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East Hampton Town Council member Sue Weintraub held a press conference this week to discuss past lawsuits filed against Town Manager Jeffery O'Keefe. She is pictured above, center, surrounded by many supporters.

'The Cover-Ups Are Unraveling'

by Claire Michalewicz

In the latest twist in the East Hampton police chief saga, Town Council member Sue Weintraub held a press conference Wednesday and accused Town Manager Jeffery O'Keefe of lying on his job application to the town.

Because of his lies, Weintraub said, O'Keefe should be placed on administrative leave – an action she has repeatedly demanded since three harassment complaints were brought against O'Keefe in April.

O'Keefe laid off Police Chief Matt Reimondo in June, and though he and the Town Council – sans Weintraub – have repeatedly stressed the move was strictly for budgetary reasons, many in town have said the decision was retaliation for Reimondo launching the investigation into the harassment claims.

Surrounded by about 60 residents who braved the heat to join her in front of Town Hall, Weintraub explained that she had obtained two lawsuits filed against O'Keefe when he worked as the Chief Executive Officer of the Greater Bridgeport Transit Authority. The lawsuits and other information she has uncovered, she said, demonstrate “a disturbing behavior pattern of discrimination and deceit.”

O'Keefe started as East Hampton town manager Sept. 1, 2008. In his job application submitted to East Hampton in the spring of 2008, Weintraub said, O'Keefe said that he had never sued an employer, nor been sued by an employer or employee.

“This was a lie,” Weintraub said, explaining that two lawsuits were filed against the GBTA when O'Keefe was the director there. A suit from September 2005 alleged that O'Keefe had

laid off several non-union employees because of financial difficulties, but gave raises to all other employees, including managers, during the same time.

The other lawsuit, from September 2004, accused O'Keefe of racial discrimination. According to the lawsuit, O'Keefe laid off an African-American employee and hired a white employee in another position without offering it first to the laid-off employee.

Weintraub also said O'Keefe's job application stated he managed 250 employees at the GBTA, though one of the complaints mentioned that there were only 70 employees.

O'Keefe said Wednesday he did not have to mention the suits in his job application.

“Because the law suit was against the Authority, and I wasn't being sued personally, it wasn't relevant to my application,” O'Keefe said in an e-mail. He also added that he believed one suit had been settled and the other had been dropped.

Town Council Chairwoman Melissa Engel echoed O'Keefe's comments, explaining that O'Keefe's background check “came back clean as a whistle.”

“It is not my opinion that he lied on his job application,” Engel said, explaining that since O'Keefe had been sued as part of an organization instead of as an individual, there was “no reason” to mention it. Engel called Weintraub “a great researcher,” and said that if she had further researched the lawsuits, she would have found that one was dropped and the other settled this year.

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Hebron Harvest Fair Turning 40

by Lindsay Fetzner

Next Thursday, Sept. 9, the Hebron Harvest Fair will open its gates, marking, as the Hebron Lions describe it, “40 years of family fun.”

As the third-largest agricultural fair in Connecticut, the four-day fair brings visitors from all over, with attendance reaching up to 150,000 to the 100-acre property, said Hebron Lions Club Senior Advisor Robert E. Lee, who has been with the organization for 20 years.

All the fun starts on Thursday afternoon; fair gates open at 4 p.m., followed by an opening ceremony at 6 p.m., including a parade and performance by the RHAM High School marching band. Lee added that Thursday is designated as “Hebron Night” each year.

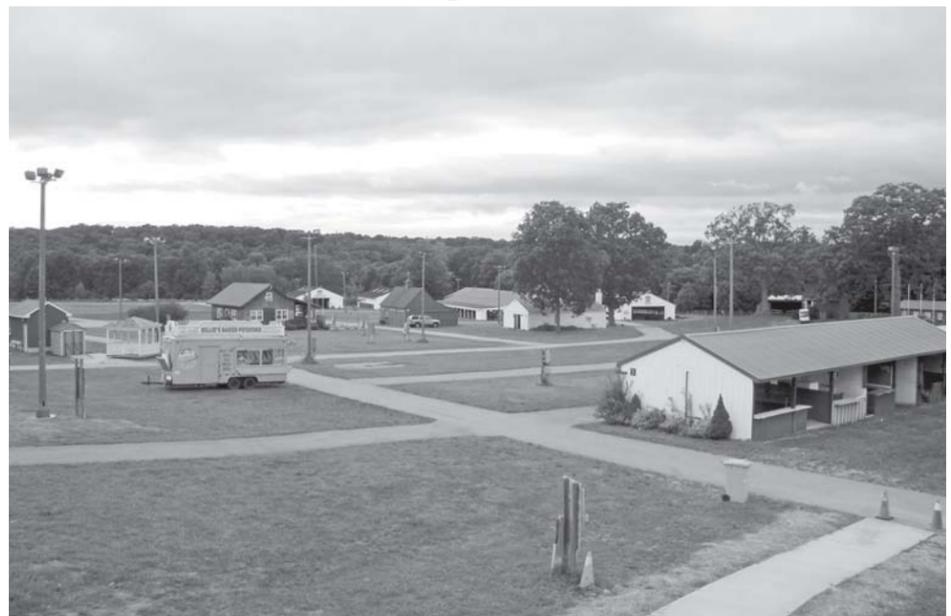
This year's fair superintendent, John Johnson Jr., said the best part of the event this time around will be “the last-minute things that we all pull together on to get [the fair] running.” Johnson has been a part of the Lions for five years, but has assisted with the fair for about 10 years. Due to the fact that both Johnson's mother and father are part of the Lions Club, Lee referred to his involvement as “a family affair.”

Lee credited Johnson's dedication to the Lions Club and his efforts to put the fair together this year serving as superintendent. “He's put in a tremendous amount of hours,” Lee said.

The Harvest Fair is dedicated to the Boy Scouts of America this year; the organization is celebrating 100 years of scouting in 2010. Earlier this year, the Lions hosted the Connecticut Rivers Council Boy Scouts 2010 Jamboree, which brought over 10,000 Boy Scouts, leaders and Lions to the fairgrounds. In the past, prominent community or Lions members who have passed away have been honored.

This year, several singers will take the stage over the course of the four days. Among the many performers is Vocal Trash, who will perform on the Lions main stage on Thursday at 6:30 and 9 p.m. Local band Columbia Fields will take the main stage at 8 p.m. Friday. Two shows are in store for Saturday, with the Don Campbell Band performing at both 1 and 6:30 p.m. on the Leos stage and Earl Wear and Haywire on the main stage at 3 and 8:30 p.m. And, on the final day of the fair, Earl Ware and Hay-

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In less than a week, the Lions Fairgrounds on Route 85 will be bustling, as thousands will flock to the 100-acre site for the annual Hebron Harvest Fair.

Cover-Ups cont. from Front Page

Moreover, Engel said, she and Town Council Vice Chairman John Tuttle had interviewed four of O'Keefe's former colleagues in Bridgeport and three in Santa Clarita, CA, where O'Keefe was working when he applied to the East Hampton position. All these co-workers, Engel said, recommended O'Keefe for the position and did not mention any problems they had with him.

In addition, Engel pointed out, Weintraub and fellow Chatham Party member Scott Minnick had been involved in the process of hiring O'Keefe, along with the rest of the Town Council.

"I just think that Sue Weintraub and the Chatham Party continue to grasp at straws to further any cause they might have," Engel said. "To me, it's theater."

Another lie O'Keefe told, Weintraub said, concerned O'Keefe's consulting with a public relations professional. After Reimondo was laid off, Weintraub e-mailed O'Keefe to ask if he had been speaking with anyone about dealing with the media. O'Keefe replied that he had not.

But, Weintraub explained, e-mails between O'Keefe and Kyle Muncy, an official for UConn's basketball program, showed that O'Keefe and Muncy planned to meet in late June, because, as O'Keefe wrote in an e-mail to Muncy, "I could use all the PR help we can get."

O'Keefe said Wednesday he met with Muncy only once, at the suggestion of a Town Council member.

Acting Lieutenant Michael Green, whom

O'Keefe appointed to serve as interim police chief after Reimondo was laid off, attended the press conference, but said he did not wish to comment on Weintraub's allegations until he could study the information.

"I have a working relationship with him," Green said, explaining that O'Keefe gives him "free reign to run the department."

Weintraub also commented on O'Keefe's June e-mail that said Weintraub's allegations that the council mishandled the harassment complaints were what his friend in Chicago called "a .38 cent problem."

"This reference to the cost of a bullet – to violence and retaliation – is inexcusable and cannot be tolerated," Weintraub said. By sending this e-mail, she said, O'Keefe showed "that he is not qualified nor should he be entrusted with the management of East Hampton."

But, O'Keefe said in an e-mail, that "comment was not made directly by me nor was it directed at Ms. Weintraub." He also said he did not know it was a reference to firearms until he asked his friend about it, explaining that he used it to describe a problem that had no merit.

Green also said he didn't feel O'Keefe's comments constituted a threat, explaining that the reference to 38 cents – the price of a bullet – was "not a widely-known saying."

Weintraub said she had consulted with various agencies about filing a complaint about O'Keefe's comments, but was waiting to obtain more of O'Keefe's e-mails before taking any action.

Weintraub has repeatedly demanded that O'Keefe be placed on administrative leave, ex-

plaining that the harassment complaints against him could not be properly investigated while he was still working in Town Hall.

Last week, Weintraub said, she filed a Freedom of Information (FOI) request for all of O'Keefe's sent e-mails since he started work with the town in September 2008. The *Hartford Courant* recently tried to obtain all of O'Keefe's e-mails dating back to January of this year, but O'Keefe told the *Courant* he did not set up his own e-mail account, and did not know much about computers.

But, Weintraub said, two town employees told her O'Keefe said in a staff meeting that he deletes all his e-mails, and also boasted that he was an expert in the FOI Act.

After the press conference, O'Keefe said he only deletes personal e-mails from family and friends, which he said is allowed under FOI rules. Furthermore, he said, Town Hall employees discussed e-mail rules during a staff meeting.

"It was impressed upon everyone (including me) that all emails are subject to FOI rules and regulations and that you can't delete anything," O'Keefe said in an e-mail.

"It appears that for two years Mr. O'Keefe has deliberately and intentionally deleted his sent e-mails," Weintraub said. "This isn't spin – this is fraud!"

Weintraub asked Superintendent of Schools Judith Golden for the e-mails to be retrieved from the town's servers, which are housed in the school administrative offices.

After the press conference, Weintraub released Golden's response, which explained that

O'Keefe's sent e-mails were irretrievable. A computer technician had set up O'Keefe's e-mails before the school offices were administering the network, she said. Golden said the technician who set up O'Keefe's e-mails had recently died, and she did not know why he had set up O'Keefe's e-mail program to delete his outgoing messages.

Wednesday, Weintraub said, was O'Keefe's two-year anniversary with the town, and according to his contract, he will receive an automatic 3 percent increase in pay.

"Day by day the cover-ups are unraveling," Weintraub said. "I am convinced there is more we will learn in the weeks and months to come."

"We will not stop until we uncover the truth and do what's in the best interest of East Hampton," she concluded.

* * *

In related news, Engel last week released data provided to her by O'Keefe outlining the savings generated through reorganization of the police department. (The numbers "don't include long term pension obligations," O'Keefe noted.) Elimination of the police chief, the data said, would save \$99,564 in salary and \$46,795 in benefits. Elimination of two police officers would yield \$107,720 in salary savings and \$50,628 in benefits. Eliminating one office manager would save \$37,259 in salary and \$17,511 in benefits. Not purchasing two police cruisers would also save \$70,000 – but, unlike the others, this would be a one-time savings and not an annual one.

The savings, according to the data, totaled \$429,478.

Harvest Fair cont. from Front Page

wire will perform for the second day in a row at 1:30 p.m. on the Leos stage. This year's headline act, country group Gloriana, will perform at 3:30 p.m. Sunday.

Other entertainment will include one of the largest carnivals/midways, complete with about 39 rides, according to Lee. Over 225 vendors will also be on location, selling food, exhibiting locally-made arts and crafts and representing local nonprofit organizations.

In the "family edutainment" area, the New England Championship for dock dogs will provide entertainment each day of the fair. The dogs will be judged on speed retrieval, height and distance, as they propel into a large pool of water.

On Saturday, in the same area, the children's pedal tractor pull will take place in the morning hours, followed by children's games in the afternoon. Competitions such as bubble gum blowing, balloon blowing, pie eating and a watermelon eating contest will test the youngster's skills.

The demolition derby returns Thursday and Friday evenings. There will be a fire department muster on Saturday and three showings of a monster truck/freestyle motocross/ATV

show on Sunday. Truck and tractor pulls, the Rising Star Talent Show, a birds of prey demonstration and a horseshoe tournament are also sprinkled through the fair on various days.

Lee said events like the fire department muster, which began a few years ago, are a way to involve area residents in the fair.

"We get a lot of people involved," he said. "It's a real community event."

Visitors may also want to tour the arts and crafts tent, antique farm equipment display, multiple animal exhibits and the Better Living building, each with their own events and demonstrations going on throughout the fair.

More than one-third of the profits from the Hebron Harvest Fair goes to the Hebron Lions Charities, which distribute money to local and international organizations, Lee said. Each year, he said, the Lions try to increase that amount. The remainder of the fair profits is put toward maintaining the 100-acre fairgrounds, in addition to other costs such as heating and electricity.

To help supplement funds, the fairgrounds are rented out over the summer months, Lee said. Events such as motorcycle shows and the Renaissance Faire, which will begin on Sept.

25 and run until Oct. 24, help the Lions to earn additional revenue.

In a good year, with favorable weather, Lee said, the fair can draw from 140,000-150,000 people. He emphasized how weather-dependent the fair is, which directly correlates to the proceeds the Lions take in. "We keep our fingers crossed," Lee said. The past two years, Lee said rain came for portions of the fair that put a damper on attendance.

The first Hebron Harvest Fair took place in 1971 at Veterans Memorial Park. A year later, it moved to its current home, after the Lions purchased 84 acres on Route 85. (An additional 16 acres were purchased in 1999.)

"These fairgrounds have come a long way," Lee said. "They have been evolving for the past 39 years." The Lions continue to make changes to the grounds with each year that passes, including efforts this year to "go green." For example, tents are utilizing fluorescent lighting and new roll-away recycling and garbage pails have been acquired. With close to 70 Lions, Lee said, "everybody contributes," especially in their area of expertise, drawing on professionals such as carpenters or electricians.

Other improvements over the years have included the addition of Wi-Fi on the fairgrounds,

underground wires that used to hang across the fields, the ability to use credit cards and debit cards at the gates and an auxiliary parking area about a quarter-mile down the road that visitors can utilize (bus services are provided to the fair).

In 2005, when there was heavy vandalism to the fairgrounds, the Better Living building was burned down. It was later rebuilt, thus marking another fairly new addition to the grounds. "It set us back a ways and it took a while to recover from that," Lee said of the vandalism, but added that a lot of people pitched in and helped to bring the fairgrounds back into working order.

The Hebron Harvest Fair will run from Thursday, Sept. 9, through Sunday, Sept. 12, at 347 Gilead St. on Route 85. Gates are open on Thursday from 4-10 p.m., Friday from noon-11 p.m., Saturday from 9 a.m.-11 p.m. and Sunday from 9 a.m.-8 p.m.

Admission is \$12 and youths 12 and under accompanied by an adult are free. Seniors can attend the fair free of charge on Friday until 4 p.m. Tickets are available for purchase at the gates and at www.HebronHarvestFair.org.

For more information and a complete, daily fair schedule, visit the website.

New Principal Introduces Himself to Marlborough School Board

by Katy Nally

At a Board of Education meeting last Thursday, Aug. 26, Principal Scott Nierendorf gave board members a short preview of this year's Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) scores and discussed recent staff changes for the district.

In addition to Nierendorf, there are four other staff members who are new to Elmer Thienes-Mary Hall Elementary School. Kristen Deliman and Beth Mackie will be long-term substitutes in grades four and two, respectively, Patricia Aloisi is coming on board as the school's occupational therapist and Dena DeJulius is the new assistant principal.

Last Thursday was Nierendorf's inaugural Marlborough Board of Education (BOE) meeting.

"I'm really happy to be here," Nierendorf told the board, adding Thursday was his first chance to see the elementary school filled with children. "The hallways got some use and that was an extraordinary part of our day today," he said.

While Nierendorf introduced himself to the BOE, the school's now-former assistant principal, Maylah Uhlinger, said her goodbyes.

"I've been blessed to have had 10 years in this wonderful school," Uhlinger, who is now principal of Carl Allgrove Elementary School in East Granby, told the BOE. "I really feel the district is in good hands."

Uhlinger's replacement, DeJulius, comes to Marlborough from Manchester. Beginning in 2009, DeJulius was the assistant principal at Illing Middle School. Before that, from 2007-09, she was the K-12 curriculum supervisor of mathematics for the Manchester district.

DeJulius got her start as a classroom teacher at Nathan Hale School in Manchester, teaching grades four and five from 1995-2000.

"Dena DeJulius is the ideal candidate," Superintendent of Schools David Sklarz told the board. "She has a personality and a lot of energy and passion." But, he added, "Maylah's will be tough shoes to fill."

With the new additions to the school's administration, Sklarz stressed, "This really is the beginning of a new era – who do we want to be in the future?"

Much of the rest of the meeting focused on

CMT scores. Last year's students did very well on the CMTs, Nierendorf told the board, and their marks "really reflects the hard work of the previous administration" and current teachers, he said.

Nierendorf partly attributed the high scores to Scientific Research-Based Intervention (SRBI), which groups students into three tiers to target their specific needs, then an intervention method can be tailored to each group.

BOE Chairwoman Betty O'Brien said the program works well because it doesn't let children fall under the radar and then cater to their needs after it's too late.

Nierendorf said he would put together a presentation to parents, over the next few months, about SRBI to explain how it works.

"We need to clarify for parents what that means," he said.

Besides SRBI, the board also took a look at the school-wide benchmark for CMTs scores. Currently, the administration sets the bar at having 85 percent of Elmer Thienes-Mary Hall students reaching goal on the CMTs in all three

subjects: reading, writing and math. Goal is one of five categories for scores on the CMTs, which are: below basic, basic, proficient, goal and advanced.

Looking at the overall data, Nierendorf said "we've exceeded or met [the 85-percent benchmark] in most areas," which prompted the discussing of possibly setting that standard higher for Marlborough students.

"Relative to where we're performing now, that's an insufficient goal," Uhlinger noted.

Several board members agreed with Uhlinger, saying the bar should be set higher, but no standard was decided on.

O'Brien said she liked the fact the BOE and the school's administration was revisiting the 85-percent goal.

The board agreed to discuss possibly setting a new benchmark at a future meeting. A more in-depth review of the CMT scores will also be given at a future meeting.

The next regularly scheduled BOE meeting will be held Thursday, Sept. 23, at 7 p.m. in the elementary school's media center.

RHAM School Board OKs Use of Drug-Sniffing Dogs

by Lindsay Fetzner

The Board of Education (BOE) unanimously voted to authorize Superintendent of Schools Bob Siminski to start the process surrounding the use of drug-sniffing dogs at its meeting Monday evening.

BOE Chairman Mike Turner said last week that during the spring months, the administration considered preventative measures that could be put in place regarding the use of drugs on the school premises. The school has not had an overly large problem with drugs in the past; there have been 11 drug-related student expulsions since 2006. But, Turner said, this move is designed to be preventative, as opposed to reactive.

"Drugs don't belong in school," he said last week.

Siminski told the board Monday that he wanted permission to move forward and start the process, which he said would be made "as transparent as possible," a recommendation from other communities. He added that he wanted to include both students and parents in the process as well, and that it is his goal "to keep everyone informed every step of the way."

"It's not about catching kids, but saying we won't tolerate it," Siminski said. He later added, "The total goal of the project is to keep the stuff out of the schools."

The board's vote is the first step in moving forward with the use of the dogs, as Siminski said he still "needs to work out the details with the State Police." The cost of the service is free to the district, provided by the State Police, Siminski said. On Tuesday, Turner said that Siminski still has a lot of "groundwork to do" including student and parent awareness as well as working out the specifics of the program.

A memorandum from board attorney Richard Mills addressing the use of drug-sniffing dogs in faculty areas was also discussed. The

memorandum states that a board member questioned whether the dogs should also be used to sniff property either belonging or controlled by teachers. In response, it states, "For legal and practical reasons, we recommend that drug-detecting dogs be limited to sniffs of unattended school property controlled by students – such as student lockers and student cars – and that the dogs not sniff property controlled by teachers."

The memorandum states that there are several aspects that differentiate between searching students' possessions versus possessions of the teachers that could raise legal concerns. The example of a student locker was given. According to the memorandum, the students control their own lockers. When a drug-detecting dog "alerts to an unattended locker, the individual student controlling that locker is easily identified and located."

However, teachers often share rooms, lounges and classrooms with other staff and students. And, when the teacher-accessible common areas are searched, all teachers would have to be removed from the area prior to the search.

The memorandum stated that "even if the dog were to alert on an item in such an area, it might be difficult to identify the teacher who brought the contraband or illegal drugs into that common area."

For these reasons, the memorandum says to use caution against using the dogs to "sniff all employees' property." However, despite this, it says that RHAM High School administration "retains the ability to address individual situations that may arise with a specific employee."

Some board members said that by only using the dogs in common areas, as opposed to the whole school, "safe zones" would be created.

BOE member James Cherry said a lot of dis-

tricts have put similar actions in place, where the dogs sniff for drugs in these common areas, such as the students' lockers and in the parking lots. Cherry said, "It's not about catching the people, it's about making people aware that this could happen and people could be caught." The dogs can't hurt, he said Tuesday, they can only help.

"We are serious about it," he said at the BOE meeting. "There is no reason for drugs in the school."

Turner agreed with Cherry, and added, "there are some things it does, there's a lot it doesn't do." Although every situation dealing with drugs will not be discovered, Turner said, it is "something that can be done to let students know that some stuff doesn't belong in schools."

As opposed to reactive measures like school expulsions, "it is one of the proactive things we can try and do," Turner said.

Statistics show that overall, RHAM High School has expelled 28 students between the 2006-07 and the 2009-10 school years. Out of that figure, 11 were due to drugs, with the most in the latter two years.

In the 2006-07 school year, there was one expulsion, due to prescription drugs. The following year, in 2007-08, there were a total of 12 expulsions, with one for the "procurement of drugs on school grounds." In 2008-09, the overall number decreased to seven, with four expulsions due to drugs – two for prescription drugs, one for the sale and distribution of marijuana and one for the possession of marijuana. And, in the 2009-10 school year, there were a total of eight expulsions, five dealing with drugs. They included drug possession (marijuana), procurement/ sale of drugs, sale and distribution of marijuana, drug paraphernalia and possession of a controlled substance.

In other news, the board approved the superintendent's contract and extended it by one year. Siminski's raise, however, will be deferred until his retirement or until he leaves the district, Siminski said. Cherry said Siminski has not taken a raise the past two years and due to the "really tight budget," Siminski was concerned with taking a raise at this time. The raise, which amounts to \$6,000, will be spread out over time, as opposed to a lump sum, Cherry said, upon leaving the district.

By deferring the raise, Siminski is showing he is "really dedicated," Cherry said. "His heart is in the right place."

Siminski's salary is currently \$138,986, covering the two schools in the district. Siminski said other aspects of his contract remain constant, with the exception of his health insurance contribution, which was bumped from 18 percent to 20 percent.

The superintendent's salary is comparable to other school superintendents in the surrounding communities. Hebron Superintendent of Schools Ellie Cruz earns \$133,245 covering two schools. In East Hampton, Judith Golden earns \$142,359 covering four schools (but will take three furlough days to return approximately \$2,000 to the East Hampton BOE), while in Portland, Sally Doyen earns \$149,590 covering five schools (but will not be receiving the full amount to help with budget cuts). Glastonbury Superintendent of Schools Alan Bookman earns \$154,835 covering nine schools, while in Colchester, Karen Loiselle earns \$139,229 covering four schools and in Bolton, Paul Smith earns \$130,000 covering two schools.

The next BOE meeting is slated for Monday, Sept. 20, at 6:30 p.m., in the chorus room at RHAM High School, 85 Wall St., Hebron.

Portland Korean War Veterans Honored for Service

by Claire Michalewicz

It's often called The Forgotten War, but on Monday, 40 local veterans of the Korean War were honored with a special ceremony.

Secretary of State Susan Bysiewicz presented the 38 men and two women with Public Service Awards to honor their service in the military, and offered them the chance to share their stories.

Monday's ceremony at Portland High School was the first such ceremony in the state, Bysiewicz said, explaining that she was working to schedule similar events in other towns.

Though the Korean War had no official start or end, Bysiewicz said, it was costly, with over 36,000 U.S. military personnel killed, including 326 from Connecticut. Another 80 Connecticut soldiers, Bysiewicz said, are still missing in action.

After returning home, Bysiewicz said, Korean War veterans were often "granted a kind of second-class status," forgotten between the veterans of larger, longer wars like World War II and Vietnam.

"These men and women could not stand idly by in the face of a communist threat," Bysiewicz said. Despite the hardships and atrocities of the war, she said, "you never gave up and fought very valiantly."

State Representative Jim O'Rourke, present at the ceremony, said, "To face bullets and bombs on behalf of your country takes a tremendous love for your community."

O'Rourke commended the veterans for their civic involvement, explaining that he personally knew most of them because of their contributions to Portland.

First Selectwoman Susan Bransfield also spoke, thanking her fellow selectmen and the Veterans Affairs Committee for their work in organizing the event. She also commended Town Clerk Bernadette Dillon for collecting the

names of Portland's Korean War veterans. Above all, Bransfield thanked the veterans in attendance for fighting to preserve freedom.

After an invocation from Reverend F. William Hodge, chaplain for the Portland Volunteer Fire Department, Bysiewicz offered veterans the opportunity to speak. Several of them stood up to share stories about their experiences in the military, both in Korea and elsewhere.

Victor Favara explained that he was getting ready to be deployed to Korea when his time in the National Guard was up. Many of the soldiers he went through training with did fight in Korea, though.

"Our hearts and our souls were with the ones who went over to fight," Favara said.

"War is hell," said Nick Cannata, "but the funny thing is, I loved the Army." What he loved about it, Cannata explained, was the quality of his fellow soldiers, whom he was proud to have served with.

Bill Martz said he was relieved as a 16-year-old, when World War II ended and he thought he wouldn't have to go to war. Eight years later, he was flying combat missions over Korea. While there, Martz also met his wife, Priscilla, a fellow Navy veteran who was also honored at Monday's service.

Their stories were not all somber – Bill Sanborn told how he was monitoring radar and put the entire West Coast on alert for a rocket attack, only to later realize that the blip he saw approaching on his screen was his own radar signal bouncing back.

After they shared their stories, Bysiewicz and state Director of Civics Education Tammy Marzik presented each veteran with a certificate honoring their service.

Veteran Thomas Manning was especially proud during the ceremony. As he walked up to collect his certificate, he told Bransfield he had just found out from a text message that he had



Thomas Manning, shown here with State Representative Jim O'Rourke, Secretary of State Susan Bysiewicz and Portland First Selectwoman Susan Bransfield, was one of 40 Korean War veterans to receive an award in recognition of his military service at a ceremony held Monday.

become a great-grandfather for the first time, to a baby girl named Makayla.

"It's a great omen, a great thing," Manning said. "It's quite a day."

Joe Vinci brought along memorabilia from the war, including an album of photos he took while stationed in Korea. Don Markham also brought a collection of photos from his time on the USS Tarawa. Though the aircraft carrier was sold for scrap decades ago, Markham said, he still meets with his former shipmates twice a year.

After the ceremony, John Ruscica said he was honored to receive the award.

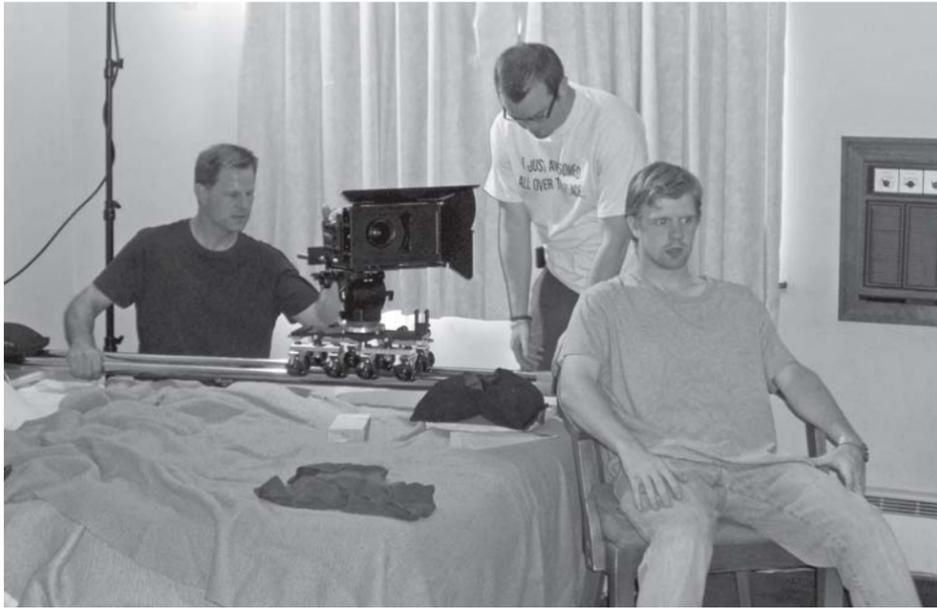
"A lot of people today don't know about the Korean War," Ruscica added, explaining that he felt people tried to dismiss it by describing

it as a police action, or calling it a "conflict" instead of a "war."

Ruscica noted that he never actually served in Korea, instead being stationed in Iceland during the war. But, he said, the ceremony was an honor for him and the other veterans, especially those who did go to Korea.

"I'm thrilled to death that the little town of Portland did this," Ruscica said.

Dillon said she had initially contacted 109 Korean-era veterans in Portland, and she still has 69 certificates to distribute to those who did not attend the ceremony. Any veteran who was invited but did not attend, Dillon said, can come to the Town Clerk's office or call 860-342-6743 to collect their award.



The Riverdale Motel was the setting for Ryan Casey's independent film *American Jubilee* last Saturday. Pictured above is Casey, center, reviewing a take shot by John Galvin, right, with help from Mike Patick, left.



Ryan Casey's film *American Jubilee* was shot last Saturday in Portland. Above, John Galvin, left, and Mike Patrick, center, film actor David Thomas McLaine.

Portland Makes Appearance in Feature Film

by Katy Nally

No words were spoken between the two actors in scene 54 of *American Jubilee*, but take three was last Saturday morning's money shot because it captured the tension between siblings Avery and Kenzie McCormick.

With the salmon curtains drawn, and the faint smell of hot laminating film wafting down from the tall bright lights in the corner – to bathe the room in a pink glow – David Thomas McLaine and Rebecca Dale acted out their roles in room 38 at the classic Riverdale Motel in Portland.

The film, directed by Ryan Casey, depicts a modern family that is essentially falling to pieces.

"They each kind of have an issue they're trying to work through," Casey explained. "Each one is in their own world."

The single father of three, Otis McCormick, is dying from "general exhaustion" ever since his wife left him due to his constant womanizing, Casey said. "He's not really coming through on being a father to any of them," he added.

The oldest son, Avery, can't seem to hold a job, but decides to interview eccentric people he meets around town, one of whom is a burglar who goes by the name "Mittens." "He sort of throws himself into different things," Casey said.

Kenzie, the middle child, is juggling college, a love interest and her haphazard family. "She's really a good natured person," Casey said, "She's trying to help her family members." But, he added, "Kenzie kind of has control issues and she's trying to get over that."

And then there's Claude, the 9-year-old delinquent who runs a gambling ring at school. "He's just kind of doing his own thing because he doesn't really have a moral compass," Casey explained.

But, what moviegoers won't see when the independent film premieres Jan. 1, 2011, are the folks behind the scenes – and in Saturday's case, those who were crammed into the bathroom, in between the wall and the bed and in the closet – that made *American Jubilee* possible. Assistant Director Katrina Zickwolf explained "you won't be the pure popcorn eater" once viewers realize the amount of work that occurs off screen.

Including the actors, there are about 35 crew members working on set, the majority of whom are volunteers.

The production comprises mostly Connecticut natives, except a few actors, so, they figured, why not film in their home state? Casey, of Bristol, said he chose to shoot last weekend at the Riverdale Motel and *The Wedding Dress* because "we wanted something to fit our two main characters."

"In Portland, we have finally found what we were looking for," he said. "They both look so great and we wanted to capture this on film."

Locations manager and East Hampton resident Sarah Trobaugh said Casey wanted sets that were reminiscent of "bygone days," she said.

"All of our sets kind of had that cozy, nostalgic feeling," Trobaugh said.

In addition to Portland, the crew has filmed scenes in at Grant's Restaurant in West Hart-

ford, the Center of Medical Arts and Allen Street in New Britain, and other towns, including Bristol, Terryville, Cromwell and Waterbury.

Scene 54, shot at the motel last weekend, showed Kenzie's concern for her brother Avery, who was temporarily shackled up in room 38. After reviewing take two, Casey told the actors that Avery is supposed to stand in place as Kenzie walks past him.

Casey explained this action is significant because "Avery isn't asking for help, and this further aligns itself with Kenzie being a little bit pushy in regards to his life.

"That's a consistent theme throughout the movie for Kenzie," he added.

And the actors immediately took to Casey's direction.

"Okay, I'll hold my ground and you push through," McLaine told Dale.

In the scene, Kenzie, the family fixer, came to bring Avery "vitamins" – Red Delicious apples she quarters with a Swiss Army knife.

And to make sure Casey got the scene just right, there was a whole shopping bag full of shiny Red Delicious apples hidden in the small bathroom.

The apples were an example of the continuity that Casey and his crew members strived to achieve for *American Jubilee*. Everything, from the pile of clothes clumped on the motel bed to the guitar strap laying over Avery's instrument to Kenzie's pink tank top, was manicured for each shot.

Amber Graham, who handled costume and wardrobe, explained continuity for each take

was extremely important so that, when edited, the film won't show any small discrepancies between scenes.

Graham fussed over Kenzie's tank top before each scene, making sure the wrinkles and fit were just right.

"That pink shirt is going to be the bane of my existence," she said jokingly.

In about an hour and a half, the *American Jubilee* crew had shot scene 54, as well as 54A, B, C and D, which all took place in room 38. Once inside the room, each take included the same dialogue between Avery and Kenzie, except the camera angles changed.

In total, Saturday's work at the motel will probably yield about 3-4 minutes of actual footage, Casey said. But, even though their efforts will only amount to minutes on the silver screen, Casey said he was "really happy" with the work everyone accomplished Saturday.

"Dave and Becca kept getting their lines and hitting their marks," he said. "Everyone was hitting on all cylinders, which will make the editing process easier."

With filming is winding down (Saturday's shoot was the second-to-last day for filming), Casey said he's excited to see the final product. The director admitted he was "nervous going into it," but the cast and crew quickly made him feel at ease with the production.

"You just got to throw yourself in and do your best," Casey said.

For more information about *American Jubilee*, visit ajmovie.com or e-mail Casey at ryan@ajmovie.com. *American Jubilee* is still accepting donations to complete production.

Portland Veteran Returns Home From Year in Kuwait

by Claire Michalewicz

Michael Leroux just returned from a year of serving in the Army, but he insists that his family are the real heroes.

The Connecticut National Guard member was honored by local officials in a ceremony last Monday, Aug. 23, at Town Hall. Leroux, 47, a chief warrant officer in the 169th Aviation Regiment, spent a year stationed in Kuwait flying Blackhawk helicopters on missions in and out of Iraq.

After a ceremony, Leroux said that while what he did might have been difficult, it was even harder for his family to stay at home without him.

"You learn to deal with blood and guts, but when it comes to something like this, I get very emotional," Leroux said.

Accompanying Leroux at the ceremony were his wife, Julie, 41, and three of their children – Katelyn, 14, Chris, 12, and Matt, 11. The Lerouxes have another daughter, 22-year-old Nina, who gave birth to a son, Caden, in January. Nina and her husband Geoff were unable to make it to the ceremony, but Michael said he'd had a chance to meet Caden for the first time after arriving home.

"The Town of Portland is fortunate to have you as a citizen," said Veterans Affairs Commission (VAC) Chairman Reg Farrington, presenting Leroux with proclamations from the commission and the Board of Selectmen.

"We're proud, Michael," VAC member Bill Willinsky added. "We're proud to have you home."

First Selectwoman Susan Bransfield explained that she had known the Lerouxes for years and had always been impressed with their involvement in the town and their knowledge of local issues. Several years ago, she explained, Julie Leroux had been instrumental in getting some tax cuts passed for veterans in Portland.

A high school math teacher, Julie volunteered her services to the town as part of a class project

for her master's degree. She conducted a statistical analysis of veterans' benefits that were available, and helped the town of Portland enact new exemptions made property tax assistance available to veterans in certain income brackets.

State Representative Jim O'Rourke and State Senator Eileen Daily presented Leroux with another proclamation from the Connecticut General Assembly. "Mike, like with our other vets that have come home, we're very happy to have you back here," O'Rourke said. "We're also very thankful for your service." O'Rourke pointed out that Katelyn, Chris and Matt were the same ages as his three children, so he felt a special bond with the family.

Michael Leroux explained that joining the Army in 1984 – "a nice quiet time" – had been "the scariest thing I've ever done." Leroux served several years on active duty, and deployed to Kuwait last August.

"It was fun; it was a challenge," he said. "It was an honor to be able to serve."

Julie said the family had good days and bad days while Michael was deployed. The nights, Chris pointed out, were usually worse than the days, since he and his family were usually busy during the days. In the evenings, he said, he started thinking more about his father and missing him.

"We just stayed as busy as we could," Julie said, explaining that with cell phones, Skype web-based video chat and e-mail, they were able to stay in close contact even when he was in Kuwait. "We took it one day at a time."

"The kids were definitely proud of their dad," she added, explaining that at times, she felt they were stronger than her. She also thanked the community for their support, explaining that volunteers came to her house to help with cooking and yard work.

Having Michael home, Matt said, was "awesome." He added that the three things his fa-



Chief Warrant Officer Michael Leroux was welcomed home to Portland in a ceremony held at Town Hall last week. Leroux is shown here with his wife, Julie, and children Chris, Matt and Katelyn.

ther missed most when he was gone were grass, rain and "real food."

Leroux said he hopes to rejoin The Hartford, his former employer, in a few weeks, but for now he's looking forward to spending time with children, as well as tackling the list of household chores Julie has compiled for him.

Leroux arrived home from Kuwait Aug. 6, and his family was waiting at the airport to meet

him. "Right when we saw the plane, everybody started screaming," Matt said. Shortly afterward, the family piled in the car and took a two-week road trip across the country, covering 6,500 miles before arriving home on Sunday.

"It was so much fun," Michael said. "Nothing but immediate family, just getting to know each other again."

East Hampton Middle School Community Mourning Teachers

by Claire Michalewicz

East Hampton Middle School opened its doors for the start of classes this past Monday, but this year there were two familiar faces missing. Social studies teacher Robert "Bob" Hodgson and French and Spanish teacher Robert "Bobby" Surdel, both died unexpectedly in August, both at the age of 62.

"It was very difficult opening for us and we're all trying to move on," said John Fidler, the school's principal. "They both were just vital, vital members of our staff and our community."

Surdel, he said, was a "very colorful" man, who showed a lot of passion for the French and Spanish languages and cultures. Fidler said one of Surdel's annual traditions was an escargot-tasting party for students, which for many of them, was their only chance to try eating snails.

"He just loved being here," Fidler said. "He loved being with the kids."

Superintendent of Schools Dr. Judith Golden agreed said the feeling was mutual.

"The students loved him and they loved world languages because of him," Golden said.

Aside from languages, Golden said, Surdel's other great passion was fashion. "You could put him on the cover of *GQ*," she said.

Surdel's niece, Stacey Johansen, was also impressed by her uncle's fashion sense, explaining that he loved to shop and had coordinated outfits for any occasion. His other main interests, Johansen explained, were music – espe-

cially Madonna – and tropical fish, which he kept in several tanks in his home. Johansen said her uncle diligently cleaned the fish tanks every Saturday.

Ed Boyle, one of Surdel's colleagues in the world languages department, said Surdel was well-liked in the school, but didn't want to comment about him because he was "a private person."

"What I will state is that his students missed him very much today," Boyle said in an e-mail on Monday, the first day of classes. "We ALL miss him at EHMS and keep his family in prayer."

Fidler said that just as much as Surdel "loved his languages," Hodgson "loved and took pride in our country." Fidler said Hodgson gave inspiring speeches during the school's Memorial Day observances, stressing the solemnity of the occasion.

Hodgson was always willing to take on extra responsibilities, Fidler said. He was usually one of the first teachers to arrive and one of the last to leave, and he also took on administrative duties when the principal or assistant principal had to leave the building, Fidler said.

Hodgson had a 35-year career with East Hampton schools, previously working as the assistant principal of EHMS for several years, as well as teaching social studies.

"He was a man of character," his fiancée, Su-

san Smialowski, said, and he managed multiple careers at once, serving as a part-time police officer on weekends, and even shipping out for active duty with the Coast Guard twice while teaching. Another huge passion of his was the Masons, which Smialowski said he was actively involved in.

Colleagues, family and even a former student remembered Hodgson for his commitment to his country and his community.

"This was a good dude," former East Hampton Middle School student Jason Cronen said. Cronen, now 30 and living in South Carolina, said he always remembered Hodgson as being a great teacher.

Cronen said he thought Hodgson intimidated many other students, coming across as a strict disciplinarian. But, Cronen said, Hodgson also had a loud laugh.

Golden agreed. "He had a smile that could light up a room," she said.

Influenced by his many years in the Coast Guard, Cronen said, Hodgson tried to encourage students to make a difference in the world.

"He encouraged a sense of participation in the community," Cronen said. "That call to service is so important right now in this country."

"He was a true leader and a friend," Cronen added.

"Bob was a wonderful person," Smialowski said. He was instrumental in many of his stu-

dents' lives, she added, explaining that she heard of several students who had joined the military because of him.

"Mr. Hodgson was one of the best models of how to do the job that I have ever seen," said Rich Storrs, one of Hodgson's fellow social studies teachers. "He was tough but fair and fun."

Storrs said Hodgson had a way of adapting to each student he spoke to, making a joke or adding a comment that was suited to that student's sense of humor. After working with Hodgson for years, Storrs said, it was difficult to see his classroom with someone else now teaching in it.

"He was a role model that I could only hope to look up to," Storrs said.

Surdel, too, was also an inspiration to Storrs, who said Surdel had "a bottomless bag of tricks" he used to teach students about language.

"My uncle liked his solitude, but he loved his family and close friends," Johansen said. "He would do anything for them. He would do most anything for his students as well."

"It still feels unreal to all of us," she added. "He was very loved and is sorely missed by all."

Storrs said the loss of two well-liked teachers was "weighing on many people's minds."

"They will be missed by staff and students alike," he added.

Andover Selectmen Agree to Use LoCIP Funds for Senior Center

by Lindsay Fetzner

The Board of Selectmen (BOS) voted to use Local Capital Improvement Program funds to make upgrades to the senior center, and purchase a security system and defibrillator for the Town Office Building.

Local Capital Improvement Program (LoCIP) funds provide financial assistance to municipalities for projects, such as construction for public buildings, roads and bridges, according to the Office of Policy and Management (OPM). Projects utilizing the money can be used for repairs for reconstruction and renovation, however, cannot be used for routine maintenance.

As of this past March, the town of Andover's entitlements from LoCIP was \$134,911. Out of this figure, the BOS voted to allocate up to \$1,500 for a defibrillator, up to \$2,000 for an emergency communication system and up to \$25,000 for senior center upgrades.

First Selectman Bob Burbank said a highlight to the defibrillators is that "anyone that's not trained can use it," as they are "almost fool-proof." The defibrillators have step-by-step in-

structions on how to utilize them, Burbank said. However, the board said they are looking to have two people certified in the Town Office Building on their use, who will undergo training.

The security system would include both cameras and panic buttons for staff to use in the event of an emergency. Cameras would be installed at the entrances to the office building, and panic buttons would be placed in the town offices.

BOS member Jay Linddy noted that although Andover "hasn't had any problems," it is more or less a proactive measure.

Burbank said there was discussion with both the town safety committee and staff in the Town Office Building, and this was "something they thought we needed."

The final area to use LoCIP funds is at the senior center, housed in the old firehouse. Due to the fact that Small Town Economic Assistance Program (STEAP) funds the town received in 2009 cannot be put toward the senior center, another option is to use LoCIP funds

for the building upgrades.

In 2008, town officials applied for a \$500,000 STEAP grant with the intention of applying for an additional \$500,000 Small Cities to hopefully fund building a new senior center. However, due to restrictions with the grant – such as requiring the senior center to serve only those 65 and older, and to be open the same hours as Town Hall – the town decided not to pursue it.

But, in September 2009, Andover officials found out the town was the recipient of a \$250,000 STEAP grant to be put toward a new senior center. However, because this money was not enough to construct a new building and only half of the amount applied for, the town considered several options for where to put the money at the time.

Renovating the old firehouse on Center Street, the location of the current senior center, was one possibility. But, if any renovations were made to the old firehouse, the building must be brought up to code. Costs were estimated to be greater than the actual grant amount.

Another option was to apply for a Small Cit-

ies grant and use those funds in addition to the STEAP funds for a new senior center, as the restrictions that had kept the town from applying for a grant from Small Cities in 2008 had since changed.

However, even \$750,000 was not enough to construct a new senior center with, town officials felt. To further compound the problem, senior centers are a fairly low priority for Small Cities grants, so town officials decided – again – not to apply for it.

So, due to the fact that STEAP funds that the town received for will not be put toward the building, due to a shortage in funding, Burbank said the LoCIP money could be used to "make that a much more presentable place."

Burbank and Linddy said a priority list will be compiled, with what upgrades can be done to the senior center with the allocated funds. Lighting and the building's entrance ramp were two areas mentioned to be addressed.

The next meeting of the BOS is slated for Wednesday, Oct. 6, at 7 p.m. in the Town Office Building.

East Hampton Convicted Killer Gets Thirty Years in Prison

by Claire Michalewicz

A local man has been sentenced to 30 years in prison in connection with the beating death of a man in the woods.

David J. Hill, 26, formerly of East Hampton, was convicted of manslaughter in June of this year, after being charged with second-degree murder for allegedly beating Louis D'Antonio to death in 2005.

Last Friday, Hill was sentenced to 10 years for conspiracy to commit assault, and 20 years for the manslaughter charge. A third, five-year sentence for tampering with evidence will be served concurrently, bringing the total to 30 years.

Hill and another local man, Edgar Canterbury, were charged in connection with D'Antonio's death in 2008. According to the affidavit, Canterbury had a fight with D'Antonio earlier that summer, and persuaded Hill to come with him to the campsite where D'Antonio was living to frighten him.

Hill and Canterbury allegedly beat D'Antonio to death with a steel rebar, fleeing the scene and burying the bar in the woods. D'Antonio's body was found a month later, and after three years of investigation, Hill and Canterbury were arrested and charged with murder. Canterbury is still awaiting trial.

D'Antonio's brother Jay declined to comment on the sentencing. "We just want to move forward, to move on," he said.

D'Antonio did thank the East Hampton police department and the trial jury for their work



Louis D'Antonio

in the case.

"They went out there and they worked hard, and so did a lot of other people," D'Antonio said. He added that he and his family missed Louis, explaining that his brother had been "a valued member of the family."

Hill's attorney, J. Patten Brown, could not be reached for comment.

Chemical Bomb Found in East Hampton Mailbox

by Claire Michalewicz

Police are investigating a chemical bomb that was found in a mailbox last Friday.

East Hampton Police Sergeant Garritt Kelly said the bomb, found in the mailbox at 11 North Cone Rd. the evening of Friday, Aug. 27, consisted of chemicals in a plastic bottle. Kelly said the bomb was what is commonly referred to as a "toilet bomb," due to the chemicals used. It caused "a rather minor explosion," Kelly said.

"We don't have any leads on it at this point," Kelly said.

Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) spokeswoman Cyndy Chanaca said a DEP crew responded to the scene around 9:30 p.m., when the East Hampton Volunteer Fire Department called them for assistance.

The DEP crew neutralized the acid in the bottle and cleaned up the mess, Chanaca said. She said there was no environmental damage

from the bomb.

Julie Gerzabek, who lives at the North Cone Road home, said that when she arrived home last Friday evening, her husband said he had seen a car driving by the house slowly, but hadn't thought much of it. Shortly afterward, she said, he heard a loud bang coming from the mailbox, followed by a hissing noise. She and her husband decided to call the police, Gerzabek said.

"I don't know anyone who would have done it," Gerzabek said. "I hope it was random." Gerzabek said she was glad no one was hurt – many people walk on her street, she said, and someone could have been burned if they walked by the mailbox at the moment the bomb exploded.

Anyone who knows more information about the incident should call East Hampton Police at 860-267-9544.

Hebron Man Killed in East Hampton Crash

by Claire Michalewicz

A Hebron man was killed in a fiery one-car crash in East Hampton Tuesday afternoon.

Jacob Plude, 25, died after his car struck a tree on Chapman Road, just east of Berkshire Drive around 2:30 p.m., East Hampton Police Sergeant Garritt Kelly said. Plude's Chrysler Sebring burst into flames upon impact, Kelly said.

Neighborhood residents tried to extinguish the flames and take Plude out of the car, but they were unable to save him, Kelly said.

A man who heard the crash ran to the car with a fire extinguisher, but because of the intensity of the spreading fire, was unable to remove Plude from the wreckage, Kelly said.

"The fire overwhelmed the rescuers and caused them to have to retreat from their heroic rescue efforts," Kelly said.

When the man was trying to rescue the victim, Kelly said, another neighbor came across the street with a garden hose. Though she was

unable to reach the car with it, she used the hose to douse the flames that had spread to the first rescuer, Kelly said.

The East Hampton and Marlborough Volunteer Fire Departments, along with East Hampton Ambulance and a paramedic from Middlesex Hospital participated in the rescue, Kelly said.

Kelly said Plude was pronounced dead at the scene. Kelly said the state medical examiner's office was conducting an autopsy and identifying the body from dental records on Wednesday morning.

Kelly said police were still working to determine the cause of the crash.

"Speed's definitely a factor," he said. "It's definitely a high-speed impact." He said police were investigating other potential causes, such as distracted driving or intoxication.

Plude's obituary appears this week on page x.

Colchester Choir Tours Throughout Austria

by Katy Nally

After singing their way through Austria, and catching a world-renowned play in Germany, St. Andrew Choir members returned to their Colchester home Friday, Aug. 20.

The choir sang its most difficult piece yet, Franz Joseph Haydn's "Mariazellermesse," at the Salzburg Cathedral in Austria.

"Musically, this was the most challenging by far," Choir Director Colleen Puscas said. "It was just a lot of work," she added, laughing. But, she said, "We just felt so triumphant at the end of that Mass."

Puscas described the piece as many "sounds weaving in and out." She said the composition was polyphonic, as the St. Andrew Choir collaborated with the Salzburg Cathedral Choir and Orchestra.

The venue where the two choirs convened was the massive Salzburg Cathedral that seats 10,000 people, Puscas said. The full orchestra, in addition to both choirs, were two big draws for the Salzburg Cathedral Mass. Puscas said the large church was "literally jam-packed."

"It was an amazing place for performances," she said.

In addition to the Salzburg Cathedral, the St. Andrew Choir also toured the Melk Abbey in Melk, Austria, and St. Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna, Austria.

Puscas said 35 of her 70-member choir went along on the 10-day trip.

She said simply, it was the choir's chance to "sing and praise God in song." But, in order to debut their talents in Austria, the choir rehearsed

all summer, Puscas said. There were even special sessions for specific sections of the choir, like the tenors and basses.

But the payoff was great.

"It was exhilarating," Puscas said of the tour. "It was extraordinary and we just loved it."

Also as part of its tour, the choir stopped in Germany to attend the Oberammergau Passion Play that is performed only once every 10 years. Two years ago, Puscas purchased the tickets for the play that has been a decennial tradition in the village of Oberammergau since 1633.

Puscas explained the people of Oberammergau promised to perform the passion play every 10 years if God would stop the plague from killing any more villagers. Once the vow was made, Puscas said, no more Oberammergau villagers died, and the play has since been performed for over 200 years.

The production lasted about eight hours and included dinner, Puscas said.

"It's pretty magnificent," she added.

The August tour was actually the sixth traveling tour for the St. Andrew Choir, Puscas said. The choir's international venues began when the group sang at the 20th anniversary of Pope John Paul II's ordination. Puscas said the opportunity to perform at the celebration "happened by accident," after she applied for a program to "take you choir to Rome."

Since then, the agency that set up the 20th anniversary performance helped Puscas secure other tours for the choir. In 2001 the group went to France, in 2004, Ireland, in 2006 it was Wash-



The St. Andrew Choir recently visited cathedrals and palaces in Austria and Germany. Above, Choir Director Colleen Puscas conducts the group in the Melk Abbey, outside Salzburg, Austria.

ington, DC, and in 2008 the St. Andrew Choir went to Turkey and Greece.

Now that they're back, Puscas said, there might be plans to tour another venue that's not quite as far away as Europe.

But no matter where they are, Austria, Italy or Colchester, the choir members will continue performing.

"We're just people who like to sing," Puscas said.

Colchester Town Hall Employee Under Investigation

by Katy Nally

An active investigation regarding a "personnel matter" began Monday, First Selectman Gregg Schuster said this week.

Schuster could not comment on who or why the investigation began, but a source, who asked to remain anonymous, said it's a Town Hall employee.

Schuster said Tuesday "At this point, it does not involve the police."

The source said the employee under investigation allegedly hid a video camera in a room

and recorded fellow employees.

One of these employees who had been recorded, supposedly found the camera and "the rumor is, all the video has since been deleted," the source said this week.

The source said a grievance against the employee was expected to be filed with the Town Hall employees' union. As of press time, Connecticut Employees Union Independent office administrator Tracy Deegan said nothing had been filed by a Colchester Town Hall union member.

Colchester Charitable Organization Asked to Stop Soliciting

by Katy Nally

A charitable veterans' organization that solicits donations outside the Stop & Shop on Linwood Avenue was asked to leave last week, after a patron complained about the validity of the organization.

"They weren't above board," Stop & Shop Manager Jon Reardon said about The Veterans Support Organization. "They weren't accurately portraying themselves, let's put it that way."

The Veterans Support Organization chapter that includes Connecticut operates out of Warwick, RI, and, according to its website, it offers housing to homeless veterans and coordinates a job program.

Spokesperson for the organization, Hilarie Viener, said she had not received any information whatsoever that The Veterans Support Organization was asked to stop soliciting in front of the Stop & Shop. She said a store manager had asked the men collecting donations to leave after their four-hour time limit was up, but added she had not spoke with a Colchester Stop & Shop manager as of Wednesday.

The patron who complained to a Stop & Shop manager claimed a man collecting donations was not wearing military-issued fatigues.

Viener said the organization has a "very strict dress code policy" for the people who collect donations, the majority of whom are veterans. Viener explained the non-veterans are usually homeless and The Veterans Support Organiza-

tion accepts them into its job training program. If they are veterans, Viener said, they should be wearing their uniforms, but if they're not, they have a uniform issued by the organization, which is khaki pants and a shirt that reads "non-veteran."

But this complaint doesn't seem to be the first of its kind for The Veterans Support Organization. The group has received negative media coverage in North Carolina and Tennessee. (The organization has seven chapters: Georgia, New England, North Florida, South Florida, Tennessee, Texas and the Institute for Social Renewal, which includes Connecticut, New Jersey, New York and Pennsylvania.) Published reports in those two states have said veterans and non-veterans who solicit donations for The Veterans Support Organization are allowed to keep a percentage of what's collected as commission.

Viener explained that soliciting donations is one area of the job training program arranged by the organization. She said some veterans and non-veterans also work at thrift stores and in offices in other states.

When asked why a veterans' organization would allow non-veterans to solicit donations for a veterans' organization, Viener said the non-veterans in the job training program are homeless or near-homeless, "who actually need a fresh start."

Also in Tennessee, the organization was under investigation by Secretary of State Tre Hargett this year. According to a press release issued July 26 by Hargett, The Veterans Support Organization was found to be in violation of Tennessee's charitable solicitations law.

"The Veterans Support Organization (VSO) faces \$50,000 in civil penalties following an investigation by the Department of State's Division of Charitable Solicitations and Gaming," the release states. The investigation showed the organization violated the solicitation law 10 times "while engaging in fundraising efforts for its Tennessee chapter, with each offense carrying a penalty of \$5,000," it said.

Hargett said in the press release The Veterans Support Organization claimed in its written material its Tennessee chapter provides services like housing, job search assistance, bus passes, holiday meals and healthcare to veterans.

"However, the investigation concluded that the Tennessee chapter was not actually offering any of those services in Tennessee," the release said.

The chief financial officer for The Veterans Support Organization, John Nakowicz, said he anticipates the organization will be "more active in giving grants out [to veterans] and work-

ing with the local VAs" in Connecticut. He said that, since the organization just recently opened up a Connecticut office, it has not yet aligned itself with many area veterans' groups.

The Tennessee investigation also found The Veterans Support Organization did not register its state chapter with the Division of Charitable Solicitations and Gaming, as required by Tennessee law, the press release said.

Viener said the incident in Tennessee happened because a license had lapsed by a "matter of weeks" and it was later reissued.

According to the Connecticut Secretary of State's office, The Veterans Support Organization is registered as a charitable organization in Connecticut.

Reardon said The Veterans Support Organization had presented its tax-exempt certificate when it asked to solicit donations.

However, after The Veterans Support Organization was asked to stop soliciting outside the supermarket, Reardon said the Colchester Stop & Shop also filed a complaint with the Connecticut Department of Consumer Protection (DCP).

The DCP did not return calls for comment. Altogether, Reardon said, The Veterans Support Organization was outside the supermarket for just one day.

Gumby's Garden in Hebron Provides Homegrown Produce

by Lindsay Fetzner

What started as a seasonal youth activity alongside his father has slowly become a successful endeavor for 16-year-old David Johnston and his local business, Gumby's Garden.

"I've been gardening since I was tiny with my Dad," David said last week. David's father Ernie said the family always had a big garden at their Hebron home, which David lended a hand to since he was 4 or 5 years old. And, when he was about seven, Ernie said David started his own garden.

For about two and a half years, David has worked for a local farmer, Ned Ellis, on his Mapleleaf Farm on Route 85, where he assisted with farming and tending to the animals. When Ellis heard that David had ambitions to gain access to a field and begin growing crops to sell at a farm stand, David said Ellis offered a roughly 2-acre field on his farm for David to lease. Since Ellis leased the field to David last year, an activity that was once only in his backyard has transformed into a widely-known business endeavor.

"He's very, very energetic and a really nice kid," Ellis said, adding that David is also a "really good worker."

And as for the name, David says it comes from his younger years, when he was part of the Hebron youth wrestling team. "My wrestling coach gave me the name 'Gumby' because I was really flexible," he said.

David estimated he has 2,000 tomato plants that he grew over the spring and summer months, including three different varieties of heirloom tomatoes. Over time, David said, "It started getting bigger and bigger." Ernie said through trial and error, David learned the way of the land, which he referred to as a "second home and second job."

"We have lots of tomatoes," David said lightheartedly.

All of the plants, he said, were planted by hand at the end of May. Depending on the week, David said he picks the tomatoes every couple of days and in one day, can pick an astonishing 500 pounds of tomatoes. In addition to the tomatoes, David also grows broccoli, lettuce and jalapeno peppers.

Ernie said Dick Gotta, of Gotta's Farm in Portland, has also been "so instrumental in helping David" with both the produce and the plants. The Johnstons get corn from the farm to sell at the farm stand on the weekends.

With the help of his parents and three other siblings, David is able to operate a farm stand at Ellis' farm each weekend from 10 a.m.-6 p.m. David estimates that he will continue to sell

the produce until September or October, when his tomato crops run out.

"We have some people who are regulars and come almost every day we're open," David said.

Local support has helped David's successes along the way, be it donated business cards from one local resident or the opportunity to sell at the local area supermarkets.

Currently, David sells tomatoes at Ted's Supermarket in town, Pat's Market in Marlborough, as well as Westchester Market Place and Noel's Market in Colchester.

Westchester Market Place Produce Manager Tricia Fields said she was approached by David last week, and is the first time the supermarket has done business with him.

"That young man is awesome," Fields said. "He brought me some really pretty organic tomatoes." Fields added that she is very pleased so far in doing business with David, who she referred to as a "very professional young man."

Umar Jahangir, store manager of Pat's Market, said he received some of David's tomatoes this past weekend. These tomatoes, along with a local line of corn, peaches, squash and other tomatoes will be sold throughout the season. Jahangir also said this is the first time he has done business with David, like Westchester Market Place.

And at Ted's Supermarket, store manager David Armata said he has been selling David's tomatoes for a couple weeks. "We like to sell local stuff," Armata said, adding that sales of the tomatoes have been "excellent" lately.

In addition to selling his produce to the supermarkets in the local community, David also donates to Hebron Interfaith Human Services (HIHS) on a regular basis.

"They do so much for us," said Donna Ziegra, a volunteer at HIHS. "It's great to be able to give fresh produce [out]. It's wonderful."

At one point in July, Ziegra said David donated about 64 pounds, and in August, 221 pounds one week and 264 pounds another week. "It's huge amounts," Ziegra said.

David said the produce that does not sell at the farm stand each weekend goes directly to HIHS.

In August, David also donated to the mobile Foodshare van supply, which now comes to town every other Tuesday in the First Congregational Church parking lot. The event is in collaboration with HIHS and other local social services and food banks.

Although the endeavor is quite time consuming, David says it is all "really rewarding at the end of the season." Nearly everyday, David heads to the fields to harvest and tend to the



David Johnston, 16, began Gumby's Garden in 2009 and now sells his homegrown produce to area stores and donates to the local food bank. He is pictured above in front of his tomato plants, holding a box full of ripe red tomatoes.

plants.

"It starts from nothing every year and grows up to these huge plants," he said, adding that he enjoys seeing the plants progress throughout the season.

"They are beautiful, they look great," Ellis said of David's tomato plants. Ellis said David claims the manure had a hand in the crop success, but Ellis said he believes it was David's "TLC" that had helped in making it a great growing season.

At the beginning of the season, David said it was a huge investment, which included purchasing about 900 stakes and string to hold the plants, as well renting machinery.

"It's a big investment at first," he said.

The weeds, David said, have been one of the hardest aspects to keep under control. David said this year, he used newspaper to lay in sections between the plants to help with the weeds and also hold the moisture in. This, he said, was "extremely time-consuming," but he was lucky enough to have help from a couple of his friends.

David will be a junior this year at Lyman Memorial High School in Lebanon. He will continue to tend to the produce, he said, after he gets out of school in the afternoon hours. "It slows down a lot," David said. "[The plants are] not growing as much anymore and it's pretty much just picking and keeping the weeds down."

Drawing on his interest in farming, David is currently part of the agricultural science program at his high school, where two classes a day are set aside for agricultural-related curriculum. Also, through Lyman, David is a two-year member of the The National FFA Organization, which originally stood for Future Farmers of America (before the organization simply shortened it to FFA). The youth organization is involved in agricultural programs at both the middle and high schools at the local, state and national levels.

Looking ahead, David said he hopes to pursue the agricultural field when he graduates high school, and possibly go on to study either plant sciences or livestock.

A

Police News

8/24: Edward Ryba, 41, of 81 Graham Rd., East Hartford, was charged with a stop sign violation and operating a motor vehicle when license/registration is suspended, State Police said.

8/29: Chelsea Golden, 22, of 5 Glenwood Rd., Ellington, was charged with DWI and restricted use of left-hand lane, State Police said.

C

Colchester Police News

8/24: Nafiz Keskin, 46, of 104 Chestnut St., Manchester, was charged with DUI and failure to drive in proper lane, State Police said.

8/25: Tyler Poole, 18, of 92 Parum Rd., was charged with possession of less than four ounces of marijuana, Colchester Police said.

8/27: Gabriel Cordero-Matos, 23, of 76 Layzon Brothers Rd., Indian Orchard, MA, was charged with possession of less than four ounces of marijuana, State Police said.

8/30: A business owner reported several business checks were taken from his office and his signature was forged, Colchester Police said. Four checks had been cashed fraudulently.

8/30: Shane Boulais, 18, of 61 Standish Rd., was charged with possession of less than four ounces of marijuana and possession of drug paraphernalia, Colchester Police said.

M

Police News

8/26: Michael Appleton, 55, of 51 West Rd., was charged with DUI and making an improper turn, State Police said.

8/30: Sometime between 9 a.m.-2 p.m. an unknown suspect kicked in the front door of a residence on James Lane and activated the alarm system, State Police said. The suspect fled without entering the home. Anyone with more information is asked to contact the Marlborough Resident State Trooper's office at 860-295-9098 or Troop K at 860-537-7500 and reference case number 1000471723.

8/30: Lorenzo Dunn, 42, of 228 North Windham Rd., Windham, was charged with possession of less than four ounces of marijuana, State Police said.

S

Salem Police News

8/25: A residence on Norwich Road was forcibly entered and numerous items were taken including jewelry, money, tickets to various theatrical plays and other personal effects, State Police said. Anyone with more information is asked to contact Trooper Carson Konow at 860-537-7555, ext. 4046.

EH

Police News

8/14: Peter Atkins, 42, of 33 West High St., was arrested for disorderly conduct and criminal damage to landlord's property, East Hampton Police said.

8/22: Tasha M. Hall, 22, of 21 Hilltop Rd., was arrested for third-degree assault and disorderly conduct, police said.

8/23: Gilbert Donald Goslin, 49, of no certain address, was arrested for fourth-degree larceny, credit card theft and illegal use of a credit card, police said.

8/23: Gary Messier, 35, of 19 Main St., was arrested for third-degree assault, second-degree strangulation, disorderly conduct and interfering with a police officer, police said.

Obituaries

East Hampton

Laura Jensen

Laura Esther Madeline Hansen Jensen, beloved mother and dear friend to many, left this life peacefully on Sunday, Aug. 29, at the Salmon Brook Center in Glastonbury.

Laura, a life-long resident of Old Marlborough Road, East Hampton, was born on July 15, 1921, in her family home on Lake Pocotopaug. She was the daughter of Ellen (Johansson) and Hans M. Hansen, and baby sister to Carl, Henry and Albert Hansen.

Throughout her life, she was a popular and valued employee of many town establishments including Sunset View, her family's summer boarding house during the pre-WWII years, and after her graduation from Middletown High School in 1939, the local light company office, Clark's Corner Store, and Palm's Delicatessen. She was also an energetic participant in numerous community activities over the years from garden club to friends of the library and a long-time member of the East Hampton Congregational Church.

Laura married her childhood sweetheart, Charles Christian Jensen Jr., in a garden wedding at her parents' home on July 3, 1943, and they lived happily together until his untimely death in 1980.

She and Charles had two daughters: Marcia, wife of Howard W. Newkirk, now of Boyne City, MI and Jill, wife of Michael B. Foster, still of East Hampton.

She also leaves behind her three cherished granddaughters: Wendy (Newkirk), wife of David Collins of Aurora, CO, and mother of Laura's three exceptional great-grandchildren, Tyler, Riley and Kelsey Collins; Katherine (Kate) Jensen Foster, a visual artist currently living in Providence, RI; and Emily Bronson Foster, now attending Lyme Academy College of Fine Art; the eldest of her much-loved, large extended family of nieces and nephews, Evelyn (Hansen) Franson of Rangeley, ME, and Eleanor (Hansen) Burgess of Killingworth; her special "adopted" granddaughter, Sarah Doris Nielsen, daughter of Randolph ("Buzzy") and Jacquelyn ("Jackie") Nielsen, formerly of East Hampton; and her very best friend since first grade, Mrs. Stuart ("Dottie") Flood, now retired in Flagler Beach, FL.

Relatives and friends are invited to attend a graveside funeral service celebrating her remarkable life of giving to loved ones and community with humor and unconditional love, at 11 a.m. on Saturday, Sept. 4, at Lake View Cemetery (between Lake View and East High streets), East Hampton.

Arrangements are under the direction of the Spencer Funeral Home, 112 Main St., East Hampton.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made in Laura's memory to The Friends of Lake Pocotopaug (FLP), c/o Stephen Diemer, Chairman, 47 Eastham Bridge Rd., East Hampton, CT 06424.

Hebron

Jacob Arthur Plude

Jacob Arthur Plude, 25, of Hebron, beloved husband of Elyse (Rinaldi) Plude, died tragically on Tuesday, Aug. 31 as a result of an automobile accident.

Born Sept. 9, 1984 in Middletown, he was the son of James Plude of East Hampton and Karen (Reed) Kloof of East Hampton.

Jacob was employed as a toolmaker at Hobson Motzer in Durham. He was raised in East Hampton and had attended East Hampton schools before moving to Hebron seven years ago.

Besides his parents and his loving wife Elyse, he is survived by his young son, Cameron Plude, who meant the world to Jacob; his brother, John Plude of East Hampton; his father-in-law and mother-in-law, Sal and Deborah Rinaldi of Hebron; his brother-on-law and sister-in-law, Bryan and Cristina Rinaldi of Plymouth, MA; many aunts, uncles and cousins.

Funeral arrangements will be in today's edition of the *Hartford Courant*.

The Spencer Funeral Home has care of arrangements.

Colchester

Ida May Sherwood

Ida May (Pierce) Sherwood, 88, of Lebanon, and formerly of Norwich, passed away Thursday morning at the Apple Rehab Center in Colchester, where she had resided for several years. Born in North Stonington Jan. 12, 1922, she was raised by her aunt and uncle, the late Herbert Walker and Mary Louise (Pierce) Walker.

A child of the Depression era, she left school at a young age and went to work in area mills, Phoenix and Cape Heart Manufacturing. Most recently, Ida worked for many years in the house-keeping department at the Norwich State Hospital before her retirement.

Survivors include a daughter, Beverly Chasanek of Las Vegas, NV; two grandchildren, Lincoln, his wife Victoria Breault and Catherine Alberts Przekop; four great-grandchildren, Megan, Rachel, Kendall, Timothy, a sister, Marion Hindle and numerous extended family members.

She was predeceased by a daughter, Francine Breault; a grandson, Brandon Breault and several siblings.

The family wishes to extend their heartfelt gratitude to the staff at Apple Rehab Center, especially the caregivers on B Wing. The feeling of home and the loving care they so graciously extended will always be remembered with appreciation.

Funeral services will be held privately. The Aurora-McCarthy Funeral Home of Colchester has been entrusted with care of arrangements.

For online condolences, visit www.aurora.mccarthyfuneralhome.com.

Hebron

Christine Marie Barrett

Christine Marie (Elliott) Barrett, 54, of Hebron, beloved wife of Joseph, passed away peacefully at home surrounded by her loving family after a courageous battle with cancer on Sunday, Aug. 29.

Born Nov. 23, 1955, in Hartford, she was the daughter of the late Harry and Gladys (Slater) Elliott. On Feb. 18, 1978, she and Joseph were married at Sacred Heart Church in Wethersfield. Chris was a communicant of St. Columba Church in Columbia. She worked in the RHAM school district library for 14 years, where she enjoyed the company and smiles of her co-workers, but especially the students. A special pastime of hers was playing cards "hand and foot." She was also an avid Red Sox fan.

In addition to her loving husband of 32 years, she leaves behind two children, Shauna of Hebron and Steven and his fiancée Jenn of Portland; three brothers and sisters-in-law, Mark and Lorraine of Hebron, Jeffrey Scott and Janice of Rocky Hill and Peter and Mary Beth of Grovetown, GA; two brothers-in-law and their wives, Deacon James and Barbara Barrett, Jr. of West Barnstable, MA and Thomas and Suzanne Barrett of Centerville, VA; a sister-in-law, Dolores D'Andrea of Windermere, FL; her godson, Jeffrey Toohey of Hebron, whom she adored; as well as numerous nieces, nephews and extended family members; as well as many friends that were her chosen family; and a very special angel, Chris.

The family would like to extend their heartfelt thanks for the extraordinary care of Dr. Todd Alekshun and his staff, especially Christine and Oncology Nurse Jen.

Friends called Wednesday, Sept. 1, at the Aurora-McCarthy Funeral Home, 167 Old Hartford Rd., Colchester. The funeral assembled Thursday, Sept. 2, at the funeral home before the celebration of the funeral liturgy at the Church of the Holy Family, 185 Church St., Hebron. Father Michael S. Smith officiated, assisted by Deacon James Barrett, Jr. Interment followed in the New Hebron Cemetery.

In lieu of flowers, donations in her memory may be made to the Hebron Vol. Fire Dept., P.O. Box 911, Hebron, CT 06248 or to the Dana Farber Cancer Institute, 10 Brookline Pl. West, 6th Floor, Brookline, MA 02445-7226.

For online condolences, visit www.aurora.mccarthyfuneralhome.com.

Andover

David M. Swenson

David M. Swenson, 68, of West Hartford and Andover, passed away Friday, Aug. 27. He was the husband of the late Linda (Schoen) Swenson and the son of the late Otto and Elsie Swenson. He worked at the Travelers Insurance Co. in Hartford as a Computer Programmer for 20 years. He was active in the American Legion, Post 96 in West Hartford. David was an avid Red Sox fan and protector and friend to all animals, especially his cats.

He leaves his daughter and son-in-law, Kelly and Dan St. Laurent, granddaughter, Linda St. Laurent, his sisters, Carla Weiman and Donna Mack, a dear friend, Patricia Rolfe and five nieces and nephews.

He was predeceased by a brother, Stuart Swenson.

A funeral service was held Tuesday, Aug. 31, at Rose Hill Funeral Home, 580 Elm St., Rocky Hill. Burial followed inside Rose Hill Memorial Park. There was a calling hour prior to the service.

In lieu of flowers, memorial donations can be made to The Jimmy Fund, 10 Brookline Place, 6th Floor, Brookline, MA 02445-9924 or Protectors of Animals, PO Box 24, South Glastonbury, CT 06073.

Amston

Linda Gill

Linda Gill, 64, of the Amston Lake section of Hebron, passed away Sunday evening, Aug. 29, at St. Francis Hospital with her family and friends by her side.

She was born Dec. 10, 1945, in Hartford, daughter of the late Robert Hayes Sr and Emma Kusian Hayes. She worked for many years for the City of Hartford as a senior clerk. Her last position was with the Hartford Police Department. Linda is survived by her brother, Michael Hayes; three cousins, Bill and wife Gussie Swanson, Carl and wife Joy Swanson and Craig Swanson; a niece, Maureen Hayes; a dear and devoted friend, Phyllis and her husband Leslie Richardson; her caring neighbor, Dawn Steiner; and her beloved pets.

She was predeceased by her loving and caring companion, Carl Johnson, on Aug. 13.

Visitation was held Thursday, Sept. 2, at the Belmont/Sabrowski Funeral Home, 144 South Main St., Colchester, followed by a Reflection of Time.

In lieu of flowers donations, may be made to Linda Gill/Johnson Memorial Dog Fund, P.O. Box 596, Dunstable, MA 01827.

East Hampton

Ruth Elizabeth Dillingham

Ruth Elizabeth (Schneider) Dillingham, 77, formerly of Chestnut Hill Road in East Hampton, passed away peacefully with her son Christopher at her side Saturday, Aug. 28, at the Waters Edge Care Facility in Middletown.

She was born in Switzerland on Feb. 15, 1932, and came to America in 1950. She became a practicing registered nurse and worked 20 years at Connecticut Valley Hospital in Middletown.

Predeceased by her husband Paul, Ruth is survived by her son, Christopher, and two stepdaughters, Hillary Hunt and Eve O'Rourke, both of Massachusetts.

Ruth will be greatly missed by her friends – Ben and Cassie, Donald, Vic and Ann, Loretta and Juliette, along with many others that knew her as a loving and caring mother and friend.

The burial will be private and at the convenience of the family. Ruth's care has been entrusted to Spencer Funeral Home.

Marlborough

Nina Parent

Nina Parent, 76, of Marlborough and formerly of Hebron, widow of the late Francis J. Parent, died Thursday, Aug. 26, at Connecticut Hospice in Branford. Born March 8, 1934, in Eagle Lake, ME, she was the daughter of the late Arthur and Elsie (Dumond) Voisine.



Nina was a hairdresser and had lived in Marlborough for most of her life before moving to Hebron and then Berlin. She was a member of the Moose Lodge in Marlborough, and the French Social Circle in East Hartford.

She is survived by her son, Francis Daniel Parent of Columbia, a brother Herman Voisine and his wife Jeannette of East Hartford, nephews David Yeager and his wife Pamela of East Hampton, Dickie Voisine and his wife Marion of Chester, Paul Saucier of Eastford and his children Julie LaChapelle, Michelle Saucier, Alison Saucier, niece Julia Fahy and her husband Stephen of Berlin, great niece Kimberly Usmani and her daughter Sara, and her niece Linda Roy of South Windsor, two grandchildren Nicole Mitchell and her husband Douglas, Michelle Parent and many other nieces, nephews and cousins.

A memorial Mass will be celebrated Saturday, Sept. 11, at 10 a.m. in St. Patrick Church, East Hampton. Burial will be private in St. Patrick Cemetery.

In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions may be made to the American Cancer Society, 825 Brook St., I-95 Tech Center, Rocky Hill, CT 06067.

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

From the Editor's Desk

Observations & Ruminations

by Mike Thompson

The recent poll that indicates nearly one-fifth of Americans think that President Obama is a Muslim is somewhat surprising and also saddening. There's always been a fringe group of Obama haters who have been determined to detest him and not to let simple facts like him being born in Hawaii and him being a Christian get in their almost joyful hatred of the man and everything he stands for.

But I was confident it was just a small, if rather loud, minority. But 18 percent of Americans? Granted, it's just a poll of 3,000 people, but still. It's also disheartening that percentage has shot up from 11 percent in 2009. The percentage that believe he's a Christian, meanwhile, has dropped from 48 percent in 2009 to only 34 percent today.

Obama, who, again, is a Christian, was interviewed on *NBC Nightly News* Monday and Brian Williams directly asked him about the one-fifth thing. While Obama said he wasn't concerned about the poll, that "the facts are the facts" and that "I can't spend all my time with my birth certificate plastered on my forehead." However, he didn't openly come out and deny it, or state simply, "I am a Christian."

One wouldn't think he'd need to – after all, he spent decades attending a Church of Christ in Chicago, the one Rev. Jeremiah Wright was the pastor of (remember, Obama haters, before you decided to bash Obama for being a Muslim, you bashed him for attending that church for as long as he did; you can't have it both ways, guys) – but still, I wondered after the interview ended, should he have done it anyway, if only to try to shut those guys up?

But then I opened up that day's *Journal Inquirer* and on the editorial page was a picture of someone holding a sign that featured Obama with a Hitler moustache. No, I said to myself, Obama shouldn't have said anything after all. Because it wouldn't have made a bit of difference. I mean, if they're nutty enough to equate Barack Obama with *Adolf freakin' Hitler*, then they might be beyond reach. If they hate Obama that much, they wouldn't have believed a word that came out of his mouth anyway.

It's just plain sad.

* * *

The Emmys were this past Sunday night, and I was pleased with the show. Jimmy Fallon pleasantly surprised me as host – per-

haps I should give his late night show another chance – and I was glad to see *Modern Family* take home the prize for Best Comedy. While *Parks and Recreation* was, in my mind, the funniest show on television this past season, *Modern Family* was an extremely close second, so I wasn't disappointed at all that it won.

Mad Men won for Best Drama. I have yet to see an episode of that show, even though multiple people have told me the show, set at a 1960s ad agency, would be right up my alley (I'm a fan of those old '50s and '60s advertisements). But the show is so universally praised, I doubt its win was undeserved.

However, I was disappointed *Friday Night Lights* wasn't even nominated for Best Drama. True, it picked up a writing nomination, as well as much-deserved nods for leads Connie Britton and Eric Chandler, but the series itself should have been nominated. It's basically got everything you could want in a TV drama: realistic, compelling human stories; terrific acting; great dialogue; and even some exciting, well-filmed moments of high school football. Plus, the show is filmed entirely on location in Austin, TX; there's not a hint of phoniness about it. To be honest, I can't say enough good things about it. The show's first three seasons are on DVD; I highly recommend seeking them out.

* * *

As regular readers of this column know, I live in Manchester – one of the two towns in the state whose Shaw's didn't morph into a ShopRite or Stop & Shop earlier this year; it simply closed down. The other night, I was cutting through the mostly-abandoned plaza in which Shaw's was housed to get to another, slightly-less-abandoned plaza, and I noticed Shaw's still had many lights on inside. Not a full set of lights, but the lights that would typically be left on when the store closed for the night.

It's a phenomenon you see more often than you should; a major store closes, and yet it leaves its lights on. It's probably done to deter thieves or something – although I don't know what you'd hope to steal from an empty grocery store except maybe shelving units – but it just strikes me as a colossal waste of energy. And as the world goes greener, massive energy wastes like that really stand out.

* * *

See you next week.