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And They're Off!...The East Glastonbury Fish and Game Club held this year's Easter Egg Hunt last Sunday, March 28, in Marlborough. Many area kids participated. For a list of winners, see page 15.

Hebron Woman Honored by State

by Lindsay Fetzner

The Connecticut Commission on Culture & Tourism (CCT) has selected long-time resident Donna McCalla as a 2010 Distinguished Advocate.

The award honors McCalla for her dedication to the Hebron Historical Society (HHS) and other organizations in town.

"I was shocked, amazed and humbled," McCalla said when she received the e-mail last month notifying her that she was an award recipient. "It's this entire town and all the work that so many people, organizations and businesses have contributed to preserving Hebron's history. It is never one person."

Connecticut residents who have "worked to strengthen, preserve or promote the arts, historic preservation/history, film or tourism in the state" are eligible for the award, according to the CCT. Nominees are selected on a combination of their volunteer service, leadership and commitment, and their record of supporting and advocating for the arts, history, film or tourism, the CCT said.

Awards coordinator Rhonda Olisky said the CCT has honored volunteers for nonprofit cultural organizations since 1998. "It is a program

to acknowledge and honor volunteers," she said. And, it is usually those who "know and work with them" that complete the recommendations. The award recognizes McCalla's dedicated volunteerism to the HHS and "efforts to revitalize the preservation of history in Hebron," Olisky said.

McCalla had a "very strong nomination," Olisky said, and was recommended by HHS member Jean Cyr. Cyr described McCalla as the "backbone of the historical society," which she has been president of since 2002. "She's always willing to give her time for history," Cyr said. "And she's always on the lookout for Hebron artifacts."

Cyr, who has known McCalla for 10 years, described her as a devoted, hardworking asset to the society, "who always gives a lot of herself to everyone." Cyr has been a HHS member for 35 years, and presently serves as treasurer, a position she has held for eight years. "She's really devotes her life to history, especially the life of Hebron," she said.

Letters of recommendation were also written by three Hebron residents: Deena Watson, **See Woman Honored on Page 2**

Portland Resident Dies in House Fire

by Claire Michalewicz

A Portland man was killed when a fire swept through his house last Saturday, March 27.

Michael Flood, 57, was alone at his 10 Freedom Way home when the fire broke out shortly before noon. Firefighters initially had trouble reaching him in the house due to intense flames caused by several medical oxygen tanks in the home.

Portland firefighters received a call around 11:51 a.m. reporting flames shooting out of a window at the residence, said Portland Fire Chief Robert Shea. Shea said police and firefighters made two attempts to rescue Flood, but were pushed back by heavy flames. The flames were most intense in the den or family room at the front of the house, Portland Police Sergeant Scott Cunningham said.

Firefighters later removed Flood from the house, but he was pronounced dead at the scene. Flood lived in the house with his wife, Leslie. Leslie Flood arrived at the house in her car shortly after the fire broke out, said Cunningham.

The fire was extinguished quickly once more firefighters arrived with more equipment, Shea said, and was completely out about forty minutes after the first phone call. Firefighters stayed on the scene for hours to make sure that the fire was out.

Portland and state fire marshals are still investigating the cause of the fire. Fire marshals remained at the scene well into Saturday evening to investigate the fire and to ensure that the oxygen tanks were properly disposed of, Shea said.

Portland Fire Marshal Ray Sajdak said the damage was extensive, and the home is uninhabitable. The fire was unusually intense because of the oxygen tanks. Cunningham, the first police officer on the scene, heard the oxygen tanks hissing, and began moving people away from the house because of the potential danger from the tanks.

Fire marshals are still investigating the cause of the fire, and it could be weeks before they know how it started, Sajdak said. Flood's body was taken to the state medical examiner's office in Farmington. The autopsy was inconclusive, but the medical examiner did not find anything suspicious, said Cunningham.

One firefighter and a nearby resident were transported by ambulance and treated for smoke inhalation, Cunningham said.

Two dogs that were in the house survived the fire. One escaped from the house while firefighters were extinguishing the blaze, and the other was found hours later, still covering under a piece of furniture in the kitchen, said Sajdak.

The blaze was Portland's first fatal fire in 16 years, Cunningham said.

Family members this week recalled Flood as a generous, friendly man who always kept a sense of humor.

"I want everyone to know that he was a great person," said his older daughter, Danielle Spicely. "He was the type of person who would give you his shirt off his back."

"He was one of a kind," Flood's sister Mary said of her brother, adding, "Everyone says 'Hi' and asks how you're doing, but Michael really



A Portland home was destroyed by fire last weekend. Resident Michael Flood died in the blaze, which was the town's first fatal fire in 16 years.

wanted to know."

"He was the type of guy who always looked out for his friends' best interests," said Jim Fitzsimmons, who was friends with Flood for decades.

Michael Flood had been sick for years, Mary said, and probably didn't have much longer to live. "It's ironic that the thing that he needed to

live was what did him in," she said of the oxygen tanks. Mary said that Michael's two daughters and two grandchildren live in Portland, and she was grateful that he had been able to spend some time with them before he died.

"He was a big kid," said Spicely with a laugh. "He was like our play toy."

See Fatal Fire on Page 2

Woman Honored cont. from Front Page

chairman of the Hebron Historic Properties Commission, Fred Massa, Eagle Scout coordinator for Boy Scout Troop 28, and Elaine Wallace, an HHS member.

McCalla "has all her ducks in a row, she has her facts straight and she does her research," said Wallace, who has been a Hebron resident for almost 50 years. Wallace said McCalla is one of her closest friends, someone she has known for 10 years, and has "nothing but good to say" about her.

In Wallace's letter of support sent to Olisky, she said McCalla "has an unusual combination of skills that she uses generously for the benefit of the town and its history." She attributed McCalla's "uncanny ability to research even arcane and convoluted histories" and preservation as notable characteristics that are very evident in McCalla.

Among the major projects McCalla has been involved in with HHS are the restoration of the Peters House, production of the short film *Testimonies of a Quiet New England Town*, which portrays the capture and emancipation of slaves Cesar and Lewis Peters, and the Connecticut Freedom trail designation. Cyr said McCalla was "instrumental in saving the Peters House" for the town of Hebron, which McCalla said was first acquired in August of 2004.

Watson said it was McCalla's "perseverance, creativity and effectiveness" that has fueled her to continue to advocate for such important artifacts within the town, despite obstacles that she had to overcome. McCalla said the members of the Historic Properties Commission are "very supportive of the historical society and have always been a good partner in fundraising." She credited them with the success of sales and fundraising at the Maple Festival nearly two weeks ago.

McCalla has also teamed up with local cub scouts, assisting them with their community service projects. Massa said this week that McCalla is very patient with all of the scouts that are going through the process for the first time, which can be very time-consuming for both of them.

Some of the more recent projects under McCalla's direction were the restoration of the Gull School and Burrows Hill School houses as well as preservation of the Gilead Hill one

room school and opening of Prophet's Rock to the public. Massa said in his letter of recommendation that "to our troop, Donna is the face of the historical society." He said Tuesday that McCalla is "a real blessing for the town of Hebron to have someone as dedicated" as she is.

McCalla said working with the scouts are some of her fondest memories over the years. "They have all demonstrated such leadership and communication skills," she said. "They have done a marvelous job in representing Troop 28 and the town of Hebron." Not only have the scouts taken part in repairs to historic properties, she said, but have followed nationally recognized standards and guidelines and gone before town leaders to present their projects. "Between the boys and their fathers, who are incredibly talented, they have built trails, restored old school houses and restored historical landmarks."

"To have a resource such as Donna is such an asset to a community- a person who knows so much of the town's history, and is interested in preserving it and making it known to the town's residents," Massa said. "To Hebron, Donna is a true advocate of the town's historical past."

One of McCalla's hopes is that future generations will look back and appreciate the work in preserving the landmarks. As they get older, she said she hopes they will feel a connection to Hebron because they were part of preserving it.

McCalla is also an active member of the Hebron Republican Town Committee and currently serves as chairwoman. She is also the vice chair of the Hebron Historic Properties Commission and a member of the town's original Women's Club.

"What I've learned from all of the different preservation projects, whether it be a film, a play, a building, or a new nature trail, is that with people by your side, anything is possible," she said. "It's really been a community effort."

McCalla, along with five other 2010 Distinguished Advocates, will be honored on April 28 at 6:30 p.m. at the Legislative Office Building in Hartford. The four recipients of the Governor's Awards for Excellence in Culture & Tourism will be honored that evening as well.



Michael Flood

Fatal Fire cont. from Front Page

"He made up a song about himself called 'Mr. Wonderful, Mr. Marvelous,' and we all believed that he really was Mr. Wonderful and Mr. Marvelous," said Flood's niece, Jessica DeRing. The song, DeRing said, had remained a joke in the family ever since.

Mary Flood added that she and her family were grateful to the Portland police and fire departments for their quick response and all their help in this difficult time. Michael Flood's funeral was held on Wednesday at St. Mary's Church.

Flood's friends have set up a fund to help his family, since Leslie lost everything in the fire. Memorial donations can be made to the MW Flood Fund at Liberty Bank.

A full obituary for Flood appears on page 13.

Andover PZC Rejects Dog Daycare Proposal

by Lindsay Fetzner

A proposal for a kennel and dog daycare center that has been in the works for approximately two years was denied without prejudice by the Planning and Zoning Commission (PZC) last month in a 3-2-0 vote.

The proposal, put forth by resident Scott Beebe, was for a special permit for a Class C commercial kennel and dog day-care. It would be located on a 10-acre parcel on the north side of Hutchinson Road, according to town officials. The property is owned by Ellen Post and is part of a 207-acre farm that has been in her family since the 1800s. Post, who would be leasing the 10 acres said she has lived on the farm since the early 1970s.

Fourteen kennels, an indoor training facility, a fenced-in roaming area and main building were included in the plan, according to Zoning Enforcement Official John Valente. The kennels would be inside the 3,000-square-foot main building and the indoor training facility would be approximately 1,600 square feet. People would have a place for their dogs, Post said, who stressed the animals would not be "running free." The 900-square-foot fenced-in area would allow the dogs to roam outside when

not inside the various kennels the daycare would house.

Valente said the location of the proposed daycare and kennel was of particular concern for PZC members. (No commission members would comment for this story.) Post's property is at the end of Hutchinson Road, which is a cul-de-sac. The street runs parallel to Route 6 and was connected to the busy road at one point. Since that time, the road was discontinued and the cul-de-sac was created. The disconnected portion of the road is closed to the public but there has been evidence of tire tracks, Valente said. People who are familiar with the area could be tempted to take it as a short cut, he said, and would mean driving only about 200 feet as opposed to a half-mile or more. "I've never seen anyone take it, but there is evidence." Committee members were concerned with patrons' safety if residents utilized the shortcut as well, Valente said.

The idea of a blockade to close off the area was brought up, Valente said, and the commission would want it in place with approval from the Department of Transportation before a ken-

nel and daycare was put in place. This recommended component would be necessary before the approval of the plan, he said.

Traffic was another concern the commission had with Beebe's proposal. In order to reach the farmland from Route 6, people would have to take Hendee Road to eventually reach Hutchinson Road. Resident Mike Palazzi said he also has concerns with traffic as well. With limited access from Route 6, he said Hendee Road would see an influx of cars, especially in the morning and afternoon when people would drop off and pick up their dogs.

Palazzi said the "safety of people entering and exiting" Hendee Road is his main concern. He also said he doesn't know how much noise the dogs would create, which could pose another problem. "I think it's the wrong business for the area," Palazzi said.

Post said she has researched two other commercial establishments similar to the one proposed to the town, located on routes 6 and 66, and found that overall, they were quiet and were not a source of heavy traffic. Only "a couple" of residents are against it, she said, who raised

concerns regarding these two issues.

Beebe currently works with the Connecticut Humane Society and "is very involved with dogs in general," Post said. The proposed kennel and daycare center would not only be a good use of the property but would also allow Beebe to continue his work with the animals, she said. "We've been trying for it," she said. "But they are still not saying 'yes.'" (Beebe could not be reached for comment for this story.)

Post expressed her concern with the lack of business in Andover, saying, "we've gone backward," she said. Post saw the proposed plan as a way to bring business into town, calling taxes "very high" and "atrocious." "It would help everyone," she said. "I'm trying to do something that would help everyone out."

In the future, Post said Beebe would resubmit the proposal to the commission. Valente said he is not bound by any time period. "I would like to see it go through," Post said. Since Valente began work with zoning in town two years ago, he said there has been a lot of discussion of a daycare and kennel, but no other proposals have been presented.

Hebron BOS Adopt Town Government Budget

by Lindsay Fetzner

The Board of Selectmen (BOS) unanimously adopted an \$8.85 million town government budget at a meeting last Thursday. The spending plan calls for a .22 percent increase over the current year budget year.

The move came after residents expressed concerns ranging from all-day kindergarten (even though last week's meeting was to deal with the general government budget, and not the Board of Education's) to money allotted for open space.

The bulk of the \$8.85 million budget included \$6.26 million for general government spending. A contribution of \$626,627 for Capital Improvement Projects (CIP), \$100,000 for Open Space and \$1.86 million for debt service accounted for the remainder of the \$8.85 million budget.

BOS Chairman Jeff Watt said that, as a board, the goal is "to present to the taxpayers a budget that can be passed the first time."

The adopted budget for the 2009-10 fiscal year totaled \$8.83 million. It included a \$6.17 million town government budget, \$626,627 to CIP, \$130,000 to Open Space and \$1.90 million for debt service. Last year's budget also included \$7,000 for the capital non-recurring fund, which was not included in this year's budget.

Selectwoman Gayle Mulligan said she supported the town government budget as well, but that it couldn't afford any additional cuts. It's a "bare-bones minimum budget and it can't afford to be cut anymore," she said.

Mulligan also voiced support for the CIP budget, which she said is "extremely underfunded" and makes up the core of the town. "If we don't maintain it, the town will fall apart," she said. "Ideally, I would like to see that once we get to a more comfortable level, we consider increasing the fund."

During public comment, Kathy Shea thanked the town management team and town employees for their hard work in preparing the budget and the sacrifices they have taken. Shea said she did not advocate for cutting down the town budget any further and said as a CIP member, she is upset it is being flat-funded. However, Shea stressed that, "I will take the flat-funding rather than a deduction."

A part-time administrative layoff included in the budget within the police department concerned selectman Mark Stuart. He said he hopes

the state troopers would be able to fill in and pick up the extra workload. Law enforcement and protection, Stuart said, are "what we really want them for."

Interim Town Manager Andy Tierney, during his budget presentation to the BOS on March 4, said he felt the two resident troopers could handle the responsibilities and noted that Hebron was the only town that currently employed a part-time administrative officer.

O'Connell said he too had concerns with the cut, but felt that the police department could handle the reduction in staff.

Other initiatives included in the budget were the addition of a full-time park maintainer, a fitness instructor at the senior center and a plotter for the town hall. The park maintainer resulted in a net increase of \$1,150 to the budget, with no insurance or pension benefits. Tierney said at the March 4 meeting that this position was necessary for maintaining the park facilities in town. Grant revenue (\$7,191) and participant fees (\$2,889) would offset the fitness instructor, which would cost \$10,080. The total cost for the large printer is \$4,800 plus the licensing and set up fee of \$1,200. The town clerk, building department, assessor and public works department would divide up the cost necessary for the plotter.

The budget included a 2 percent salary increase for non-union employees and a 3.25 percent contractual increase for union employees (public works, clerical and parks unions). Increases also reflected adjustments for five furlough days during the 2009-10 fiscal year.

Non-funded mandates were of particular concern for selectman Dan Larson, who said that both state and federal mandates have the potential to ruin a town's finances. "Our hands are tied," he said. "We don't have options." Larson said Hebron schools are doing their job, which is evident by the fact that they are up for a Blue Ribbon award. However, students still have the choice to attend the magnet schools, which in turn costs the town.

The BOS also made a recommendation that the Board of Finance (BOF) receive the final recommended budgets for the local Board of Education (BOE) and RHAM BOE, which will be included in the overall town budget for the 2010-11 fiscal year. The Hebron levy for the RHAM budget sits at \$11.76 million and for the Hebron BOE, it is currently at \$12.08 mil-

lion. The BOS recommended that the BOF work with both boards of education to lower their overall budgets before they go to referendum, which is slated for May 4.

Mulligan said she cannot support the Hebron BOE budget as it was presented to the BOS on March 18. "I don't feel that this number is low enough," she said. "I don't support some of the programs included in the budget." Mulligan said she supports the "middle-of-the-road" budget presented by the RHAM BOE at the same meeting, which calls for a 1.49 percent increase. At a zero percent increase, she said key programs would be affected that are necessary for the students.

BOS member Brian O'Connell said the "RHAM middle-of-the-road budget is not pretty, but I can accept it." O'Connell said that school is more than looks, whether it be the sports or the extracurricular activities. "We are so blessed to have what we have here in Hebron," he said. "I support them however they come out."

All-day kindergarten (ADK) was a topic many residents voiced their opinions on during public comment. Dave Morrison said he still does not believe that ADK should be brought in this year. "I believe in a zero-percent increase," he said. "The town budget is the one I would like to see increase."

Peter Carlin agreed with Morrison and said ADK is "a bad idea." Carlin said he is not "anti-education" or "anti-student" and has voted for the education and town budget for 30 consecutive years. ADK "would be a nice silver bullet to have against the [magnet schools], but it's a gold-plated bullet and not one the town can afford," he said.

Stuart said later in the meeting that he too is "not sold on ADK." Stuart said he is not against ADK, but that he does not think the case for the program has been adequately made. He recommended that the BOE work closely with the BOF, given that the education budget is much higher than the other budgets within the town. "There is a lack of clarity in why it's made some of the decisions they've made," he said, which has created "a fog" in town.

Resident Marie Egbert said "it is really, really difficult to get information" on the specifics of the ADK program. Egbert stressed that the BOE bring their budget "down as close to

zero as possible or they are not going to get my support."

Morrison, an advocate for open space, voiced his opinion of the \$100,000 contribution to open space, which was reduced by \$30,000 from last year. He said as a farming community, the town is lucky to have active farms in town. But, he said, "how long can they survive unless we preserve the land?" Morrison said if any money were to become available, that it should be directed toward the open space fund.

Resident Harvey Desruisseaux brought up another matter, bifurcation, and requested that the board reconsider it. "I implore you, as a board, to reconvene the Charter Revision Commission to address budget issues," he said. Desruisseaux said many people have voiced interest in reconvening and think, "it's only fair." "We've got to face reality," he said. "It's tough for us right now."

Mulligan suggested that the ballot include an advisory question, where residents would have the opportunity to provide their feelings on the budget. She said gauging whether, in their opinion, the budget was too high, too low or just right is important for town officials to know. Tierney recommended to the BOS that instead of an advisory question, they do an exit poll. Bonnie Therrien, who will assume her role as town manager on April 12, told the board she would look into how successful exit polls have been in surrounding towns.

During her earlier public comments, Shea advised the selectmen to "keep your chin up," and Watt seemed to heed this advice at the end of the meeting, offering a bright outlook for the future of the town. "The future shows more promise for us on a financial standpoint," he said. "I do feel and believe that we, as a town, will come out of this economic crisis in a good position. And the number one reason is because of the character of the town."

With the budget recommendation adoption by the BOS, the budget now moves on to the BOF. The BOF sets the bottom line for both the BOS budget and for the local BOE.

The next BOS meeting is scheduled for April 15 at 7:30 p.m. in the town office building. The BOF will meet at on April 6 at 7:30 p.m. in the Douglas Library for their next regularly scheduled meeting.

Marlborough Lifeguards on the Chopping Block

by Katy Nally

It all came down to lifeguards at Tuesday's Board of Finance (BOF) budget workshop.

Parks and Recreation Commission Chair Barbara Lazzari asked the BOF to retain the \$46,000 that would fund lifeguards at Lake Terramuggus and was slated to be cut from the Parks and Rec. budget.

Speaking for the commission, Lazzari said, "If we don't fund this it could be disastrous for all of us."

Several residents agreed with Lazzari. "It's a much bigger issue than 'swim at your own risk,'" Brenda Bula said. "Who wants to go down when the lake might not be safe?"

Resident Mary Sciano told the board she had begun an online petition in support for the lifeguards, after hearing concerns around town. She said in one week, 175 signatures were collected, though some were "Anonymous." "It's obvious people in Marlborough feel really strongly about the lake," she said. The petition is available at www.ipetitions.com/petition/lake.

Lazzari said the elimination of lifeguards would not simply mean an unattended lake, it would also cut swimming lessons, cleaning and maintaining the bathrooms, protecting against vandalism and patrolling the park. "Our concern is the safety of the lake and its participants," Lazzari said. "They [lifeguards] kind of keep the peace down there."

She added that lifeguards normally run

Marlborough Day, the triathlon and the concert at the park. "It really impacts everything we do at the lake," she said.

Lazzari said she and other Parks and Rec. Commission members looked at other towns that had lakes and charged residents for a season pass, like East Hampton, and noticed two obvious differences – one entrance and a parking lot guard.

Marlborough's Blish Park has several entrances and people sometimes park their cars outside of the parking lot, board members said Tuesday. For a parking/season pass to work, "we would have to do some serious thinking about making one entrance," Lazzari said.

But with making one entrance, come the funds needed for a parking attendant. Lazzari was not optimistic that money collected from a pass could amount to \$46,000.

Rather than a parking attendant, board members also discussed the idea of a guard writing down the license plate numbers of parked cars without a sticker pass. But Lazzari said employees wouldn't have the authority to ticket people. "We can slap them on their hands and that's about it," she said.

BOF alternate Pasquale Amodeo suggested the town constable run through the parking lot and ticket cars without passes as more of a "stick" method.

Lazzari and BOF Chair Cathi Gaudinski

agreed, whatever the solution, it would cost money. "It's not an easy answer, I wish it was," Lazzari said, adding that she's looked at the problem "eight ways from Sunday and it still doesn't make any sense."

For some additional savings, Gaudinski suggested asking the lifeguards to pay for their own \$35 background check, which is mandated by the town. This could create some room in the Parks and Rec. budget and she said it's a request similar to other places with employees who work with children.

Lazzari said the pavilion fee was also doubled to \$20 per hour to create additional revenue. She said program fees have not increased because she "thought with the economy the way it was, we'd lose about 20 percent of our participation."

A new contract for a Parks and Rec. Department director would also cut costs. Gaudinski said for the director's first six months, only 80 percent of the salary is paid, then 90 percent for the following six months. (After one year, the director would begin receiving 100 percent of his salary.) This would start July 1.

First Selectman Bill Black also weighed in, calling the problem a "cost-benefit" situation. He asked rhetorically how much would be spent for what Parks and Rec. would get in return.

The selectmen, Black said, have looked into

it and "we're encouraging some additional fee-based support."

Lake Terramuggus is open from Memorial Day to Labor Day, Lazzari said. For the first two weeks in June there is a partial staff, but once school lets out a total of four lifeguards were always working at the park.

From June to August these four rotate and work 10 hours a day, seven days a week. At any given time, two guards are watching the lake, one is maintaining the facilities and one is patrolling the park and the playscape, Lazzari said.

Cuts could be made to the \$46,000 to reduce the line item to about \$38,000, Lazzari said. This would include having the park open only on the weekends for the first two weeks in June, the park maintainer position, which stayed vacant last year, would not be filled and no cost-of-living raises would be handed out.

Whatever the solution, Lazzari maintained the park was an asset to Marlborough, and lifeguards a valuable resource. "A lot of people in town have said we can't afford a vacation this year, so we're going to the lake," Lazzari said. "This is the one big town facility that Marlborough has."

There will be a public hearing on the proposed town budget Monday, April 26, 7 p.m., at the elementary school.

Grant Approved for Rail Trail in Andover

by Lindsay Fetzner

Spring cleaning in Andover won't be limited to indoors this season – portions of the rail trail that runs through town will be upgraded and maintained thanks to a state Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) grant.

The DEP grant, in the amount of \$22,428, will be used for the upkeep of the rail trail adjacent to the Hop River, First Selectman Bob Burbank said. The town applied for the grant at the end of last year and announced during the March 3 Board of Selectmen (BOS) meeting it had received approval.

Over the years, as more improvements have been made to the rail trail, there has been increased use by the public, resident Bill Penn said. Penn, who utilizes the trail for biking and running, said he frequently bikes to points in both Manchester and Willimantic. "It is a great asset to the town and community," he said. He hoped that with more improvements utilizing the grant money, more people would take advantage of the trail and use it for recreational purposes.

The grant money would not only be for smoothing out parts of the trail. Around this time of year, Burbank said some areas of the trail get washed out due to rain and require attention. Identifying areas that need improved drainage will be addressed as well.

"The trail gets quite a bit of traffic," Burbank said. The northern part of the trail, which runs up through Bolton and into Vernon, sees the majority of the traffic, Burbank said.

The timeframe for renovations and maintenance is still to be determined. Burbank said weather is a big determining factor. Because Andover shares equipment with both Coventry and Bolton, Burbank said the town often collaborates with those municipalities on maintenance. "The first priority is to get our roads in good shape," he said. "Then, between projects, we allow some time to upgrade the trail."

As maintenance and renovations are made to the rail trail, Burbank said the town will be reimbursed by the DEP using the grant money.

Selectwoman Susan England said nearly five years ago, the trail was hardly used by the public, but said "it is used very heavily now." England is an avid runner and frequents it often. "It is a wonderful, wonderful resource," she said.

England said that, in addition to the recreational aspect of the trail, it also boasts historical significance and contains several historical

remnants due to the fact that it was once used by the railroad in the 1800s. The trail is in good shape up until Burnap Brook Road, she said, but there have been drainage problems identified beyond that point. England also said putting down a stone dust surface, as other towns have done, would create a good foundation for the trail. Bolton has added trail markers and benches, among other improvements, England said, that have added to the great trail and hopes Andover can utilize the grant money for upkeep of this "great resource."

Burbank said the extent of the rail trail that runs through town is about five miles, and goes from a location in Andover close to the Columbia line and travels to Bolton along Route 6. According to the DEP, the trail runs southeast through town for six miles and connects with Bolton's portion of the trail at its start. It crosses Bailey Road, Burnap Brook Road and Burnap Brook before continuing on to Wales Road and Hebron Road. When the trail hits Parker Bridge Road after traveling under Route 6, it connects with Columbia's part of the trail, which ends the Andover portion, according to the DEP.

"It is quite an interesting trail," Burbank said. "It is a mixture of old and new."

Burbank said it incorporates newer homes and developments, but historical landmarks are still visible along the trail, like England said. Cutouts in the mountain are visible from the trail, which were made to allow the trains to pass through. Some portions of the trail have sheer rock ledges, Burbank said, with significant drop-offs. Burbank agreed the trail is a great asset for the town and receiving the grant money for upkeep will ensure it stays usable for residents.

The trail is open from dawn until dusk and is suitable for walking, hiking, running and bike riding. Coming from the east on Route 6, the trail can be reached in Andover by turning right on Bailey Road. From the west on Route 6, take a left on Merritt Valley Road, which will intersect the trail after about a half mile, according to the DEP.

The entire trail, which spans about 20 miles along an old rail bed, goes from Manchester to the Willimantic River in Windham. It connects the Charter Oak and Air Line trails. There are various access points in Manchester, Vernon, Bolton, Andover and Columbia, according to the DEP. For more information on the trail, visit the DEP's website, www.ct.gov/dep.

Principal Search, PE Topics for Marlborough School Board

by Katy Nally

Board of Education (BOE) members, and the superintendent, discussed the results of the principal search survey, as well as the state of the physical education curriculum, at a meeting last Thursday, March 25.

A survey seeking input on what characteristics residents want in a principal went out March 4 to parents and teachers and has been on the school website since then. Current Principal Loraine Giannini is set to retire at the end of the school year, after 10 years at Elmer Thienes-Mary Hall.

Superintendent of Schools David Sklarz said several weeks ago, the survey data would allow a committee to compile a profile for a potential principal.

At Thursday's meeting, Sklarz updated board members on the search process, noting the survey was well received in the community and had a high response rate. He said many residents thanked him and the board for asking for their input.

So far, Sklarz said, there have been "numerous candidates that closely met the profile," and represented a "good cross-section" of people.

Sklarz said he spent all of last Wednesday, March 24, interviewing and weeding out 36 candidates. He said he was "very impressed with the group," noting their "enthusiasm about the school." He said many of the candidates said they chose Marlborough because of the community's "passion for education."

For the superintendent, the survey was a success. "Everybody ended the day saying the process really worked," Sklarz said.

In total, 10 people were interviewed, and four of those applicants were interviewed again Tuesday by a subcommittee made up of teachers, paraprofessionals, central office staff and parents.

He said he hopes to make a recommendation to the BOE before April vacation, which starts after Friday, April 16.

BOE member Corinne Chappelle, who joined Sklarz last Wednesday and sat in on the interviews, said that everyone involved "seemed to click very well." "I think in the end we're going to be very happy with our choice," Chappelle said.

Board members also heard an update on the physical fitness of students at the elementary

school. Giannini said she had reviewed the physical education curriculum and looked at fitness assessments for students from 2005-10.

The data for fourth- and sixth-grade boys and girls who were tested in four areas, flexibility, abdominal strength, upper body strength and aerobic activity, does not definitively go up or down over five school years. "It's very hard to draw conclusions," Giannini said, adding that the administration would like the number of students who passed to increase.

One trend, however, did appear across the board. More students in both grades passed the 2009-10 test than the 2008-09 test. The cohort showing students' progress from fourth to sixth grade also provided good news. In the 2007-08 year 20 out of 86 fourth graders passed, while the same students, two years later, 38 out of 84 passed.

And for the most part, Marlborough students passed the state fitness average for reaching the health standard on all four tests from 2005-2008. But, during the 2008-09 school year, the percentage of fourth- and sixth-grade students who passed was below the state average. Fourth graders were off by about 1 percent and sixth graders by about 10 percent.

Giannini mentioned several changes made to the physical education curriculum, including introducing yoga and allotting more time for "stations" that target skills needed to master the fitness test.

Physical education teacher Anthony Colavecchio was also able to attend a professional development day in January, with staff from Andover and Hebron to discuss lesson plans and increasing student performance on state assessments. Giannini noted the alignment of Andover, Hebron and Marlborough school calendars would allow for more talks with physical education teachers.

The principal said the physical education teacher continues to encourage activity over school vacations and during events such as "Hoops for Heart." Giannini said the school will also participate in the statewide "Kid's Marathon" and "The World's Largest Exercise Class."

The next regularly scheduled meeting will be Thursday, April 29, 7 p.m., in the elementary school.

Sklarz Presents Decreased Education Budget in Marlborough

by Katy Nally

Superintendent of Schools David Sklarz warned the Board of Finance about the impact of decreasing the school budget, during his presentation of the proposed \$6.91 million school spending package, last Thursday, March 25.

As Sklarz presented the proposed 2010-11 budget, which is a 0.08 percent decrease over the current year's spending plan, he cautioned BOF members of the price they might pay for passing a "zero-percent" budget two years in a row. "We also have to think about how we'll get out of this in the next couple of years," he said. "Some decisions," he added, have "not just a financial" impact on Elmer Thienes-Mary Hall Elementary School.

BOF member Cliff Denniss said after the BOE meeting he planned on "taking every budget as it comes." He noted that so far, deliberations for the 2010-11 budget have been some what less arduous than last year's to get down to a zero-percent proposal.

At a budget workshop this past Tuesday, finance board members said they were satisfied with the education budget decrease, but decided not to make a recommendation to the BOE just yet. Some BOF members said they were holding out for teachers' concessions, which are not included in Sklarz' budget.

"The 800-pound gorilla in the room is the teachers' salaries," BOF member Dan McMahon said Tuesday.

BOF Chair Cathi Gaudinski said she was

pleased with the budget presentation, but disappointed that staff at the elementary school had not "stepped up to take concessions." She said the Elmer Thienes-Mary Hall teachers were dedicated, but said, without concessions, "other things" are taken from the students.

Evelyn Godbout, BOF vice-chair, agreed with Gaudinski, adding, "They [elementary school staff] must see what the cuts are doing to the school." She called the absence of concessions a "serious issue," and said she was "glad to hear there's some discussion."

The president of the teachers' union was unavailable this week for comment.

"It doesn't feel like the pain is being shared," when other departments at town hall face staff cuts, BOF alternate Pasquale Amodeo said.

The budget includes the "roll forward" salary increase for certified staff, which totals about \$130,000, or a 3.13 percent increase, over the 2009-10 year. Benefits for all employees increased 8.95 percent, or \$84,000. However, Sklarz included a salary reduction for non-union/non-certified staff, totaling \$6,489.

McMahon said he supported the education budget "not going any lower," but questioned the salary cut for non-union/non-certified employees, which could come at the expense of staff morale. But Gaudinski said she was doubtful that a budget would actually increase at this point.

At the March 25 meeting, Sklarz said the

BOE aimed to create an education budget with reductions that impacted the students as little as possible, Sklarz said. However, as he went over the changes, he highlighted some cuts that, if not corrected for next year, could affect students, like the one-year moratorium on new books, which saved \$29,000.

Sklarz' "roll forward" education budget (the proposal without any reductions, also known as a continuation budget) was estimated at \$7.1 million, or 3.32 percent more than the 2009-10 budget.

The changes made to take that \$7.1 million down to \$6.91 million include increasing class size for sixth grade, from 18 to 23 students per class because of attrition – a savings of \$85,000, reducing department supplies, for \$33,000, opting out of non-mandated professional development conferences (\$25,000), reducing a custodian position (\$22,000) and cutting the equivalent of one paraprofessional (\$17,500).

When Sklarz reached the custodial cut, he said, "It worries me we may pay a price for that." A particularly painful change for Sklarz was the reduction in salaries for non-union and non-certified employees, he said.

The superintendent mentioned the public works supervisor/building and grounds position was still being negotiated. "One thing I do know for sure is we need a maintenance person here," he said.

On the additions side was a total of about

\$25,000, including a \$20,000 placeholder for sewer fees and a scenario writing stipend for \$2,000. Sklarz said this \$20,000 might be more or less than projected. Gaudinski said she was working to nail down a sewer figure for the BOE.

Sklarz said that overall, the BOE wouldn't be able to "continue this [budget decrease]" in the "long range." "At some point we have to have a corrective course of action," he said.

After his presentation, BOE Chair Betty O'Brien thanked Sklarz, saying "We've all worked very hard in a cooperative effort with the Board of Finance."

Out of 93 of the total 155 Connecticut school districts, the \$6.91 million budget is among 15 others statewide that call for a zero-, or close to zero-, percent increase for the 2010-11 budget, Sklarz said. Marlborough is among 10 Connecticut districts that passed a zero-, or close to zero-, percent increase for the 2009-10 year and proposed a similar increase for the 2010-11 year.

As of mid-March, the state average for the proposed 2010-11 budget was an increase of 2.73 percent, Sklarz said.

There will be a town-wide public hearing, Monday, April 26, at 7 p.m., at the elementary school, to discuss the proposed budget. The town budget vote is scheduled for Monday, May 10.

Wiring Blamed for Nichols Bus Fire in East Hampton

by Claire Michalewicz

A fire ripped through the garage of Nichols Bus Service last Saturday, March 27, causing significant damage to the building and several buses inside.

Faulty wiring in a water cooler caused the blaze, said East Hampton Fire Marshal Phil Visintainer.

Visintainer said the fire department received a call around 7:15 p.m. about a fire at the Nichols garage at 27 North Main St. Firefighters were on the scene within about 10 minutes, and the fire was extinguished quickly. Trucks from Portland, Marlborough and Colchester assisted East Hampton firefighters in putting out the blaze, Visintainer said.

Visintainer said he and a state fire marshal remained on the scene until after midnight, examining the scene of the fire. The fire started when wires in a water cooler in the garage shorted, he explained.

The fire was "pretty well advanced" when firefighters arrived at the scene, and the heat of the blaze caused significant damage to the roof, garage door and windows. The walls of the garage are made from cinder blocks, so they escaped major damage, Visintainer said.

The intense heat in the garage damaged four buses, though Visintainer couldn't elaborate on what the damage was. The fire damaged the part of the garage where Nichols mechanics repair buses, and the company lost many of their tools in the blaze, Visintainer said.

Representatives from Nichols declined to comment about the fire.

The company has come under scrutiny in the past few weeks, after a *Hartford Courant* story revealed the company had one of the worst safety inspection records among school bus operators in Connecticut. The bus company provides services to the school systems in East Hampton, Portland and other neighboring towns.

Since then, school officials have offered assurances that Nichols is taking steps to improve the safety of its buses.

The bus company's owner, Charlie Nichols, "has been very responsive," Superintendent of Schools Judith Golden told the Board of Education at a meeting last week. Golden said that she was working with Nichols to create a better inspection policy, and planned to hire an outside inspector to check the buses.

First Step for Revaluation Begins In Colchester

by Katy Nally

Colchester began its data collection for the 2011 revaluation last week, which Assessor John Chaponis called an "in-house" head start on the process.

So far, town employees have begun to inspect properties on McDonald Road, Piekarz Road, Shadbush Drive, Spicebush Drive, Winterbury Drive, Homonick Road, Marvin Road, Brainard Road, Daniel Drive, Jan Drive, Stanavage Road, Colburn Drive, Natalie Lane, Mahoney Road and Sashel Lane.

The website, www.colchesterct.gov/Pages/ColchesterCT_Dept/TA/revaluation, will be updated bi-monthly as more properties are inspected.

During this revaluation, every property – both commercial and residential – will be "fully inspected," including the inside of each building. The last time this type of revaluation was done in Colchester was in 2001, and cost the town \$284,000.

In 2006, however, a town-wide assessment was done that did not include every parcel, at a cost of \$153,000. Due to state law, the full inspection that occurred in 2001 must be performed once every 10 years, and the town-wide assessment in 2006, once every five.

According to Chaponis, data collection is the most expensive part of the five-step revaluation process. The other steps are market analysis, valuation, field review and informal hearings.

By having town employees begin the data collection now, instead of waiting for an outside service to start in 2011, Chaponis estimated the town could save about \$100,000.

Chaponis said personnel complete a full interior inspection of each property, gathering information on the number of rooms, bathrooms, fireplaces and floor/wall coverings. They also note the type of heating and cooling systems, finished basements, attics, kitchen and bathrooms, then also outside structures like decks, porches, garages, sheds and barns. The square footage is also recorded.

The assessor said "it can feel intrusive when someone asks to enter" a residence, but that the

10-minute inspection process is necessary to accurately evaluate a property. He made the distinction between data collection and actually appraising a property, which will not happen for some months.

Chaponis added that if data collectors come to a house at the wrong time, residents can reschedule another appointment.

Data collection is expected to be completed by October 2011. The next step, market analysis, would then begin. Chaponis said this is when home sales data from December 2010-September 2011 is analyzed and the condition of the property at the time of sale is recorded.

By November 2011, Chaponis said "notices of assessment change" will be mailed out.

Despite the town beginning the process in-house now, Chaponis said an outside company would be brought on later to help out. Chaponis said a request for proposals should be mailed out in about one month, and then bids for the service will be submitted and eventually awarded. He estimated the company awarded the contract would start working in Colchester in December 2010.

The last revaluation in Colchester, and the one before it, was performed by Vision Appraisal Technology out of Northboro, MA.

Chaponis said property values typically increase as a result of revaluation, but 2011 might not be a typical economic year. In 2006, when the last reval was done, Chaponis said the market was higher than it is today. "So if things stay the same or go down between now and October 2011," assessments possibly could go down," he said. But, he added, "nobody can predict what's going to happen between now and October 2011."

After the reval was completed in November 2001, the town Grand List jumped by 10 percent, Chaponis said.

For more information, and to stay current on the reval process, visit www.colchesterct.gov, find the assessor department page and click on "Revaluation."

Overall Budget Cut by \$1 Million in Colchester

by Katy Nally

After a final budget review last week, the finance board cut a total of \$1 million, with \$700,000 coming from both the education and town operations budgets.

The Board of Education (BOE) budget was cut by \$500,000, with \$239,000 coming from union and non-union employees' concessions in the form of two furlough days. The remaining \$261,000 cuts 10 athletic teams in three sports, library books and stipends for teacher leadership positions, BOE Chair Ron Goldstein said.

On the town government side, First Selectman Gregg Schuster's operations budget was cut by \$200,000. He said this reduction would affect all departments, and came from "lower than expected bids," on town vehicles, cuts to the library, fire department and other services.

Another \$300,000 will be taken from the undesignated fund balance, Board of Finance (BOF) Chair Bruce Hayn said. With this reduction, Schuster said the fund would decrease to 5.75 percent of the town debt based on current projections. He said Colchester would "dip in" to its savings, as "we expect to have some difficult times," but not take so much that the town is unprepared. The 5.75 percent would still be enough to allow for good bonding and interest rates, he said.

With the total \$1 million reduction, Hayn said the mill rate would still increase by 1.42 over the 2009-10 year, bringing the rate to 25.07. This jump is not typical for Colchester, where every year since 1999-00 the rate increased by less than one mill.

In total, the education budget changed from \$36.48 million to \$35.98 million, and the percent increase over the 2009-10 year went from 4.75 to 3.31. The 2009-10 budget showed a 1.55

percent increase over the previous year.

With the \$200,000 reduction to Schuster's \$13.77 million budget, the percent increase over the 2009-10 budget went from 3.18 to 1.68.

Goldstein said these latest cuts to the education budget were especially painful because "all of these items are important." However the board was able to retain 1 FTE position it fought for – enrichment.

"We are among the lowest [per pupil expenditures] in the state and we're still cutting," Goldstein said.

Among the \$261,000 in reductions is the elimination of 10 athletic teams, which totals \$24,000 in savings. Six teams from Bacon Academy are slated to be cut: freshman boys' and girls' soccer and basketball, and boys' and girls' indoor track; and four at William J. Johnston Middle School, junior varsity boys' and girls' soccer and basketball.

Cuts to stipends for certified staff totaled \$32,000 and \$23,000 was cut from library books at all four schools. Capital improvements also took a \$16,500 hit, which will halt plans to repair a driveway at Bacon.

Goldstein commended the union and non-union employees who took concessions. "The fact they've done this now for the second year in a row shows an extraordinary level of commitment to help us get through this budget," Goldstein said.

Goldstein said the insurance rates also came in lower than projected, and created a savings of \$92,000.

Schuster said many of the cuts to his budget, were reductions town hall planned to take any way. He used the example of the \$5,000 cut to Youth Services, saying he made that decision because the Youth Services director plans on

receiving a grant for the same amount.

Schuster gave other examples like highway maintenance, which was cut by \$4,000, so now the town won't treat gravel roads with calcium-chloride. He noted the \$320,000 slated for road improvements was not cut.

Some of the biggest savings were from the purchase of new vehicles like lawn mowers, pickup and dump trucks, which will cut down vehicle maintenance. He said these purchases were made with reserves and state funds. Also, like the BOE, insurance for employees came in less than expected.

There was a \$37,000 reduction at the fire department and a \$10,000 cut to library books. Schuster said the fire department will forego physicals for some of its volunteers, as a result.

The first selectman said his budget cuts were "a little bit here and a little bit there."

Hayn said the BOF arrived at the \$1 million figure based on what the BOE and Schuster presented. He said the board "took into consideration" the results of a recent budget survey, but with no overarching themes from the data, Hayn said it was difficult to take draw conclusions. He said most residents don't want to give up services or raise taxes.

As of March 22, the survey, which is available on the town's website www.colchester.ct.gov, showed 178 people said they could support an increase in their tax rate, while 163 said they could not.

Also, of the 371 survey respondents, 215 supported a 0-0.5 mill increase, while 48 said they could support a 1-1.5 mill increase, which would include the current 1.42 proposal. (There were other answers available for which respondents to choose.)

East Hampton BOF Sends \$38 Million Budget to Public Hearing

by Claire Michalewicz

The Board of Finance (BOF) voted at its meeting Monday to send the town's \$38 million proposed budget in its current form to the public hearing next week.

The BOF debated whether to restore some money to the Board of Education (BOE) budget, which Town Manager Jeffery O'Keefe reduced by \$200,000. Finance board members opted not to touch the BOE budget because they were still waiting to hear about negotiations with the school employees' unions. Superintendent of Schools Judith Golden attended the meeting, but explained that she couldn't comment on personnel issues.

O'Keefe's \$38 million proposed budget would require a .97 mill increase, or 4.04 percent. The education budget calls for a 3.08 percent increase, down from the 3.88 increase that the BOE passed in February.

Many residents came to the meeting to protest the proposed cut to the school budget, and urged the BOF to put the \$200,000 back.

"We've just been maintaining for years," said

Roger Abraham, a high school teacher. "We're not going forward. We've gotta go forward."

"East Hampton has gotta put on its boots and dig deep," said BOF member George Pfaffenbach. "You have to move forward or you'll move backwards automatically."

"There's other places where we could make some difference," said another resident, Alison Moriarty Daley.

Some BOF members explained that if they were to reverse the cuts to the BOE budget, it was only fair to also reverse the \$80,000 O'Keefe had cut from the town operations budget.

"If you're gonna put it out there, I'd put it all back," said BOE Member Patience Anderson.

Currently, the budget calls for a tax increase of .97 mill, or 4.04 percent. At the meeting, Finance Director Jeff Jylkka calculated that changing the BOE budget would require a mill increase of 1.15, or 4.79 percent. Also adding the \$80,000 to town operations, Jylkka said,

would bring the mill increase to 1.49, or 6.21 percent.

"If we don't get it right the first time," Walton said, "the cuts are gonna be more than what we're feeling in this room right now. It's like playing catch with an egg."

Resident Elaine Pellegrino asked finance board members how they would interpret a "no" vote if the budget failed at the referendum. She explained that some people were willing to pay higher taxes to support the school system, and urged the board not to automatically assume that people wanted lower taxes if the budget failed.

The BOF also debated O'Keefe's decision to hire a full-time town engineer. Public Works Director Keith Hayden explained that East Hampton was missing many opportunities to receive grant money, since many applications required detailed plans, which could only be made by an engineer. If the town had a full-time engineer, Hayden and O'Keefe both ex-

The results also showed the majority of residents want to maintain both town and educational services. Of nine town services, fire and emergency medical services received the most votes to maintain funding, at about 80 percent, or 298 people, and library services received the most votes for a reduction, at 27.5 percent or 102 people. Economic development services came in first for an increase in funding, with 30.7 percent of the votes, or 114 of the 371 people.

Hayn noted that there are about 17,000 Colchester residents and the survey reflected only a few hundred. He said he wished more people in town, especially the 9,000 who vote, would speak out about what they want in the budget. "It would help us understand what people want," Hayn said.

Schuster called the results "good data points," but added, "it's difficult to know if that's what's on the minds of the people out there."

In an education question, 36.1 percent, or 132 people, voted for an increase in spending for academic programs, 73.6 percent, or 271 people, voted to maintain funding for facility maintenance, and extracurricular and school library books tied for the most votes to decrease spending, with a margin of one person, at 25 percent, or 92 people.

When it came to increasing class size, respondents were basically split, with 30.5 percent in favor of an increase in size to retain educational services and 28 percent voting nay.

Although conclusions based on the survey were hard to draw, Goldstein reiterated the BOE is "still listening."

There will be two budget hearings Monday and Tuesday, April 26 and 27, 7 p.m., at Town Hall, 127 Norwich Ave.

Police News

3/23: David Phillips, 18, of 2 Meadow Dr., No. 5, was charged with violation of probation, State Police said.

3/24: Neil Dagata, 39, of 3342 Framingham Ave., Palm Bay, FL, was charged with violation of probation, State Police said.

3/28: Angelila Hernandez, 23, of 8 Manns Rd., Hartford, was charged with DUI, reckless driving and improperly passing on the right, State Police said.

3/28: Mary Parent, 49, of 159 Norwich Ave., was charged with DUI, failure to drive in established lane and failure to carry a license, State Police said.

3/27: Griffin Simon, 21, of 84 Hillside Ave.,

Hartford, was charged with failure to appear, State Police said.

3/29: Kerry Shorey, 48, of 55 Gill St., was charged with breach of peace and interfering with an arrest, State Police said.

3/29: Brittiney Church, 18, also of 55 Gill St., was charged with falsely reporting a 911 call, breach of peace and interfering with an arrest, State Police said.

3/29: A 15-year-old was charged with disorderly conduct and threatening, State Police said.

3/29: Jeffrey Rosenberg, 47, of 63 Lakeview Ct., was charged with disorderly conduct and threatening, State Police said.

Hebron Police News

3/22: Keith Rochette, 37, of 103 Chestnut Hill Rd., was charged with disorderly conduct, second-degree harassment and threatening, State Police said.

3/24: Joseph Currier, 41, of 35 Lafayette Rd., Marlborough, was charged with DUI, speeding, failure to drive right and possession of cocaine, State Police said.

Andover Police News

3/26: Sometime between 7:30 a.m.-3 p.m., a residence on Gilead Road was burglarized and several items were stolen, State Police said. The case remains under investigation.

East Hampton Police News

3/15: A 15-year-old male juvenile was referred to Juvenile Court for possession of tobacco by a minor, East Hampton Police said.

3/20: Mallory Reynolds, 28, of 64 Barton Hill Rd., was arrested for third-degree criminal mischief, police said.

3/20: Keron F. Flannery, 58, of 8 Sears Pl., was arrested for failure to drive right and operating under the influence of alcohol, police said. Also on 3/20, Flannery was arrested for operating under suspension, police added.

Portland Police News

3/24: Barry Spence, 35, of 177 Weston St., Hartford, was charged with two counts of third-degree burglary, third-degree larceny, and fifth-degree larceny, Portland Police said.

From the Editor's Desk

Observations & Ruminations

by **Mike Thompson**

Those of you used to my observing and ruminating probably noticed that reporter Katy Nally had the honors last week. That's because I wasn't here; I was once again down in Alabama, visiting relatives.

When I went last year, I wrote about the vast array of food choices down there. So I won't go back to that same well again – although I will note that this year I really noticed the sheer volume of fast food fried chicken joints. There are just so many – and probably the majority of them weren't KFCs (which are kinda the only fried chicken joint around here).

There were lots of regional chains, some of which you may have heard of (like Chik-Fil-A), others of which maybe not (I saw a couple outlets of something called “Bojangle's Chicken and Biscuits”). There were also several Popeye's Chicken eateries.

But I vowed not to talk about greasy fast food and, tempting though it may be, I shan't.

While I was down there, the health care bill passed. And in Alabama, where President Obama isn't exactly the most popular of figures – I even saw a car with a bumper sticker that simply said “Nope,” with the word written in the style of the “Hope” Obama campaign slogan – the bill wasn't exactly met with thunderous applause. In fact, moments after Obama signed the bill Tuesday, Alabama joined 12 other states in suing the federal government to stop the legislation, claiming it unconstitutional.

I, on the other hand, like the health care bill. Yes, it may not be quite the overhaul many were hoping for when Obama got elected, but there's still a lot to like about it. Requiring individuals to buy medical insurance is a good idea; several months ago, Obama made a very good point when being interviewed about health care on television. He noted that Americans are mandated to buy car insurance, so why shouldn't they be mandated to buy health insurance? Like several parts of the bill, this mandate won't take effect until 2014, but at least it will take effect. It's a requirement that really does make sense.

I also like that insurance companies will now be prohibited from denying coverage based on preexisting conditions. (This aspect of the bill will take effect six months from now for children; starting in 2014, it will expand to include adults with preexisting conditions.) And I'm also a fan of forcing insurance companies to allow people to stay on their parents' medical plan until they're 26 years old. Let's face it, it can be difficult to find a full-time job after graduating college, so this is a pretty cool feature.

Does the bill have the true, government-funded, public option people were looking for? No. But like I said, there's a lot to like about it. And it passed despite Republicans using one of their favorite tools – scare tactics. When the bill was being voted on by Congress two weekends ago, I heard Republicans throw out words like socialism and Communism, and bring up the Soviet Union. They knew what they were doing, just like Sarah Palin knew what she was doing months ago when she made that baseless point about “death panels.” Well, thankfully, none of it worked and, though the vote was close, the bill passed.

Health care reform was one of the main items on Obama's agenda when he got elected, and I'm glad he's been able to realize it. Also passed the same day as the health care legislation was a bill reforming the college aid program, which was another of Obama's goals; the bill eliminates the reliance on private lenders that currently fund so

many college loans. It also looks like we're also getting closer to a repeal of the “don't ask, don't tell” law, and it's about time. (Because, really, who gives a crap? If somebody wants to serve in the military and fight for our country, why should it matter if they're gay?)

So, last Tuesday, when Obama signed the health care reform, was a very good day. And I now know first-hand that a lot of Alabamians didn't think so.

* * *

Also while I was vacationing down there, the news broke that, next month, residents of the town in which I was staying will vote on whether to keep it a dry town or to make it a “wet” one (i.e., able to legally sell alcohol). It's been a dry town for as long as I can remember, even as many of the other towns that surround it have turned wet. This isn't the first time a vote has been held on the matter, either; previous attempts to change the policy, though, have all failed.

I expect there to be plenty of opposition to making the town wet. And I understand concerns that it may lead to an increase in DUIs and drunk driving accidents, especially if restaurants in town begin serving (which I'd imagine they would). However, like I said, there are nearby towns that *do* serve alcohol, so there's nothing to stop someone from driving to that town, having a few at a bar, then driving home. DUIs are an unfortunate reality, but they *are* a reality. Take a gander at the police news in the *Rivereast* each week; there are always at least a few DUI arrests. So, if someone is going to make the stupid decision to drive drunk, at least it's safer – for them and for others – if they have to drive only five minutes or so from the local bar as opposed to 20 or 30 minutes from a watering hole in a surrounding town.

I've also heard concerns about turning the town wet leading to an increase in alcohol-related crimes. I'm not so sure about that one either. See, while the town may be a dry town, it's not like alcohol is, say, marijuana; it's perfectly legal to own, and consume, in your own home. In fact, while I was down there a study came out finding that the majority of “binge drinkers” (which were defined as those who consumed about five drinks or so over two hours) lived in dry counties.

A spokesperson for MADD speculated this was because people in dry towns, when they purchased alcohol in the wet ones, tended to buy in bulk to sort of stock up. And, the spokesperson said, when people buy alcohol in bulk, they tend to drink it in bulk. I'm not sure if I totally buy that; I've bought plenty of food items “in bulk” before – I used to be a card-carrying Sam's Club member, after all – and it's not like I ate them all in one or two sittings. Still, it's an interesting theory.

So, it's not like people don't already have plenty of opportunity to get sloshed at their homes, and then run amok in the town. The fact that they don't do so now leads me to believe they won't do if the town turns wet. I've lived in a “wet town” – Manchester – most of my life, and it's not like it's the equivalent of Pottersville from *It's a Wonderful Life*.

Now, I know it might seem like I've devoted a large amount of space writing about an issue that's decidedly not local, but like I said, I've lived in towns where you can buy alcohol my whole life. The idea of there being a town where you can't do that is kind of interesting to me. I'll be curious to see how the vote goes next month.

* * *

See you next week.

Obituaries

Colchester

Micheline Squires

Micheline Susan (Bouchard) Squires, 52, of Colchester, beloved wife and soul mate to Richard, passed away Monday, March 29, after a long battle with cancer, at the Middlesex Hospital Hospice with her family and close friends by her side. Born in Edmundston, New Brunswick, Canada, she was a daughter of Oneil and Lena (Deschenes) Bouchard of Colchester.

Micheline was past president and honorary member of the Colchester Hayward Fire Department Auxiliary. Micheline built her career at both the Travelers and more recently, the Hartford Insurance Co. She enjoyed traveling and reading and she found the most joy in helping others. Micheline will be remembered by her family for her generosity and selfless spirit.

In addition to her beloved husband of 20 years, she leaves behind a daughter and stepson and their spouses, Dawn and Jeremy Utz of Indiana, Brendon and Summer Reed of Maryland; three adoring grandchildren, Zachary Utz, Caleb Reed and Keegan Utz; three siblings and their spouses, Mario and Nancy Bouchard of Michigan, Michael and Krystyna Bouchard of Connecticut, Liza and Keith Anderson of Connecticut; their children, Kim and Dayna Bouchard, Kamil, Eric and Ana Bouchard, Emily and Jared Anderson and numerous extended family members and friends.

Micheline leaves behind her very special family at the CHVFD. She will always treasure the special friendship and camaraderie with her family at CHVFD. Their compassion and love of the fire department goes beyond any words to truly express how much they meant to Micheline.

Friends may call from 4-6 p.m. Monday, April 5, at the Aurora-McCarthy Funeral Home, 167 Old Hartford Rd., Colchester. A memorial service will follow immediately at 6 p.m. with CHVFD Chaplin Rev. Ted Dole officiating. A reception will follow at the CHVFD. Burial will be held privately in the New St. Andrew Cemetery, Colchester.

In lieu of flowers, donations in her memory may be made to the CHVFD, 18-54 Old Hartford Rd., Colchester 06415

For online condolences, visit www.auroramccarthyfuneralhome.com.

Andover

Michael Marco

Michael "Mike" Marco of Andover passed away Sunday, March 21, at his winter home in Ft. Myers, FL, following a brief illness. He was born in New Jersey, the son of Anna and William Marco, but grew up on the family farm in West Willington.

Mike is survived by his beloved wife of 58 years Jean Herrick Marco and was particularly close to his sister-in-law Evelyn Hampson of Bolton and brother-in-law Carl Herrick of Leesburg, FL. Mike was predeceased by two sons Michael and John, two brothers George and Nicholas, and three sisters Elsie, Mary and Eva. He is survived by a sister Helen Sadow, several grandchildren, nieces and nephews.

He retired from Hamilton Standard where he worked as a machinist for many years. Mike was very active in sports, playing baseball as a pitcher for the Hamilton twilight league, and also Stafford and Willimantic leagues. He also belonged to several 10-pin bowling leagues where he accumulated many trophies in his retirement. He became an avid golfer, belonged to the Cross Creek Golf and Country Club at his winter home in Fort Myers, FL. He played golf often at local Connecticut clubs where he was lucky enough to make a hole-in-one at Tallwood Golf Club. He enjoyed cars and working on his Andover home which he built in 1953. He also belonged to the Andover Seniors Young at Heart Club.

Funeral arrangements are incomplete at this time. A memorial service will be planned for a later date.

In lieu of flowers, contributions may be made to the Andover Fire Department, Andover, CT 06232 or a charity of the donor's choice.

Marlborough

Joseph L. Bilodeau

Joseph L. Bilodeau, 78, of Marlborough, beloved husband of Rolande (Gervais) Bilodeau, died Saturday, March 27, at the Chestelm Health Care Center.

Born Dec. 13, 1931, in Sharon, son of the late Leopold and Grace (Vachon) Bilodeau he had lived in New Britain many years moving to Marlborough in 2004. Prior to his retirement he was a grading foreman for Central Paving. Joe was a lifetime member of the American Legion in New Britain and Berlin. He joined the army when he was seventeen years old and served during the Korean War.

Besides his wife, he is survived by his children and their spouses, Denise and Clayton Foster of Bow, NH, Arlene and Gerard Risano of Marlborough, James Bilodeau of Hingham, MA, Marc Bilodeau of Marlborough; seven grandchildren, Tamara Maziarz, Sean Foster, Michael Risano, Theresa Risano, Marc Bilodeau Jr., Brett Bilodeau, Ryan Adams; an aunt, Edna Beaudoin and her husband Roger of Canada; a nephew, Richard Bilodeau of Keene, NH; and many cousins in Connecticut and Canada.

Funeral services and burial will be private.

In lieu of flowers, memorial donations may be made to St. John Fisher Church, 30 Jones Hollow Rd., Marlborough, CT 06447 or to the Chestelm Health Care and Rehabilitation Center, 534 Town Rd., Moodus, CT 06469.

Portland

Michael E. Flood

Michael E. Flood of Portland died Saturday, March 27, in a fire at his home. He was born Dec. 16, 1952, in Middletown, a son of the late Thomas W. and Mary Kennedy Flood.

He attended St. Mary School, Xavier High School, Central Connecticut State University and was employed for many years as an electrician for U.S. Navy contractors in the Norfolk, VA, area.

He is survived by his wife of 31 years, Leslie H. Flood; his two daughters, Danielle Spicely and Laurin Flood, of Portland; his two grandchildren Kathleen Jorge and Edwin Spicely; his five brothers, Thomas and Timothy of Portland, Patrick of Vermont, William of Arizona and Joseph of Guilford; his four sisters, Anne Sandalls and Ellin Murphy of Massachusetts, Mary of Portland and Betsy of Manchester; his son-in-law, Eddie Spicely of Portland; and his 26 nieces and nephews and eight great-nieces and great-nephews.

He was predeceased by his brother John, his nephew Benjamin Sandalls, and his beloved Aunt Marion.

Michael was known for his sense of humor and would always leave you with a smile on your face.

The family would like to thank the Portland Fire and Police Departments for their response and kindness in a most difficult situation. They are truly unsung heroes.

His family received relatives and friends in the Portland Memorial Funeral Home, 231 Main St., Portland, Tuesday, March 30. A Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated Wednesday, March 31, in the Church of Saint Mary.

A fund has been set up at Liberty Bank to help the family, who lost everything in the fire. Donations may be sent to the MW Flood Fund c/o Liberty Bank.

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

Hebron

Albert Salk

Albert Salk, 93, died in Hebron on March 30, in the home of his son Gilbert and daughter in-law Kathy, cared for there with the invaluable help of his son Russell.

Albert was born in Providence, RI in 1916. He and his wife Ruth Cohen Salk lived in Providence until moving to the Springfield, MA area in 1953.

In addition to Russ, Gil and Kathy, Al is survived by his brother Morton, sister Rose, and granddaughter Lauren. He will be sorely missed by them, and by his extended family and many friends.

His funeral service was held Thursday, April 1, in the Sugarman-Sinai Memorial Chapel, 458 Hope St., Providence, RI, with a burial in Lincoln Park Cemetery.

Condolences may be sent to 107 Jan Dr., Hebron, CT 06248.

Colchester

June Elaine Merkent

June Elaine (Durfee) Merkent, widow of Albert Merkent, daughter of the late Clifton and Sarah (Irish) Durfee, passed away of natural causes Friday, March 26, at Harrington Court convalescent home in Colchester.

She was born in Cranesville, PA, and resided in West Hartford for most of her life. She had been a longtime member of St. James' Episcopal Church, West Hartford. She was also a member of the Daughters of the American Revolution.

June attended a business college in Cleveland, OH and was employed as a secretary in a variety of positions including Tool and Equipment Distributors, Inc. (TEDI) from which she retired. June had a great love of cats and supported the efforts of the Connecticut Humane Society.

June was predeceased by her son, Malcolm Alanson Merkent, and her dear friend and companion, Richard A. Herman. She was also predeceased by her brother, Alanson Durfee and sister, Jane Elizabeth (Durfee) Price.

June leaves her daughter, Barbara J. Merkent, of East Hartford; her son, Stephen A. Merkent and his wife, Janet, and their three sons, Ryan M. Merkent, Christopher S. Merkent and Matthew J. Merkent of Colchester. She also leaves her daughter-in-law, Debi Fitzgerald of Pennsylvania and her granddaughter and husband, Marissa and Christopher Nuhfer, and great-grandson, Bradley J. Nuhfer of New York.

Funeral services will be private. Taylor & Modeen Funeral Home, 136 South Main St., West Hartford, has care of the arrangements.

Donations in June's memory can be made to National Multiple Sclerosis Society, Connecticut Chapter, 659 Tower Ave., First Floor, Hartford, CT 06112, in loving support of her daughter, Barbara.

Hebron

Michael N. Schivetz

Michael N. Schivetz, 93, husband of Catherine Rich Schievetz of Amston, passed away on Monday, March 29. He was born Aug. 7, 1916, in Brooklyn, NY, son of Conrad and Catherine Kellog Schievetz.

Besides his wife, he leaves one sister, Mary Spencer of Baltic. He was predeceased by two brothers and a sister.

He was employed 22 years for the Archie Green Lumber business, ran a blacksmith shop in Colchester for the Greens, worked as an operating engineer for Local 478, was a U.S. Navy veteran of WWII and was a MMI rifle instructor for the Marines.

Mike was a charter member of the Colchester Fish & Game, member of Amston Lake Fire Department, an avid hunter and fisherman, member of Wooster Lodge of Masons No. 10 A.F.A.M. of Colchester. He could fix anything mechanical, was a licensed pilot and built his own airplane.

There are no calling hours or services as his request was to be cremated.

Belmont/Sabrowski Funeral Home of Colchester is in care of arrangements.