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Gilead Congregational Church voted to become an Open and Affirming Church at its annual meeting on Nov. 7. Rev. Denise Esslinger and Mark Hand, chairman of the Open and Affirming Committee, are shown here with the statement that the church adopted.

Hebron Church Goes 'Open and Affirming'

by Lindsay Fetzner

Members of Gilead Congregational Church in Hebron have voted to make it an "Open and Affirming" church, a designation that, according to the United Church of Christ – Gilead's denomination – means the church is open to all people, regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression.

However, the statement that Gilead adopted at the church's annual meeting last month is much deeper, and "welcome[s] and affirm[s] all persons of every race, age, gender, family structure, physical or mental ability, economic status, faith background, nationality, sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression into the full life and ministry of this community of faith, including membership and leadership."

"Diversity is a strength and including people of all backgrounds strengthens our community," said Mark Hand, chairman of the Open and Affirming Committee.

Gilead Congregational Church joins over 50 congregations in the Connecticut Conference of the United Church of Christ (UCC) that are Open and Affirming, according to www.ct.confucc.org.

Gilead's statement, its pastor Rev. Denise Esslinger said, is open for revision down the road. In the UCC denomination, she said, "we believe that God is still speaking and challenging us." And in the future, prejudices may arise that will need to be addressed, she said.

The church, Hand said, wanted the statement to be "very clear," and "welcome everyone on that list." He added that he wanted to remove

the question of whether someone would be welcome at the church.

Hand said it is not just about the church declaring itself as Open and Affirming, but rather, it's about the people who want to be in the faith community knowing "they will be home here."

Open and Affirming Committee member Ginny Miller said she was surprised to find that the church hadn't gone through the actual process when her family joined the church nearly six years ago.

"When we joined the church, because of the friendliness and the openness, I thought we were Open and Affirming," she said. "I was shocked we hadn't actually gone through the process - it's such a warm and friendly congregation."

The written ballot vote, which was overwhelmingly in favor of the designation, was taken at the church's 262nd annual meeting on Nov. 7. Eighty-seven members voted in favor, 11 voted 'no,' and one member abstained, for a total of 99 voting members. Even though the opportunity was there, no discussion was held on the topic.

Miller said when the votes were tallied and the result came in, "I was proud as punch." She added that there was a "big round of applause" when the result was announced.

Despite the fact that annual meetings normally operate by a voice vote, Hand said this particular vote was written, due to a request from a church member. Hand added that a typi-

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Hebron Men Charged in Cab Driver Attack

by Lindsay Fetzner

Two Hebron men have been arrested in connection with an assault on a Newington cab driver last month, Newington Police said.

In the early hours of Nov. 6, police said, the two men assaulted a taxi driver, and hurled anti-Muslim epithets at him. The first suspect, Gerald F. Margelot Jr., 25, of 81 Old Daniels Ln., was arrested the day of the attack, police said, while the second, Michael Hirth, 22, of 132 Old Andover Rd., turned himself in Nov. 23.

At approximately 1:12 a.m. Nov. 6, police responded to a reported robbery in the area of 375 East Cedar St. in Newington. The victim was a taxi driver, who said that two people had punched him, spat at him and stole the keys to the taxi. The two men also shouted derogatory anti-Muslim comments at the driver, before fleeing on foot, according to police.

Police said the driver of the vehicle pulled

the taxi to the side of the road when one of the men vomited inside of the car. The taxi driver sustained injuries to his head, wrist and hands, police said, from the attack.

The two suspects were pursued by police with the help of a police K-9. Margelot and Hirth were tracked by police, and found near a motel on the Berlin Turn-



Gerald F. Margelot Jr.

pike. The officers and the K-9 were able to locate one suspect, Margelot, who "violently resisted arrest," according to police. The release states that Margelot "severely bit one officer," and, during the incident, another officer broke his hand. Hirth was not apprehended at the time, police said.

Upon turning himself in last week, Hirth was charged with second-degree robbery, third-degree assault, intimidation based on bigotry/bias, sixth-degree larceny, third-degree criminal mischief and disorderly conduct, police said.

Margelot, however, was charged with sixth-degree larceny, disorderly conduct, second-degree robbery, interfering with police, two counts of assault on police, two counts of third-degree assault, third-degree criminal mischief and intimidation based on bigotry/bias, according to police.

Lt. John Johnson said a racial attack like this

is not something Newington Police see very often, but he said, "I wouldn't say it's rare."

Margelot is next due in New Britain Superior Court on Dec. 20; the court is currently awaiting plea, according to the state judicial website. Hirth's next court date is Dec. 16; the court is awaiting plea from him as well.



Michael Hirth

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cal annual meeting draws much less than 100 people; if there are 50 in attendance, Hand said, he considers that a large number.

Although the vote was taken last month, the process began nearly two years ago, in February 2009. At a meeting of the church deacons that month, Hand asked the other deacons to begin the process of what it would mean to become an Open and Affirming church in the UCC. In 1985, the Fifteenth General Synod, the national delegate body of the UCC, adopted a resolution entitled "Calling on United Church of Christ Congregations to Declare Themselves Open and Affirming." It encouraged UCC congregations to adopt policies similar to the one Gilead Congregational Church did last month.

The deacons unanimously approved engaging in the process and the Church Council approved forming an Open and Affirming Committee in March, which met for the first time on Aug. 23, 2009.

Hand said the committee, comprised of eight church members, created a mission statement,

outlining its purpose of engaging in "a time of study, prayer and conversation specifically focused on what it means to be an Open and Affirming Church."

"We wanted to engage in this process, rather than just take a vote," Hand said, adding that the committee was looking for people of all different opinions to come together and talk about "a difficult topic."

From there, the committee held various events for both educational purposes and in an effort to gain feedback on the topic. In November 2009, "Open and Affirming 101" was held, which gave an introduction to the process, the history within the UCC and gave the public an opportunity to ask questions and provide feedback. A suggestion box in the church was also made for people to share their thoughts as well.

After the November session, the church viewed the film *For the Bible Tells Me So*, which highlights the intersection of homosexuality and religion. Other events included a panel discus-

sion, where community members were able to share their experiences with homosexuality; a five-session Bible study; a church forum on why a church shouldn't be Open and Affirming; and a program called the "GOP (Grumpy Old Pastors)," which featured reflections/experiences from pastors who served churches that went through the process.

"It made it that much easier because we had those voices of experience," Hand said of those pastors.

Over the many months, Esslinger said she felt the church "leaning in the open and positive direction." Hand said that roughly 30 to 35 people showed interest in the process, including supporters, those questioning the designation, as well as those joining the church.

Early on in the process, Esslinger said people asked why the church was engaging in the process. They said Gilead Congregational Church was a "healthy and stable congregation" and felt becoming Open and Affirming could "di-

vide the congregation."

Despite this, Esslinger said the church was trying to model a community that could talk about "difficult issues and love each other" at the same time, a move that elicited praise.

"Many, many people have come up and thanked me and the committee for addressing [the topic]," Hand said, adding that it was "high time" to address it.

Esslinger said she has also received e-mails from clergy across the state congratulating her and the church for their decision to become Open and Affirming. Hand added that the UCC was also "very excited" with their vote last month.

"I'm so thankful we've done this process," Esslinger said.

For more information on Gilead Congregational Church or the Open and Affirming designation, visit www.gileadchurchucc.org, contact the church by phone at 860-228-3077 or by e-mail at GCC@GileadChurch.net.

Rift Between Morron, Schuster Heats Up in Colchester

by Katy Nally

In light of the recent controversy surrounding former Police Commission chairman Glenn Morron not receiving his reappointment from selectmen, First Selectman Gregg Schuster held a press conference Monday to elaborate on his 'no' vote.

Schuster said it would be easy for Morron and other Democrats to make the case his choice was politically motivated, as the two ran against each other last November in the race for first selectman, but Schuster said this was untrue.

Morron claims the entire situation represents "politics at its worst," he said in an e-mail this week.

But, Schuster claimed Monday Morron has shown a "clear pattern of going after whoever is in charge," and pointed to Morron's past lawsuit against Middletown officials including the mayor and police chief.

Schuster also attempted to put to rest any rumors floating around about how he wants to decimate the Colchester Police Department.

"I've been completely supportive of the Colchester force," he said.

According to published reports, in 2005 Morron, then a Middletown police officer, sued former Middletown mayor Dominique Thornton, saying she defamed him after releasing public statements that said Morron and another officer acted politically when they charged her with DUI.

Morron and the other officer stopped Thornton one night and subjected her to a field sobriety test, which she failed, and a breath test, which she passed. According to reports, Thornton later passed a urine test and charges were dropped.

"That's his history in Middletown," Schuster explained.

Morron commented on his time in Middletown, saying he "served with distinction" for 20 years as an officer and has "the utmost respect for authority."

"However, I am also not afraid to speak out against an injustice no matter who the individual is," Morron continued.

After Middletown, Morron came to Colchester and joined the Police Commission in February 2008.

"True to form," Schuster said, "he starts going after the chairman of the commission."

In May 2009, former Police Commission chairman William Otfinoski resigned after internal conflicts that had engulfed the commission. Several months prior, Morron and another commissioner, James Stavola, filed a complaint with the town's Ethics Commission alleging Otfinoski was not sharing information about police union negotiations with other commission members.

The Ethics Commission ultimately found Otfinoski had not breached Colchester's code of ethics at a February 2009 meeting.

Schuster explained Otfinoski was privy to the negotiations, but it was up to him to discuss them with other commissioners.

Once Otfinoski stepped down, Morron was unanimously voted Police Commission chairman in June 2009.

"He's going after whoever is in charge," Schuster said. "This is what he does."

Besides the "pattern" Schuster alleged, he also said his vote against Morron's reappointment was not an attempt to further a plan to slash the Colchester Police Department. On the contrary, Schuster pointed out several instances when he supported the local force.

"I have no desire, nor any intention," Schuster explained, "to replace officers with resident state troopers."

But, Morron said otherwise.

"It has always been Gregg's desire to get rid of the local police force," he said.

Schuster cited a letter he submitted to the *Colchester Bulletin* in May 2009 to support his claim. He wrote the letter when he was chairman of the Republican Town Committee and said remaining in the resident state trooper program, versus having a completely independent town police force, depends on "what is best for Colchester."

"I don't know which path is best for our

town," Schuster said in his letter, but added some plan should be created and adhered to.

"That doesn't sound like someone who wants to get rid of the police force, does it?" Schuster asked rhetorically Monday.

He also touched on the Colchester officers' third shift, which he dealt with almost as soon as he took office. Schuster said instead of changing a policy outlining how local officers manning the third shift could file grievances, as former First Selectwoman Linda Hodge had attempted to do, he decided to keep the policy as is, he said. However, the third shift was never instituted because of staffing shortages.

He mentioned how the second resident state trooper was cut from the 2010-11 budget, rather than a local officer, and added that Colchester doesn't have a history of laying off its police officers. During budget discussions, Schuster explained everything "was on the table," but said making reductions to the local force would "not be the best thing for Colchester."

Morron said Schuster explored switching the police benefit plan for a cheaper version that "would have made it more difficult to hire and retain officers."

Either way, rumors that the town's force might be cut were circulating and Schuster said they were affecting officers' morale.

Last spring, three Colchester Police officers left for positions elsewhere, but Schuster said their decision to leave Colchester was partly because of a lack of "career progression" within the local department. Until last month, no Colchester officers had moved beyond officer first class to sergeant.

Morron said the three officers left the force after they were told "their jobs were on the line." He added former Colchester Police Officer Brian Owens said publicly the reason he left was because of "job security."

Lastly, Schuster said there was a "lack of leadership" on the commission. He touched on the four-board meeting that was held in July, when the Police Commission agreed to create a strategic plan outlining where the town's po-

lice force was headed, in the short and long term. After the July meeting, a due date for the plan was set for the end of July, but it was not held up.

The deadline kept changing and the plan had not been completed before Morron left the commission last month.

Morron said the commission was "hindered" in completing the strategic plan due to vacancies – two members left the Police Commission this year and another did not seek reappointment.

Although the strategic plan wasn't completed, Morron said he presented a "complete plan including financial impact" to the boards of selectmen and finance on Sept. 1 and 2.

Schuster also said updating the police department's "ancient" rules and regulations had been on Police Commission agendas since March, but progress was slow.

Morron said revising the regulations became a second priority after officers left in May, however, the commission was still able to update many rules, including those regarding patrol procedures, hate crimes and news media relations.

Again, Morron noted the lack of police commissioners to help with the workload. Tony Camilleri left in March and John Jones in October.

"The First Selectman's reluctance to fill the slots directly affects the amount of work the commission can accomplish," Morron said.

When asked why he didn't intervene and ask the commission to make headway on the strategic plan and the rules and regulations, Schuster said, "I try not to crack the whip because they're all volunteers."

But in the end, Morron did not receive his reappointment from selectmen after a 2-2 vote last month (Selectman Stan Soby was absent).

"I've taken my responsibility on the police commission very seriously," Morron said in his e-mail. "I have always focused on what's best for the citizens of Colchester and the police department."

East Hampton Resident Alleges Bullying by Fellow MHHDC Members

by Claire Michalewicz

The Middle Haddam Historic District Commission (MHHDC) is revisiting an old controversy, after a former member sent them a letter asking them to make a correction to meeting minutes from several years ago.

Margaret McCutcheon Faber, who served on the commission from May 2006 to April 2007, said she resigned after a dispute over her position, but she wants the dispute clarified in the MHHDC's documents.

Faber alleged that the other MHHDC members antagonized her, and drove her to resign. Faber said that after serving as "vice chair/clerk" for several months – a position to which she was unanimously elected – other members began to insist that she had only been elected clerk, and was wrongly serving as vice chair.

In February 2007, Faber said, Doug Mackeown and two other commission members started saying she had only been elected to the position of clerk, not vice chair. She said attorney Janet Brooks agreed with the other commission members, issuing a legal opinion that Faber was wrongfully serving as vice chair.

But, Faber said, the transcript of the May 2006 meeting recording clearly shows that she was elected as "vice chair/clerk." The minutes of that meeting, however, indicate she was only elected as "clerk." Faber said this was a typo, and MHHDC members later used it to try to oust her from her role as vice chair.

In April of this year, attorney Jean D'Aquila reversed Brooks' opinion, after consulting with Town Clerk Sandra Wieleba, and declared that Faber had, in fact, been elected "vice chair/clerk."

Faber said she just wants the town's official

documents to reflect D'Aquila's change. She is requesting that the commission change the minutes of the meeting at which she said she was elected vice chair/clerk, and all subsequent meetings, to reflect her position. Faber also wants the Town Council and all MHHDC members from 2007 to the present to be notified of the change in writing.

"That this group developed selective amnesia less than one year after the election was not innocent and accidental, but an intentional bullying tactic employed to hasten my resignation from the MHHDC," Faber wrote.

"I think they just resented that I wanted to be on it," Faber said. She explained that she heard that there was a vacancy on the commission from then-Town Manager Alan Bergren, and she applied through Town Hall. Faber, a lifelong Middle Haddam resident, said she was interested in joining the commission after the historic Samuel Taylor house was extensively altered in a renovation, which she opposed.

"It's not a pleasant commission to be on unless they ask you to be on it," Faber said. "It's almost like a club, not a commission."

Faber said commission members felt that, as she was only the clerk on the commission, she was overstepping her bounds by acting as vice chair, and too heavily involved in commission activities, such as the redrafting of the ordinance that establishes the commission. But, Faber stressed, she was really vice chair all along, and said she was specifically asked to work on the ordinance.

Faber filed her request for a correction on Nov. 11, and it was passed on to the Town Council and the MHHDC. The MHHDC briefly dis-

cussed the issue at its Nov. 18 meeting, commission chair James Royster said. Royster said Interim Town Manager Bob Drewry was consulting D'Aquila to see if it was possible to grant Faber's requests. D'Aquila said she could not speak about the case, and Drewry could not be reached for comment.

Faber said she would not have brought the issue up again, except that, in February of this year, then-Town Manager Jeffery O'Keefe sent Brooks' opinion to the Town Council in February of this year, when the council was considering altering the boundary of the historic district in the town's ordinances. Faber said O'Keefe damaged her reputation by circulating Brooks' document, since it said that she had wrongfully served as vice chair. Faber said she just filed the complaint now because it took her months to research it, to make sure she got all the details correct.

"My reputation within the community has been unjustly tarnished as a result of the false allegations leveled against me and I believe a correction is in order," Faber wrote in her request.

"I'm not even asking for an apology," Faber said. "I'm just asking for it to be fixed." She said if the town does not grant her requests by Dec. 31, she will file a complaint with the town's ethics commission. She said she expects the MHHDC to take action at their next meeting.

Faber said the bullying from other MHHDC members went beyond their alleged attempt to remove her from the vice chair position. Shortly after she was appointed to the commission, she

said, the other members asked her to work on writing a handbook for the MHHDC, which Faber agreed to do.

But when she presented the document in 2007, Faber said Royster "berated the document I produced and attempted to discredit it completely, claiming among other things that it threatened property rights."

"I have never bullied her," Royster said emphatically. He explained that he had not been on the commission at the time, but, as an interested citizen, had offered written feedback about her handbook. What he said had been professional and was "in no respect disrespectful" to Faber, he said. Royster, an attorney, said he wanted to correct some potential legal problems with what Faber had written, which Brooks later confirmed.

But later, the MHHDC produced its own version of the handbook, incorporating substantial portions of Faber's draft and passing it off as their own work, Faber alleged.

Royster said the rift between Faber and the MHHDC ran deeper than the controversy over the vice chairman position. Faber, Royster said at a Town Council meeting earlier this year, "has waged a determined and relentless crusade to undermine the commission." Royster said this week that he still stands by that comment, and denied Faber's allegations of plagiarism.

Beyond Royster, other former and current MHHDC members could not be reached for comment for this story.

The next MHHDC meeting is scheduled for Thursday, Dec. 16, at 6:30 p.m. at Town Hall, 20 East High St.

Reimondo Files Complaints Alleging Retaliation in East Hampton

by Claire Michalewicz

East Hampton is facing more litigation, as Police Chief Matthew Reimondo has filed complaints with the Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities (CHRO), a state agency that investigates employment discrimination.

Reimondo filed complaints against the town, former Town Manager Jeffery O'Keefe, Town Council Chairwoman Melissa Engel and Vice Chairman John Tuttle. The complaints were sent to the CHRO in late October, and the CHRO forwarded them to the town clerk last week.

In the complaints, Reimondo alleges that O'Keefe's decision to lay him off in June was retaliation for handling complaints against O'Keefe from three female town employees, two complaints of sexual harassment or assault and one of gender discrimination. Reimondo was put on paid leave for four and a half months, before being reinstated to his position by a referendum early last month.

The content of the four CHRO complaints is identical, accusing the four respondents of retaliating against Reimondo on or about April 26 of this year. The retaliation, the complaint

says, is a violation of state statute 46a-60(a)(4), which prohibits employers from discharging or otherwise discriminating against an employee who has "opposed any discriminatory employment practice or because such person has filed a complaint or testified or assisted in any proceeding."

Representing Reimondo in the complaints are attorneys Leon and Alexandra Rosenblatt. Leon Rosenblatt is also representing him in his lawsuit against the town.

The complaints repeat many of the same allegations Reimondo has made against the town since his layoff – mainly, that he was removed from his position as retaliation for handling harassment complaints against O'Keefe.

The complaints recount how the three women told Reimondo of their concerns about O'Keefe. Reimondo encouraged them to put their concerns in writing, and he brought them to Town Attorney Jean D'Aquila on April 26. Reimondo and D'Aquila agreed that they would be given to Engel and Tuttle.

But, Reimondo said, "rather than take ap-

propriate corrective action against O'Keefe," Engel and Tuttle told O'Keefe about the harassment complaints.

"They then combined and conspired with him to create a scheme whereby I would be removed from office so I could not initiate or support an investigation of O'Keefe's alleged sexual harassment, gender discrimination, and sexual assault," the complaints read.

This scheme, Reimondo said, was to "reorganize" the police department and eliminate his position. The Town Council voted to terminate Reimondo "in an illegal secret meeting" on June 22, after having labor attorney Mark Sommaruga draft a termination agreement. A few days later, Reimondo said, O'Keefe also ordered the elimination of one of the three complainants' position. (This woman, Elizabeth Shepard, is still in her job at the police department. Shepard, also represented by the Rosenblatts, filed CHRO complaints against the town and O'Keefe in October.)

Rosenblatt explained that he the CHRO generally moves slowly, and the process usually

takes months. If the CHRO decides to investigate the cases, they would schedule a fact-finding hearing.

The Town of East Hampton, Engel, Tuttle and O'Keefe, along with police Sergeant Michael Green – who served as acting lieutenant and police chief in Reimondo's absence – are also named as defendants in the lawsuit Reimondo filed in August. Though Reimondo was reinstated to his job last month, the lawsuit is still ongoing, with Reimondo seeking damages for the distress he suffered.

According to court records, this Tuesday, Judge James Abrams granted the defense attorneys' request for a motion for an extension of time, until Dec. 17, regarding the discovery portion of the trial.

Town Clerk Sandra Wieleba forwarded the complaints to Town Attorney Jean D'Aquila, and to the town's insurance company. D'Aquila confirmed that she is representing the town in Shepard's CHRO complaints, but said she and town officials had not yet decided who would handle Reimondo's complaints.

Portland Selectmen Agree to Continue Brush-Burning

by Claire Michalewicz

Portland will continue burning brush at its transfer station, at least for a few more months.

At Wednesday's meeting of the Board of Selectman (BOS), Director of Public Works Richard Kelsey asked selectmen whether he should continue burning brush – which has drawn complaints from residents in the area – or hire a grinding service, and charge residents to use it.

The BOS reached a consensus to continue burning over the winter, and revisit the issue next year.

The grinding service, Kelsey said, would be "a little more environment-friendly, and a little more resident-friendly," though it would be more expensive than burning. The exact cost of the grinding service would take a year to calculate, Kelsey said, though charging residents who bring in brush and stumps would offset the cost.

The transfer station is allowed to burn brush six times a year, Kelsey said, and burning requires permits from the Department of Environmental Protection and from the fire marshal. A fire truck is required to be onsite while brush is burning, and burning can only happen when

the wind is blowing from the northwest, which Kelsey said can make it difficult to schedule.

Selectman Mark Finkelstein suggested the town continue burning, since it has less of an impact on residents during the winter, when most of their windows are closed. Finkelstein suggested waiting until budget season early next year, when the town can look at its finances and see if they have money for grinding.

"We've been burning since time immemorial, haven't we?" Finkelstein asked Kelsey. Most of the time, Kelsey responded, residents did not complain about the burning, though he said he had been receiving more complaints recently.

In the other major agenda item of the evening, First Selectwoman Susan Bransfield and Finance Director Tom Robinson shared information about the town's plans for tax sales. The sales, Bransfield explained, would be public auctions of properties for which back taxes are owed. The purchase price would go toward paying the taxes, she said. The process, she said, was different from a foreclosure, which is handled by a court.

Robinson explained that he was discussing

the sales with attorney Adam Cohen, and they were tentatively planning to auction properties that owe a total at least \$15,000 in taxes over a period of at least three years.

The tax sales, Bransfield said, are "very serious."

"We are a small town and there are a lot of people that you know on this list," Bransfield said.

The BOS also voted unanimously to change Ordinance Chapter 12, Section 12-2, which prohibits swimming in the town's quarries. The revision clarifies that is legal for visitors to the Brownstone Discovery and Exploration Park to swim. A public hearing was held on the ordinance before the meeting, but no one commented.

Bransfield explained that the BOS had gone through the process to change the ordinance last year, but since the ordinance was never printed in a local newspaper, it never officially took effect.

Bransfield also announced that the Arrigoni Bridge will be extensively renovated in 2011, which will create traffic delays for many Portland residents. At a briefing in Middletown she

recently attended, Bransfield learned the deck of the bridge needs to be replaced, a project that will start in April and last until at least November.

"It will be a major project and a major interruption," she said, but added, "It's a very necessary interruption." DOT crews will replace one lane of the bridge deck at a time, leaving at least one lane of traffic open in each direction, Bransfield said.

An information session about the repairs is scheduled for Tuesday, Dec. 14, at noon, at Middletown City Hall, 245 DeKoven Dr.

In another announcement, Bransfield said, the police department will be getting a new dog to take the place of Niko, the German shepherd who died in September. The dog, also a German shepherd, is named Jesse, she said.

Jesse will cost \$6,500, she said, and the police union had contributed \$1,000 toward the cost. Bransfield said the police department was planning a fundraiser, and resident Tom Logano will also contribute.

The next BOS meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, Dec. 15, at 7:30 p.m. at Portland Library, 20 Freestone Ave.

Hebron Resident Charged with Insurance Fraud

by Lindsay Fetzner

A former state Department of Transportation (DOT) employee was charged last week with workers' compensation fraud for allegedly working in another capacity while collecting more than \$12,000 in disability benefits from the state, according to a Nov. 23 press release from the Connecticut Division of Criminal Justice.

Clint J. Verdone, 33, of 95 Yorkshire Dr., was charged with fraudulent claim or receipt of benefits, according to an arrest warrant affidavit. The press release states that during the time that Verdone was receiving benefits, he "failed to disclose his work capacity and the income he earned while working at his business, Diamond Landscaping."

According to the Workers' Compensation Fraud Control Bureau, if the benefits obtained through fraud exceed \$2,000, the offense is a Class B felony. The felony is punishable by up to 20 years in prison and/or up to \$10,000 in fines, according to the bureau.

According to the affidavit, Verdone was "supposedly injured" while working for the DOT on Sept. 22, 2009. The affidavit states that Verdone claimed he was climbing down from the top of a sweeper truck when his foot got stuck, causing him to fall backwards, and landed on his back and buttocks. He was treated at the Lawrence Memorial Occupational Health Center, and diagnosed with "multiple contusions and a strain," the affidavit states.

On Sept. 25, 2009, Verdone returned to the health center for a follow-up appointment, where he "appeared to be in pain" and said he

still had a headache, neck pain, upper back pain and minor elbow pain. The affidavit states he was kept out of work until his next visit to the health center.

Verdone again returned to the health center on Sept. 28, Oct. 2 and Oct. 9, 2009 where he continued to complain of pain. After being referred for physical therapy on the 9th, the affidavit states he was again kept out of work.

On Oct. 16, 2009, Verdone was scheduled for an MRI, but was unable to complete the test due to "an episode of anxiety and claustrophobia," the affidavit said. In addition, the affidavit states that Verdone also had a chronic cough, attributed to working at the World Trade Center site following the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. Verdone returned to the health center again on Oct. 23, 2009, when Verdone said his pain had not changed from his previous visit, according to the affidavit, and his "out of work status was extended."

On Nov. 1, 2009, the affidavit states that Verdone was put under surveillance by a private investigation company, authorized by the administrator for the State of Connecticut's Workers' Compensation program, to be completed during multiple days in November and December. According to reports, on the first day the surveillance was conducted, Verdone was videotaped behind his residence, where he was seen constructing a "large capacity leaf collection box on the back of a flat bed truck." Verdone was also observed lifting sheets of plywood, carrying lumber and climbing ladders, among other activities. He did not appear to be both-

ered by a cough and "seemed to move fluidly with no signs of impairment," the affidavit states.

Verdone was again under surveillance on Nov. 3, 2009. He was followed to Rolling Hills Mobile Park in Mansfield, while operating a flat-bed truck containing a leaf collection box. Throughout the afternoon, Verdone was observed raking leaves, operating and pushing a leaf blower and seen using the leaf collection system on the truck. He was observed moving in a "normal fluid manner" and did not appear to be stiff. The affidavit states that the investigator reported following Verdone for more than 60 miles, while Verdone "conducted his activities" that day.

One day later, on Nov. 4, 2009, Verdone returned to the health center, where he reported that there was "no change in his neck or back pain." Additionally, Verdone stated that he was unable to go ahead with the MRI, due to his cough. The affidavit states that Verdone continued to be kept out of work. Verdone again returned to the health center on the 11th, but said there was "no improvement in his pain level," according to the affidavit.

The last doctor visit listed on the affidavit that Verdone attended was on Nov. 20, 2009, at the Norwich Orthopedic Group. The affidavit states that the doctor reported that Verdone was scheduled for an MRI, and that he was kept out of work until his next visit.

In October 2010, the inspector from the Division of Criminal Justice went to the Rolling Hills Mobile Park to get further informa-

tion on the leaf collection filmed while Verdone was under surveillance. The maintenance foreman stated that the park is owned by Southington-based Jensen Company. In addition, the foreman said that leaf collection and some mowing is done by Diamond Landscaping, owned by Verdone and his wife, according to the affidavit.

When the inspector went to the office of the Jensen Company, the assistant vice president for Connecticut operations stated that Diamond Landscaping did do work for the company, and that any work that was completed would have been invoiced and paid by a check. The inspector received the invoices submitted by Diamond Landscaping to Jensen Inc. They were for work done at Rolling Hills, but also for work done on other Jensen property as well. The affidavit states that there are a total of six invoices for the time period which Verdone was on "total disability," each with multiple entries for fall clean up and lawn mowing.

The affidavit states that according to the administrator for the State of Connecticut's Workers' Compensation program, Verdone collected \$12,762.23 in "indemnity payments" between Oct. 8, 2009, and Feb. 8, 2010, "while he was classified as totally disabled."

Verdone was released on a written promise to appear in Rockville Superior Court today, Dec. 3. According to the press release, the case will be prosecuted by the Workers' Compensation Fraud Control Bureau of the Chief State's Attorney's Office in Rocky Hill.

Library Auction Raises More Than \$3,000 in Marlborough

by Katy Nally

All bids were closed Wednesday for Richmond Memorial Library's holiday auction, which means the lucky winners can now collect their spoils.

Every year the Richmond Memorial Library Friends Committee hosts 25 Days of Holiday Cheer and offers a wealth of items and services. From Nov. 1 until Wednesday, residents were allowed to bid during the silent auction for prizes ranging from Southwest Airlines tickets to a "Chick Lit" gift bag containing cookies from the Marlborough Bakery.

Over the summer, library staff and Richmond Memorial Library Friends Committee members solicited donations from local and area businesses. Families also donated prizes or packages.

Library Director Nancy Wood said Tuesday the auction raised almost \$3,000 last year and she expected this year's event to bring in even more.

"It's a good fundraiser for us," she said.

Indeed, after tallying the final numbers, Wood announced Thursday this year's auction did in fact raise more money, bringing in \$3,192.

Richmond Memorial Library Friends Committee member Pat Cosgrove touched on the charity of Marlborough residents.

"I think we're lucky because our community really supports the library," she said. "People are very generous."

She said the auction is also a way for businesses to get their names out.

"It's fun to get the local businesses involved," Cosgrove said.

All proceeds from the auction will go toward purchasing books and other materials for the library, Wood said. This includes DVDs and magazines, and because the library is pretty tight on space, the new items will replace older ones.

"We are constantly weeding the collection, removing the things that have not been borrowed," she said.

Some popular prizes that saw a lot of bids this year included two lift tickets for Stratton Mountain Ski Resort, a "Floral Filled Year" donated by It's So Ranunculus, which, this year, included five floral gifts for five different holidays, and "Greener Pastures" from Grundmann Landscaping, which offered two hours of shrub pruning and four yards of mulch delivered for free.

"People love that mulch," Wood said laughing.

Each year the committee arranges the auction before the holidays because, Wood said, winners tend to use the prizes as Christmas or Hanukkah presents.

"[Bidders] say I'm getting something for someone else and I'm helping out the library at the same time," Wood said. "It's sort of like a double whammy."

The actual value and a starting bid – usually at about one-third of the cost – are listed next to each prize. Wood said bidders often go above

the asking price, and every prize received an offer this year.

"People like to think they're getting a bargain," Wood explained.

Bidders are asked to bid in \$1 increments, but Wood said many residents go well over, and sometimes up the price by \$20 at a time.

For each annual auction, the library aims to offer 25 prizes, but this year it surpassed that goal and included 34, Wood said. Even in the current economy, Wood noted area businesses were willing to donate. In fact, the most "nerve-racking" part for Wood this year was actually finding the prizes that had swallowed up her office at Richmond Memorial, she said.

On Wednesday night, Wood began making calls to the winners, telling them to come and claim their prizes at the library. But, she warned, if the winners don't collect within a week, the prize will go to the next highest bidder.

For more information about the auction and the library, visit richmondlibrary.info.

Winter Weather, Snow Sparks Town Contests in Hebron

by Lindsay Fetzner

Attention holiday decorating extraordinaires: the first annual holiday lights home decorating contest is coming to town.

Throughout next week, judges from Parks and Recreation and the community at large will travel around town and judge residents' holiday displays based on the categories of creativity, originality and overall display.

Parks and Rec. program coordinators Jared Redmond and Josselyn Salafia, along with Parks and Rec. Commission members and seniors from the Russell Mercier Senior Center will judge the homes.

The program, put on by Parks and Rec., was introduced this year in an effort to engage the community and generate involvement in various activities in town, Redmond said.

"We're trying to reach out to the community and offer more types of things the community can get involved with," Redmond said.

But all those interested in decorating with holiday cheer need to register by today, Dec. 3, in order to be part of the contest. There is no fee to enter, but residents have to come into the Parks and Rec. office, located in Town Hall, to complete a registration form complete with family information and an address, to be eli-

gible to win.

Prizes for each of the three categories include discounts on programs offered by the Parks and Rec. Department.

And, as a result, Redmond said, "Hopefully, [residents will] look into doing more Parks and Rec. related programs."

Salafia agreed, adding, "We're trying to get [residents] involved with Parks and Rec. programs, and offer different events they might be interested in."

Lights can be displayed as often as residents wish, but they must be illuminated between 6:30-9 p.m. throughout next week.

The contest is restricted to Hebron residents only.

But, don't be discouraged if you missed out on the contest, or didn't snag a prize, because this holiday season, Parks and Rec. has many other holiday-inspired events for the community to take part in.

On Friday, Dec. 10, Parks and Rec. is hosting a holiday decorating extravaganza, which began in 2009.

"We did it last year and we got quite a few people to attend which was really nice," Salafia said. "And the kids really seemed to like it."

In celebration of Christmas, Kwanzaa, Hanukkah and the holiday season, children will have the opportunity to decorate items such as pictures and ornaments.

Salafia said the children are broken down into Christmas, Hanukkah and Kwanzaa groups, where they have the opportunity to learn about each holiday and decorate an item of their choice. Hot chocolate and cookies will be served as well.

And the fun continues with a visit from Santa Claus, so cameras are recommended. Salafia said the children "always love" when Santa visits, and added that Santa can sign children's ornaments as well.

The event will take place at Gilead Congregational Church, located at 672 Gilead St., from 6:30-8:30 p.m. It is a free event, but Hebron residents are encouraged to call ahead and reserve a spot due to space limitations.

And Parks and Rec. isn't only looking for decorators to join in on the fun. The department is also hosting a 2011 snow sculpture contest, in celebration of the spirit of winter and creative outdoor activities. Salafia said the contest was offered a couple years ago, but due to the lack of response, Parks and Rec. put the

event on hold. They decided to reintroduce it this year to see if more community members would get involved.

So, break out the mittens and hats and use your imagination to craft a creative snow sculpture. The contest will begin with the first snow following Jan. 1, and continue through March 5. Entries are judged in different categories and the top winners from each group will receive a gift card.

But be sure to capture the snow sculpture with a camera before it melts away. In order to enter the contest, participants must bring or send a picture of the snow sculpture to the Parks and Rec. department by March 7 (pictures will not be returned).

A name, an address and a brief description of the sculpture, as well as the designer's category, should be included. Categories are as follows: kindergarten-grade 3, grade 4-8, adult and child, adult only and business.

Visit the Parks and Rec. website, hebronct.com/parks.htm, for more information. Click under "Parks and Recreation Special Events" on the left-hand column. Contact Parks and Rec. at 860-228-5971 x129, or stop by Town Hall, at 15 Gilead St.

Fight Leads to Three Arrests

by Claire Michalewicz

An alleged assault in East Hampton led to Portland police arresting three men on drug charges over the weekend.

Lee Gray, 19, of 38 Ferry St., Middletown, Joshua Meehl, 19, of 1762 Saybrook Rd., Middletown, and Mentor Berisha, 19, of 330 Plaza Dr., Middletown, were apprehended and arrested for drug possession because they matched the description of suspects wanted in an East Hampton assault.

East Hampton Police Chief Matthew Reimondo explained that police sent out an alert late Friday evening, looking for suspects in a fight that broke out at 82 Main St. in East Hampton. The fight sent one man to the hospital, Reimondo said, and four others fled the scene.

Portland Police Officer Daniel Knapp heard the dispatch call over the police radio, and parked his car at the corner of Main Street and Route 66 in Portland. Lt. Ron Milardo of the Portland Police Department said.

After about an hour of waiting, Knapp saw a red sedan with four men inside, which matched the description East Hampton police gave in the bulletin. The men in the car glanced at Knapp, then quickly looked away, which Knapp found suspicious, Milardo said.

“Officer Knapp had a hunch that something was up,” Milardo said. Knapp followed the car over the Arrigoni Bridge into Middletown, and pulled alongside it at the corner of Main Street and Rappallo Avenue, Milardo said. The men in the car were still avoiding eye contact with Knapp, Milardo said.

Knapp said he pulled the car over on Wash-

ington Street, and found that the four men inside matched the description East Hampton police gave. He said Meehl, who was driving, let him search the car, and he found bags of marijuana and cocaine, and scales for weighing drugs. Knapp arrested three of the four people in the car. The fourth, he said, could not be connected to the drugs.

Meehl was charged with possession of drug paraphernalia. Meehl was released on a \$500 bond and is due to be arraigned at Middletown Superior Court on Tuesday, Dec. 14.

Gray was charged with possession of less than four ounces of marijuana, and two counts of failure to appear in court for previous charges. He was held in custody on those outstanding warrants and is due to be arraigned Monday, Dec. 13.

Berisha was charged with possession of narcotics, possession of narcotics with intent to sell, possession of less than four ounces of marijuana, possession of marijuana with intent to sell, and possession of drug paraphernalia. He was released on a \$5,000 bond and will be arraigned on Tuesday, Dec. 7.

“It was a good motor vehicle stop,” Knapp said, since he was able to determine the suspects’ involvement in the earlier assault and help East Hampton police with their investigation.

Knapp said he called East Hampton police, who interviewed the suspects and obtained confessions about the earlier assault. Their investigation into the fight is ongoing, Reimondo said.

Hebron Police News

11/24: Franciszek Jusko, 63, of 60 Lancaster Rd., Apt. 4, Wethersfield, was charged with DUI and making a restricted turn, State Police said.

11/24: Trooper Brendon Rea’s dog Banjo located a “marijuana smoking device” inside a vehicle on Main Street and a 17-year-old male was charged with possession of drug paraphernalia, State Police said.

Marlborough Police News

11/24: A residential burglary on East Hampton Road was reported around 11:30 a.m. A 16-inch Craftsman chainsaw, a seven-inch circular saw and all the copper plumbing from the basement was stolen, State Police said. Anyone with more information about the incident is asked to contact Trooper Randy Ransom at Troop K at 860-537-7500.

Portland Police News

11/26: Susan Gieras, 45, of 103 Sherwood Dr., East Hartford, was charged with DUI and operating under suspension, Portland Police said.

Portland Home Heavily Damaged in Fire

by Claire Michalewicz

A Jobs Pond Road home sustained heavy damage after a fire broke out early Wednesday evening.

The house’s owner called 911 at 5:28 p.m., after he arrived at 78 Jobs Pond Rd. to see smoke billowing out of a second-floor bedroom window, Portland Volunteer Fire Department Chief Robert Shea said.

Shea said the fire and smoke damage had been confined to the second floor and the attic, though there was water damage throughout the rest of the single-family house.

“The house did take extensive damage,” Shea said. “It’s unoccupiable, that’s for sure.” The family who lives in the home is staying with relatives, he said.

No one was home when the fire broke out, Shea said. He said firefighters were able to rescue one cat from the house, but another cat died in the blaze.

One firefighter was transported to Middlesex Hospital for treatment and evaluation after he passed out at the scene, Shea said. He said he may have been fatigued or suffering from heat exhaustion. The firefighter

also sustained an injury to his thumb, Shea said.

Shea said Thursday morning the firefighter had been held overnight for observation, but was expected to be released soon. He said he had spoken to him and his family the previous night, and said he was doing well.

The fire had been knocked down quickly, in about 20 minutes, Shea said, and the scene was cleared within two hours. Shea said Portland firefighters were on the scene minutes after receiving the call, and the East Hampton, Glastonbury and Middletown fire departments sent mutual aid.

Shea said investigators are still unsure what caused the fire, though they know it broke out in the second-floor bedroom.

Deputy Fire Marshal Peter Willse was at the scene of the fire Wednesday evening, and on Thursday morning he said it was an electrical fire, though he was still investigating the exact cause. He said investigators were considering the possibility that the fire was connected to Wednesday’s severe storms.

Three-Car Crash in Colchester Sends Two to Hospital

A three-car accident near the intersection of Old Hartford and Upton roads shortly before 3 p.m. last Monday, Nov. 22, sent two women to the hospital, Colchester Police said.

Alyson Portelance-Ayer, 41, of Hebron was transported to the Marlborough Clinic for whiplash and a 17-year-old from Colchester went to Backus Hospital for a “possible injury,” Colchester Police said.

The driver of the third car, Timothy Baker, 44, of Colchester, had no reported injuries,

Colchester Police said. However his 1994 850 Volvo sustained damage to the front end.

Portelance-Ayer’s 2005 Jeep Grand Cherokee was damaged on all sides and the 17-year-old’s 2003 G35 Infinity sustained damage to the front driver’s side.

Anyone with more information about the accident is asked to contact Colchester Police Officer Shannon Brosnan at Troop K at 860-537-7500. The case remains under investigation.

Rollover Severely Injures Teen

A 19-year-old Colchester man was transported to Hartford Hospital last Saturday, Nov. 27 around 3:07 a.m. after his car rolled over on Route 16, State Police said.

Daniel Fitzgerald was traveling northbound on Route 16 in the area of Linwood Cemetery Road when his 1986 Dodge W150 pickup rolled over and he was ejected from his car, State Police said.

Fitzgerald sustained “serious injuries,” State Police said, and his truck was totaled. Fitzgerald was listed at the hospital Thursday as in stable condition.

The case remains under investigation.

Woman, Infant Transported to Hospital

A woman and a 1-year-old were transported to the Marlborough Clinic after a two-car accident on Route 66, State Police said.

The woman, Kelly Naughten, 25, of East Hampton, rear-ended Michael Thurz’ 2008 Ford Explorer that was stopped near the intersection of Staeth Road and Route 66 because of a previous car accident, State Police said. Naughten, who was driving a 1997 Honda Accord, had a possible chest injury and the infant in her vehicle had a “possible injury.”

Thurz, 43, of Glastonbury, was not injured. He was traveling with three children who were also listed as not injured, State Police said.

Colchester Police News

11/21: Brandon Fitzgerald, 29, of 49 White Plains Rd., Norwich, was charged with sixth-degree larceny, State Police said.

11/21: Ren Bebe, 23, of 210 River Rd., Lisbon, was charged with first-degree criminal trespass and disorderly conduct, Colchester Police said.

11/22: Jessica Minney, 28, of 1 Skylark Rd., was charged with third-degree assault and breach of peace, State Police said.

11/24: Craig Bruscato, 23, of 70 Prospect St., Norwich was charged with third-degree larceny, State Police said.

11/26: Justin Warren, 20, of 156 Halls Hill Rd., Apt. 2, was charged with possession of less than four ounces of marijuana, Colchester Police said.

East Hampton Police News

11/16: Christopher Laurito, 44, of 33 Hoffman Rd., Ellington, was arrested for operating an unregistered and uninsured motor vehicle, failure to carry a driver’s license, failure to display a front marker plate, DUI and drinking while operating a motor vehicle, East Hampton Police said.

11/19: Anthony Pezzello, 48, of 10 West Dr., Gales Ferry, was arrested for failure to drive right, DUI and failure to store narcotics in their proper container, police said.

11/20: Marshall M. Stockburger, 28, of 3 Overlook Rd., was arrested for speeding, failure to drive right and DUI, police said.

Obituaries

East Hampton

Richard Bishop

Richard L. Bishop, 86, beloved husband of 53 years to the late Stasia (Kowalski) Bishop, died Wednesday, Nov. 24 at Middlesex Hospital. Born June 27, 1924 in Salem, MA, he was the son of the late Leslie and Hazel (Richards) Bishop.

Richard had proudly served his country in the U.S. Army during World War II. He had lived in East Hampton for 32 years before moving to Middletown 12 years ago. He had retired from the Frank Davis Resort where he had been a chef. After his retirement he was a chef at several fraternities at Wesleyan University in Middletown. Richard loved football and was an avid Giants fan; he loved to travel, especially to Hawaii; he also enjoyed photography and taking pictures of both sunrises and sunsets.

He is survived by his five sons, Gregory Bishop of Vernon, Patrick Bishop and his wife Denise of Somerville, MA, David Bishop and his wife Darlene of Coopersburg, PA, Thomas Bishop and his friend Suzanne Caron of Wakefield, MA, and Andrew Bishop of Middletown; three daughters, Mary Linda Bishop of Wichita, KA, Barbara Rose Knurek and her husband Steve of Manchester, and Jacqueline Nasi and her husband Richard of Waterford; 10 grandchildren, Timothy Bishop, Sarah Bishop, Katherine Bishop, Jennifer Bishop, Thomas Bishop, Clare Bishop, Megan Bishop, Justin Bishop, Charles Knurek, and Randall Knurek.

He was predeceased by his sister, Justine Martin.

Friends called at the Spencer Funeral Home, 112 Main St., East Hampton on Tuesday, Nov. 30. Burial followed in Lakeview cemetery with military honors.

In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions may be made to Middlesex Hospital Hospice Unit, c/o The Development Office, 55 Crescent St., Middletown, CT 06457.

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

East Hampton

Norm Sartre

Norman C. "Norm" Sartre, 63, of East Hampton, died Wednesday, Nov. 24 at his home. Born December 25, 1946 in Middletown, he was the son of the late Kenneth C. and Grace B. (Maxwell) Sartre.

Norm was a lifelong resident of East Hampton and had proudly served his country in the U.S. Army during the Korean War. He had retired from the DOT where he had worked as a supervisor. He was a life member and past commander of the VFW Post 5095 in East Hampton, was active in the color guard, a member of the American Legion Post in Marlborough, and past president and member of the Old Home Days Committee in East Hampton.

He is survived by his son, Kenneth C. Sartre of Canada; his daughter, Tammy L. Sartre of Canada; a sister, Beverly Walton and her husband Matthew of East Hampton; sister, Janice Littlefield and her husband George of Colorado; his brother-in-law, Robert Miner whom he lived with for many years; three grandchildren, Justin, Shane and Mallory Sartre; and several nieces and nephews.

He was predeceased by two sisters, Sally Miner and Nancy Sartre.

Norm's family would like to extend a special thank you to Kathy Rose for the loving care given to Norm and to their good friend Linda Praskievicz.

A graveside service with military honors was held Monday, Nov. 29 in Lakeview Cemetery, with the Rev. Thomas Kennedy officiating.

In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions may be made to VFW Post 5095 Color Guard, North Maple Street, East Hampton, CT 06424 or to the Middlesex Hospital Hospice Program, c/o The Development Office, 55 Crescent St., Middletown, CT 06457.

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

The Spencer Funeral Home, 112 Main St., East Hampton has care of the arrangements.

Colchester

Julie Anne LaTerra

Julie Anne LaTerra, 51, of Colchester and Charlotte, NC, beloved wife of Nicky, passed away Wednesday morning, Nov. 24, at Hartford Hospital after a courageous battle with cancer. Born Jan. 29, 1959, in New Britain and raised in Meriden, she was the daughter of Frederick Bulmer of Durham and Doris (Krulikowski) Carpenter of Anchorage, AK.

On Sept. 16, 1978, she and Nicky were married at the First Baptist Church of Lebanon. In addition to being a devoted wife and mother, she was also a talented designer and builder of custom homes along with her husband, as the CEO of Julie LaTerra Homes. Julie's eye for style was evident in all aspects of her life – in that of design, dress and decorating to name a few. She was also a faith-filled member of the Living Word Ministries Church in West Haven.

In addition to her parents and her loving husband of 32 years, she is survived by three children, Tiffany, Joshua and Dante Josiah; two brothers, Marcus Bulmer of Warrenton, VA, and Timothy Bulmer of Simsbury; her mother-in-law, Dolores LaTerra of Colchester; and numerous extended family members and friends.

Friends may call 4-7 p.m. today, Dec. 3, at the Aurora-McCarthy Funeral Home, 167 Old Hartford Rd., Colchester. A time of reflection will be observed at 6:30 p.m. A celebration of her life will be held at 11 a.m. Saturday, Dec. 4, at the Living Word Church, 225 Meloy Rd., West Haven. Burial will be private.

For online condolences, visit www.auroramccarthyfuneralhome.com.

Colchester

Alyssa Ryan Kristoff

Alyssa Ryan Kristoff, beloved 6-year-old daughter of William and Pamela (Pasay) Kristoff, of Colchester, was received into Jesus' loving embrace in Heaven on Thanksgiving Day, Nov. 25, with her loving family by her side. She was welcomed into the world on July 20, 2004, in Durham, NC,

and from that day lived her life with love and laughter.

Alyssa will be lovingly remembered for her love of people, music, books and all things purple. Her bright smile and her beautiful soul will truly be missed every day.

Alyssa had attended Apple Preschool and was in Mrs. Pepin's Kindergarten class at Colchester Elementary. She recently was able to take her dream trip with her family to meet the Princesses at Disney World, which she absolutely loved – her favorite princess was Belle.

Despite her many medical obstacles, she never complained and her courage and determination were an inspiration to many.

In addition to her loving parents, she is survived by two siblings, Ryan and Katherine; her grandparents, Ruth and Martin Kristoff of Glastonbury and Walter and Kathleen Pasay of Lebanon; and numerous extended family members and friends.

Friends called Tuesday, Nov. 30, at the Aurora-McCarthy Funeral Home, 167 Old Hartford Rd., Colchester. During that time, family and friends were invited to share their memories. The funeral liturgy was celebrated Wednesday, Dec. 1, directly at St. Andrew Church, 128 Norwich Ave. Interment followed in the New St. Andrew Cemetery, Colchester.

In lieu of flowers, donations in her memory may be made to Hunter's Hope Foundation, P.O. Box 643, Orchard Park, NY 14127; Duke PBMT Family Support Program, DUMC Box 3350, 1400 Morreene Rd., Durham, NC 27705; Connecticut Children's Medical Center, 282 Washington St., Hartford, CT 06106; or Make-A-Wish Foundation, P.O. Box 749596, Los Angeles, CA 90074.

The family would like to express their sincere appreciation to the countless people throughout Alyssa's life that helped her to live as full and vibrant a life as she did.

For online condolences, visit www.auroramccarthyfuneralhome.com.

East Hampton

Friedrich Hecht

Friedrich (Fritz) Hecht, 79, of East Hampton, beloved husband of Anna (Hartinger) Hecht for 56 years, died at Marlborough Health Care Center after a short illness Sunday, Nov. 28. Born in Kirchenrohrbach, Germany, to the late Josef and Katherine (Fischer) Hecht in 1931, Fritz emigrated to Hartford in 1952. He married and moved to East Hampton in 1954.

He was a skilled brick and stone mason working for several large construction companies, including Wadhams & May Company, in Hartford. St. Joseph's Cathedral and Aetna Insurance Company were among the large projects he was proud to have worked on. He was a life member of the International Union of Bricklayers & Allied Craftworkers. Fritz started his own contracting business in the early 1970s and with his son, Joseph, completed many projects throughout the local area, including the Marlborough Veterans Memorial, working up until this past summer.

To honor his German heritage, Fritz led the effort to construct a new clubhouse for the Hartford Liederkrantz, a German-American social club in Newington. He held the position of president of the club for the past 14 years until the time of his death and was a past president for many years before that.

He was also a past president of the East Hampton Lions Club of which he was an avid member since the 1970s. He was a recipient of several awards, including the highest in Lionism, Connecticut Knight of the Blind. He was also a Melvin Jones Fellow and received the Ambassador of Sight and Presidential awards. Fritz also served on the East Hampton Zoning Board of Appeals. In his free time Fritz enjoyed traveling to his family in Germany, tending to his vegetable garden, stocking his woodpile, UConn basketball, and playing cards with his friends.

Besides his wife, Anna, Fritz is survived by a daughter, AnneMarie Bohan and her husband, Michael Bohan, of Harvard, MA; a daughter, Rosemarie Hecht of East Hampton and her companion Peter Horne; his son, Joseph Hecht of East Hampton; two grandsons, Michael Bohan of San Diego, CA, and Matthew Bohan of Montreal, Canada; a brother, Franz of Kirchenrohrbach, Germany; a special cousin, Marion Fischer of Wethersfield; a sister-in-law Janet Marchand and her husband Donat of Greenwich; a sister-in-law, Elizabeth Wolstenholme and her husband Roy of Salem; a sister-in-law, Marie Johnson of Marlborough; several nieces and nephews; and many cousins in Germany.

Fritz was predeceased by a brother Josef, also of Kirchenrohrbach, who passed away Nov. 17.

The family would like to thank the staffs of Marlborough Health Care Center and Masonicare Partners Hospice for their compassionate care. Friends called at the Spencer Funeral Home, 112 Main St., East Hampton, on Thursday, Dec. 2, and will call again today, Dec. 3, from 9:30-10:30 a.m. The funeral procession will leave the Spencer Funeral Home today at 10:30 a.m., followed by the funeral liturgy at 11 a.m. in St. Patrick Church. Burial will follow in St. Patrick Cemetery.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made in Fritz's memory to the Connecticut Lions Research Foundation c/o the East Hampton Lions Club, P.O. Box 153, East Hampton, CT 06424.

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



Colchester

Murray Nicholas Oken

Murray Nicholas Oken, 64, of Simsbury, husband of Sheryl (Gordon) Oken for 28 years, passed away peacefully Tuesday, Nov. 23, at Apple Rehab Farmington Valley in Plainville. Born in Hartford, he was the son of the late Hyman and Lillian (Ziccardi) Oken.

Murray attended Windsor schools and graduated from DeVry University in Chicago. He was employed by VanZelm Shadford and Heywood in Farmington retiring in 2008 as an HVAC senior mechanical engineer. He loved to listen to classical, opera, and country music, loved reading, playing board games and cribbage. He had an amazing wealth of knowledge in all subjects. Murray was a 29-year summer resident of East Hampton and always opened his cottage to family and friends.

Besides his wife, he is survived by his mother-in-law, Joan Gordon of Middletown; a brother, Louis Oken of West Hartford; a sister, Ann Marie Ullom and her husband, Paul of Westerville, OH; two sisters-in-law, Nancy Raymond and her husband, Michael of Chuluota, FL, and Jill Weisenberg and her husband, Neil of Avon; five nephews, Jeffrey Oken, Michael Oken, Timothy Synder, Adam Weisenberg and Gregory Raymond; three nieces, Michelle Cox, Erin Weisenberg and Kelly Weisenberg; four great nephews and four great nieces.

Funeral services were held November 28th at Congregation Adath Israel Synagogue in Middletown with the Rabbi Seth Haaz officiating. Burial was in Adath Israel Cemetery in Middletown.

There will be no calling hours and in lieu of flowers, friends may make donations in Murray's memory to American Heart Association, 5 Brookside Dr., Wallingford, CT 06492 or Simsbury Volunteer Ambulance Association, P.O. Box 301, Simsbury, CT 06070.

Messages of condolence may be sent to the family at www.doolittlefuneralservice.com.

The Doolittle Funeral Home, 14 Old Church St., Middletown, CT, is handling the arrangements.

Colchester

Calvin Fletcher

Calvin Fletcher, 79, husband of the late Ruby Reeves Fletcher of Colchester, passed away on Saturday Nov. 27, in Hyattsville, MD. He was born on May 24, 1931 in Wake County, NC, son of Levi and Ida McCaskill Fletcher.

He was a truck driver and worked for 25 years for the former Schuster's Express.

Surviving are two sons, Calvin D. and wife LaDonna of Beltsville, MD, Jeffrey and wife Barbara of Brandford; two daughters, Jacqueline and husband Gary Moore and Brenda and husband William Trent both of Bowie, MD; two brothers, Walter Fletcher of Norwich and Joe Louis Fletcher of Atlanta, GA; one sister, Louida Jones of Norwich; ten grandchildren; six great-grandchildren and a host of nieces and nephews.

He was predeceased by a daughter, Carol Fletcher; and eight brothers, Levi Jr., Ernest, Willie, Essex, John, George and J.W. Daies.

Funeral Services will be held tomorrow, Saturday Dec. 4 at 9 a.m., at the Abundant of Life Assembly of God Church, Route 16, Colchester. Burial to follow in Linwood Cemetery.

Visitation will be held today from 5-7 p.m. at the Belmont Sabrowski Funeral Home, 144 South Main St., Colchester.



Observations & Ruminations

by **Mike Thompson**

I didn't quite make it out to the Thanksgiving Road Race in Manchester this year, but I caught a little of the broadcast on TV. An impressive amount of runners/joggers/walkers showed up – 15,000 to be exact. Many in funky costumes, designed to catch people's eye and maybe, just maybe, turn up on TV or in the newspaper. (While I'm not sure if he went in costume this year, last year a friend of mine turned up to the race dressed as one of the *Ghostbusters*.)

As always, the race attracted people from all over the globe. The winner, in fact, was from France (Fox 61, which broadcast the race, happened to have a reporter at the scene who speaks French, so the station was still able to pull off an interview with the winner.) And, of course, there were plenty of participants from close by, including many from *Rivereast* land.

The day after the race, in its coverage of the event, the *Journal Inquirer* handily posted the top three runners in each age/gender category. And I saw that, in the Men Age 40-49 group, Derek Hyde of Middle Haddam placed third, while in the women age 40-49 category, Pamela Cahill of Hebron came in second. In the men age 50-54 group, Scott Freeman of Marlborough came in second, while, in the women age 60-64 group, Beverly Heffernan of Portland came in first. Also, in the men 70-74 category, Clem McGrath of Colchester came in third.

Congratulations to all.

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My mother went to Auburn University, and still heavily supports their football team. The Tigers took on rival Alabama in the "Iron Bowl" last Friday, and it was one heck of a game. Alabama jumped out to a very early lead, and at one point were up 24-0. But Auburn came roaring back in the second half, and wound up winning 28-27.

After the win, Auburn was ranked as the top college football team in the country in the BCS standings. The team's a pretty big deal right now – and unfortunately is dealing with its own bit of controversy.

The team's star quarterback Cameron Newton has spent the past few weeks being investigated by the NCAA after allegations surfaced his father, a pastor, solicited \$180,000 from Mississippi State during recruiting. It's a big deal, and if Newton were found guilty,

Auburn could have been penalized big-time.

Now, why am I telling you this? Because a story related to this surfaced Tuesday on espn.com that I admit made me chuckle. Alabama University fired an employee who, before the game Friday (which was played on Alabama's home field), played the songs "Take the Money and Run" and "Son of a Preacher Man" in the stadium while the Auburn players, including Newton, were warming up.

The university is simply saying it fired the guy because all songs played at the stadium need to be approved, and these songs just weren't. But it seems pretty clear the guy was fired for displaying incredibly poor judgment, not to mention sportsmanship. Like I said, these were pretty serious allegations, and the potential penalties Auburn was facing are no laughing matter. Even if the two are heated rivals, playing songs making light of the whole thing was just uncalled for.

(By the way, the NCAA ruled Wednesday that Newton is eligible to play in the SEC title game this weekend, although the association says Netwon's father broke rules by shopping his son to another school.)

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While I'm on the subject of sports: I know in the end he'll re-sign with them, but my eyes still widened this week when I saw the headline "Jeter and Yankees at an impasse." It seems the solid-but-overrated Jeter, who's been the face of the franchise for more than a decade (sorry, A-Rod), wants upwards of \$20 million a season to re-up with the Yankees. The man's 37 years old, and conventional wisdom dictates you don't give \$20 million a year to a guy who's closer to 40 than he is to 30. Even if it's just a two-year deal or something, you still don't do it.

The Yankees, who for years have seemed to have an endless supply of money, are being surprisingly restrained here, and don't seem close to giving Jeter what he wants. At the end of the day, it would be a huge black eye to the team if Jeter were to walk, and don't think the Yankee brass doesn't know this, so I'm sure the two sides will come to some sort of compromise. And even that (which I'm guessing will be around \$15-17 million per for a year or two) will probably be too much. But for now, New York is to be commended for holding back.

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See you next week.