

RIVEREAST

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There was a healthy mix of 'yes' and 'no' signs sprinkled throughout Hebron this week. However, when the budget referendum votes were tallied Tuesday, there were substantially more 'no' votes, and the proposed spending plan was defeated.

In Hebron, the 'No's Have It

by Lindsay Fetzner

Hebron's proposed 2010-11 town budget was rejected by taxpayers Tuesday, by a 1,127-639 vote – and the controversial all-day kindergarten program may be a large reason why.

Over 1,700 voters went to the polls Tuesday on the \$33.85 million budget, out of almost 6,300 registered.

Although residents rejected the town budget, they voted in favor of the Capital Improvement Project (CIP) budget, by a vote of 1,041-718, as well as the RHAM Board of Education budget, by an 882-880 tally. (Andover and Marlborough voters approved RHAM as well, sending its spending plan to victory; for a full story on the RHAM referendum, see page x.)

The local Board of Education (BOE) budget – especially the hot-button all-day kindergarten – seemed to be of primary concern for residents at the polls Tuesday.

Daniel Alfieri, a past BOE member, said the board "has not been listening." All-day kindergarten (ADK) is a "really hot topic" that is "not flying well" with people in town, he said. Overall, Alfieri said the budget was too high.

Peter Corliss sided with Alfieri and said he was not in favor of ADK. "I don't think the balance is right," he said. "[We are] making a big sacrifice for ADK."

Janice Smart suggested that the BOE budget be separate from the town budget. Smart said she was "quite concerned with the BOE" and

believes "the administration of the BOE is top-heavy." Although ADK is a nice idea, she said, now is not the time to implement it.

Still, others supported the BOE's initiative to expand the program. Robert Blackmore has a son who will go into kindergarten in the fall. He said he "supports everything the board has done" and believes that his son "would benefit greatly from ADK." Allyson Deckman agreed and said, "ADK is a benefit for all of the kids." She said it is a "disservice" to only offer the half-day program because the day does not include enough curriculum.

While there seemed to be a prevailing belief that there was too much money devoted to the BOE, some residents said they wanted to see more dollars spent on CIP and open space. On her way into the polls Tuesday, Mary Forsyth said the town "is in a very tight situation" and "is lucky to have things they way they are right now" in light of the economy, but thought CIP should have been given more funds. Shawn Perkins too said the budget "is just too high" but wanted more money allocated to open space. "This town needs to do more," he said.

After the results were announced, BOE Chair Jane Dube said the board will have "to step back and reevaluate." Dube said if the local school board budget goes below a zero percent increase, she will be concerned with the mini-

See Budget on Page 2

Fundraiser to Benefit RHAM Student

by Lindsay Fetzner

A fundraiser is planned for next weekend to benefit a RHAM High School senior afflicted with Burkitt's lymphoma.

The event to benefit Hebron resident Mariah Lipscomb, who was diagnosed with the disease last year, will be held Saturday, May 15, at Gilead Congregational Church, 672 Gilead St., Hebron. The net proceeds will go to the Lipscomb/Aker family.

Mariah, 17, was diagnosed in October 2009, after complaining of stomach discomfort. Mariah's mom, Marybeth Aker, said her daughter had an ultrasound, and after being sent to Connecticut Children's Medical Center (CCMC) in Hartford for further care, was diagnosed with Burkitt's lymphoma.

Burkitt's lymphoma is a type of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, which is a cancer in the lymphatic system, according to Children's Hospital of Boston (www.childrenshospital.org). As the third most common childhood cancer, it occurs most often in children age 7-11. The cancer is three times more likely to affect males, according to the website.

Toward the end of Mariah's treatment, she suffered a stroke due to the chemotherapy, Marybeth said, which resulted in a change of her course of treatment. During this change, the cancer came back, primarily in Mariah's bone marrow. Mariah's diagnosis then went from just

Burkitt's lymphoma to leukemia/lymphoma.

"The only hope for her at that point was to do the bone marrow transplant," Marybeth said. Mariah's 14-year-old brother, Chris Lipscomb, a freshman at RHAM High School, donated his bone marrow to his sister on April 1.

Marybeth said Mariah has "been doing pretty good" and is "anxiously waiting to be discharged" from the Children's Hospital of Boston. When a patient undergoes a transplant like Mariah's, there is a process referred to as engraftment, which is when the body begins to resume reproducing cells on its own from the transplanted cells.

On Monday, Marybeth said last weekend the level that would allow Mariah to be discharged was reached, and she hopes Mariah will be able to leave the hospital sometime this week. "It's been a long road," Marybeth said.

On Wednesday morning, Mariah's father Chris traveled to Boston to bring her home. He said earlier in the week that upon her return home, Mariah would complete her outpatient care at CCMC.

The communities of Hebron and East Haddam (where Mariah's family lived up until 2005), have been incredibly supportive of Mariah and the family, Marybeth said. "It has been outstanding," she said. "The community, friends and family have all provided such won-

See Fundraiser on Page 2



A fundraiser next weekend will be held for RHAM High School senior Mariah Lipscomb, who has Burkitt's lymphoma. Mariah, left, recently underwent a bone marrow transplant, using marrow donated by her brother, Chris, right.

Budget cont. from Front Page

mum budget requirements.

"People had an opportunity to vote and this is how they voted," she said Tuesday night. "And we have to respect that."

BOE member Kathy Shea, who has been outspoken against the BOE budget, said Tuesday's referendum "was an overwhelming defeat to the town budget. ... It was almost a two to one ratio." Shea said she has not given up her stance that the town cannot afford ADK and believes the budget would have passed if the program has gone to all half-day. "It's unfortunate that we had to reach this point but the voters spoke," she said.

The Board of Selectmen (BOS) conducted an exit poll at the referendum in an effort to gather the public's comments on the budget and to identify the areas of the budget that were the most troubling. BOS member Gayle Mulligan said about 90 percent of voters filled out the poll and several took the time to provide additional comments. "It's been a great turnout," she said early Tuesday afternoon.

Board of Finance (BOF) member Lynn Guerriero was also pleased with the turnout, and said the afternoon and evening brought in "a lot of traffic."

Dan Larson said the poll was "a perfect opportunity [for people] to give their elected officials insight on what their feelings are... There is nothing worse than working in a vacuum."

In light of the rejected town budget, BOS Chair Jeff Watt said the BOS will use the exit poll to distinguish between the town and BOE budgets. "The town is definitely sending us a message," he said. Watt said he is confident the survey will offer "good guidance" for addressing the areas of the budget that need to be re-addressed. The BOF is considering May 18 for the next referendum, and was expected to fi-

nalize this date at their meeting last night, after press time.

The \$33.85 million budget sent to the referendum included an \$8.85 million general government budget, \$13.11 million RHAM BOE budget and an \$11.89 local school board budget. If the budget had passed, there would have been a 1.0 mill rate increase.

The general government budget included \$6.26 million in town government expenditures, \$100,000 for open space, \$626,627 for CIP and \$1.86 million for debt management. The overall town budget was an increase of .22 percent over last year.

This year, Hebron was responsible for 54.14 percent of the RHAM levy, for a total of \$13.11 million. Overall, the RHAM BOE budget was \$24.22 million and increased by 1.36 percent.

The Hebron BOE budget, at an increase of 1.5 percent over last year, totaled 11.89 million. The increase in spending was \$175,739 over last year.

At a special meeting of the BOE on April 26, the board voted 6-1 on a list of spending cuts. The list included one Challenge & Enrichment teacher (C&E) (\$61,500), one fourth-grade teaching position (\$61,500), one custodian (\$27,928), one paraprofessional (\$19,695) and reductions in supplies (\$5,328) and professional development (\$1,698). The ADK expansion program was not included in the list. The approved cuts for the 2010-11 budget total \$177,649.

In an e-mail sent to parents and members of the public on April 27, the BOE stated that if the budget failed, those reductions would stand and that the board would reduce the budget further. The BOE's next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, May 13, at 6 p.m., at Gilead Hill School.

Fundraiser cont. from Front Page

derful support [that] Mariah has really been able to pull from."

Marybeth also credited Mariah's own strength, determination and attitude, which have "really helped her overall." Rev. Denise Esslinger of Gilead Congregational – where Mariah and her family are active parishioners – said the teen has "such a strong vision and spirit for her life to come" and "is an inspiration."

Mariah attended RHAM High School up until around October of last year, her dad said. RHAM PE/Health teacher Kim Hills said a few months ago, the students at RHAM High School began selling bracelets that said, "Hold on be strong ML" to show their support for Mariah. Hills said about 800 were sold, at a cost of \$3 each, with the proceeds going to the Friends of Mariah Lipscomb fund at Liberty Bank in Marlborough.

RHAM High School senior Nicholas Aubin said the support for Mariah has been "very noticeable." "Everyone has their bracelets on," he said. Aubin will be present at the fundraiser and provide entertainment with his band.

Next weekend's fundraiser at Gilead Congregational is yet another way the community has stepped up to help Mariah and the costs the family is facing due to her treatments. Marybeth said the fundraiser was a result of colleagues, friends, members of the church and family "coming together as one" to help. Esslinger said, "so many people are coming together to show their support."

Mariah's father said the family has "had some really wonderful help from the church," and overall, the community has been "very supportive and generous." He said although the struggle the family has been faced with is not something anyone would ever want to experience, "especially with those you love and care about," the generosity of resources, spirit and

support "takes our breath away."

On Monday morning, Teresa Olio, who is involved with the fundraiser, said approximately 120 out of the 150 tickets had been sold for the dinner portion of the evening. Hill's said the church can accommodate an additional 100 people for the silent auction. "We hope to sell out," Hills said.

Mariah's brother Chris will also present a video slideshow on Saturday night containing "pictures of Mariah over the years" accompanied by music, Marybeth and Mariah's dad Chris said. Entertainment will also be provided by The Modern Riffs, a band comprised of nine members, four of which are RHAM students (Aubin, Matt Angelo, Eileen Cannon and Anne Michaud). Esslinger said the band is an "unbelievably talented group" and the church is "so grateful they are coming" to the fundraiser.

The RHAM Leos also donated \$250 during the Hebron Lions' annual Night of Giving, held April 23. Leo advisor Rich Griswold said the club, which is comprised of approximately 70 RHAM High School members, held several fundraisers in conjunction with the Lions to raise funds that they donated.

The May 14 fundraiser will begin at 5:30 p.m., with a silent auction and hors d'oeuvres. At 6:30 p.m., dinner will be served with entertainment to follow. For the auction and hors d'oeuvres, tickets are \$10 per person or \$20 per family. For dinner, tickets are \$25 per person or \$50 per family. The deadline to purchase dinner tickets is Monday, May 10. Tickets for the auction and hors d'oeuvres can be purchased up until the event starts. Items for the silent auction are still being accepted.

Donations can be made out to the Friends of Mariah Lipscomb Fund, Liberty Bank, 26 East Hampton Rd., Marlborough, CT 06447. Any further questions on donations or tickets can be directed toward Teresa Olio at 860-228-8044.

East Hampton Budget Passes by Less Than 100 Votes

by Claire Michalewicz

East Hampton's \$38.00 million budget narrowly passed at Tuesday's referendum, with 947 votes for it and 860 against. The 1,807 votes represent about a 22 percent voter turnout.

Town officials erupted into cheers and congratulations when the results were announced shortly after voting closed at 8 p.m. But the budget process still isn't quite done – the Board of Finance (BOF) still has to set the mill rate.

In a quick meeting in the high school gym after their celebration, the BOF decided to wait until their next meeting on May 17 to set it. The proposed mill rate discussed throughout the budget process is 24.98, an increase of .97 mills or 4.04 percent.

BOF member Judith Isele said it was standard practice to wait to set the mill rate until they had received more definite numbers from the state. Finance Director Jeff Jylkka agreed, though he said he wasn't sure whether the numbers would change much. Revenues from the state, which towns depend on to fund schools and many other projects, have been a major concern throughout the budget process, with the state government still struggling to approve a budget.

The town officials gathered in the gym when the tallies were announced seemed relieved that the budget had passed on the first try. Last year's budget took two referenda to pass.

"Wow!" Jylkka said immediately after the totals were announced. "Now I know what I'm going to be doing over the weekend – not working." Jylkka later said 22 percent was a fairly good voter turnout – it was 23 percent last year, Jylkka noted – and that close votes are common for East Hampton referenda – in one year, 1991, the budget squeaked past the referendum by a margin of three votes.

BOF members Mattie Walton, Tim Csere and George Pfaffenbach all echoed Jylkka's sentiments.

"It actually feels really good," Walton said. "It's always close in East Hampton."

Csere credited the teamwork between the

BOF, Town Council and Board of Education for creating a budget that residents thought would work.

The celebratory mood in the gym was a change from a few minutes before, when residents had anxiously waited for polls to close.

"I would hate to see it be cut anymore," Town Council member Thom Cordeiro said before the votes were tallied. He said he worried that some people might take out their frustrations with national politics on their local government. "When you affect your local municipality, it's very real."

Still, Cordeiro said he was optimistic about the referendum results. "I think we have some good momentum," he said.

But not everyone in the town government is happy with the vote's result.

"I was shocked," said Town Council Chairwoman Melissa Engel the next day. (Engel was not at the high school Tuesday evening.) "I'm glad people in East Hampton have more to pay on taxes than I do."

Engel added, "I just hope everyone's as happy about this when they go to pay their taxes."

Engel's comments echoed the thoughts of many of the residents who voted against the budget. Outside the high school on Tuesday afternoon, voters pointed out that people were struggling with unemployment and pay cuts, and said they felt the town was asking too much of them.

"This is no economy to be increasing taxes," said Jane Christopher. "It's about time to tighten our belts."

A voter who identified herself only as Janice agreed. "Everyone I know hasn't had raises in six years," she said. "Who can afford it right now?" Janice added that the budget hadn't been publicized well-enough. "Nobody knew about the vote. Nobody's here!"

A voter who didn't give his name explained that he worked in the struggling printing industry, and people in the industry had had to learn



There were smiles and hugs all around Tuesday after the town's \$38.00 million budget passed at referendum. Pictured from left are Board of Finance members Mattie Walton and George Pfaffenbach, Town Council members John Tuttle, Barbara Moore and Thom Cordeiro, Assistant Superintendent of Schools Kevin Reich and Director of Finance Jeff Jylkka.

to manage their own money. In addition, he said, though taxes had only increased by small amounts each year, the increases added up to a much larger amount over several years.

The mood outside the polling place reflected the close split in votes, with many other people saying that they supported the budget. Most of these residents said they were concerned about potential cuts to the school system. The education budget, at \$25.88 million, takes up most of the total town budget.

"We need strong schools," said resident Jen Friday. "People can be a penny wise and a pound foolish." Friday added that having a good school system would financially help the town, since it would attract more new residents and increase East Hampton's tax base.

"One belief I really stand by is that kids from

East Hampton can go anywhere," Raymond Krupa said, explaining that he worried that a cut in education funding would limit their opportunities.

Some residents voted for the budget even though they didn't entirely agree with it. Scott Minnick said he voted yes because he was concerned about the school system, but said the town wasn't managing its money as well as it could.

"They're worrying more about passing the budget than taking economic steps to get things done," Minnick said.

Now that the budget has been passed, it will go into effect at the start of the 2010-11 fiscal year on July 1. The BOF will set the mill rate for the next year on May 17 at 7:30 p.m..

Back on Track Celebrates Five Years in Hebron

by Lindsay Fetzner

It has been five years since Back on Track opened its doors in town and since that time, director/teacher Erin Mucciacciaro says business at the tutoring and enrichment facility has “taken off more than I could have asked for.”

Mucciacciaro, a Hebron resident, is a certified special education teacher for K-12 with a cross endorsement in elementary education. She taught English language learners in Colchester public schools between 2004-06, while tutoring on the side.

“I have always wanted to be a teacher,” she said. Opening Back on Track gave her the opportunity to “help in another way,” and allowed her to incorporate her own creativity in a service for all ages and academic levels.

Since the opening, Mucciacciaro said the numbers have grown consistently. She estimated that the center sees between 20 and 25 kids per week for tutoring. Parents, she said, have been one of the major elements to keeping the business going. “The parents have been very supportive,” she said, and are the reason Mucciacciaro knows there “is more to come.” Referrals from people both in town and out of town have helped business greatly. Kids from as far away as Coventry, Manchester, East Haddam and Salem have come to Back on Track for assistance.

There are three teachers on staff at Back on Track, including Mucciacciaro, who are all certified and come from a variety of backgrounds. “It is a very comfortable place for everyone who works here and walks through the door,” she said. Although the center tries to keep each student with the same teacher, all of the staff are informed of each student’s program and know which areas to address in session.

Mucciacciaro said that all subject areas are touched upon at Back on Track. She said the teachers do their best to provide support and to teach the skills and strategies associated with each area. If an inquiring parent wants more in-depth, specialized tutoring, Mucciacciaro said she will recommend the family to someone who can meet the needs of the student.

All of the services that Back on Track offer are individualized for the student, she said. Pinpointing each student’s strengths is important in addition to finding the areas that the student

needs more practice with. “We make it fun and challenging at the same time,” she said.

Most parents know the area that their child needs help in, she said, and definitely helps with planning the student’s individual program. Through the one-on-one tutoring, Back on Track is able to provide both support and practice in that subject area identified. Formal testing for the specified area of concern is also available. Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) and Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) assistance are two tests that Mucciacciaro said many students come in for assistance with. The center uses SAT books and other CMT resources to improve skills that can be applied to the test.

Mucciacciaro and the staff at Back on Track are in constant communication with parents, she said. Be it an update on the student’s progress or simply networking, Mucciacciaro said it is important to know the levels the student’s are at. “They blossom,” she said, and to see it happen and hear that they have continued to succeed throughout their academic career is “the best part.”

Students are given a choice between one-on-one sessions or collaborative group sessions. Although most sessions begin as a one-on-one, students have the option of being part of a group if they feel they can be successful in it, Mucciacciaro said.

Carrie Coutinho, a Newington resident, joined the Back on Track staff last November. A former teacher at Windham Middle School, she is now an intervention math specialist at Cromwell Middle School. She devotes about three days a week to the center. “I love it here,” she said. “The kids are just wonderful.”

Coutinho, a longtime friend of Mucciacciaro, said the age group that Back on Track services is one of the many perks of the job in addition to the personal, one-on-one tutoring. She said the “‘a ha’ moments” the kids have are “so rewarding” and to hear that they continue to succeed down the road after leaving the center is “so impressive.”

“We are here to help the kids and we want to see them succeed,” Coutinho said.

Building confidence in the students, Mucciacciaro said, is the key to everything Back on Track does. “You can tell the minute they have reached it - they are a different person,”



Director/teacher Erin Mucciacciaro is celebrating the five-year anniversary of Back on Track, a tutoring and enrichment center.

she said. Although many kids stay throughout the entire school year, it is a team decision on whether they need to continue coming back. If students have reached a certain level of mastery in the area that was of concern, Mucciacciaro said she often introduces concepts that will come up in the future, so they will have an understanding of it comes up in the school curriculum.

The center is able to offer an environment where kids can ask questions they might not be comfortable bringing up in the classroom setting, Coutinho said. The teachers are given the opportunity to offer strategies and pinpoint the subject areas the student’s need help in. “The people in town are very fortunate to have a place [like this] where kids can come,” she said.

The business’ 2009 move from Pendleton Drive to Main Street, Mucciacciaro said, was one of the best decisions the center made. It

allowed for more exposure and for people passing through town who are not residents to see their sign. Mucciacciaro said as a Hebron resident, she felt it was important to stay within her community and bring business into town, contributing to community growth. She is tentatively planning to hold a five-year celebration for Back on Track in October.

Back on Track is located at 10 Main St. and can be reached at 860-228-4033 or by e-mail, at backontrackllc@aol.com. Office hours are Monday-Thursday from 3-8 p.m., Friday from 3-7 p.m. and Saturday from 8:30 a.m.-noon.

Mucciacciaro said Back on Track is willing to work with family’s schedules and offers tutoring sessions outside of the above office hours, if necessary. “If you want to come in, I’m coming in,” she said with a smile, stressing that giving parents scheduling options is very important.

Website, Charter Review Appointments Made in Andover

by Lindsay Fetzner

Progressive steps for the town website and charter review committees were made at Wednesday night’s Board of Selectmen (BOS) meeting in an effort to get the ball rolling with the two town groups.

The board appointed 12 people to the website committee. Selectwoman Elaine Bucharadt informed the board that an introduction meeting took place, where she met with the interested residents and discussed what the committee would entail. “A lot of these people have good management skills, technical skills and good connections with the school,” Bucharadt said. She also said many come with experience in designing websites as well.

Although Bucharadt said she thinks 12 members might be too many for the committee, she said getting the website up and running might require a larger group of people than what would be needed to simply maintain it after it goes live.

Selectman Jay Linddy made a motion to allocate \$800 for the website committee, which is an additional \$300 from what the Board of Finance suggested at last week’s public hearing. Bucharadt said the original \$500 was recommended at the hearing because she did not want to “mess up having a zero increase in the mill rate.” Linddy was in favor of additional money being allocated to the committee. “I

don’t think \$500 is enough,” he said. “What they don’t use, they can give back.”

Appointed to the website committee were: Nancy Chmielewski, Aimee Desimone, Jay Kamins, Theodore Sakelarakis, Scott Sauyet, Emily Timrek, Debra Toupenca and Lorraine Costanzo, and alternates Lisa Burke, Whitney Covell, Heidi Donnelly and Jeanne Sheehan.

After a resolution to establish a charter revision committee was made, seven members were appointed to the committee. No more than one-third of the group can be currently serving on a board or commission in town. Therefore, a total of five residents not currently on a board or commission were appointed, in addition to the two residents currently serving. The BOS in March interviewed all of the interested candidates.

Linddy said several people in town were concerned on why progress hadn’t been made earlier on the committee. He said, “We had to make sure all the ducks were in place.” The budget, he said, also took up a large portion of the months of January, February and March, and slowed things down a bit.

Selectwoman Susan England said she did not agree with the law regarding the percentage of people that can be currently serving in town. Linddy sided with England and said, “Looking at the list of people currently serving, [there is]

so much experience there. It is a shame that we can only take a few.”

Appointed to the Charter Revision Committee were Ordinance Review Committee member Marie Burbank, Town Clerk Carol Lee and residents Penny Auer, Donald Denley Jr., Donald Keener, Catherine Magaldi-Lewis and Gary Gile.

Also Wednesday, the BOS allocated \$900 to the library for repair of the ceiling due to water damage. Burbank said the work “needs to be done immediately because plaster is falling down on the books. ... It is a situation where they could not wait any longer.”

Linddy was concerned that the alarm system at the library still had not been installed. The BOS approved the installation at its January meeting. During public comment, resident Dianne Grenier stressed the importance of the library having the alarm system, due to the fact the facility is “full of paper.” She said she does not think the librarian should be responsible for seeing that it is installed; instead it should be under the direction of the library board of directors. That, she said, is “the body you should be dealing with.”

In response, Burbank said he did not realize the librarian was not in communication with the board after approval for the installation had

been given and would look into the matter further.

Bob Wanagel spoke on the maintenance needed at the senior center, highlighting entranceways and the parking lot, among other areas of concern. Burbank said the town “is not ignoring the senior center” and that he will be addressing the facilities needs next year. He also said he is looking into getting estimates for repairs and maintenance that will be necessary.

The board also briefly addressed that the RHAM budget passed at Tuesday’s referendum, with Andover, Hebron and Marlborough in approval. Only 107 votes were cast in Andover. “This is very sad,” England said, due to the fact that RHAM makes up “a big part of the budget.”

Two important dates coming up in town are the Andover Economic Commission Business Fair and the Memorial Day parade. The fair, which will showcase local businesses in town, will take place on Saturday, May 15, from 11 a.m.-3 p.m. in the Town Hall community room. Parade formation will begin at the elementary school at 8:30 a.m., with step off at 8:45. The parade route will end at the Center Cemetery for memorial observance.

The next BOS meeting is Wednesday, June 2, at 7 p.m. at the Town Office Building.

Marlborough Building Inspector Files Intent to Sue Town

by Katy Nally

The town's building inspector, Patrick Looney, filed an intent to sue Marlborough and First Selectman Bill Black on April 9, claiming his constitutional and civil rights were violated.

In his intent to sue, on file at Town Hall, Looney alleges his hours were cut from 36 to 20 per week, "in retaliation for exercise of his First Amendment rights."

On October 8 of last year Looney filed a grievance with the town stating that his "freedom of speech rights" had been violated, the document states.

According to the intent to sue, Looney had "provided information" to a resident about the "potentially unlawful exercise" of the health department over outdoor wood-burning furnaces, which are regulated by the Department of Environmental Protection.

Looney alleges Town Planner Peter Hughes told him not to "discuss matters outside of his job duties" that concern state or local agencies. Looney also cites a letter from Hughes in his intent to sue, that repeats the same request.

Looney later wrote to Black "protesting the limitations placed on him" by Hughes, adding "he had no right to place these restrictions on me..." according to the suit.

In December, Looney's attorney, Jacques Parenteau, asked Black to drop the restrictions, but, according to the intent to sue, counsel for

Marlborough refused and "threatened" Looney with "discipline, up to and including discharge."

The town's counsel, Andrew Houlding, said he could not comment on the matter Tuesday as it is a personnel issue, however he did mention Looney's grievance never reached the arbitration level.

On Jan. 4, Houlding notified the town hall employee's union that Looney's position was "part of a cost savings reduction plan" and that his fulltime status would drop to 20 hours per week. The reason for the reduction was because of "a sharp reduction in building activity" in town and because the number of building permits had dropped by 50 percent, the intent to sue says.

According to the 2010-11 budget, revenue from building permits is projected at \$70,000 for the 2010-11 year. This is a zero percent increase over the 2009-10 year, which is also listed at \$70,000. These numbers are up from the 2008-09 year, which accrued about \$57,000 from building permits, and shows about a 22 percent increase.

However, before the 2009-10 year, building permit fees decreased each fiscal year by an average of about 20.98 percent. Over a six-year period, from 2004-05 to 2009-10, the town took in the most money from building permits in 2004-05, at about \$148,000.

Because Looney's hours were reduced to

fewer than 25 per week, he became illegible for medical benefits and could no longer be part of the collective bargaining agreement with Local 1303-443 of Council 4 AFSCME, AFL-CIO.

The town's original employee reductions also included eliminating the Public Works supervisor/building and grounds position, because it was "non-essential," but it was eventually reinstated, the intent to sue states.

According to the file, Looney has suffered "stress associated with the accumulating work that cannot be done" in a 20-hour workweek. Looney said he asked to work the 20 hours over fewer than five days, but his request was denied, which, the document states, means Looney has "to spend a part of each of the five work days in Marlborough, making it more difficult to find replacement income."

The document goes on to state that reducing Looney's position was in retaliation for the grievance he filed and for his "exercise of his First Amendment rights." It cites the reinstatement of the "non-essential" position of Public Works supervisor/building and grounds as evidence of this retaliation. According to the file, the Public Works supervisor's salary with benefits exceeds Looney's fulltime position with benefits.

It also cites the projected increase in build-

ing permit fees (from the 2008-09 level) as more evidence of retaliation.

"First Selectman Black and the Town retaliated against Mr. Looney for contesting limits on his right to speak as a citizen" then used "the necessity to cut costs as a convenient excuse to mask that retaliation," the intent to sue states.

Looney also alleges the correct end-date of his four-year term, when his contract is up for negotiation, is November 2011, and not in 2010.

Looney was hired as building inspector in August 1994. In November 1995 he was reappointed for a four-year term, then again in November 1999. However, when Looney's position was renewed in 2003, it was set to expire in July 2006 - netting only a three-year term. In August 2006 Looney was reappointed for another four-year term.

In July 2007 the town entered into a collective bargaining agreement with AFSCME.

Because of the three-year term from 2003-06, Looney alleges his current four-year term is set to expire in November 2011.

Houlding could not comment on the town's plan of action, but he did say the next step would be up to Looney. Selectman Joe La Bella said Wednesday he was not able to comment on the intent to sue.

Marlborough BOE Unanimously Appoints New Principal

by Katy Nally

Scott Nierendorf was unanimously appointed the new principal of Elmer Thienes-Mary Hall Elementary School at last Thursday's Board of Education (BOE) meeting.

Nierendorf is currently the assistant principal at another elementary school, the Charter Oak International Academy in West Hartford.

Superintendent of Schools David Sklarz said he and a nine-person committee decided on Nierendorf after reviewing results from a recent survey and compiling a template for desirable qualities in a principal. "We maintained that template throughout the entire process," Sklarz said.

The superintendent, who has also worked in West Hartford, said he knew Nierendorf and added "he probably had to pass a higher standard with me."

Nierendorf has experience both inside and outside the elementary school classroom, as a teacher and an administrator. In addition to working at schools, Nierendorf was also director of educational technology for the Capitol Region Education Council and provided technology training to school officials throughout the state.

Based on the survey, Sklarz said there was an "overwhelming" response for a principal who was "caring for children and had a passion for education." Other qualities sought after included having a high standard of ethics, leadership skills and the ability to promote posi-

tive staff morale.

Sklarz also discussed survey results from questions that asked for input about Elmer Thienes-Mary Hall's progress and future.

As far as the quality of education the elementary school provides for students, according to the survey, Marlboroughites are highly pleased. Almost all the residents that participated, 93 percent, agreed the "educational quality" is high. "I have never seen such staggering results as this in terms of the satisfaction level," Sklarz said.

The same 93 percent also agreed Elmer Thienes-Mary Hall employees do a good job of teaching language arts and fine arts and providing a variety of instructional strategies to help students learn.

A total of 156 people participated in the survey, of which 67.5 percent were parents of students at the school, 20.8 percent were school staff, 7.8 percent were parents of school alumni and 3.9 percent were other Marlborough residents.

Elmer Thienes-Mary Hall had high marks when it came to school climate, where 97 percent of respondents agreed the school "provides a safe and orderly environment for learning."

But over 50 percent of those surveyed said they were not sure "there is no evidence of bullying occurring" at the school. "We really do need to follow up with this," Sklarz said, adding school staff should look into how bullying

might occur and what would be done to prevent it. "It's something we need to keep on our front burner," he said.

Respondents were also satisfied with parent involvement at the school, where 94 percent of those surveyed agreed there are "sufficient opportunities" for involvement and 89 percent said parents feel welcome. However, 20 percent disagreed or did not know if parents' opinions are "invited and considered when important school decisions are made." But Sklarz was optimistic. "I think with today's teachers we can get better at that," he said.

Residents were also given the opportunity to make additional comments. "Sometimes people don't always tell you, but on this survey they certainly did," Sklarz said.

Again, the question of bullying was raised, while other respondents mentioned the school needs to be more fiscally responsible, Sklarz said.

There were also several suggestions that the school should meet the needs of all students, not just those with special needs, Sklarz said.

But the "strongest" comment came back to principal qualities. Sklarz said many residents asked for an administrator "who can lead us into the future," and noted current principal Loraine Giannini would be hard to replace.

Giannini is set to retire in June and Nierendorf will start July 1. His salary has not

yet been finalized.

BOE members also discussed the lack of teachers' concessions for the 2010-11 year - a conversation spurred by BOE member Carole Shea's question as to why the board hadn't received a formal answer about concessions from the teachers' union.

"Three or four months ago we asked a question and we never got an answer," Shea said. "I believe we really are owed that."

Sklarz clarified that a "specific question" was never asked to the union, but he said it was "determined [concessions] was an action they were not willing to take."

Several board members said they thought requesting a response from the union might pointlessly stir things up. "We negotiated the teachers' contract fairly two years ago," Ruth Kelly said. "They signed it, we signed it and I think we should move on." John O'Toole said it would be wise to "see what happens at the town meeting," to see how voters feel.

Shea later made a motion, requesting a response from the teachers' union, but all other board members were opposed.

Still, BOE Chair Betty O'Brien thanked Shea for bringing up the issue.

The next regularly scheduled BOE meeting will be Thursday, May 27.

All Three Towns Pass RHAM Budget

by Lindsay Fetzner

In a district vote of 1,195-988, the \$24.22 million RHAM Board of Education (BOE) budget passed at referendum in all three towns.

Superintendent of Schools Bob Siminski said he was very pleased with the results of the vote. "It is a vote of confidence in what the board and administration has done," he said.

In Marlborough and Andover, approximately 75 percent of voters were in favor of the budget. However, in Hebron, the results were much closer with 882 voting 'yes' and 880 voting 'no.'

One hundred and seven votes were counted in Andover, with 79 in favor and 28 opposed. In Marlborough, out of a total of 314 votes, 234 residents noted 'yes' and 80 voted 'no.'

BOE chair Mike Turner said he was both relieved and glad to see the budget pass Tuesday night. "It can get very divisive and it's nice to get it passed and beyond you," he said. With the public's approval, Turner said the board can now focus on finishing up this fiscal year and working into the next year.

RHAM BOE Vice Chairman James Cherry said he was "very pleased" with the results from the referendum. He said, "We knew we thought we did a great job preparing the budget." However, he said he was not sure if it would pass. "We did a lot of work, but you never know."

Several board members, as well as Siminski and administrative assistant Kathy Mund, gathered at the superintendent's office Tuesday evening, Cherry said, to receive results from the clerks in the RHAM towns. As the calls came in, Cherry said the votes, especially the high percentage of approval in Marlborough and Andover, "were very positive."

The \$24.22 million budget reflects an increase in population at the high school, no reduction in athletics and an increase of 11.5 percent in health insurance. The budget calls for a 1.36 percent increase over last year's fiscal budget, with the majority of the levy placed on Hebron.

For the 2010-11 year, 54.14 percent of the

levy, or \$13.11 million goes to Hebron, 29.36 percent or \$7.11 million to Marlborough and 16.5 percent or about \$4 million to Andover.

The budget allocated 56.7 percent to salaries, 11.6 percent to benefits, 11.0 percent to bond, 7.1 percent for other, 5.1 percent for transportation, 4.5 percent for tuition, 3 percent for utilities and 1 percent for fuel. Negotiated salary increases totaled \$224,532 and health insurance, an additional \$195,934.

Appropriations for curriculum writing were reduced under the budget and textbook funding was increased. General supplies were level funded and instructional supplies were reduced, due to the fact that they were pre-purchased.

There will be an increase of .8 FTEs without bringing any additional staff on board at the high school. Responsibilities of a sixth assignment will be allocated among existing staff. The budget also reflects the reduction of a .5 middle school music teacher and the reallocation of a

.5 FTE middle school PE teacher to a high school special education teacher.

Stimulus money will be used for special education, for which enrollment is expected to increase. One semester of the clinical day treatment program will be funded for the 2009-10 year as well as for the entire 2010-11 year. Siminski said the program will generate additional revenue for the district.

Despite several factors that impacted the budget, such as enrollment increases, Siminski said his goal was to provide the same level of programming, preserve teaching positions, identify and use all cost-saving measures and address the legal requirement of special education cost effectively.

The next meeting of the BOE is scheduled for Monday, May 17, at 6:30 p.m., in the chorus room at RHAM High School, 85 Wall St., Hebron.

Charges Against Colchester BOE Member Dropped

by Katy Nally

Criminal charges against Board of Education member Mike Egan and his wife Mary Fitzgerald were dropped Tuesday, after Egan read an apology letter at Norwich Superior Court.

Egan was charged with disorderly conduct and criminal mischief, and Fitzgerald with disorderly conduct, on Jan. 22, after reportedly breaking up a teen fight at Bacon Academy and throwing a student's cell phone into the woods, the affidavit said.

The incident occurred Oct. 9, 2009, after a high school football game.

The affidavit states there was a fight between Egan and Fitzgerald's son and another boy, and another student appeared to be recording the altercation on his cell phone. However, this student said during the police investigation he had planned to videotape the fight, but his phone "wouldn't work," the affidavit said. His mother, Deanna Bouchard, said the fight was never recorded.

Egan and Fitzgerald reportedly broke up the fight, and Egan threw the boy's cell phone into the woods. After the incident, there was a "red mark" on the same boy's neck where Fitzgerald

had grabbed him, he said in a statement.

According to Fitzgerald, she grabbed the boy by his shirtsleeve and "never touched his neck," the affidavit said.

Bouchard reportedly read aloud a statement in court Tuesday, the court clerk said. With the help of the victim advocate office, Bouchard asked for three things from the couple, and in exchange, she would not oppose a nolle (when the defendants are no longer prosecuted). "It was never about prosecution," Bouchard said. "It was about taking responsibility and being held accountable for their actions."

Bouchard also read her own statement into the public record, which, she said, gave her the opportunity to "convey to them how much hurt" her son went through. Some of what she read came from her son, who was not present Tuesday. "He doesn't even want to talk about it," she said about her son. "It's been so long it's just a chapter we want to close."

The first thing Bouchard asked for was that her son's name be cleared, because Egan and Fitzgerald originally told police Bouchard's son might have pushed Fitzgerald to the ground during the incident, the affidavit said. Fitzgerald

later said she was not pushed, but slipped, the affidavit said.

The second was that Egan and Fitzgerald apologize in open court for making accusations about her son.

And the third was that she receives restitution to the phone. According to the affidavit the cell phone was a LG enV Touch valued at \$429.99. Bouchard's son said in his statement, although the device still functioned after the incident, he noticed later it was damaged and there was a crack across the front screen. Bouchard said she received the amount Tuesday in court.

The three items were "things we were looking for from the beginning," Bouchard said. "It was always about doing the right thing, which they did."

According to the affidavit, Fitzgerald said she wanted the cell phone because "I believe having a video of my son being beaten on YouTube or the like for the whole world to see would be harmful to him for the rest of his life."

Egan said in his statement he considered the incident to be "two adults breaking up a kids'

fight," and not a police matter.

Both Egan and Fitzgerald were banned from attending home sporting events at Bacon Academy for six months following the incident. Superintendent of Schools Karen Loiselle said Egan was banned because he violated the student discipline policy when he reportedly used profanity. According to the affidavit, police said Fitzgerald also used profanity during the incident.

Their son and the boy he was fighting have both served in-school suspensions as a result. Bouchard's son was not punished.

Fitzgerald said Wednesday she and her husband "don't hold anything against" Bouchard and added, "We all were acting as parents protecting our children, including Deanna."

Both parties said they wanted to move past the issue that has been drawn out for about seven months.

"I hope all the children involved learn something from this," Fitzgerald said. Bouchard agreed, adding, "I think it was a very good outcome."

Portland Resident Publishes Third Novel

by Claire Michalewicz

It's unusual enough to write one book by age 21, but Portland resident Estevan Vega has already published three. His latest, a young adult novel called *Arson*, was released on Tuesday.

The book tells the story of Arson Gable, an isolated teenager who can create fire. Arson – who lives in East Hampton – is forced to confront his past and present when he meets a mysterious girl who feels more comfortable living her life behind a mask.

Vega said he's drawn to supernatural subject matter because it gives him more creative freedom. "I love being able to explore more things, either metaphorically or otherwise, that I may not be able to explore just looking at a straight-up 'normal' story," Vega said. In this book, Vega explores issues of teenage identity.

"It's definitely the most personal book I've written," Vega said. *Arson's* protagonist is 17, Vega's age when he started writing. Though his previous books were targeted at adults, he wrote this one for a teen audience. The book deals with some of the issues Vega himself was grappling with at that age. His parents were divorcing, and he was dealing with feeling like an outsider and wondering how to fit in.

"At that age, there's a lot of wondering 'What's wrong with me?' and a lot of exclusion," Vega said. He wanted to write a book that addressed some of these common teenage

issues, but still incorporated the supernatural themes that he likes to write about.

It was Vega's desire to make *Arson* more personal that inspired him to set it in East Hampton. "The story is personal to me, so it had to take place near where I lived," Vega explained. "I knew I wanted it to take place on a lake, and Lake Pocotopaug was the first lake that came to mind." Vega said people who live in the area will recognize many of the locations in *Arson*.

Vega, who grew up in Middletown and Portland and graduated from Xavier High School in Middletown, started writing his first novel, *Servant Of The Realm*, at 12, and it was self-published when he was 15. His second book, *The Sacred Sin*, followed three years later.

"I had no idea what it would be like," he said of the writing and publishing process. "I just wanted to write something that people wanted to read." Vega signed a contract for *Arson* with Tate Publishing about a year ago, and he received the first copies of the book in January, just in time for his 21st birthday.

Vega knows it's unusual to have published even one book by his age. He said he hopes that people his age and younger are inspired to do more, whether it's writing or something else they're interested in, though he's quick to add that he doesn't want to sound arrogant.

For the most part, Vega said, people have been accepting and supportive of his writing. There have been some challenges, though – Vega said that his age sometimes prevents people from taking him seriously.

"People have said stuff like 'You can't write a book, there's not a whole lot that you've experienced,'" Vega said. "And to some degree they were correct." But he thinks the criticism has helped him grow.

"I've had to grow up a lot faster than most," Vega said. "I've definitely matured as a writer." *Arson*, he said, is more character-driven than his previous books, which relied more on narrative twists and turns.

Vega's next plans are to finish his English degree from Liberty University in Virginia and to write the sequel to *Arson*, which he hopes to have published next year. This summer, he plans to make the rounds of local bookstores for signings, and he's finishing up a blog tour, giving interviews to book bloggers.

Arson is available on www.amazon.com and on Tate publishing's website. Vega is campaigning to get it into as many local bookstores as possible. For more information, visit Vega's website at www.estevanvega.com, *Arson's* fan page at www.arsonistsanonymous.blogspot.com or Vega's Twitter page at twitter.com/estevanvega.



Estevan Vega

\$47.62 Million Budget Sent to Referendum in Colchester

by Katy Nally

Town officials exhaled a sigh of relief after voters unanimously approved the town's \$47.62 million budget Tuesday and sent it to a referendum.

The approval came at one of the shortest town meetings that Colchester officials could remember.

First Selectman Gregg Schuster said he was "very happy the town meeting unanimously approved" the spending package, but he mentioned this does not give anyone the excuse to "be complacent because we still need people to come to the polls."

Both Schuster and Town Clerk Nancy Bray said Tuesday's meeting was the shortest annual town meeting they knew of – lasting just four minutes.

No one spoke in favor or opposition of either the town operations or education budgets. Although there was no opposition, something selectman Greg Cordova said was very unusual,

Board of Finance Chair Bruce Hayn was hesitant to call it a "good sign" for the upcoming referendum vote. Hayn said it was possible the naysayers just might not have shown up for Tuesday's event.

The total \$47.62 million budget allocates \$34.05 million for education and \$13.57 million for town operations.

This includes a 1.42 mill increase, bringing the rate up to 25.07 mills.

The continuation education budget was estimated at an 8.82 percent increase over the 2009-10 year, but after \$1.4 million was cut out, that number dropped to a 4.75 percent increase. These reductions called for the elimination of 9.55 FTE (fulltime equivalent) of certified staff and 2 FTE of classified staff, at a savings of about \$666,000. New curricula, technology and instructional supplies were also reduced. And capitol improvements were cut by about \$189,000.

But after the Board of Education (BOE) presented its spending package to the finance board, it was charged with reducing its budget by another \$500,000.

During the second round of cuts, the teachers union gave \$239,000 in concessions in the form of two furlough days. But this time around, programs took a hit. A total of 10 athletic teams were proposed to be cut: freshman boys' and girls' basketball and soccer, indoor track at Bacon and junior varsity boys' and girls' basketball and soccer at William J. Johnston Middle School. Library books and stipends for teachers' leadership positions were also cut.

On the town operations side, the \$13.57 million budget represents a 1.68 percent increase. This proposal included all-around cuts and the elimination of four positions and the reduction of two. One highway department official, one library employee, the public health coordinator and the second resident state trooper are all

slated to be cut. A Parks and Recreation Department employee would be reduced to seasonal and a library position will become part-time.

One line item, road improvements, was increased by about \$200,000.

As of this week all five unions in town had agreed to give concessions, Schuster said. The police have agreed to a furlough program, the firefighters approved a reduction in the town match of their retirement plan and the library union has "tentatively agreed to a wage freeze," Schuster said.

"With almost all union and non-union employees helping out, the town is doing everything possible to make it through these tough times," Schuster said in a press release.

The referendum vote is scheduled for Tuesday, May 11, from 6 a.m.-8 p.m., at Town Hall, 127 Norwich Ave.

Colchester Dog Park Grand Opening Set for July

by Katy Nally

Colchester dogs will soon be able to run free, once the new dog park opens July 18.

The grand opening celebration, which is sponsored by Mr. Lockout, will include a walk with the Colchester Land Trust along the Air Line Trail, a pet expo, booths set up by local vendors and doggie demonstrations.

The dog park committee is still deciding on the July 18 agenda, but possible ideas include a pet adoption booth, K-9 demonstrations and obedience training sessions.

"I'm very excited about the opening of the new park," First Selectman Gregg Schuster said. "The park is a tribute to all the volunteers who came together to establish a place that dogs and owners can enjoy."

Until the grand opening, the dog park committee will be at other events around town, spreading the word about the new hot spot for pooches. On Saturday, May 15, the group will be at the firehouse on 52 Old Hartford Rd., for the rabies clinic. Dog Park Committee president Keith Kelley said committee members would be on hand to answer questions about the park and fundraising opportunities.

At the June 27 annual tag sale on the green, committee members will also be selling bumper stickers, dog biscuits and engraved bricks, Kelley said.

The bricks will be used to pave the edges of the path into the bullpen. As more bricks are sold, the entire path will be paved, Kelley said. About 100 bricks have been sold so far, according to Dog Park Committee treasurer Amanda Nelson.

Plans for the park have gone smoothly, partly because of the support from residents and town officials, Kelley said. "There was not much opposition," Kelley said, adding he is "ecstatic" with the park's progress. "I think a lot had to do with the committee itself being very motivated and accommodating," he said.

All the members of the 20-person commit-

tee are dog lovers, but none of them have more pooches as pets than Jeremy and Dayle Coutu, who top the list at seven dogs.

The committee has been working on plans for the park for three years, Kelley said. In July 2009, the project was approved by the Board of Selectmen, and Kelley said he expects contractors to break ground within a few weeks.

The dog park will be constructed on a two-acre plot off of Old Amston Road. The land will be divided almost in half to separate large and small dogs. The area was selected because the town already owned the land. Thirty years ago the plot was the site of the town dump, but the landfill has been capped for many years, Kelley said.

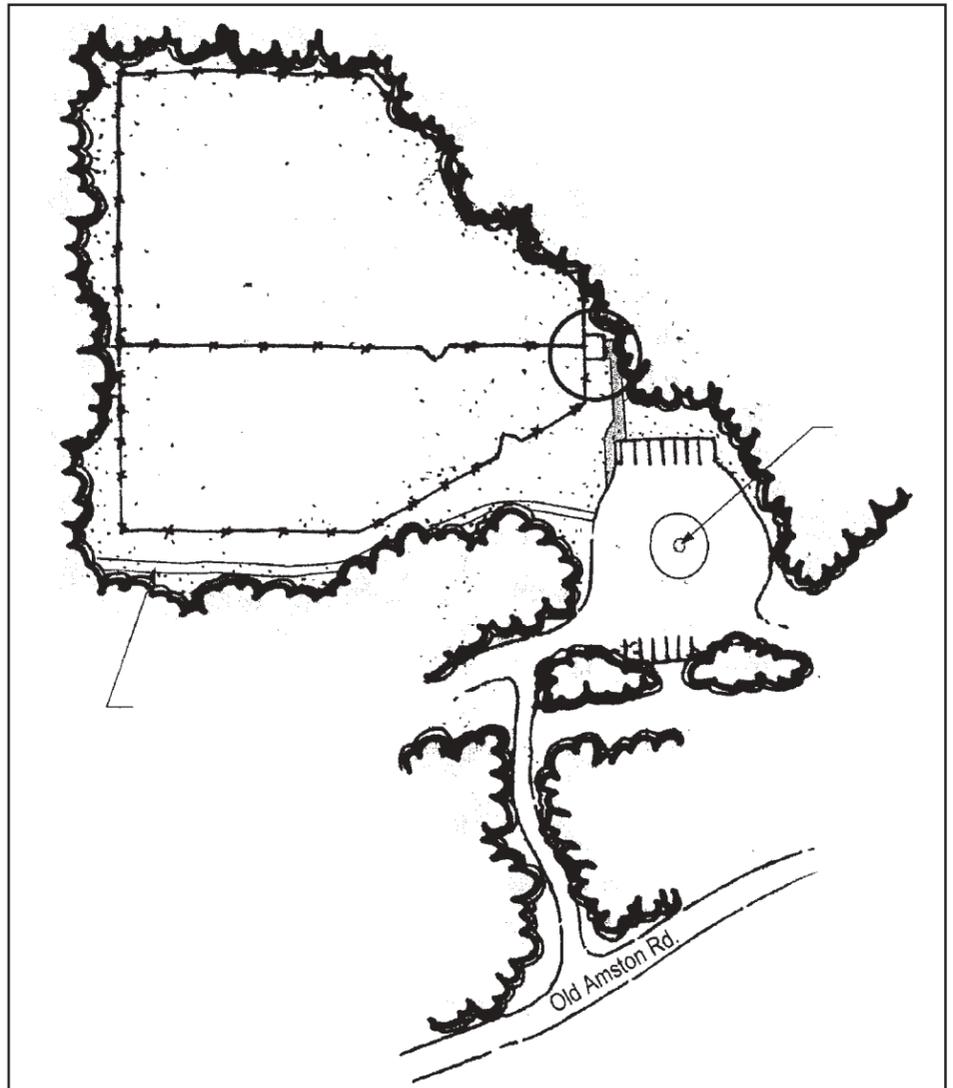
The upcoming steps for the committee are to "grade" the land, which entails filling in holes with dirt and "smoothing out the surface as best we can," Kelley said. The land already has grass growing, so sod will not be necessary.

Next, the driveway will be built by Avery Construction, and then the fence should be installed by the end of May, Kelley said.

The Colchester Dog Park has come together quicker than other communities' attempts, Kelley said. Glastonbury began dog park plans about a year before the Colchester committee came together, but Kelley said Glastonbury has yet to break ground for the project. East Haddam also began plans for a park, but has since given up, he added.

Aside from Kelley, Ryan and Shannon, his two 3-year-old black Labs, are excited for the new park. The two pups will join the 1,500 other registered dogs in Colchester. There are approximately 1,800 unregistered dogs in town, according to the dog warden, but they will be unable to use the facility. The committee estimates there will be an increase dog licensing fees as a result of this rule.

For more information on the dog park, visit www.colchesterct.gov/dogpark, or check out the group on Facebook.



The Colchester Dog Park is set to open July 18. Above is a map of the proposed two-acre site, located off of Old Amston Road. The park is divided into two parts, one for small dogs and one for large.

Woman Crashes Car in Andover After Diabetic Attack

A Pawcatuck woman was transported to Hartford Hospital for "abrasions" and "contusions" after having a diabetic attack while driving, State Police said.

On Sunday, May 2, at about 11 a.m., Joan Aborn, 58, was traveling westbound on Route 6 near Bunker Hill Road when she began having a diabetic attack. Aborn lost control of her 2003 Kia Spectra, veered off Route 6 and

sideswiped several trees down an embankment, State Police said. Her injuries were listed as "non-incapacitating."

The roadway was dry and the weather was clear, State Police noted.

Aborn was issued a motor vehicle warning for failure to drive right and making a restricted turn, State Police said.

Over 200 Animals Seized From Home in Colchester

Over 200 animals were removed from a home at 300 Lake Hayward Rd. after State Police and Colchester Animal Control executed a search and seizure.

According to State Police, on Tuesday, April 20, at approximately 8 a.m., officials removed two canines, 13 rabbits, 180 pigeons, three ducks and 30 chickens that were found to be "living in deplorable conditions."

Homeowner Czeslaw Maselek, 50, was arrested at the scene and charged with animal cruelty, State Police said. He was released on \$500 surety bond and his next court date was listed as May 6.

The animals seized have since been secured and housed by the Colchester Animal Control office, pending disposition of the court, State Police said.

Bransfield Speaks Out on State Funding to Towns

by Claire Michalewicz

First Selectwoman Susan Bransfield spoke to a group of town leaders gathered in Hartford last week about the challenges facing small towns, and what state leaders can do to address them.

Bransfield was at the capitol last Wednesday, April 28, for the Connecticut Council of Small Towns (COST) Annual Town Leaders Day, when first selectmen, mayors and town managers from across the state met to discuss the legislative bills that would affect their towns. The main concerns they discussed at the meeting were a continuing decrease in state funding, and an increase in the number of unfunded mandates, which towns would struggle to pay for.

Bransfield, who is in her second year as president of the Board of Directors of COST, was among several speakers who addressed the gathered town leaders. She spoke about the importance of maintaining education funding at the conference, underscoring that it is COST's highest priority.

"Fortunately, as we come into the final weeks of budget negotiations, the democrat, republican and governor's budgets appear to share this goal," Bransfield said. As of last Wednesday, when Bransfield spoke, the state had yet to adopt a budget. (The legislative session ended

May 5; the house and senate passed a budget shortly before midnight that night.)

Still, she said, the state was facing \$100 million in municipal aid cuts. If the cuts increased, she explained, towns would have to deal with them by raising taxes, laying off employees or reducing services, all of which the towns hope to avoid.

"We're facing a financial tsunami," said Bart Russell, executive director of COST.

"It's important that we come up and talk to [members of state government] so we know what's important," she said. Bransfield said she comes to Hartford to speak to the legislature about the challenges facing Portland and other small towns a few times a year. Coming as an organized group, she said, can be even more effective than speaking individually.

"It makes a really strong voice," she said of COST. Some of her colleagues at the event agreed.

"If we're not working together, we're gonna get drowned out," said Cromwell First Selectman John Flanders.

After members spoke about some of their concerns, they visited their legislators in the capitol to speak with them individually. She met with state Representative Jim O'Rourke to talk to him about the bills currently working their way through the legislature that she thinks could

affect Portland.

In addition to education funding, Bransfield told O'Rourke she was especially interested in a proposed hotel tax, which she said could bring Portland some extra revenue if Portland gets a second hotel. She also explained that two state programs, the Small Town Economic Assistance Program (STEAP) and Town Aid Road (TAR), had been helpful to Portland in getting projects done and she hoped the funding would continue. Bransfield said STEAP had helped with such projects as the Brownstone Avenue Extension and sidewalks and a parking lot on Middlesex Avenue, and STEAP also matched the federal grant the town received for the Main Street streetscape. TAR money is used for general road maintenance, Bransfield said.

"The cupboard's a little bare right now," said O'Rourke. "But we want to keep the good things going that we have going."

O'Rourke said he was pushing for several projects that would benefit Portland, including a sign on Route 9 in Middletown that would direct people to the Brownstone Quarry Adventure Park, and securing a piece of state land next to Fire Company No. 3 on Great Hill Road. The land, O'Rourke and Bransfield both agreed, would be necessary to expand the firehouse and better protect residents in the area.



First Selectwoman Susan Bransfield spoke in Hartford last week about challenges facing small towns.

Finances Discussed at Portland BOS Meeting

by Claire Michalewicz

Money talk dominated the Board of Selectmen's brief meeting on Wednesday evening.

Finance Director Tom Robinson presented his monthly budget report, reading through the amounts of money left in each section of the town budget. Robinson predicted that when the fiscal year ends on June 30, the town would have to take \$368,000 from the fund balance, a figure that he said was better than last year's.

Robinson also predicted that the town clerk's department, which currently had 14 percent of its budget remaining, would probably run out of funds before the end of June. "There's not really much we can do about that," Robinson said, explaining that the budget was a function of use.

Robinson also explained that the Portland Fair Association had still not paid the town for use of private duty police officers during the fair in October. "This happens every year," Robinson said, explaining that he expected the association to pay closer to the fair dates in the fall. He suggested that from now on, the town

collect the money from the fair association in advance.

Also, First Selectwoman Susan Bransfield said, "Tom continues to monitor, along with myself, the spending freeze we have." Robinson announced the freeze on discretionary spending last month. Still, he said Wednesday, the town had several important projects underway this summer, including the High Street water main, repairs on Brownstone Avenue, the Main Street Streetscape project, and renovations at the library and Firehouse No. 3.

The selectmen also decided to interview candidates for the school facilities study commission at their meeting on June 2. They will choose three members of the public to serve on the committee, from the list of people who have already contacted the selectmen about joining. The committee will study the use of space in Portland's schools over the summer and report their findings to the Board of Education. In addition to the three members of the public, the committee will also include two selectmen and

two BOE members.

Before the meeting, the selectmen had convened for an executive session about an assessment appeal. Later, the selectmen voted to hire an attorney to further pursue the matter. They also moved to hire Adam Cohen, the attorney from Pullman and Comley, LLC, whom they had interviewed before their last meeting on April 21. Working for the town of Portland, Cohen would work to collect delinquent taxes.

At the end of the meeting, selectman Carl Chudzik announced he had attended a conference of the Government Finance Officers Association last week, along with Robinson. At the meeting, Chudzik had learned more about the cost savings associated with turning off streetlights, and said he would like to bring a guest speaker to a BOS meeting to talk about streetlights. Energy costs, Chudzik told his fellow selectmen, were expected to increase by 30 to 40 percent, and removing some lights, or turning them off at certain times, could save the town thousands of dollars.

Chudzik had proposed removing about 25 percent of Portland's streetlights in 2008, but hundreds of residents protested, saying they were worried about safety. During budget workshops this spring, Chudzik announced that he was interested in revisiting the proposal to save energy.

In other business, Bransfield presented a special citation to Charles Gagne from the United States Power Squadron, in recognition of National Safe Boating Week, which takes place the week of May 22-28.

"Responsible boaters understand that life vests save lives," Bransfield read from the proclamation. She then explained how she had learned this personally a few years ago, when her sister was injured being thrown from a boat. Because she was wearing a life vest, Bransfield explained, her sister was able to swim back to the boat.

The next BOS meeting will be held on Wednesday, May 19, at 7:30 p.m., at Portland Library, 20 Freestone Ave.

East Hampton Man Dies in Colchester Car Crash

by Katy Nally

A 21-year-old East Hampton man, who his mother called "a friend to everybody," was killed early Sunday morning after veering off Old Hartford Road and striking a tree.

In the early hours of Sunday, May 2, Brandon Scott, of 7 Aarons Way, failed to negotiate a curve in the road, crossed the center line, hit a guardrail and then a tree on the west-bound shoulder.

Scott was presumed dead at 2:07 a.m., fire officials said.

His 23-year-old passenger, girlfriend Ashley Bonertz, also of East Hampton, had left the scene and gone to a residence "seeking assistance," incident commander Lt. Don Lee said.

Bonertz' condition was listed as "possible injury" and she was taken to the Marlborough Clinic via Colchester ambulance, and then taken by a LifeStar helicopter to Hartford Hospital, State Police and Lee said.

Fire department officials continued extraction of Scott who was wedged between his vehicle and the tree. One hour and 40 minutes after the accident was reported, Scott was removed and was found to have significant head

trauma, fire officials said.

The fire department received mutual aid from Marlborough and Hebron and personnel were on the scene until 3:41 a.m.

Scott's mother, Donna, said she would remember her son as someone who was very popular and "had lots of friends."

"He knew how to schmooze people," she added. "He was really well loved."

Scott graduated from East Hampton High School in 2006, and then attended the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth. He spent much of his time working as a bartender at Public in Middletown, Tango in Glastonbury and Damon's Tavern in Hartford.

Scott also worked as a lifeguard and even performed a life-saving rescue at Lake Pocotopaug four years ago, his mother said.

Calling hours will be today, May 7, from 5-8 p.m., at Spencer Funeral Home, 112 Main St., East Hampton. There will be a funeral service at 10 a.m., Saturday, May 8 at St. Patrick Church, 47 West High St., East Hampton.

For Scott's full obituary, see page 12.

\$20.88 Million Budget Heads to Voters Next Week in Marlborough

by Katy Nally

Taxpayers will have their chance to vote on the \$20.88 million 2010-11 spending package at the annual town meeting next Monday.

The budget represents a 0.38 percent tax increase, which is a mill increase of 0.1.

The local education budget accounts for \$6.906 million, and \$7.11 million for Marlborough's levy of RHAM. (The RHAM 2010-11 budget was approved by voters Tuesday; see page xx for a complete story.)

Town operations came in at \$4.34 million and debt at \$2.51 million.

The local Board of Education (BOE) spending plan remained unchanged throughout the Board of Finance's budget review process, and is a 0.08 percent decrease from this year's budget.

The BOE's continuation budget – what its proposal would have been had the school board simply carried 2009-10 spending forward to next year – was estimated at \$7.1 million, or 3.32 percent more than the current fiscal year's. The cuts made to get that number down to \$6.906 million include not replacing a retiring teacher – thereby increasing class size for the sixth grade from 18 to 23 students – reducing department supplies by \$33,000, placing a one-year moratorium on new books, opting out of

professional development conferences, reducing a custodial position and cutting the equivalent of one paraprofessional.

The town operations budget underwent more changes than the local BOE's. Selectmen first presented a \$4.29 million budget to the finance board in March, but several items were eventually reinstated.

The Board of Finance approved a town operations budget that was about \$50,000 more than the original proposal, with about \$38,000 going to the lifeguards. The Public Works supervisor/building and grounds position was also funded full-time.

Money for several projects was borrowed in December 2009, which added to the town's \$2.51 million in debt. The approved plans include funds for road reconstruction, the business park, open space and a fire truck.

Funds for capital improvements were completely cut, from the \$40,000 for the 2009-10 year.

Contingency remained unchanged at \$20,000.

The town meeting will be held Monday, May 10, at 7 p.m., at Elmer Thienes-Mary Hall Elementary School, 25 School Dr.

Colchester Police News

4/27: Corrine Sumner, 46, of 135A North Main St., Jewett City, was charged with failure to obey traffic light and DUI, State Police said.

4/30: Robert Dettore, 46, of 283 Westchester Rd., Apt. 16, was charged with possession of less than four ounces of marijuana and possession of drug paraphernalia, State Police said.

4/30: Rebecca Lake, 24, of 65D Main St., Somers, was charged with fifth-degree larceny, State Police said.

4/30: Angela Lomnicki, 21, of 626 Gilead

Rd., Hebron, was charged with violation of probation, State Police said.

5/1: David Gallagher, 47, of 77 Standish Rd., was charged with failure to drive right and DUI, State Police said.

5/3: Julie Gallagher, 40, of 161 Wetherell St., Manchester, was charged with criminal violation of a restraining order, State Police said.

5/4: Michael Pacheco, 32, of 108 West Middle Tpke., Manchester, was charged with violation of probation, State Police said.

Andover Police News

5/4: James Mumley, 46, of 327 Route 6, was charged with disorderly conduct and third-degree assault, State Police said.

Hebron Police News

5/2: David Heriot, 25, of 11 Jackman Rd., was charged with disorderly conduct and threatening, State Police said.

Salem Police News

4/27: Bruce Benoit, 44, of 59 Salem Ridge Dr., was charged with failure to drive right and DUI, State Police said.

Portland Police News

4/16: Nichole Landry, 36, of 1940 Chapel St., New Haven, was charged with operating a motor vehicle with a suspended license and traveling too fast for conditions, Portland Police said.

5/1: Robin Thomas, 44, of 1504 Portland Cobalt Rd., was charged with criminal violation of restraining order and first-degree criminal trespass, police said.

East Hampton Police News

4/24: Martin J. O'Toole, 48, of 18s Quaker Ln., West Hartford, was arrested for operating under the influence of alcohol, failure to drive right and traveling unreasonably fast, East Hampton Police said.

4/24: Ronald J. Howard, 54, of 21 Blue Heron Dr., was arrested for drinking while operating a motor vehicle, driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs and failure to drive right, police said.

4/26: Caleb J. Sonnichsen, 21, of 137 Auge Spring Rd., Middle Haddam, was arrested for possession of marijuana and possession of drug paraphernalia, police said.

4/26: A 15-year-old female was arrested for burglary, larceny and criminal mischief, police said.

Obituaries

Colchester

Frank R. Knight

Frank R. Knight, 68, of Uncasville and formerly of Colchester, passed away peacefully surrounded by his loving family at the Lawrence and Memorial Hospital in New London Friday, April 30.

Born in Colchester on Nov. 7, 1941, he was the son of the late Frank and Ruth (LaCharite) Knight. He was a 1959 graduate of Bacon Academy in Colchester, where he lettered in Baseball and Soccer. He retired as a manager from M.J. Sullivan Automotive in New London.

On June 1, 1963, he was united in marriage to his loving wife of 46 years, Elizabeth Ann Kovolingo. They lived in Uncasville for the past 26 years. He was also a devoted Green Bay Packers and Cleveland Indians fan.

Frank was a very loving, dedicated and caring family man. He will be deeply missed by everyone that knew him and he will be sadly missed by his family.

Besides his wife, he is survived by his three sons, Frank Jr. of Moosup, Cliff and wife Kelly Knight of Naugatuck and Joe and wife Denise of Norwich; a daughter, Debbie Collins and husband Bill of Lebanon; 11 grandchildren; two great-grandchildren; three sisters, Doris, Carole and Barbara; and numerous extended family members and friends.

Friends called Tuesday, May 4, at the Aurora-McCarthy Funeral Home, 167 Old Hartford Rd., Colchester. Burial will be private.

In lieu of flowers, donations in his memory may be made to the CT Childrens Medical Center, 282 Washington St., Hartford, CT 06106.

For online condolences, visit www.auroramccarthyfuneralhome.com.



Colchester

Richard Thomas Hungerford

Richard Thomas Hungerford, "Rich," 30, of Lake Hayward, beloved son of Warren Steven and Patricia Rene (Zarate) Hungerford, passed away unexpectedly, yet peacefully, Friday, April 30, at home.

He was born April 15, 1980, in Manchester and was a 1999 graduate of Nathan Hale-Ray High School in East Haddam. Rich had a passion for cooking, having worked as a chef, and had also worked as a landscaper for a time. In his spare time, he enjoyed weight lifting, playing basketball and fishing. However, Rich found his greatest joy in spending time with his family and friends.

In addition to his loving parents who mourn his passing, he leaves his brother, Leon of Middletown; his half brother, Dennis Pellegrini of San Antonio, TX; a niece, Allison; his paternal grandfather, Leon Ransom Hungerford of Norwich; and numerous extended family members and friends.

Friends may call Saturday, May 8, from 11 a.m.-1 p.m., at the Aurora-McCarthy Funeral Home, 167 Old Hartford Rd., Colchester. A celebration of his life will be observed at 12:30 p.m. Burial will be private.

For online condolences, visit www.auroramccarthyfuneralhome.com.

Portland

Sharon G. Solek

Sharon G. Solek, 63, of Cromwell and formerly of Portland, wife of Henry A. Solek, passed away Tuesday, May 4, at Middlesex Hospital.

Born in Middletown, she was the daughter of Eunice (Thompson) Goodyear of Fort Myers and formerly of Cromwell and the late Fred Goodyear. Sharon lived many years in Cromwell and Portland and recently in Florida. She was employed by the City of Middletown as an administrative assistant in the city attorney's office and health department for 25 years and retired in 1999.

Besides her husband, she is survived by her children, Brian Solek of Newington; Susan Solek of Middletown; Jeff Solek and his wife, Ellen of Hamden; Caron Poitras and her husband, Gary of Portland; and Cindy Coote and her husband, Rich of Branford; a brother, Ted Goodyear and his wife, Sandy of Meriden; eight grandchildren, Frank, Jenna, Jessica, David, Danielle, Renee, Matthew, and Camryn; and two nieces, Kelly and Erica.

Besides her father, she was predeceased by a brother, David Goodyear.

A Mass of Christian Burial will be celebrated Monday, May 10, at 11 a.m. at St. Pius X Church, 310 Westfield St., Middletown, and burial will be private and at the convenience of the family. There will be no calling hours.

In lieu of flowers, friends may make donations in Sharon's memory to the Weiss Hospice Unit c/o Department of Philanthropy, 28 Crescent St., Middletown, CT 06457, Bladder Cancer Research c/o UConn Foundation, 10 Talcott Notch Rd., Suite 100, Farmington, CT 06032 or American Cancer Society, P.O. Box 1004, Meriden, CT 06450.

Messages of condolence may be sent to the family at www.doolittlefuneralservice.com. The Doolittle Funeral Home, 14 Old Church St., Middletown, is handling the arrangements.

Colchester

Luisa St. Pierre

Luisa St. Pierre, formerly of Colchester, is deceased. With family at her side she entered eternal life on Monday, April 26, after a brave two year battle with breast cancer.

Her marriage to Gilman St. Pierre ended after producing two sons: Michael and his wife Connie of Panama City Beach, Florida; and Kraig and his wife Sharon of Orange, California. They have three children apiece, Luisa's beloved grandchildren, who are, respectively, Carlton, Romeo, Prince, John Paul, Katherine and Joseph.

One of 17 children, she was born Sept. 23, 1942, the eldest daughter of Custodio Garay and his second wife, Octavia Marcano, of Caguas, Puerto Rico. She was predeceased by her parents and her siblings Alberto, Rosa Gibson, Georgina Belyea, Enrique, Juan, Victor, Jesus, Serafin and infant twins.

She is survived by Jose Miguel of Orlando, FL; Jose of Hartford; Francisco of Torrington; Carmen of Santa Monica, CA; Maria Butler of Prosperity, SC, and Miguel of Worcester, MA.

She was employed for over 20 years as a press operator at Hartford Tape and Label, Inc. At the age of 39, she fulfilled a lifelong dream by beginning a 20-year career as a police officer with the Hartford Police Department - the last 15 as a homicide detective. She ended her professional life as a much-loved security officer at the East Hartford Middle School. She leaves behind many friends and admirers who will remember her for her strength, loyalty and love.

A Mass of Christian Burial was held Tuesday, May 4, at St. Joachim Roman Catholic Church in Costa Mesa, CA. Reverend Enrique Sera was celebrant. Internment followed at Holy Sepulcher Catholic Cemetery in Orange, CA. A Connecticut memorial service will be held on a date to be announced.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be sent to St. John the Baptist School at www.sjbschool.net or the NEJAT International Childhood Cancer Research Society at www.niccrs.org.

East Hampton

Brandon E. Scott

It is with great sorrow and heavy hearts that we have to say goodbye to a cherished son, grandson, nephew, cousin and friend. Brandon Edward Scott died unexpectedly Saturday, May 1, as a result of a tragic car accident. He was born July 19, 1988, in Hartford, and grew up in East Hampton. He graduated from East Hampton High School in 2006 and attended UMass Dartmouth.



Brandon is survived by Donna, his mother; Don, his father; "Mappie," his grandfather; Bryant, his brother; Alyssa, Bryant's girlfriend; and Ashley, Brandon's girlfriend. He also leaves behind several aunts and cousins. Brandon was predeceased by his two grandmothers, Jenny and Leona, grandfather, Edward and uncle, Dennis.

Brandon was truly loved by everyone, and touched many in his short life time. He lived life to the fullest and had countless friends from all walks of life. He thoroughly enjoyed bartending at various establishments in Middletown and Glastonbury. Brandon also enjoyed being a lifeguard, a job at which he attained recognition that he was very proud of. Both jobs gave Brandon an opportunity for making friends. We love you Brandon and will miss you.

A funeral liturgy will be celebrated Saturday, May 8, at 10 a.m., in St. Patrick Church in East Hampton. Burial will be private. Friends may call at the Spencer Funeral Home, 112 Main St., East Hampton, today, Friday, May 7, from 5-8 p.m.

In lieu of flowers memorial donations may be made to the Connecticut Humane Society 701 Russell Rd. Newington, CT 06111.

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

Portland

Patricia (Frazier) Drega

Patricia (Frazier) Drega, 59, of Grove Street, Portland, beloved wife of John Drega, passed away Friday, April 30, at Middlesex Hospital. She was born in Middletown, the daughter of the late Warren and Jean (Carris) Frazier.

Besides her husband, she is survived by her son, Matthew Drega of Portland; stepson, Daniel Drega of Vernon; and her brother, James Frazier and his fiancée Rhonda LaPointe of Middletown; as well as many friends and family.

Pattie had a joy of, and zest for, life that she shared with everyone as willingly as her fantastic food. She took great pride in cooking for the rectory of St. John's Church in Old Saybrook.

Friends called at Biega Funeral Home, 3 Silver St., Middletown. The wake was held Monday, May 3. Fr. Joe Ashe will hold a service at Biega's on Tuesday at 1 p.m. Burial will be held at the convenience of the family.

Colchester

Richard A. Aikin

Richard A. Aikin, 66, husband of Bonnie DeBowsky Aikin of Colchester, passed away Saturday, May 1, at the Marlborough Clinic. Richard was a 23-year serviceman serving in the U.S. Navy.

Surviving besides his wife are two sons, Isaiah P. Aikin and Todd J. Harvey; a brother, Jack Aikin Jr.; a sister, Nancy Stiffler; stepmother Jessie and several nieces and nephews.

Visitation was held Wednesday, May 5, at the Belmont/Sabrowski Funeral Home, 144 South Main St. His funeral service was held Thursday, May 6, at the funeral home followed by full military honors. Interment will be private.

Donations may be made to ASPCA in his memory c/o your local chapter.

East Hampton

Dorothy Ann DiStefano

Dorothy Ann DiStefano, 50, of East Hampton and Portland, died Wednesday, April 28, at Middlesex Hospital after a long illness. Born Aug. 21, 1959, in Middletown, she was the daughter of Paul DiStefano and Gail (Villa) DiStefano. Dorothy was a longtime resident of East Hampton and a graduate of East Hampton High School.

Besides her parents she is survived by her longtime companion, Thomas Fournier of Portland; her brother Paul DiStefano Jr. of East Hampton and her sister Cathy Fournier of East Hampton.

Friends called at the Spencer Funeral Home, 112 Main St., East Hampton, on Wednesday, May 5. Burial will be private at the convenience of the family.

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

Amston

Victoria Ann Caron

On May 4, Victoria Ann Caron (Vicki) died peacefully at home in the company of loved ones at the age of 61. Vicki was born June 14, 1948, to Nicholas and Mary Malinowski of Jewett City. Vicki was a resident of Amston.

Vicki leaves behind her beloved husband, David Paul Caron. Vicki and David were together for 41 years. The greatest joy in Vicki's life was spending time with her family and tending to her gardens. Vicki is survived by her two children and their families; Elizabeth and Brian Roche of Plainville, MA, and Matthew and Mady Caron of Keene, NH. Vicki is also survived by her sister Virginia A. Rourke of Lisbon, along with her granddaughter Lily Roche of Plainville, MA, both of whom held a special place in her heart. Along with immediate family, Vicki is survived by many nieces, nephews, grandnieces and grandnephews, all of whom were an important part of her life.

Vicki was a devoted wife, mother, sister, aunt and friend and will be sadly missed.

Per her wishes, there will be no calling hours. A memorial service will be held Saturday, May 8, at 1 p.m., at Westfield Congregational Church, 210 Main St., Danielson.

In lieu of flowers, memorial donations in memory of Vicki may be made to SNCARC Family Autism Center, 789 Clapboardtree St., Westwood, MA 02090.

Observations & Ruminations

by Mike Thompson

If you live in Hebron, Portland, East Hampton or Marlborough, you might have heard the news already. Effective last Saturday, May 1, you can now recycle more – a lot more – than ever before.

Connecticut Resources Recovery Authority (CRRRA) has expanded its recycling program. (Only towns served by CRRRA's Mid-Connecticut Project are affected by this, which is why you didn't see Andover or Colchester listed above.) Whereas before only plastic containers marked with numbers one or two could be recycled, now plastics up through number seven can be recycled. If you're a friend of the environment, that's good news. While many things are marked with a one or two – such as the microwaveable trays frozen dinners come in or those big plastic bottles of juice (like Simply Orange) – there are an awful lot of items marked with those higher numbers. And now you can recycle them all: disposable party cups (i.e., those red or blue Solo cups), plastic bags, yogurt containers, ketchup containers, Tupperware, shampoo bottles. . . .the list goes on and on.

This is all in addition to the stuff you could normally recycle. Computer paper, newspapers, cardboard food packaging like cereal boxes – with the plastic inside removed – envelopes, magazines, aluminum cans, glass bottles and jars, tin foil and more.

As one of the staffers at the *Rivereast* office said last week, it'd almost be easier just to tell us now what we *can't* recycle, instead of what we *can*.

And yes, there are still things you can't recycle. According to www.crra.org, plant and flower pots are still a no-no, as are medicine bottles, foam plastics (Styrofoam will never, *ever* be good for the environment), plastic straws or pizza boxes. (Yes, pizza boxes may be made of boxboard – which is recyclable – but considering they tend to be coated in grease and remnants of toppings and cheese, the CRRRA prefers you just pitch these in the garbage.)

But, for the most part, there's less of a need to put things in the garbage can than ever. Your recycling bin may become fuller faster, but the Earth will be better for it.

* * *

I got a notice e-mailed over to me last week that told me this past week, May 3-7, was National Drinking Water Week. There were informational displays set up at, among other places, the Colchester Town Hall. Now, I got

the notice too late to include in last week's paper to let people know to check out the display (don't forget, the deadline is now Tuesdays at noon), but if the info was like the info up at www.drinktap.org (the official National Drinking Water Week website), then it preached about the quality of tap water. And it's a message that I support.

I've been telling people for years that this is the United States, a major, industrialized nation. We're not some underdeveloped, third-world country. For the most part, the drinking water here, from coast to coast, is perfectly safe straight from the tap. There's no boiling of water needed, or any safety measures like that. And yet there are still people who act as if the water from their kitchen sink will give them the plague if they dare to drink it. As a result, you see scores of people perfectly content to purchase seemingly-endless supplies of Aquafina or Poland Spring or some other bottled water. And while those plastic water bottles are now recyclable, it's still, in my opinion, an unnecessary expense.

Oh, and check the label on that bottle of water you just bought, particularly if it's from a no-name brand or a store brand. Chances are the water source is a "municipal water supply." Guess what? You just drank tap water.

* * *

Some of you may recall when, earlier this year, I lamented the closing of Bernie's, the regional chain of appliance stores. Well, I read in the paper last week Bernie's is back. The owner of the store, Milton Rosenberg, son of founder Bernard Rosenberg, received permission from Bankruptcy Court to purchase the rights to the Bernie's name.

Apparently, Rosenberg plans to start over at square one, with an appliance, bedding and TV store in Manchester, right in the old Bernie's building. He plans to open the store by the first of June. He also hopes to eventually open a second Bernie's, although he can't disclose the location as of yet.

I applaud Rosenberg's attempt to resuscitate the family business, and I hope it works. As more and more of these regional chains either die out or get gobbled up by national chains – I just read Tuesday that East Hartford-based Better Bedding has reportedly been sold to Sleepy's – it's nice to see Bernie's isn't totally gone.

* * *

See you next week.