEx packages Wednesday afternoon, with checks ranging from \$120,613 to \$249,484.

State law requires the money go right into the towns' general fund account. Where it goes from there is up to each town's governing board. In Hebron, Clark gave two possibilities for using the town's \$126,434 check. In recent

years, the town has attempted to keep the undesignated fund balance at 7.5 percent of the town's overall budget. This account currently stands at 6.5 percent, and Clark suggested the money he received Wednesday could be used to bolster this fund. The undesignated fund balance exists to protect the town in the case of a major catastrophe.

Clark also suggested the money could go towards the reserves for post-employment benefits. Due to a change in accounting regulations, towns will now be required to set aside money for the health insurance and other benefits of town employees after retirement.

Ultimately, though, it will be up to the Hebron Board of Selectmen to decide the best use for the money.

Portland First Selectwoman Susan Bransfield also had suggestions for the money, but, as in Hebron, it will be up to the Portland Board of Selectmen to decide where the money goes. Bransfield said that each year the town subsidizes the transfer station account. If the town allocates the \$149,918 it received from the settlement to this account, Bransfield believes it would be a tremendous step towards making the account self-sustaining.

At press time, discussion of what to do with the money received Wednesday had not yet been added to the Board of Selectmen's next meeting agenda. However, with a check now in hand, the issue will be discussed in the near future, Bransfield said.

In Marlborough, First Selectman Bill Black says that he doesn't see any need to move the \$120,613 from the general fund account. "That money will be used to reduce the impact of next year's budget," he said.

Black expects to present his budget for 2008-09 after the start of the new year next month.

Drewry did not return calls for comment at press time.

Former Portland First Selectman Sues Town

by Michael McCoy

Former First Selectman Ed Kalinowski is suing the Town of Portland for allegedly breaching a confidentiality agreement the two entities reached in September.

Kalinowski worked as a patrolman for the Portland Police Department from 1978-93. He then spent the next 10 years as the town's First Selectman. In December 2004, Kalinowski filed a suit in small claims court, seeking \$5,000 against the town, concerning retirement benefits that he had not received from Connecticut Interlocal Risk Management Agency (CIRMA), the town's insurer.

Kalinowski said he won that case, and won again after the town appealed it. The town then asked to have the case transferred to Middletown Superior Court. However, before that case was heard, the two parties reached the Sept. 13 agreement

That agreement stated that as of Oct. 1, 2007, Kalinowski would "no longer be entitled to health coverage" made available by the town to its employees or retirees. In return, though, Portland was to pay Kalinowski a total of \$15,000. Once paid, the agreement states, the town would have "no further responsibility" to Kalinowski.

That agreement also reads, "The parties agree that, subject to the Freedom of Information Act, the terms and conditions of this Settlement Agree and Release are confidential."

However, according to Kalinowski, the town released the terms of the agreement to *The Middletown Press*, *The Hartford Courant*, and private residences.

So, a new suit was filed by Kalinowski at Middletown Superior Court on Nov. 13, and served to the town Dec. 14. The suit states that an "integral part" of the Sept. 13 agreement between Kalinowski and the town was a "confidentiality clause." But, the suit alleges, the town "knowingly and willfully violated the confidentiality provisions" of the agreement.

The lawsuit also alleges that the breach of confidentiality was "motivated by actual malice against" Kalinowski. The suit also alleges that "as a direct result" of the confidentiality breach, Kalinowski "suffered embarrassment, pain, humiliation and loss of public esteem and respect."

Kalinowski said he is seeking damages in excess of \$15,000.

First Selectwoman Susan Bransfield declined to comment on the lawsuit, except to say "We've referred it to our insurance carrier."

Kalinowski also would not comment beyond saying that he is "standing by the confidentiality agreement and cannot and will not discuss the terms of the settlement agreement."

Kalinowski's attorney, Igor Sikorsky Jr., was not available for comment.

Three Charged in Portland Shoplifting Scheme

Three men were arrested Monday in connection with a plot to shoplift from an area liquor store, Portland Police said Tuesday.

At around 4:30 p.m. Monday, police said, Charles Mifflin, 38, and Peter Davidson, 41, both of 256 Airline Ave., began arguing and fighting in the rear corner of Portland Discount Liquor Store, 348 Marlborough St. During the fight, several bottles of champagne and sparkling wine were knocked to the floor and smashed, police said.

While the liquor store's clerk attempted to intervene in the fight, police said, Paul Burchard, 45, of 77 Spring St., Middletown, grabbed a case of wine and a 30-pack of beer and fled out the back of the store.

Once outside the store, police said, Burchard was met by a second store employee and attempted to hide the stolen items behind the store dumpster.

Officer Peter Paranzino responded to the store, due to a report of an active fight, and had detained Mifflin and Davidson. When a

second officer, Sgt. Scott Cunningham, arrived at the scene, Burchard ran through the rear parking lot and attempted to climb a small hill onto the adjacent railroad tracks, police said.

However, police said, as Burchard began to climb, a small tree he was using for support broke, and he rolled backwards down the hill, landing at Cunningham's feet.

Police said they later learned the fight in the rear of the store was staged, and that Mifflin, Davidson and Burchard had devised the scheme before entering the store.

Mifflin and Davidson were each arrested and charged with breach of peace, third-degree criminal mischief and conspiracy to commit sixth-degree larceny, police said, while Burchard was charged with sixth-degree larceny.

All three were released on non-surety bonds, police said, and are due in Middletown Superior Court Dec. 27.

Portland Food Bank Helping Needy for Holidays

by Michael McCoy

Today, for the second time in as many months, the Portland Food Bank is gathering a team of around 30 volunteers for the second time in as many months today, as they spread a little Yuletide cheer in the form of Christmas baskets to families in need.

Last month, two days before Thanksgiving, the food bank gave away 73 Thanksgiving baskets to Portland families. These all included a turkey, 42 of which were donated by local business Airex Rubber. The baskets also included all the other Thanksgiving trimmings, including potatoes, yams, cranberry sauce, corn and much more.

The Christmas baskets being distributed today are similar to the Thanksgiving ones. However, this time, some families will receive turkeys, while others will get chickens or hams. As has been the case in the past, Jackie Gotta of Gotta's Farm will also furnish the food bank with fresh produce to include in the baskets, while children will receive a special gift. Distribution will begin late this morning and will probably go into the afternoon. The food bank expects to distribute over 100 baskets.

Ruth Maio has officially been the food bank coordinator since it moved to the senior center almost 10 years ago. Her right-hand man is Nunzi, her husband of 51 years. The two have lived in town for 50 years.

"It's a family affair," Maio said, adding that her daughter, Kim Franklin, and granddaughters, Kelly and Michelle Franklin, volunteer as well. Other frequent food bank workers include Connie Masella, Bill Renals, Hans Hopps, Laurie Griffith, Pete and Jean Zaborowski, Jan Stevenson, Ginny Peruccio and Delores Jarzabek.

The food bank started about 35 years ago, through the Portland Visiting Nurses Association, and Maio has been involved since day one. In the late 1990s, the food bank moved to the

basement of the senior center. However, major renovations to that building made the food bank relocate temporarily from the spring of 2004 to the spring of 2006. During that time, the food bank set up shop at the Seventh Day Adventist Church, as well as the old senior center under the Arrigoni Bridge.

However, they have been back in the newly renovated senior center basement for over a year now, and are quite content with the new space. At last week's Board of Selectmen's meeting, their efforts prompted selectman Mark Finkelstein to say, "I was blown away when I took the tour of the building and saw how much you process down there."

People in financial constrictions for various reasons are welcome to visit the food bank. For example, in August, a fire on Route 66 left three families homeless. Maio met with First Selectwoman Susan Bransfield the day of the fire and made sure the families had the things they needed. Since then, two of those families have rented apartments in town, while the other has temporarily moved to Middletown. The food bank is still helping them out, and has provided furniture as well. "We had a family from Glastonbury give a ton of furniture!" Maio said.

The food bank offers a variety of items, including canned vegetables and other goods: cereal, snacks, drinks, rice, frozen and canned meat, coffee, sauces and condiments. The bank also gives away clothing, including winter coats, hats and even children's snow pants.

Also, Portland's own Cavaliere Bakery and Deli donates their day-old bread to the food bank on a regular basis. Maio also reports that such churches as St. Mary's, Zion Lutheran, Trinity, and the Congregational Church all give regularly to the food bank.

In addition, the food bank often coordinates the retrieval of furniture for families in need. Maio keeps tracks of those who call her look-



Ruth Maio, right, is the coordinator of Portland Food Bank. The food bank today is distributing Christmas baskets to needy families. Maio is shown with her husband, Nunzi.

ing to donate such items as well as those who are in need and makes sure the items get to the right people.

Maio has devoted basically her entire retirement to the food bank. And, when asked what drives her, she said, "I love it. ... I have met so many beautiful, beautiful people."

The food bank operates without a budget and is propelled 100 percent by donations and volunteer efforts. Nunzi Maio estimated that about

100 people are helped by the food bank each month.

The Portland Food Bank is open Mondays and Thursdays, from 9 a.m. to noon. Any family with a financial need is welcome to stop by the food bank, and are asked to bring a driver's license, a piece of certified mail, or other official document that proves they are a Portland resident. Donations are also welcome during this time.

East Hampton Council Fires New Town Manager Before He Starts

by Michael McCoy

At a special meeting Tuesday night, the East Hampton Town Council effectively fired new Town Manager Jim Thomas just two weeks before his first day on the job.

Thomas "was hired incorrectly," Town Council Chairman Melissa Engel said. "He should not have been hired by the Town Council three weeks before the election."

In June, the Town Council, which at that time had a 5-2 Chatham Party majority, fired former town manager Alan Bergren. In October, the council voted 6-0 to hire Jim Thomas as the new town manager, effective Jan. 1.

But on Election Day, Nov. 6, the Chatham Party lost control of the Town Council, and it now has a 3-2-2 Republican majority.

At the time of Thomas' hiring, Engel said the move "was all about [the Chatham Party]... I hope it doesn't, but it may prove to be a mistake." Engel said Wednesday that last week she had asked town labor attorney Mark Sommaruga to look into the nature of Thomas' hiring. When asked if it had anything to do with the quality of Thomas's character, Engel said, "No."

Thomas, 47, is currently the town manager of Old Orchard Beach, ME, a resort town located about 10 minutes from Portland. He was to leave that job just before starting in East Hampton.

Engel explained that the action on Tuesday night was not technically a firing. The motion the Town Council approved was to "rescind the motion and Town Council action taken at its October 24, 2007 meeting..." and "revoke and/or rescind the contract of employment with the incoming Town Manager, as void, unenforceable, and/or invalid, effective immediately." The motion was passed 5-2, with Chatham Party members Scott Minnick and Sue Weintraub dissenting.

The contract the town agreed to in October provided for an annual salary of \$118,000 for Thomas, as well as access to a town-owned Ford Taurus. The contract also stated that either party would give 90 days' notice should they choose to terminate the relationship, and in the event that the council terminated him, six month's severance pay.

In a letter to the editor that appears in this week's *Riverast*, Engel stated, "It was deter-

mined by our labor attorney that the contract under which Mr. Thomas was hired was flawed." Also, Engel wrote, the Town Council "can now proceed with careful consideration and the due diligence warranted in the selection of a new town manager." She added that "Background research will be done extensively."

Minnick this week called Tuesday's firing "a sad day for East Hampton." He said it was the town attorney's opinion "that one council cannot be burdened by a prior council with a decision to hire a town manager."

But, Minnick said, "This was clearly not about Jim Thomas" and called the move "purely political." He elaborated, "In [the Town Council members'] minds, the new town manager was a Chatham Party pick."

He also said, that since the election, the new Town Council has been, "systematically undoing what we've tried to build in the past two years," and added, "this last one is the most egregious by far." He also suggested that firing Thomas "was decided even before we walked into the room."

Minnick also called some of the stated reasons for the decision were "very petty," noting that one councilmember claimed Thomas' not greeting them with a phone call was one reason. He also pointed to the timing of the decision, which came exactly one week before Christmas, and said that Thomas' wife was in the process of professionally relocating to Hartford.

Minnick said Thomas' attorney Kenneth Plumb was not privy to the executive session, and was barred from commenting once the decision was announced, though he publicly objected.

Minnick also said he felt the move made by the Town Council "put the town at risk," and suggested this could result in Thomas responding legally.

"I'm embarrassed for the town," lamented Minnick, who said that 15-20 members of the public attended the Tuesday meeting at the library's community room. He claimed many of them "walked out of there utterly disgusted."

"Good luck trying to find any respectable town manager after what they did to Jim Thomas," warned Minnick.

In a letter to the editor in this week's paper,

former council member Kyle Dostaler said, "Mr. Thomas was fired because he would have gotten things done that were contrary to those with too many self-interests whose only motive is for profit," adding that Thomas would "unearth the hidden skeletons" and would have "properly negotiated and presented an affordable water system to our town."

Nancy Anton, who chaired the Ad-Hoc Committee to Hire a New Town Manager after Bergren's dismissal, issued a written statement Thursday morning, saying she was "deeply disappointed" with the actions taken by Engel and "her 3 blind mice." She continued, "This quick and pointless decision to terminate Jim Thomas's contract was thoughtless."

The statement later said, "Our committee was adamant about finding a person all parties would like. And, I still believe Jim is that kind of person, but it was the focus on destroying all actions taken by the prior town council that motivated this bad move."

Anton stated that "Jim Thomas was doomed from the start, and Melissa Engel knew it when she voted yes to appoint him." She said she wonders how Engel "can sleep at night." She also called Thomas an "honest, hard-working, top-tier candidate," and said "the undeserving blow he has taken breaks my heart. His family, his 7th -grade daughter who has gotten to know our school and teachers, one week before Christmas has their future blown apart. We recruited Jim in good faith. A faith that Engel has destroyed."

Thomas said Thursday he was "shocked and disappointed" by Tuesday's action.

Earlier this month, after meeting with officials in Hartford, Thomas said he had lunch with Engel, council member Tuttle and Board of Finance Chairman Ted Hintz. "It was a very good lunch," he said. "We talked on a number of issues. They expressed delight over a person of my caliber coming to East Hampton." He added, "The meeting went so well, I ended up picking up the tab."

"I still have no idea what brought this about... no one has talked to me," Thomas said Thursday.

According to Thomas, Engel sent him an e-mail at 4:30 p.m. on Monday, telling him the

Town Council would have an executive session the following night to discuss his contract, but that it was not necessary for him to attend. Thomas said he has called Engel twice since Tuesday's decision, but has not received a call back. In fact, Thomas said, neither he nor his attorney has been given a reason for the termination of the contract.

Thomas had tendered his resignation in Old Orchard Beach immediately after winning the position in East Hampton. Thomas said that, though Old Orchard Beach is currently searching for a new town manager, "we're discussing some options."

As for the general direction of his career, Thomas mentioned his more than 20 years in the field and said, "I've enjoyed public administration. I see myself serving in this capacity in the future."

As for legal recourse, Thomas said, "We're discussing a number of options. I think it's premature at this time to comment on any of that."

Thomas said he and his family are "not going to let this issue interfere with our Christmas holiday or our future." Thomas and his wife of 29 years, Kathy, have four children, ranging in age from 13 to 26.

Ultimately, though shocked by the move, Thomas seemed to take this blow in stride, calmly saying, "If you have your health, your family, and your colleagues, everything works out for the best." Applying that observation to the future, Thomas predicted, "We'll get through this situation."

Engel said she hopes to secure a new town manager within the next six months and planned to bring the matter of forming another ad-hoc search committee to the council at its next meeting in January.

Public Works Director Bob Drewry has served as Acting Town Manager since Bergren left in October, and has agreed to continue to do so until a permanent town manager can be found.

"He has asked for nothing," Engel said of Drewry, who has virtually been pulling double duty since October. But, she said, she also planned to introduce the notion of further compensating Drewry before the council in January as well.

Colchester Resident Takes In Ukrainian Orphan for Holidays

by Sarah McCoy

Lisa Collins has always had a propensity for helping others. It's a trait easily observable by the 40 dogs, cats, rats, rabbits, snakes and ferrets she has rescued over the years.

This week, however, the Colchester woman's willingness to help has reached a much larger scope, as Collins is hosting a 12-year-old Ukrainian orphan for Christmas.

Last summer, Collins, 24, met Marina Artyukhova at an ice skating rink. Collins was practicing, while another Connecticut woman was hosting Marina for the summer. The two immediately bonded, as Collins, who speaks Russian, was one of the few able to communicate with Marina.

For the next six months, Collins saved all she could, so she could bring Marina back to Connecticut through the hosting program Frontier Horizons. On Monday, Marina arrived.

"I wanted her to experience Christmas," Collins said. "My grandfather was an orphan and I grew up hearing horror stories from him. I couldn't imagine the same for Marina."

Marina's mother passed away four years ago and she has never met her father. So, when she was eight, she was placed in an orphanage just outside the capital city of Kiev. Marina doesn't have any horror stories to share but she says living with Collins and her mother, Susan Mende, is "very different."

For instance, Monday night was the first time Marina had ever slept in a room by herself. Admittedly scared at first, she got used to it when she saw her bedroom. Collins and Mende had decorated it with pink, Marina's favorite color.

"It helped that she was so tired from the traveling," Collins said. "And I think she got com-

fortable on the pink sheets."

Marina will be in Colchester for just three weeks, so Collins and Mende are trying to fill up the days as much as possible. They've already been to the ice skating rink where they first met, to tae-kwon-do class where Collins earned her black belt, and to Wal-Mart for all the odds and ends Marina has never had. "On the first night we had to go shopping because she didn't have pajamas," Mende said. "She came with a small backpack and an empty suitcase."

They'll also do the typical Christmas things that Marina has never experienced, such as bake cookies, hang ornaments and decorate the house.

"For years I heard my grandfather tell me this story of the Christmas that he received a toy truck with a missing wheel," Collins said. "He couldn't play with it at all and soon Christmas to him became a time that he dreaded because it was a day of sadness and disappointment. I don't want Marina to have those same thoughts. I want her to come downstairs on Christmas morning and open presents surrounded by people that love her."

Marina is not unlike your average 12-year-old. She maintains a fine balance between becoming an adult and remaining a child. "The other day she put on make-up and then began drawing pictures of fairies," Mende said. She loves to draw and hopes to become an artist one day. Her favorite subject is English, which she can read but is hesitant to speak. She doesn't have a plan for when she will be forced to leave the orphanage at age 16; not surprising, considering Marina just turned 12.



Colchester resident Lisa Collins, right, sponsored a visit by Marina Artyukhova for Christmas. Marina is a 12-year-old orphan from the Ukraine who met Collins last summer.

One thing that struck Collins and Mende is Marina's gratitude for even the smallest gesture. On Tuesday evening she opened a small Christmas gift, and thanked Mende profusely before even realizing what the present was – a small bottle of clear liquid that contained sparkles for her to spray on.

"She thanks me all the time for bringing her here, for dinner, for everything," Collins said.

In a rare moment of courage Marina said one sentence in English. "You are a big angel," she said, looking at Collins.

If all goes according to plan, Marina will return in the summer for a longer visit.

"I've always wanted a sister," Collins, who is an only child, said. For now she, Mende, and Marina are content enjoying their days together and getting to know one another.

School Board Returning \$450,000 to RHAM Towns

by Sarah McCoy

Santa Claus may be coming a little late to Hebron, Andover and Marlborough this year, but he'll be bringing quite a treat.

The RHAM Board of Education this week approved a motion for Superintendent of Schools Robert Siminski to return an estimated \$450,000 to the three towns as a result of the recently completed audit for the 2006-07 school year.

Siminski will make the deliveries in early January.

Peter Hornyak, of the auditing firm Seward and Monde, was on hand Monday to give the regional school board an overview of the audit findings. He reported that the district can expect a surplus of approximately \$450,000 from the last fiscal year's budget.

The primary area of unexpected income came from investment income. Hornyak reported that the district earned \$190,000 more

than expected through capital gains. An additional \$60,000 was also accrued through gate receipts for school activities and building uses from outside groups. The main areas of savings for the district came from the employee benefits and special education line items.

Siminski requested that the school board approve a motion enabling him to distribute the surplus to the member towns, despite the fact that the district is lacking final numbers.

"We will know the exact results of the audit in the coming days and, I believe, it is important that the towns receive their share of the surplus before they begin their budget considerations for the coming year," he said.

But before the motion passed (by a vote of 8-2), the newest RHAM board member, Joe Farrell, expressed his concern with the plan. "I can't even imagine entertaining a motion to give this money back when we don't know our own

finances for the coming year," he said. Farrell questioned whether the money could be better used to offset some of the district's debt.

Siminski responded to Farrell by reporting that state statutes require the district to return to the towns any funds not allocated in the year they were approved for.

Ultimately, the motion passed 8-2, with Farrell and Michael Turner voting against it.

In his presentation, Hornyak also addressed some of the district's business management practices. The number one issue facing RHAM, in his opinion, is the lack of separation of duties in the finance office.

"You want to make sure that the person approving an expenditure isn't the same as the person making the request," Hornyak said. "Also, there should be some form of oversight and written documentation to review purchase orders and condition of received goods."

He said that, generally speaking, it takes between five and six individuals to ensure complete separation of duties.

Hornyak commended the district on its business manual, indicating that most school systems do not have these sorts of policies. However, he would like to see the Board of Education and financial professionals review and expand the section on general computer control.

Monday night's meeting was the first with the newly formed board. With Turner winning re-election in Marlborough and Thomas Tremont and Maryanne Leichter winning in Hebron, the only change in the board's composition is Farrell replacing former chairman of the board Al Covino.

Susan Griffiths was elected the new chairman of the school board, with Jim Cherry remaining as vice-chairman, Dieter Zimmer as treasurer, and Leichter as secretary.

Marlborough Police News

12/17-Jane Kearns-Finnegan, 41, of 23 Blish Rd., was charged with DUI and risk of injury, State Police say.

Hebron Police News

12/14-A youthful offender was charged with possession of drug paraphernalia, State Police say.

12/14-A youthful offender was charged with sixth-degree larceny, State Police say.

12/14-A youthful offender was charged with second-degree criminal mischief, State Police say.

Colchester Police News

12/11-Danielle Demac, 22, of 35 Neptune Ave., New London, turned herself into State Police for the charges of second-degree failure to appear and operation of a motor vehicle with a suspended license, State Police say.

12/11-Anthony Perry, 29, of 383 Barbour St., Hartford, was charged with DUI and improper plate display, State Police say.

12/14-William Freitas, 48, of 60 Brindlewood Path, was charged with DUI and failure to stay in the lane, State Police say.

Andover Police News

12/11-Marybeth Surprenant, 48, of 34 Kelly St., Bristol, was charged with third-degree larceny, State Police say.

Obituaries

Marlborough

Katherine C. Helweg

Katherine C. Helweg, 59, of Kingston, RI, and formerly of Marlborough, died Tuesday, Dec. 11. She was the wife of Paul F. Helweg, Jr.

Born in Providence, RI, she was a daughter of Dorothy (Whittaker) Fahey of Warwick, RI, and the late John Fahey. Mrs. Helweg was a special education teacher's aide for the Chariho school system. She enjoyed spending time with her family, especially her 3 month old granddaughter, Katie. She moved to RI seven years ago.

She is survived by her son, Todd Helweg of New Britain, her daughter and son-in-law Courtney and John Jamroga of Waterford, her granddaughter Katie Jamroga of Waterford, a brother, Stephen Fahey of Westerly, RI, a sister Deborah Fahey of Warwick, RI.

A funeral service was Wednesday, Dec. 19, at the Avery-Storti Funeral Home, in Wakefield, RI. Burial followed in the Rhode Island Veterans Cemetery, Exeter. The family kindly requests memorial donations to the Joslin Diabetes Clinic, One Joslin Place, Dev. Office, Suite 745, Boston, MA, 02215.

Portland

James Patrick Serra

James Patrick Serra, 85, lifelong resident of Portland, died Thursday, Dec. 13, at home surrounded by his daughter and granddaughters, after a courageous battle with cancer. Born in Portland on April 5, 1922, he was the son of the late Joseph and Josephine (DiMauro) Serra. Jim was predeceased by his wife of 47 years, Ida "Skip" (Dentino) Serra.

Jim, a World War II veteran, served in the U.S. Navy in the Southwest Pacific as an aviation mechanic. He worked at Northeast Utilities for about 30 years as a mechanical maintenance supervisor. He was very proud and honored to receive his high school diploma from Portland High School in 2000 and recently was the recipient of the Connecticut Wartime Veterans Service Medal with a proclamation from the state in recognition of his service during World War II. Jim was an avid sports fan and especially loved watching his granddaughters play basketball, the UConn women's basketball team, and the Red Sox, he never missed a game. Family meant everything to him and he meant the world to those who knew and loved him. His smile, quick wit, kindness, friendliness toward and love of family, friends, and strangers alike will be deeply missed.

He is survived by his daughter, Lucyne Peterson and her husband Mark of Moodus; two granddaughters, Melissa Couch and her husband Lee of Portland, Marcy Herlihy and her husband Rory of Ivoryton; two brothers, Angelo Serra of Dudley, MA, Paul Serra of Amston; two sisters, Palma Wilk and Joanna Formica both of Portland; and many nieces and nephews. He was predeceased by five brothers and two sisters, Connie Serra, Sebastian "Mike" Serra, Joseph Serra, Salvatore "Tootie" Serra, C. John Serra, Mary Salustro, and Anna Serra.

Funeral services were held at the Church of St. Mary, 51 Freestone Ave., Portland on Monday, Dec. 17. Interment will be in Rose Hill Memorial Park in Rocky Hill, where full Military Honors will be accorded. There were no calling hours. Friends who wish may make gifts in Jim's memory to Middlesex Hospice and Palliative Care, 28 Crescent Street, Middletown, CT 06457. Messages of condolences may be sent to the family at www.doolittlefuneralservice.com. The Doolittle Funeral Home, 14 Old Church St., Middletown is in charge of arrangements.

Hebron

Edward Burns

Edward "Ryan Michael" Burns, 36, of Amston and Provincetown, MA, spouse of Franky Burns, passed away Sunday, Dec. 16, at home. Born March 11, 1971 in Hartford, he was a son of Robert Burns of Florida and the late Joanne (Lovell) Burns. He grew up in Ashford and was a 1989 graduate of E.O. Smith High School. Eddy was a Body Art Model and was also a waiter at Cafe Euro in Provincetown.

In addition to his father and spouse, he is survived by seven sisters, Mary-Jo Langer of Windham, Lori Miller of Springfield, MA, Cheryl Daley of Danielson, Lynn Zanjungo, Esther Jogodzinski and Cynthia Lovell, all of Ashford and Joyce Fitzgerald of Eastford; five brothers, Thom Burns of Amston, Patrick Burns of Woodstock, Robert Burns, Jr. of Newington and Robert Swanek and George Lovell, Jr., both of Ashford; and numerous extended family members and friends.

A celebration of Eddy's life will be held Saturday, Dec. 18, from noon-4 p.m. at his home, 931 Church St. in the Amston section of Hebron. All are welcome to attend. In lieu of flowers, donations in his memory may be made to Hospice of Eastern CT/VNA East, 34 Ledgebrook Dr., Mansfield Center, 06250. Care of arrangements has been entrusted to the Aurora-McCarthy Funeral Home of Colchester.

Marlborough

Marion J. Kane

Marion J. Kane, 75, of Fox Lake, IL and formerly of Marlborough, died Saturday, Dec. 15, at her home. She was born Oct. 22, 1932, to Glenn W. and Bertha M. (Wolfert) Sarner. She married Edward Eugene Kane on April 11, 1953. He preceded her in death Nov. 26, 1989. She had been the secretary for Barclay's Business Credit in Hartford for many years. She was the social director at Leisure Village in Fox Lake, and she enjoyed traveling.

Survivors include three children, John Kane, Susan (John) Stanescki and Nancy (Al) Smith, all of Illinois; 11 grandchildren; a sister, Shirley Kosan of Bridgeport; a brother, Glenn Sarner of Burlington, VT; and a daughter-in-law, Karen Kane of Brandon, VT. She was preceded in death by her parents; her husband; two sons, Patrick and Thomas Kane; and a brother Earl Sarner.

Friends greeted the family Thursday, Dec. 20, at Saunders & McFarlin Funeral Home, 107 W. Sumner St., Harvard, IL. The memorial service was to be held at 11 a.m. Friday, Dec. 21, at the funeral home. Memorials may be made to the American Brain Tumor Association, 2720 S. River Road, Suite 146, Des Plaines, IL 60018. Sign the online guest book at saundersmcfarlin.net. For information, call the funeral home at 815-943-5400.

Portland

Edward J. Leffingwell

Edward J. "Eddie" Leffingwell, 80, of Congdon St. West, Middletown, died Monday, Dec. 17, at Middlesex Hospital Hospice Unit. Born in Norfolk, March 24, 1927, a son of the late Richard and Bessie Dean Leffingwell, he was a lifelong resident of Portland until recently moving to Middletown. He had been employed by the Portland Board of Education for 34 years until his retirement in 1988. He was a veteran of World War II having served in the U.S. Army 15th U.S. Zone Constabulary from 1945 - 1946. Eddie was a 60 year member of the Portland Volunteer Fire Department, Company # 2 and had been a member of the Drill Team. He served as Chief of the Fire Police and as a Constable for the Town of Portland. He was a Past-Commander of the American Legion Post No. 69 of Portland. He also served on the Portland Board of Selectmen from 1995-97. He was a member of the Middlesex Police Association, the Interstate Police Association, and the Portland Senior Center. He was a member of Trinity Episcopal Church in Portland.

Eddie was a loving and devoted father and grandfather who was adored by his children and grandchildren who survive him: his daughters Susan Marth and her husband Dennis, of Lake Wylie, SC, Diane Kszywanos and her husband Bob of Chester, and Sandra Trabucchi and her husband Roger of Chester; his sons, Edward J. "Skip" Leffingwell and Peter Leffingwell and his wife Kimberly, all of Chester; his grandchildren Dana, Joshua, Kelly, Peter, Emma, Tim, Dan, Mike, and Jon; his sister Shirley Wade of Portland; his brother Ernest Hamilton of VT, and many nieces and nephews. He was predeceased by his sisters Gert, Isabell, Bessie, Helen, Alice and Janette, and his brothers Roland, Henry, Alfred, Donald, and Samuel "Rolle" Hamilton and Johnny "Hammy" Hamilton.

His family received relatives and friends in the Portland Memorial Funeral Home, 231 Main St., Portland, Thursday from 4-8 p.m. Funeral services were to be held Friday at 10 a.m. in Trinity Episcopal Church, Portland. Interment, with military honors, will be in the State Veterans Cemetery, Middletown. In lieu of flowers, the family requests that gifts in Eddie's memory be sent to the Middlesex Hospital Hospice Unit c/o Office of Philanthropy 28 Crescent St., Middletown, CT 06457 or the Portland Volunteer Fire Department, Company 2, 594 Main St., Portland. www.portlandmemorialfh.com

Portland

Elizabeth Cunningham

Elizabeth (Sanborn) Cunningham, 78, died Dec. 9, in Floral City, FL. She was born in Middletown, to Frank and Bertha Sanborn. She served in the U.S. Air Force during World War II, and after marriage moved to Florida. Besides her parents, she was predeceased by her husband George L. Cunningham of Florida and one sister, Rosemary Wilson, of Portland. Survivors include eight children, 13 grandchildren and five siblings; including Barbara Chapman, Frank Sanborn, Constance Berggren, William Sanborn, all of Portland and Loraine Rizzo of Niantic. A memorial service will be held Jan. 11, 2008, at St. Anthony's Church in Brooksville, FL.