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Maureen Murphy of Hebron is hoping to share the love of farming with the entire community this summer through a farmers' market. Her proposal includes using a town-owned section of land adjacent to the Horton House for vendors to come and set up booth of fresh produce, craft products or other natural items.

Hebron Resident Hopes to Bring Farmers' Market to Town

by Sarah McCoy

For years Maureen Murphy never felt that she had the life for her. Working in the human resources field, Murphy felt something was missing.

"I have always been interested in farming and always wanted that to be a part of my life," the Hebron resident explained.

Murphy is on her way now and she's hoping to bring the whole town with her as she looks to begin a farmer's market in Hebron.

As a young child Murphy can remember going to her grandfather's house for fresh vegetables he had grown and the best chicken soup made from ingredients on his farm. "He was the original sustainable living person in my life," Murphy recalled.

She went to Quinnipiac University, and she joked it was largely because of Sleeping Giant State Park across the street. It was after that Murphy's career took a detour into the HR world. But she reconnected with nature soon after, volunteering for the state Department of Environmental Protection.

It was through her volunteer work that Murphy learned of a property in Hebron. At the time she was looking for a rent-to-buy option that would provide her space for both animals and a garden. The spot at 470 Gilead St. afforded Murphy just that.

The former home of the late George Milne was just what Murphy had in mind.

Milne, the former pastor at Gilead Congregational Church, developed a small Christmas tree farm on the land. Since 2004 it's been home to Murphy, her dog, two horses, two sheep, and a budding garden.

"George had two loves, God and the outdoors," Murphy said of Milne. "You can still see the love of both on the property."

Now settled in her own place, Murphy has dove head first into figuring this whole farming thing out. It hasn't been easy, by any stretch of the imagination.

She's still trying to teach her miniature horse how to pull a wagon to save herself some of the heavy lifting.

And, one time, she walked into her dining room to find one of her sheep standing there. "I'm still a novice at this," she laughed. "I didn't know how easy it is for them to escape [from their pen]."

But things do seem to be heading in the right direction for Murphy, especially when it comes to fresh produce.

To assist her in her endeavor, Murphy joined the Northeast Organic Farming Association (NOFA) and read up on community supported agriculture (CSA).

CSA farming is a partnership between

farmers and consumers. Consumers buy a share of the farm's harvest, guaranteeing a market for the farmer's crop. Murphy said there are a number of reasons she got into CSA farming including to promote sustainable living, reducing transportation costs and environmental effects, and to encourage local agriculture.

Last year she began advertising her farm as a CSA through the NOFA website. She had one client that first year and has expanded to 15 for this coming year. "There's obviously a need for this type of thing in Hebron," Murphy said. "I just want to help provide."

Space limitations have forced Murphy to stop taking customers for her fresh produce, but the demand got her thinking. "I wanted to find a way to bring fresh products to people as well as promote the history and culture of the town," she said.

With that Murphy began working on plans for Hebron's own farmers' market. The idea is to have dozens of vendors fill the spot of land adjacent to the Horton House in the center of town. Murphy envisions farmers could bring their surplus produce, crafters could showcase their work, and those with a special trade or talent could display what they do best.

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“I see it as a gathering place in town where Hebron residents can promote its agricultural roots,” she said.

Murphy hopes it could begin with a kick-off event in June with weekly gatherings following throughout the summer.

Last December, Murphy presented the idea to the Planning and Zoning Commission. Town Planner Mike O’Leary said the plan was well received, though, as it involves town property, it would need to be approved by the Board of Selectmen.

“In general commission members seem to like the idea,” O’Leary said. “They liked the idea of promoting the town’s farming roots and they liked the idea of encouraging people to the center of town.”

Town Manager Jared Clark said he hopes to see the matter on the agenda for the March 5 Board of Selectmen meeting. Clark said he sees a couple issues with the potential farmers’ market. The first is logistical. With ADA renovations scheduled to occur at Town Hall in late spring and early summer, Clark has concerns about parking in the area.

On a policy level, the Board of Selectmen

will have to decide if the farmers’ market creates an unfair competition amongst Hebron businesses. “While a farmers’ market can be looked upon as a beneficial type of business for Hebron residents to take advantage of, a concern could be whether or not the arrangement sets up any type of competition with taxpayers, specifically Ted’s Market which sells fresh produce,” Clark said.

Clark said while towns generally do not want to use their resources to compete against the private sector, it isn’t a hard and fast rule. For instance, the upcoming Maple Fest uses public property to support local businesses. There are also public daycares in town even though private facilities exist.

Murphy’s not deterred by the possible obstacles that stand in the way of making a farmer’s market a reality. “It’s pretty exciting to be doing something I love,” she said. “If I can share that with others that would be great, too.”

The March 5 Board of Selectmen meeting will take place at 7:30 p.m. at the Hebron Town Office Building, located at 15 Gilead St.

Observations & Ruminations

by Mike Thompson

Hopefully, some of you watched the Academy Awards this past Sunday. If you did, you saw a heck of a show.

And if you didn’t, well, you missed a heck of a show.

As I’ve hinted off and on here in the past, I’m a movie fan, and I watch the Oscars every year. I know a lot of people complain each year about the unfunny banter between presenters, the silly dance numbers and the absurd length of the show. It’s never bothered me that much (particularly the show’s length; it’s the freakin’ Academy Awards, the highest honor you can receive in film. The show can be allowed to go a little long). So you can understand why, when the show’s producers announced they were going to make some changes to the telecast, I was a little concerned. In an attempt to make it appeal “to the masses,” were the Academy Awards producers going to wind up with a worse show than what they had before?

But, as it turned out, I had nothing to fear. The Oscars were terrific.

Hugh Jackman was the host of the show, and he actually did a great job. His opening number was the most entertaining Oscar opening since the days of Billy Crystal hosting the show. (The routine got bonus points for the pretty-as-always Anne Hathaway’s cameo during the *Frost/Nixon* part. I knew she had good comedic chops, but her nice singing voice was a surprise.) It was well-written and also well-performed, as Jackman, who has both won Tony Awards and hosted the Tony Awards show, is a very adept song and dance man. He showed a ton of energy during that opening bit, and was justly rewarded with a standing ovation by those in attendance. (I wasn’t quite as much a fan of the mid-show number featuring songs from different movie musicals, but it was still well-done and entertaining.)

As the Oscars have been around for decades (Sunday’s was the 81st annual ceremony), the show’s producers usually find various ways to reference the show’s history. The way they did it this year was quite interesting: for each of the four acting categories (Best Supporting Actress, Best Supporting Actor, Best Actress and Best Actor), five previous winners in the category appeared on stage to present the award. The past Oscar winners came from both recent (Halle Berry, Nicole Kidman) and not-so-recent (Eva Marie Saint, Sophia Loren) years. It was a classy touch by the Oscar producers.

Another change from past years that I liked: Instead of just having the orchestra play somber music while the images of deceased actors flashed on screen during the “In Memoriam” segment, this year Queen Latifah sang a great rendition of “I’ll Be Seeing You” while clips of those who passed appeared. Again, a very classy move.

Now, on to the awards themselves. I wrote in this space last week I had only seen one of

the five Best Picture nominees, *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*. However, last Saturday, I saw *Frost/Nixon*, which brought the total number of Best Picture nominees I’d seen up to two. And last Friday, I saw *Doubt*. It was a very good movie, and the best part was the acting – and as a result, no less than four of the movie’s stars were nominated for Oscars.

Of course, as things turned out, none of the *Doubt* nominees won anything Sunday night, and *Benjamin Button* and *Frost/Nixon* both lost the Best Picture race to *Slumdog Millionaire*. I’ve heard terrific things about *Millionaire*, though I have yet to see it. But I thought *Frost/Nixon* was a great piece of entertainment, with terrific performances all around, and it would’ve been neat to see it win.

When all was said and done, I wound up seeing only one of the movies that won in what I consider to be the big categories (Best Original Screenplay, Best Adapted Screenplay, the acting categories, Best Director and Best Picture). And while the late Heath Ledger’s win for playing The Joker in *The Dark Knight* wasn’t exactly a surprise, it was certainly well-deserved. While I saw only one of the other Best Supporting Actor nominees (Philip Seymour Hoffman, from the aforementioned *Doubt*), it’s tough to imagine anyone doing a better job with the role they were charged to play than Ledger did with The Joker. Simply put, he *became* that character. You saw no traces of Ledger’s previous roles. Nor did you see any reminders of Jack Nicholson, who did such a great job as The Joker in the 1989 *Batman* film. It was a fabulous example of an actor really sinking his teeth into a part. We’ll never know, of course, but I think Ledger would have been nominated for the role even if he hadn’t passed away last year. He turned in a fantastic performance.

I always like it when a movie that I’ve seen comes away with the top Oscar prizes. It’s a neat feeling; it kind of makes you feel a little like you were in on something special. So, to that end, I’m a tad disappointed *Slumdog Millionaire* cleaned up Sunday night. Like I said, I haven’t seen it, so I can’t really say it didn’t *deserve* to win. (Which was not the case with the 2005 Best Picture winner, *Crash*, which beat out the far-more-deserving *Brokeback Mountain*. I think I might have actually yelled at the screen a little when *Crash* won. It’s one of the most overrated films I’ve ever seen. The characters were cartoons and, for a movie that had been praised for being a subtle look at race relations, it was about as unsubtle as a bad TV-movie. The acting was strong, but it was a terrible choice for Best Picture. The only time I *didn’t* like it when a movie I’d seen won a top award.) It’s just, again, rather fun when a movie you saw – and liked – wins Best Picture.

Maybe it’ll happen next year.

* * *

See you next week.

RHAM Teachers Get Pay Raise

by Sarah McCoy

Under the terms of the new three-year deal between the teachers’ union and the RHAM Board of Education, teachers will get a pay raise – but they’ll also have to start paying more for their health insurance.

The arbitration award was finalized between the union and the regional school board Feb. 21.

“Each side won some and lost some,” Superintendent of Schools Robert Siminski said of the decision. “My responsibility is to take the decision rendered and implement it.”

The arbitration award calls for a 2 percent salary raise for teachers in the upcoming 2009-10 fiscal year, a 4.1 percent raise the year after, and a 4 percent raise in 2011-12. During that time, teacher contributions to health insurance will rise to 17.5 percent next year, 19 percent in 2010-11, and 19.5 percent the following year.

Currently, teachers pay 16 percent of their health insurance premiums.

Earlier this week, Siminski said he had been waiting for these arbitration numbers to finalize his budget proposal. He is expected to present his recommendations to the RHAM Board of Education Monday.

Salaries make up over half of the school district’s budget each year.

Negotiations between the two sides began last May. When an agreement couldn’t be reached the sides took the next step to mediation and then, finally, to arbitration. School board chair Sue Griffiths said the process the board followed is in line with state guidelines and while sometimes sides can quickly come

to an agreement, in her experience, “it isn’t wildly unusual for the matter to go to arbitration.”

Griffiths said the feeling of the board was a general acceptance of the decision and an eagerness to move on with the budget process. “We now need to move forward,” she said.

Historically, much of the board’s budget deliberations occur in February, but due to the arbitration ruling the process had been delayed.

Siminski reported that while the Board of Education does not need to approve the award, approval from the selectmen in each of the three towns is needed. If the arbitration award fails by a two-thirds vote in all three towns, the Board of Education and the teachers’ union would return to arbitration with two neutral arbitration judges.

On Monday, the school board also returned over \$150,000 to the three RHAM towns as a result of the audit done on the 2007-08 fiscal year budget. Hebron will receive about 53 percent of this money, Marlborough 30 percent, and Andover 17 percent, in line with their enrollment numbers between the middle and high schools.

It has been common practice in recent years for RHAM to return money to the towns. In 2007, the board returned over \$450,000 to the towns and last year close to \$300,000.

The next RHAM Board of Education meeting will be held Monday, March 2, at 6:30 p.m., in the chorus room at RHAM High School, 85 Wall St., Hebron. This will be a special meeting to begin work on the budget for the 2009-10 fiscal year.

Colchester Police Commission, Selectmen Disagree Over Member's Removal

by Adam Benson

A decision last week by the Board of Selectmen to oust a member of the Police Commission who they say violated town policy has led to a power struggle between the sides.

The Board of Selectmen voted 4-1 last Thursday, Feb. 26, to remove James Stavola from the five-member Police Commission. Then, just four days later, the Police Commission threw its support behind Stavola's reinstatement, with three of its four members voting to keep him on board.

The Police Commission's move at its meeting Tuesday was simply a symbolic gesture, since the Board of Selectmen is tasked with removing or appointing members to town boards and commissions.

According to the town's charter, Stavola has seven days to request a hearing before the Board of Selectmen asking for reinstatement – a right Stavola said Tuesday he plans to pursue.

"My intention is to hopefully get reinstated and serve the citizens of Colchester and our officers," Stavola said. "I appreciated the support of the Police Commission, and I look forward to getting back to serving the citizens and police department for the town."

At the core of the disagreement is a Feb. 8 statement Stavola released purportedly on behalf of his colleagues expressing disappointment at an Ethics Commission decision days earlier to reinstate Police Commission chair William Otfinoski.

Otfinoski temporarily relinquished his seat Jan. 8, when the Ethics Commission launched an investigation on the heels of allegations by Stavola and fellow Police Commission member Glenn Morron that Otfinoski stalled contract talks between the police union and town officials and then mischaracterized the tenor of those negotiations at subsequent meetings. In a statement released to the *Riverast*, the police union alleges that, by stalling the talks, it forced the process into arbitration, costing the town \$100,000 in fees.

The police union also alleges that Otfinoski "deliberately withheld 64 unresolved police contract issues from the entire police commission for nearly one year."

Otfinoski was cleared of any wrongdoing Feb. 3, when he reclaimed the chairmanship of

the Police Commission.

Stavola – who serves as the Police Commission's public relations officer – drafted a statement via e-mail opposing Otfinoski's reinstatement and sent it to the rest of his board.

"The Police Commission, having 60 years of police experience, is very disappointed with the decision of the Ethics Commission," the statement said. "The Ethics Commission was supplied with enough facts and circumstances that would have supported a finding of probable cause and justified further investigation. The decision is a grave injustice to the town's police officers and has severely damaged the very foundation and concept of having a commission."

Stavola – who worked as a police officer for more than 30 years – said none of his commission colleagues objected to the statement's wording or having it released to the public at the time.

"This wasn't my idea," Stavola said. "That was on behalf of everybody. That was the premise I was working under, but obviously I was punished for it by being removed."

But according to First Selectman Linda Hodge and Otfinoski, Stavola's statement wasn't vetted by them first – in violation of the town's charter.

Hodge said that policy is in place not as a censoring tool but so Colchester leaders can make sure information released through their ancillary boards to the public is "accurate."

Complicating matters, selectmen said, was the lack of any paper trail backing Stavola's claim that he had the go-ahead from his colleagues before releasing a statement. Minutes from previous Police Commission meetings make no mention of the statement, and in November the body voted to make Otfinoski its sole spokesman.

Hodge said she supported the decision by selectmen to revoke Stavola's place on the Police Commission in light of his actions. The motion was made by selectman Stan Soby and seconded by Greg Cordova.

"It's totally within the purview of the Board of Selectmen to address how the boards or commissions to which they appoint members are

supporting the best interests of the people of Colchester," Hodge said.

Selectwoman Rosemary Coyle was the lone vote in support of preserving Stavola's place on the Police Commission.

Coyle declined to weigh in on the substance of the disagreement pending Stavola's appeal but said she voted against his removal because she didn't feel selectmen were presented with enough information to make an informed decision at their meeting.

"I base decisions on complete information, what's in the best interest of the town and trying to be fair on an issue, and I could not vote on that motion based on those principles," she said. "Just reading something in the newspaper doesn't give you the background behind it."

Otfinoski said he felt cut out of the process and had no knowledge that Stavola or other Police Commission members were crafting a direct response to the Ethics Commission's findings.

"A lot of this stems back to what the guidelines are that we operate from. Not everyone seems to take them seriously," Otfinoski said. "As usual in a board or a commission, we have quite a variation of people and opinions, and we are split on some major issues."

Stavola has the backing of at least one key group in his bid to win back his seat on the commission.

"To learn of the latest motion to oust Commissioner Jim Stavola is nothing less than inconceivable. ... His recent press release on behalf of the remaining police commissioners is 100 percent accurate. The Colchester Police Union unanimously agrees with his statement," police union president Tim Edwards said in a statement.

Though the union and Board of Selectmen came to terms Thursday on a ratified contract after nearly two and a half years of talks, Edwards said morale at the 10-person force is at an all-time low due to the protracted timelines and its grievances against Otfinoski.

Keeping Stavola sidelined, Edwards said, would further strain ties between the department and town administrators, though officers' day-to-day work to keep residents safe would

be unaffected, he vowed.

"It's unexplainable to even watch this happen, but if they somehow single him out after he had the opinion of the whole commission, it's going to be a travesty and it's not going to be taken well at all by the police union," Edwards said. "The things that we do have never been done more efficiently. Because the guys have such a good work effort, you'll never see their police work suffer. They'll just leave."

According to Edwards, that's already started to happen. He said a three-and-a-half-year veteran of the Colchester Police Department joined up with another law enforcement agency in the state partly because of the simmering tensions between the Board of Selectmen, the Police Commission and the union.

"I'm not too sure morale could get worse," Edwards said. "Everything that's supposed to be working in concert is failing, and failing miserably."

No matter what happens with Stavola, officials from all sides acknowledged communication gaps exist that need to be addressed if the commission is to get back on track.

"We are grinding to a halt, that's for sure," Otfinoski said. "The commission right now certainly is not working cohesively as a unit, and I don't know what it's going to take to make that happen."

Hodge said selectmen are using the issue as a springboard toward shoring up relations between the sides.

"The Board of Selectmen's major concern is we do things that overall are good for Colchester, and we need to make sure that all our boards are working toward that end," she said.

Coyle wouldn't give an indication about how she might vote during any future reinstatement hearing for Stavola. She also said she wants to see any future disagreements commissioners might have with one another be resolved with less strife.

"They need to function together in the best interests of the town, and they each have talents they bring to the commission," she said. "It would be a shame to lose the talents that they bring."

Schism Forms Over East Hampton Home-Based Businesses

by Michael McCoy

A sudden rift has unexpectedly broken out over the issue of home-based businesses in town.

The most recent chapter was a Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) meeting Feb. 9 that effectively resulted in the affirmation of such businesses. However, the matter all starts with a complaint lodged by Mary Ann Dostaler in December of last year.

At that time, Dostaler said she was put off by Wayne Rand's property at the corner of Route 16 and Hog Hill Road, which is situated near Dostaler's home and business at 56 William Dr. She complained that despite the property being in a commercial zone, he could not store commercial equipment there until he had a site plan approval. Dostaler also said the property was full of garbage, boats, and was, in short, blighted.

Planning, Zoning and Building Administrator Jim Carey, who also acts as the zoning enforcement officer, upheld Dostaler's complaint, and Rand said this week that, when he inspected the regulations, he agreed. So, Rand moved the boats.

After he moved the boats, Rand then "filed a complaint with the town, just as she did." His grievance was that Dostaler operated her business, MAD Communications, out of her home, though no zoning regulation permitted her to do so. He said, "She should not run her commercial business out of a residential zone."

He figured, "She's throwing stones and living in a glass house." However Dostaler offered a different take, saying, "He was found in violation, and struck out against me as a result."

"There is no regulation [dealing with home-based businesses] on the books right now. It's

something that we need," said Rand, a sentiment Dostaler agreed with. However, she said that when she moved the business to town in 1998, she registered her business and followed all protocol, and was never apprised that a complication about such business might exist. Dostaler said she agrees that a regulation needs to be in place, but that the elimination of such businesses is not the way to do it.

However, Rand said he does not want to eliminate home-based businesses altogether, but rather said the majority of them should be forced to relocate to commercial or industrial zones.

According to Rand, 92 percent of the tax burden falls on residents, and, should the appropriate home-based businesses move to what he deemed the proper zoning, the town could realize more tax revenue.

"I'm not saying there isn't a need for a home-based occupation permit, because there is," Rand said, making special note of start-up businesses. However, he said he felt that certain ones were inappropriate for residential zones, and though they pay all they should in personal property tax, would be paying more in property tax if they had a separate building. Furthermore, Rand said such change would "revitalize the center of town."

Dostaler said the tax assessor's office lists "686 business entities registered on the town personal properties." Rand said that of these "at least a third should be in commercial or industrial areas."

"I think the town's missing the boat on a lot of taxes," Rand said, but added, "The small businesses should be allowed to stay in their houses."

However, Dostaler said it was silly to expect

a business that needed little space and had few or no employees to pay for facilities they did not need. In fact, in this economy, she figured many businesses would simply not be viable under such an imposition. "Why should we pay the overhead?" she wondered.

Dostaler said these exact factors were weighed out when she and her husband moved to town, and that MAD Communications accounts for less than a third of their space in their home.

"Everybody in town would have something to gain," Rand said of home-based business relocation, and figured there were at least a million dollars in tax revenue in it for the town.

However, Dostaler said, "The only one who would benefit is the property owner, not the town." In fact, she alleged that Rand wanted to profit on home-based businesses moving to property he currently owns. However, Rand responded by saying, "All my buildings are full. I don't have any vacancies at the moment."

Dostaler said she saw Rand's complaint as mere revenge after hers and figured the issue of home-based business was completely unrelated to Rand's blighted property.

As it happens, at one time, a regulation did exist requiring a permitting process for home-based businesses. Rand sat on the Planning and Zoning Commission from 1988-91, and was there when the PZC threw out that regulation in 1989. He said the PZC was flooded with the permit applications, "it was kind of a hassle." So, in an effort to discourage the phenomenon, they got rid of the regulation. In retrospect, Rand admitted that might not have been the best action.

"If you don't see the business, it's not there," was Carey's response to Rand's complaint. Rand said he thought that was "a little too vague," so he filed the complaint with the ZBA. However, at the Feb. 9 meeting, the board unanimously upheld Carey's decision. Dostaler said five or six other home-based business owners attended the meeting.

Rand said he was not surprised by the ZBA decision, because, if the board agreed with him, "it opens up a can of worms is what it does," in terms of the town coming down on home-based businesses. But, he continued, "We need to find a way to work with everybody and get" regulations in place.

Dostaler envisioned a "laddered" permitting process, and said that those home-based businesses with no signage, and no employees should be granted an "as-of-right permit."

But Carey said he "would like very much not to have to do that," and said he would like to see the process more or less continue as is. However, by nature, East Hampton's zoning regulations are permissive, which means someone cannot technically do something unless the regulations explicitly say they can.

Because Carey now worried that people might be "using this to tweak their neighbors," he figured it might be time to form a regulation. However, he promised, "It's not the town's intention to keep people from working out of their homes." Furthermore, he said the process would not be one that opened an applicant up to "scrutiny by the general public."

Carey anticipated bringing this to the PZC for conversation during its April 1 meeting.

Portland Residents Respond to Desegregation Program

by Michael McCoy

Around 60 people attended a public hearing Tuesday night on Portland's possible participation in the state's Open Choice program – and about a third of them spoke, both for and against the town's involvement.

The hearing came three weeks in the wake of a joint meeting of the Board of Education (BOE) held with members of the state Department of Education and the Capitol Region Education Council (CREC) to address Open Choice, a program that busses urban students to a suburban school (and vice versa), in an effort to address demographic isolation. In Portland's case, those urban students would come from Hartford. *All 40 towns in the Greater Hartford region are being asked to participate in the program.*

In addition to Superintendent of Schools Sally Doyen and six BOE members, two CREC representatives and three DOE employees – including DOE Deputy Commissioner George Coleman – attended Tuesday's hearing. Coleman led off the evening by giving a brief history on the 1996 Sheff vs. O'Neill school desegregation case, as well as Open Choice. He said the court in the Sheff case decided that urban students who tended to be racially and economically segregated “were not given the opportunity of the promise of a full education.” Coleman said the DOE convinced the court to allow the state to fix this voluntarily, as the alternative would be a “prescriptive” and “binding” mandate.

Currently, 19 percent of Hartford students are educated in non-segregated environments. The DOE is legally required to increase that number to 28 percent in 2009-10. (Coleman has said he would actually like to see that number hit 41 percent by 2012.)

“I hope when we leave tonight, you leave satisfied that there is a role for Portland to play,” Coleman told the public Tuesday.

Doyen spoke next, and said that the Open Choice program currently involves 1,123 students in 130 schools in 27 suburban towns, including Glastonbury, Cromwell, Rocky Hill and Wethersfield. She said the program is designed to “improve academic achievement,” “erase racial, ethnic, and economic isolation,” and “provide a choice for families.”

She added that a new court order issued last June mandates that 3,200 students be enrolled in Open Choice by 2011-12.

Doyen also shared some possible distributions for the program, using the figure of 42 Open Choice students (which would be 3 percent of the Portland district's student population; the DOE has said it wants 3 percent of the student population of a school that participates in the program to be comprised of Hartford students). By distributing those 42 students into the classes with currently low enrollment, Doyen said they could institute the program without adding a teacher. (For instance, next year's seventh-grade class is rather large, so she propositioned including no Open Choice students. However, the corresponding eighth-grade class is very small, so she suggested 12 students be added to that class.)

Doyen said the state would pay the Portland

School District \$2,500 for every Hartford student that comes to Portland, and the transportation of those students (estimated to be \$3,250) would be paid by CREC. Also, special education costs that went above the \$2,500 mark would be paid for by the Hartford school district.

How that \$2,500 measures up to the actual cost of educating a student in the district is not quite clear. Doyen said the current school budget breaks down to about \$11,000 per pupil, but she called that number misleading, since it is simply derived by dividing the budget by the number of students in the district. Doyen told the audience that if a student left the district tomorrow, the town would not save \$11,000, as the school budget is largely composed of fixed costs that are not affected by population.

Doyen said that, on the average, supplies, equipment, books and work books cost \$262 per student, while the library, other media, and computers come to \$409 per student. There is other spending, of course, for staffing, benefits, student support services, building maintenance and operation and transportation, but these items that are more difficult to break down by student. So the magic number falls somewhere between \$671 and \$11,000, a large range that the state contribution falls within.

Following Doyen's remarks, many residents took to the microphone. The first was Ed Nocera, who put two children through Portland schools, and was also a school principal in several area towns, including, at one point, Portland. He said he supported the program, and said it would be a “benefit to Portland.”

Nocera said he was responsible for administering the plan in the Vernon School District, which involved 30 to 40 students. “I can tell, at that time, I know it was successful,” he said.

Nocera said he is now a professor at St. Joseph's College and also works as a mentor and tutor for the Hartford Public School system. “I have never encountered a rude or disruptive student in all that time,” he said of the latter, adding, “I wholeheartedly endorse the program. It's a win-win situation, I think, for all involved.”

David Phillips said he has three kids in the system and worried that the now-desirable small class sizes may disappear as a result of the program. “Now we're saying, ‘we have space, so let's fill that space.’” he figured. Instead, he said, the board should “keep these numbers as low as possible.”

“Are we being invited, or is it being mandated?” Scott Whited said. He later asserted, “This is going to be a burden on our school system,” and added, “It's very disingenuous to say we can educate a student in this town for \$2,500.” This comment was the first of many met with applause during the evening.

Connie Wache said she recently heard news that the Hartford schools were laying off 300 teachers, figuring, “It's not fair to take the students from Hartford and use our teachers to educate them.”

BOE chair Christopher Phelps, however, said he was not aware of the layoffs being a result

of Open Choice.

A resident who simply went by “Christine” was the first of the evening to express a concern of another sort. She said that while she was a student in 1995, she was part of an experiment that sent students to Middletown for a half day. “What we went through was hell,” she said, explaining that they were bullied and chastised. “Unfortunately, when we went back to school, nobody wanted to hear about it.” She did not indicate what school she went to, or even if it was in Portland.

Another resident said, “I pay a ton of money in taxes to live in this town. I didn't do that by accident.” Speaking about class size and her daughter, who is currently in the school system, she said, “I don't want a second taken away from her for someone who doesn't pay taxes. Period.”

Kurt Vogl said that any money the state gives to Portland for this program is just the residents' own tax dollars being returned to them. As a result, he proposed something else: “If you're gonna give us money, give us money to raise our own kids in our own community.”

Donna Rine said she sent her daughters to a Hartford magnet school for the first last fall, commenting, “We did have great hopes for that working out.” However, thanks to “bad behavior in the classroom,” she reported, “I yanked the girls back to Portland very fast.”

According to her, though the teachers did the best they could, she said the behavior problems were “well entrenched.”

Another resident took another angle. He said many of the Open Choice students would be English Language Learners, which he said would add an obstruction to learning.

Lisa Fontenault said she is a special education paraprofessional who works at a school that employs Open Choice. She said that her duties are to work with students one on one, but said that teachers often ask her to address behavioral problems, which often come from students in the program.

Carrie Osak wondered if the records of students with significant disciplinary problems in the past would be shared.

Coleman assured her that this would absolutely be the case. He added, “There is nothing to suggest that these students have behavioral problems that are greater than the ones you witness in your own towns.”

After several residents had spoken, resident and teacher Aleen Vincenzo remarked, “I'm hearing a little mentality of ‘them’ and ‘us’” in the comments that had been made. She said she thought better of her community than that and said, “It's one world for all of us.”

Andy Bauer, Portland resident and Glastonbury teacher, said, “I would like to register my general support for a program like this,” and added, “We have a big, wide world; we need to make it smaller.”

However, he said concerns over disciplinary problems were very real, and said, “One kid can torpedo my class on a daily basis.”

However, he drove home his overall sentiment, with, “I don't want to see it just happen;

I want to see it work. Maybe that's being naïve.”

Bauer was also just one of several people that evening to note one of the items in a hand-out distributed before the meeting. That item, pertaining to discipline issues said, “A student may return to Hartford only if the child's parents or guardian(s) voluntarily make the decision to withdraw the student from the Open Choice Program.”

Many speakers seemed to take this to mean that Portland's Open Choice students would be invincible to disciplinary action. However, Coleman promised, “the student brings no unique privileges” that would exempt them from the same disciplinary action another student would be subject to.

“If we had to suspend students, we would do that,” Doyen said. “If we had to expel students, we would do that.”

After several residents had spoken, First Selectwoman Susan Bransfield then took the microphone. Speaking to the concern over behavioral problems, Bransfield said, “There were days when I, as a parent, was concerned.” (She had three children graduate from Portland High School.) However, she figured, “People are people. We don't live isolated.”

Switching gears, she continued to note that the town did not pay for the middle high school complex on its own. She reminded the crowd that the state funded about half of it, and that the current student enrollment far from meets the projections cast when the project began.

Bransfield said that while she “can relate to some of the worries expressed here tonight,” she said she had total confidence in Coleman, with whom she worked when she was employed at the DOE.

Resident Tim Tully commended both the BOE and DOE, but added, “Dr. Doyen and Mrs. Bransfield, you're scaring me. It feels like we're being strong-armed. If there were mistakes made in the past, and we need to pay for it now, please be honest.”

While Tully said, “I think you're going a little too fast,” he did not outright condemn the program. “I think that Portland can be a contributor,” he said, and added, “I know I would like to see some of my tax dollars doing something good.”

He concluded his remarks by telling BOE and DOE members, “I applaud your efforts, because you're trying to do your best.”

BOE member Maryanne Rode concluded the meeting by telling the audience that their worries could be a self-fulfilling prophecy. “If we believe that this is going to be a nightmare,” she figured, “then we will make it a nightmare.”

Coleman also noted that more information on Open Choice is available at the DOE website, www.sde.ct.gov.

Though Hartford families wishing to participate in the program have all already applied, the DOE will not assign the accepted students until April, so Portland could still participate beginning in with the 2009-10 school year. BOE chair Christopher Phelps said after the meeting that he expects the board to rule on the matter during one of their March meetings.

Hebron Selectmen OK Pay Raises, Peters House Designation

by Sarah McCoy

At a busy meeting last Thursday, the Board of Selectmen approved three-year contracts for the two bargaining units in town, and also named the oft-debated Peters House a historic property.

The contracts for the Public Works Department include a 3.5 percent raise that will be retroactively applied with a starting date of July 1, 2008. The 11 unionized Public Works employees, which excludes the director and the department secretary, will also receive 3.25 percent raises for the next two years.

However, union members will increase their contribution to health insurance. Currently workers pay 10 percent of the cost. This will rise to 11 percent next year and 12 percent in the 2010-11 fiscal year.

“Hebron pays less for the same positions than other area municipalities,” Town Manager Jared Clark said this week. “We have an excellent road crew and want to do right by them, but at the same time we can't make up the differences in a single year.”

Clark added that the salary increases were the same as provided to independent town employees.

Negotiations for the new contract began last

spring, according to Clark. They took longer than usual for different reasons. First, Clark said, there were a number of decisions that needed to be made amongst the union members. Last year, the Public Works employees' union voted on whether to continue being represented by the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME).

The vote to change failed, and the union continues their ties with AFSCME.

Thanks to what Clark deemed a “hostile environment due to personalities,” discussions between the town and union representation got off to a rocky start. Clark said he was “not pleased” with the way the union representation handled the negotiations, especially considering the town and the union employees have a positive working relationship.

Union President John Ferree said he agreed that the two sides have had and continue to have a good working relationship. Ferree said he wished the negotiations could have wrapped up quicker but, in the end, he felt the union represented the employees well.

Both Clark and Ferree agreed the process went smoother when the town's attorney was brought in to be a part of the discussions.

In addition to the Public Works union con-

tract, the selectmen also approved a similar contract for the parks union, which is comprised of four members.

The Board of Selectmen approved the contracts by a vote of 4-1. The dissenting vote came from board chair Jeff Watt who said he preferred not to enter into multiple year contracts given the current state of the economy.

The selectmen also voted last week to add the home at 150 East St., known as the Peters House, to the list of local historic properties. Earlier this month, the board held a public hearing on that matter at which dozens stood urging the board to designate the property.

The board approved the historical designation by a vote of 4-1. The designation means that whoever renovates the structure will need prior approval from the Historic Properties Commission in addition to the town's building department.

Mark Stuart voted no on the matter not because he opposed the designation, but rather the reasoning put forth by the Historic Properties Commission.

“The fact that the house is architecturally historic is clear,” he said after the meeting. “Other events attributed to the property, well,

there's very little evidence to support that conjecture.”

Stuart was referring to Caesar and Lowis Peters who, in 1774, were captured and nearly sold into slavery before being rescued by fellow townspeople.

Historical evidence suggests the house was built no earlier than the 1790s and would have been too grandiose of a structure for Caesar and Lowis. The Historical Properties Commission has argued that the ell of the building looks to have been built 20 years prior and could have been the home of the Peters. They used this as the justification for the property's historical designation.

“I voted ‘no’ because of the reasoning,” Stuart explained. “The events with Caesar and Lowis are true. They are significant. But they are just not relevant to the property.”

The town acquired the Peters House in 2004 when it purchased the surrounding 122 acres, largely for a recreation facility. Potential uses for the home continue to be discussed, though the BOS hopes to have an advisory question, aimed at getting public feedback on potential uses for the house, included on the upcoming May 4 budget referendum.

Layoffs Possible as Hodge Prepares Colchester Budget

by Adam Benson

At a Town Hall forum held last week at Bacon Academy, Colchester taxpayers told town leaders to look inward before making deep budget cuts that impact the community.

But given the economic climate, it appears officials will be forced to pursue both avenues.

First Selectwoman Linda Hodge told the Board of Selectmen last Thursday, Feb. 26, that she's looking to carve an additional \$573,000 out of her proposed 2009-10 budget, and those savings likely will come in the form of staff furloughs or layoffs along with even leaner operating costs for town departments.

"Right now, we're going through the budget and cutting absolutely everything we can find, but we still need to leave materials for people to do their jobs, but that's a very fine balance," Hodge said.

Though she wasn't ready to offer specifics on what services or jobs might be affected or how much the town's new budget will be, Hodge said she's preparing to make dramatic reductions in both areas as the municipality struggles to square its bottom line with dwindling revenues.

Part of the problem is a virtual halt on new construction in town that has driven down coveted tax dollars. Town Assessor John Chaponis said Colchester only granted about 55 building permits last year, versus an annual average of 100 for the previous 10 years.

Last week, Chaponis released Colchester's 2008 Grand List of assessable properties, which amounted to a 1.5 percent increase over the previous year. That's expected to bring in \$442,500 in tax revenue, although that amount is based on the 2007-08 mill rate of 23.01.

Hodge said the money will help, but it won't be enough to cover necessary expenditures for basic services, salaries and benefits for municipal staffers.

"We know that furloughs, freezes or layoffs are all possibilities in making that happen," Hodge said. "They're a very real likelihood. They are going to happen in some way, shape or form, we just don't know yet what that form is going to be."

Hodge will present her proposed budget to the Board of Finance March 2, and that body is slated to host its first public discussion on the financial plan March 4.

Board of Finance chairman Bruce Hayn declined to comment on the expected downsizing this week because he said he wanted a chance to see the budget for himself first.

But Hayn and other officials credited the Feb. 18 budget forum with helping to guide their decisions as they work toward crafting a plan for voters.

"All the Board of Finance is looking for right now is to try to get the public's input early to find out what they're willing to do," Hayn said.

Despite Hodge's grim assessment, at least one selectman is hoping to look for creative, less intrusive ways to save money as an alternative to what would be Colchester's first round of layoffs since the early 1990s.

"I would first look at furloughs and trying to do those types of things before we actually look at cutting staff," selectman Greg Cordova said. "The minimal impact is what we need to look at."

Already, town leaders have taken steps toward that. Hodge said her salary in the upcoming year will stay at its current rate of \$77,092 and union leaders have indicated a willingness to be flexible with wages and benefits in an effort to keep staff.

"The unions for the most part have been very amenable," Hodge said.

Cordova said no matter what direction town leaders go in crafting a plan, he's confident officials will keep in mind the concerns of residents on the heels of the town's budget forum.

"I think it's important that they see we're doing what most people are saying we should do. Obviously, there are a lot of people out there who think we're just making these decisions arbitrarily, and I think it's great people come out and speak their mind," he said. "I'm glad the townspeople are actually writing this stuff and hopefully they realize we're doing this in the best interests of everyone."



Eric King, center, said traffic is picking up at Kingbuilt Kitchen & Bath, which he opened last August. Also shown is King's wife (as well as the business' co-owner) Catherine McNarry, left, and kitchen designer Kate LaForest.

Colchester Native Offers Options for Home Upgrades

by Adam Benson

With more than 20 years of experience as a contractor and builder in the housing field, Colchester native Eric King's new undertaking seems almost natural.

And given how business has been since last August, when he opened Kingbuilt Kitchen & Bath at 19 South Main St., King should be plenty busy in the years to come.

"When we first started, it was very encouraging. There was a lot of traffic through word-of-mouth," King said. "It seems like traffic is picking up."

Despite a tough economy and many homeowners facing toxic mortgages or foreclosure, King said there as just as many people committed to improving the value and comfort of their homes through upgrading two of its most-used and important rooms.

That's where Kingbuilt comes in. "People come in here with the intention of fixing up their house to sell it. We're trying to customize it to the mass market. A new kitchen or bathroom is the best return on an investment for a homeowner," said King's wife Catherine McNarry, who co-owns the business.

Tucked into space in the rear of Colchester Carpets, Kingbuilt Kitchen & Bath offers a full line of bathroom vanities, counter tops, faucets, hardware, cabinets and virtually every other accessory needed to build a dream kitchen and bathroom at prices ranging from economical to lavish.

"We're trying to offer something for every taste and every budget," McNarry said.

In the coming months, King hopes to expand his showroom even more and partner with local restaurants to provide cooking classes, wine tastings and other interactive programs aimed at drawing in the public.

The business is already part of the 28-year-old Colchester Business Association, and King has been able to keep intact the relationship he's built with distributors in his field, giving Kingbuilt's customers even greater assurance about the products for sale.

"Each cabinet order is made for that customer. The boxes aren't just sitting in a warehouse waiting to be picked up," King said. "We have the kind of service you're not going to get at a big box store."

Along with McNarry and King, Colchester's Kelly LaForest rounds out Kingbuilt's staff. She's a kitchen designer and works closely with prospective customers to help match colors, materials and styles to the rest of a house.

The business also enjoys a close partnership with Colchester Carpets, which helps even more to provide homeowners with all the tools they need to improve their properties.

"Some people know exactly what they want, and some people want to know what we think of their design ideas," LaForest said.

For more information, call Kingbuilt Kitchen & Bath at 537-5464.

Trying to Keep Peanut Products Off Shelves in Colchester

by Adam Benson

Volunteers at the Colchester Social Services Food Bank quickly pulled peanut products from its shelves last month in the wake of a massive federal recall over fears of salmonella – but donations of those items are still coming in, and social services coordinator Janet Taylor said this week she wants to put a stop to it.

"We don't want to create mass hysteria, but I do want to make sure those families aren't still eating these products," Taylor said. "It's very important to keep it out of the hands of residents here in town."

Although town health officials say nobody has yet been sickened through the consumption of tainted peanut products obtained through the food bank, they're worried about the lingering threat of illness through donations by the public. The food bank serves about 40 families a month, and many people in need of its services already have weakened immune systems, Colchester Health Department director Wendy Mis said. Many are elderly or children who could be at further risk of sickness, Taylor said.

Taylor said many people drop off surplus commodities after cleaning out their cupboards, and the concern is some of those contributions could be among the more than 2,500 products recalled by Peanut Corporation of America.

"We came in the other day and found a bag

of them hanging from our doorknob," Taylor said. "Right now, I would feel it's a controlled issue, because as soon as we heard about the recall we pulled those products."

As of Feb. 19, more than 650 cases of salmonella in 44 states have been linked to the recalled products, all of which contained peanut butter and peanut paste produced at PCA plants in Texas and Georgia.

Wendy Mis, director of the Colchester Health Department, said her agency is working closely with the town's food bank to make sure items handed out to the public are safe. She praised the work of Taylor and other volunteers who have remained vigilant in keeping tainted products out of the food bank.

"Our base message is we don't want people to stop donating. There's so many other things they can bring in that help," Mis said. "The issue is we want to make sure that we're not going to take the risk, and there's no way the food bank staff can check every peanut-based product that comes in against the list."

Officials said they're not sure how long the moratorium will stay in place, though they plan to stay overly cautious until federal inspectors say the danger has passed.

"It really depends on the length of the recall and this point it's already ongoing for two months," Mis said. "Until we're notified these

products are safe to eat, we're going to err on the side of safety."

Volunteers encourage donors to keep providing the food bank with jarred peanut butter, which isn't subject to the recall. Peanut butter is considered a low-cost, good source of nutrition and protein.

"We don't want to scare people away from that," Mis said.

Meanwhile, the food bank in nearby Marlborough is taking similar precautionary measures to keep tainted products out of the homes and hands of its dependent families.

That facility serves about 65 families a month, and Food Bank Director Linda Cherry is in frequent contact with state nonprofits and federal agencies over recall notices.

"Right now, we don't have any donated peanut butter products, and it's probably because people have stopped buying the things to donate," Cherry said.

Like Colchester, the Marlborough Food Bank gets a portion of its stock through the Bloomfield-based Foodshare, a regional food bank that distributes 15 tons of food a day to 400 nonprofits in the greater Hartford area.

That aid helps fight against hunger for about 100,000 people across Connecticut.

Gloria McAdam, Foodshare's president and CEO, said the organization works quickly to

remove any tainted products from its stock once a recall is announced.

"We have good procedures in place to pull products out of inventory if there is a recall notice," she said. "Food safety has to be our number one concern."

She also praised the effort of local food banks and health departments who are actively working to safeguard their clients from illness by keeping tainted products out of the mix.

"They're wise to err on the side of caution because salmonella is dangerous, especially in the population we're serving where the health is already poor in most cases," McAdam said. "We can't afford to take any more risks."

Taylor said she's confident that families who get assistance through Colchester's food bank are bringing home goods that are disease-free.

"I have no concerns on that," she said. "If it's not something I wouldn't bring home to my family, I wouldn't give it to anybody. People aren't coming into the food bank to be treated less than what they are."

For a full list of recalled PCA products, visit the Food and Drug Administration's website at www.fda.gov. More information on the steps being taken locally to keep products out of the town's food chain can be found at the website, www.colchesterct.gov.

Propane Proposal Returns to Portland IWC Next Week

by Michael McCoy

Propane was the talk of the town in Portland last fall, and the issue is up for discussion again.

On Tuesday, March 3, the Inland Wetlands Commission (IWC) will hold a public hearing on Gospel Lane Properties' latest application. The agenda lists, "activity including portion of driveway, anti-tracking pad, underground water storage tank, fence, well for a bulk propane storage facility."

On April 16, the matter will be heard by the Planning and Zoning Commission (PZC).

This application dates back to the fall, when Gospel Lane Properties was proposing six 30,000-gallon above ground tanks, three at 34 Gospel Ln., three at William Street Extension, which is an adjoining property. The application specifically sought a permit for bulk propane storage.

Just before a Nov. 20 PZC hearing on the project, the applicant withdrew the portion pertaining to William Street extension, which left only three tanks to discuss.

That hearing was continued until January. However, that never happened because the application was withdrawn on Dec. 1.

Gospel Lane Properties attorney John Boccalatte explained the action at the time by saying his client did not want to see Portland spend money on an outside consultant until they were sure they had the right plan intact. He also added, "I think we want to consider what was said at the public hearing."

As for the aforementioned consultant, the town has not hired one yet, but fire marshal Ray Sajak is in the process of forming a recommendation.

The proposed bulk propane storage facility, if approved, will be on a 3.77-acre parcel on Gospel Lane. (Gospel Lane Properties owns a total of 16.26 acres in the area.)

The facility is now planned for a different lot than before, one even closer to the plaza that

houses Dunkin' Donuts and Dairy Queen.

When the withdrawal was announced, PZC chairman Don Bascom commented, "The tanks need to be buried," when speculating how a future application might differ. And, judging by the Tuesday agenda, it would seem Gospel Lane Properties did just that. However, a narrative supplement submitted along with the PZC application, which came through Feb. 5, indicated that the tanks would not be buried completely underground, but rather, "The tanks will be mounded (covered with earthen material) so that the tanks themselves will not be visible."

The application also proposes an 11 feet by 13 feet operator's building, complete with two parking spaces. Furthermore, the facility's perimeter will be enclosed by a six feet-high chainlink fence, "with a two-foot barbed wire extension."

The applicant also proposes a 10,000-gallon underground water storage tank, in the case of fire. This water will be available to the fire department for emergencies not concerning the facility.

First Selectwoman Susan Bransfield said she knows "a lot of residents have many concerns" on the controversial application, but she assured them, "We want to be sure whatever goes in meets the highest public safety standards," and noted the close proximity of three of the town's schools as well as a YMCA camp.

Bransfield expressed apprehension in the past over this application, but when asked to sound off on the latest incarnation, she said, "I don't know enough. I will wait and listen to the public hearing as well."

The IWC meeting will be at 7 p.m. Tuesday, March 3, in the Buck Foreman Room, located on Main Street above the police station. The PZC is scheduled to hear the matter on April 16, though the location for that meeting has not been set.

Minor Accident Leads to Portland Rush Hour Road Closure

by Michael McCoy

A three-car collision tied up the southbound lane of Route 17 in Portland to start off the workday Tuesday.

Police received a call at 7:58 Tuesday morning, reporting a car accident. According to Sgt. Scott Cunningham, a pickup truck heading southbound veered into the northbound lane and struck a boxtruck. Debris from the accident, including glass from busted headlights flew into the air and struck an Audi, that was traveling behind the boxtruck.

Cunningham, who responded along with Officer David Bond and Sergeant James Kelly, called the damage sustained to the boxtruck "moderate," while the Audi received minor damage. However, the pickup, whose driver

was at fault, sustained serious damage, he said.

There were no injuries, Cunningham said. No one was been able to ascertain just why the accident happened, as Cunningham reported the driver "does not remember crossing over the line." However, a witness said this is exactly what happened.

The operator of the pickup was issued a warning for failure to drive in an established lane.

During the cleanup of the accident, southbound traffic continued along Route 17, while northbound traffic was rerouted to Wilcox Hill Road. Cunningham said the rerouting lasted only about a half hour or 45 minutes.

Portland Man Charged with Selling Prescription Drugs

A Portland man was arrested following a three-month investigation into stolen pills from a Main Street pharmacy, Portland Police said.

Jason Yarlbrough, 22, of 9 Hilltop Dr., was arrested Feb. 20 and charged with first-degree larceny, possession of narcotics with intent to sell and possession of narcotics, police said.

In December, Portland Police Officer David Bond met with agents from the state Department of Drug Control, police said, regarding the "diversion or theft" of narcotics from the Medicine Center Pharmacy, 22 Main St. According to police, the investigation began after an employee of the center noticed a discrepancy in a routine inventory pill count. An inventory of the store revealed that upwards of 9,000 pills were missing, police said. The pills were classified as "schedule II" drugs, and included Vicodin and OxyContin, police said.

According to police, surveillance and daily counts of the pharmacy were performed, through which it was learned that Yarlbrough was involved. Yarlbrough had been employed

by the Medicine Center part-time, as a pharmacy technician, police said.

Police said Yarlbrough voluntarily met with Bond at the Portland Police Department. According to police, Yarlbrough told them he met with "an individual" around January and agreed to sell him 6,000 tablets. Shortly after the deal, though, police began questioning Yarlbrough. Police said Yarlbrough quit his job at the Medicine Center and handed in his pharmacy license to the state soon after the investigation began.

Police described Yarlbrough as "extremely cooperative throughout the investigation," and said he consented to a search of his home. The search resulted in the recovery of about \$6,000, as well as around 1,000 pills (which carry an estimated street value of \$2,500), police said.

Bond for Yarlbrough was set at \$50,000, and he was due in court Feb. 20, police said.

Police said Bond continues to work with other agencies regarding the alleged sale of the narcotics, and additional arrests are possible.

East Hampton Police News

2/10 — Montaser Alchouiki, 34, of 80 Stevens Ave., West Haven, was issued a ticket for parking in a handicap zone, East Hampton Police said.

2/12 — Troy T. McIntosh, 26, of 83 Middletown Ave., was arrested pursuant to two warrants for violation of probation, police said.

2/12 — Joshua P. Pollard, 19, of 68 Childs Rd., was arrested for possession of marijuana, police said.

2/13 — Paul K. Violette, 47, of 7 Starr Place, was arrested pursuant to a court-ordered warrant for disorderly conduct and second-degree failure to appear, police said. He was also arrested for operating under the influence of alcohol and failure to drive right, police said.

2/13 — Richard C. Schaller, 51, of 31 White Birch Rd., was issued a ticket for operating a motor vehicle while using a cell phone, police said.

2/13 — Jaclyn M. Larson, 40, of 90 Abbey Rd., was arrested for operating under the influ-

ence of alcohol and failure to drive right, police said.

2/15 — David A. Korman, 28, of 85 North Main St., was issued a ticket for operating a motor vehicle while using a cell phone, police said.

2/16 — An 18-year-old male juvenile was involved in an accident at the intersection of Namonee Trail and Sequonia Trail, police said. The juvenile was arrested for evading responsibility and traveling too fast for conditions, police added.

2/17 — Shawn G. Vecchitto, 39, of 163 Champion Hill Rd., was involved in a one-vehicle accident on Clark Hill Road, 300 feet east of Skyline Drive, police said. Vecchitto was arrested for evading responsibility, police added.

2/18 — Jason M. Gosselin, 29, of 17 Old Coach Rd., was arrested for operating under the influence of alcohol, police said.

Portland Police News

2/19 — Gary Anderson, 38, of 5 Buttonhook La., was charged with two counts of second-degree failure to appear, Portland Police said.

2/20 — Timothy Sherrick, 18, of 33 Terp Rd., East Hampton, was charged with third-degree larceny, police said.

2/20 — Javon Lockhart, 23, of 168 Stoneyrest Dr., Middletown, was charged with less than four ounces of marijuana, police said.

Marlborough Police News

1/31-Kenneth Bowman, 23, of 66 S. Bushboard Ln., was charged with driving while intoxicated and failure to drive in the proper lane, State Police said.

Hebron Police News

2/7-Adam Friedman, 44, of East Haddam, was charged with risk of injury to a minor and violation conditions of release, State Police said.

Obituaries

Colchester

Marion Johnson

Marion (Betty) Miller Johnson, 89, of Old Hebron Road, Colchester, passed away peacefully at home Feb. 20. Betty was born in Colchester on June 30, 1919, the daughter of the late Clayton George and Hannah (Antonson) Miller and graduated from Middletown High School in 1936. She was a direct descendant of Nathaniel Foote, the founder of the Town of Colchester.

Betty was predeceased by her loving husband of 51 years, George L. Johnson (affectionately known as "Yorge" by all who knew him) on Sept. 19, 2000. They were married July 9, 1949 in a small ceremony at the family home in Colchester.

Betty is survived by her adoring daughter and son-in-law, Nancy J. and Richard P. Baldi, Jr., of Colchester, along with their three children. Christine, Clayton and Nathaniel Baldi were the most important things in Betty's life, and they brought her much joy and happiness. She was so very proud of all their achievements and was grateful for their tenderness, caring and devotion.

Betty is also survived by her sister and brother-in-law, Amy Miller Ferling and Karl R. Ferling, and her brother, Robert B. Miller, all of Colchester, along with several nieces and nephews. Betty's older brother, Clayton G. Miller, Jr., predeceased her in 2003.

Betty and Yorge owned and operated the Universal Food Store in Fitchville for 25 years and retired from that business in 1986. Prior to that, Betty worked as a bookkeeper at Clark & True Jewelers in Middletown, the Aaron Dress Factory in Colchester, and Palm's Delicatessen in East Hampton. She also did the bookkeeping for her son-in-law's business for many years and was a tremendous help every day to her daughter and family.

Calling hours were held Tuesday, Feb. 24, before the service at the Belmont Funeral Home, 144 South Main St., Colchester. Interment followed in the Linwood Cemetery, Colchester.

Betty was a quiet, sweet, gentle and generous woman, and will be dearly missed by her family and friends. Donations may be made to the foundation that promotes research and education of the genetic bleeding disease with which her husband suffered for many years: HHT Foundation International, P.O. Box 329, Monkton, MD 21111.

Marlborough

Sheila Therese Hobin

Sheila Therese (Clifford) Hobin, 55, of Marlborough, beloved wife of the late James Hobin, entered eternal peace Tuesday, Feb. 17, in Marlborough, surrounded by her loving family. Sheila was born May 28, 1953, in Providence, RI, daughter of the late Frank Clifford II and Jane (Sullivan) Clifford. She was raised in New London prior to moving to Marlborough 26 years ago.

Sheila received her bachelor's degree in registered nursing from the UConn School of Nursing then went on to begin her career at Mount Sinai Hospital. Later she went on to work at Colchester Convalescent Home, Travelers and then became a System's Analyst for Clinical IT at United Healthcare. Sheila will always be remembered for her bubbly personality. She always knew how to bring joy into a room and put smiles on everyone's face. Her free spirit and constant laughter will never be forgotten. Sheila was not only a great mother, grandmother, sister, aunt and friend, but most of all a great person with a big heart. She will be missed tremendously and this world is a better place for having had her.

Sheila will be fondly remembered by her loving family: two sons, Derrick and Sean Hobin and his wife Julie (Shaw) Hobin; the light of her life, her granddaughter Kaitlin Hobin, all of Marlborough; her mother-in-law Grace Hobin of New London; a sister and best friend Pamela Pack of Italy, formerly of New London; a niece and daughter she never had Elizabeth (Pack) McDonald and her husband Keith of New London; a brother Frank Clifford III and his wife Jennifer and their two sons, Frank and Jake, all from Rhode Island.

A memorial service celebrating Sheila's life was held Tuesday, Feb. 24, in the Farley-Sullivan Funeral Home, 50 Naubuc Ave., Glastonbury. In addition, a Mass in Sheila's memory will be held today, Friday, Feb. 27, at 4 p.m., at St. Mary Star of the Sea Roman Catholic Church, 10 Huntington St., New London, CT 06320.

Sheila's friends are asked to consider memorial donations to the American Cancer Society, 538 Preston Avenue, P.O. Box 1004, Meriden, CT 06450.

For online expressions of sympathy or information, visit farley-sullivan.com.

Colchester

Donald Webster Standish

Donald Webster Standish, 79, of Colchester, beloved husband of Barbara (Van Cedarfield) Standish, passed away Sunday afternoon, Feb. 22, at Middlesex Hospital, surrounded by his loving family. Born Sept. 8, 1929, at home in Colchester, he was a son of the late Charles and Ethel (Webster) Standish.



A lifelong resident of Colchester, he attended Bacon Academy in Colchester with the Class of 1947. Early on, he partnered with Bob Balaban and started Balaban & Standish T.V. and Appliance in Colchester for many years. After Bob's retirement, the business later become known as Standish T.V. & Appliance and his career there spanned 45 years in the service of his community.

Donald was a 50+ year member of the Colchester-Hayward Volunteer Fire Co., an emeritus member of the Colchester Business Association; a member of the Colchester Fish & Game Club and was a former member of the Colchester Lions Club. For over 55 years, he was an amateur Ham Radio Operator with the call letters of WIZKE. In his spare time, he loved to farm his land, raising herefords and pheasants for many years. He will be remembered most fondly for his undying love and devotion for his family – may he now rest in peace.

In addition to his beloved wife of 62 years, he is survived by three children, Donald Myles Standish and his wife, Winnie, William Standish and Beverly Tarnowski and her husband, Arthur, all of Colchester; seven grandchildren: Michael Standish, Melissa Dudzic, Daniel and Alison Tarnowski, Heather Bunkley, Holly Gibson and Jeffrey Standish; four great grandchildren, Rexford Standish Welch, Kyle and Colin Bunkley and Lily Gibson; his sisters, Barbara Smith Clark of Colchester and Betty Jean Bruce of Orlando, FL; his brother, Arthur D. Standish of Colchester; his special niece and nephew, Jodi Balaban Mendlinger and Mark Balaban, both of Colchester; and numerous extended family members and friends.

He was predeceased by a daughter-in-law, Valerie Evans Standish; a sister, Gladys Ladegard and a brother, Charles Myles.

Friends called Thursday, Feb. 26, at the Aurora-McCarthy Funeral Home, 167 Old Hartford Rd., Colchester. A chapel service was observed that night with the Rev. Fred M. Dole, CHVFD Chaplain, officiating. Burial in the Standish family plot in Linwood Cemetery will be private.

In lieu of flowers, donations in his memory may be made to the Colchester-Hayward Vol. Fire Co., 18-54 Old Hartford Road, Colchester 06415.

The family would like to express their heartfelt gratitude to the staff at Chestelm HCC as well as that of the Middlesex Hospital Weiss Hospice and Palliative Care Unit for the genuine care and concern shown to them as well as Don during his illness.

For online condolences, visit www.auroramccarthyfuneralhome.com.

Marlborough

Alexander J. Grossi

Alexander J. Grossi, 53, of Marlborough, beloved husband of Tammy (Meade) Grossi, died Tuesday, Feb. 24, at Hartford Hospital. Born March 8, 1955 in Germany, he was the son of the late Alexander A. and Rosemarie (Hirsch) Grossi. He had proudly served his country in the U.S. Army. Alexander had been employed at the Alpha Q Corp. in Colchester.

Besides his wife he is survived by his two daughters, Rachelle Hill and her fiancé Jody Mitchell of Manchester, Jennifer Blonstrann and her husband Erik of New Britain; three brothers, Theodore, Peter and Michael; three sisters, Dianna, Mary and Christine; several nieces and nephews and his beloved granddaughter, Khyllie Hill.

A memorial service will be held Saturday, Feb. 28, at 11 a.m. in the Spencer Funeral Home, 112 Main St., East Hampton. Burial will be private. Friends may call at the funeral home on Saturday from 10 a.m. until the time of the service.

In lieu of flowers memorial contributions may be made to Connecticut Breast Health Initiative Inc., 185 Main St., Room 210, P.O. Box 566, New Britain, CT 06051.

To leave online condolences, visit www.spencerfuneralhomeinc.com.

Portland

Paul James Coen Sr.

Paul James Coen Sr., 88, of Brazos Drive, Portland, died Tuesday, Feb. 10, at the Highview Health Care Center in Middletown. He was the husband of Josephine Musumeci Coen, the couple had celebrated the 60th anniversary of their marriage.

Born in Rosendale, MA, Dec. 10, 1920, a son of the late Paul and Bertha Johnson Coen, he was a Portland resident for 52 years. He had been employed by the Standard-Knapp Co. for many years until his retirement in 1982. He was a member of the International Brotherhood of Machinist AFL-CIO Union of Aerospace Workers. He had served 2 enlistments in the U.S. Army serving in World War II in the Pacific Theater of Operations notably in the Battle of Iwo Jima, as well as the Korean War. He was a parishioner of the Church of Saint Mary and a member of the Knights of Columbus. He also was a member of the American Legion in Cromwell, the Iwo Jima Survivors, and the former Portland VFW.

Besides his wife Josephine, he is survived by his daughter Teresa Yarlott and her husband Michael of Cromwell; his grandchildren David Clifford Yarlott, Melonie Coen, Paula Jean Morin, Rebecca Helen Yarlott, and Michael Patrick Yarlott; his great-grandchildren Todd James Morin, Samuel E. Ankras, Alexis Robin Yarlott, and Tyler Anderson, and several nieces and nephews.

He was predeceased by his son, Paul J. Coen, Jr., his sister, Rosemary Coen Murphy, his brother, Richard Coen, his half-sister, Kathleen Coen, his brother-in-law, William P. Murphy and his nephew, William Murphy.

His family received relatives and friends in the Portland Memorial Funeral Home, 231 Main St., Portland, Thursday, Feb. 12. Funeral services were held Friday, Feb. 13, from the Portland Memorial Funeral Home and then in the Church of Saint Mary, where a Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated. Interment, with military honors, followed in St. Mary Cemetery.

For directions or to leave an online expression of sympathy, visit portlandmemorialfh.net.

Colchester

Eunice McNeil

Eunice McNeil, 95, of Lake Hayward and formerly of Cromwell, widow of the late Charles Dittman and James Rodney McNeil, passed away peacefully Saturday, Feb. 21, at home, surrounded by loving family and friends. Born April 27, 1913 in East Haddam, she was the youngest daughter of the late Fred and Mary (Burch) Ray.

Eunice was a 1929 graduate of Deep River High School and went on to attend secretarial school. Mrs. McNeil was an administrative secretary at the former Connecticut Bank & Trust Co. in the corporate headquarters in Hartford for many years before her retirement.

She always took great pride in tending to her gardens at the house on Lake Hayward, as well as crafting, crocheting and quilting, and many of her creations will be cherished by their countless recipients for years to come.

She is survived by five children and their spouses, Charles and Barbara Dittman of Springfield, MA, David and Barbara Dittman of Beaufort, SC, Ray and Mitra Dittman of Hawaii, Rhoda and John Szymkowitz of Colchester and Dennis and Joy McNeil of East Haddam; 12 grandchildren, Susan Lee Tsokalis, Darlene, Danny, Brian, Eric and Milia Dittman, Bonnie, Adam and Sharon Szymkowitz, Lisa O'Halloran and Tai and Michael Scarborough; 17 great-grandchildren; her special friends and dear neighbors, Joan and Jerry Soboleski of Lake Hayward; her devoted caregiver, Lolly; and numerous extended family members and friends.

She was predeceased by her siblings, Margaret Wolfe and Floyd and Harold Ray.

Care of private arrangements has been entrusted to the Aurora-McCarthy Funeral Home of Colchester. In lieu of flowers, donations in her memory may be made to the Lake Hayward Memorial Fund, P.O. Box 230, Colchester 06415.

For online condolences, visit www.auroramccarthyfuneralhome.com.

Marlborough

Scott Michael Noel

Scott Michael Noel, 40, of Marlborough, died unexpectedly Feb. 24, at his home. Born July 25, 1968, he was a son of the late Lester and Janet (Griffin) Noel.

He is survived by a brother, Mark and wife Theresa Noel of Salem, two nieces, Amanda and Samantha, and a nephew, Dylan.

Friends may call Tuesday, March 3, from 1-2:45 p.m., at the Aurora-McCarthy Funeral Home, 167 Old Hartford Rd., Colchester. Funeral service will follow immediately. Burial will be private.

For online condolences, visit: www.auroramccarthyfuneralhome.com.

Marlborough

Martha Blowen

Martha Blowen, 56, of Lisbon Falls, ME, and formerly of Marlborough, died Aug. 18, 2008, at the Hospice House in Auburn, ME. At her side were Denis Ledoux, with whom she had shared her life since 1977, their daughter Zoë and her partner Alain Cossette, of Montréal, and their son Maxim and his fiancée Molly Powell, of New York City.



Martha was born on May 30, 1952, in Worcester, MA, to Rev. Arthur and Ladora Blowen. Rev. Blowen served as pastor of the Congregational Church in Marlborough from 1967 to 1970. Martha was a 1970 graduate of RHAM High School and was a graduate of Bates College (English, 1975).

Her first occurrence of breast cancer was in 1992. After 14 years, Martha was diagnosed on Nov. 9, 2006, with metastasized breast cancer that was likely the same as the original.

Accomplished in many spheres, Martha felt her mothering was her greatest contribution to the world. She lived her values, home-birthing and homeschooling her children and raising them as vegetarians with a commitment to peace and non-violence. She took great pride in the adults they have become and their fine choice of partners.

In 1977, Martha co-founded the Androscoggin School in Lewiston, with Denis Ledoux. It was an independent school in the model of Summerhill. Later, she served as town librarian in Lisbon Falls, creating the monthly Maine Author's Series, which attracted literature lovers from all over Maine. She also co-founded the Wild Oats Food Co-op, which is active today in Lisbon Falls. A handmade papermaker, Martha was a popular Maine touring artist, the founder of the non-profit Artists of the Androscoggin, and an L/A Arts board member. In her last years, she took up encaustic painting and continued to draw and paint up until her death. Her pizzazz for entertaining and her culinary imagination were well known. Martha often recreated dishes at home that she had enjoyed in restaurants. Most recently, she had reconstituted her Aunt Lily's pickle recipe from her childhood.

In 1977, she united her life with Denis Ledoux with whom she had two children and was a loving and contributing partner through their 31 years of making a home and contributing to their commitment to meaningful work.

Through their company, Soleil Lifestory Network, she touched thousands of people seeking to write and publish their personal and family stories. She was a talented editor who added sensitivity and encouragement to Denis' output. She had a sure eye for books and was much appreciated by their clients.

Martha is also survived by a granddaughter, born Feb. 20, 2009, in Montreal.

A memorial service will be held Aug. 22 and will be announced in this newspaper.

East Hampton

Leigh Barton Shearer

Leigh Barton Shearer, 70, of East Hampton, died Monday, Feb. 23, at his home. Leigh was the loving husband of the late Dorothy Geysen Shearer. He was born Nov. 13, 1938, in Middletown, the son of the late Frederick W. and Anna (Lundgren) Shearer.



In seventh grade, he had taken classes at Wesleyan University and was a graduate of Central Grammar, Middletown High, and Central Connecticut State University with both a BS and MS. Leigh was employed as a teacher in Middletown at Snow School for 36 years and had worked at Gillette Castle as a seasonal employee for 26 years. He is survived by his sister Jean Samolyk of Middletown.

Besides his wife Dorothy, he was predeceased by his brothers, Frederick Shearer Jr. and Fred Worthington Shearer, his sisters Meredyth Shearer and the Reverend Margaret Hurlbutt.

Leigh was a member of St. John's No. 2 AF&M, Washington Burning Bush Chapter No. 6, Columbia Council No. 9, past State Treasurer of CT Court of Chevaliers, East Hampton Volunteer Ambulance Corps, Friends of Gillette Castle, both state and Middletown Retired Teachers Associations. Leigh dedicated his life to his family and serving the community. He will be greatly missed by all who knew and loved him.

A memorial service will be held today, Friday, Feb. 27, at 11 a.m., in the Christ Episcopal Church in Middle Haddam, with the Rev. Mark Given officiating. Burial will be at the convenience of the family in Skinnerville Cemetery, East Hampton.

In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions may be made to the East Hampton Ambulance Association, P.O. Box 144 East Hampton, CT 06424 or Snow School Library, 299 Wadsworth St., Middletown, CT 06457.

To leave online condolences, visit www.spencerfuneralhomeinc.com. The Spencer Funeral Home, 112 Main St., East Hampton, has care of arrangements.