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Miss USA Erin Brady came home to Portland for the first time Tuesday since being crowned Miss USA June 16. Pictured above, the 25-year-old Portland High School alum is all smiles surrounded by the town's day campers.

Welcome Home, Miss USA

by Elizabeth Bowling

"Hi, I'm Erin," may seem like a funny way to introduce yourself when the entire country already knows you as "Miss USA." But Erin Brady, Miss USA 2013, greeted everyone she met with a smile and a handshake – some even got a hug – during her homecoming to Portland on Tuesday.

Brady, 25, who was born in East Hampton but grew up in Portland, was crowned Miss USA on June 16.

"It's been a whirlwind of a past month," she said, "but it is quite an opportunity of a lifetime and I've been blessed to represent not only the state but the country and it's really great to come home to my roots and have everybody as supportive as they are of me."

Among her supporters were the 80 day campers, ranging in age from kindergarteners to eighth-graders, who sat in the Portland High School cafeteria, waiting to meet the hometown hero. Brady entered the room to the sound of the kids chanting "U.S.A.! U.S.A.!"

Portland town officials like First Selectwoman Susan Bransfield and members of the Board of Selectmen, as well as state Rep. Christie Carpino and state Sen. Art Linares were also in attendance to support the Portland High School alum.

Bransfield proudly announced that July 23, 2013, was "Erin Brady Day" in Portland. Carpino said, "You're a true inspiration to all our Portland residents." And Linares put it sim-

ply, "What a role model."

A beaming Brady quipped to the campers, "I never got to go to camp, so I get to live that today." She then welcomed her "teammate," Miss Connecticut Teen USA Kendall Leary, 18. The two of them shared in the excitement of the day.

The kids present had an opportunity to meet Brady during a not-so-regular day at summer camp, which consisted of photos, autographs and an ice cream social – during which, Brady provided service with a smile and accommodated to kids' requests for "no cherry please."

Addressing the campers' enthusiasm, the brunette beauty said, "I'm glad that they acknowledge that you can be a smart and nice person" who does pageants. According to Brady, it's a common misconception that brains and beauty are mutually exclusive in the world of pageantry.

She also explained that she was nervous to come back to Portland – where she graduated high school in 2005 – because "it's been so long and you're coming back as a different person, kind of. But it's great to have people that have known me beforehand that are still here supporting me."

Brady said she owes everything to her hometown, a place where she was "able to show my intelligence and my athleticism and make friends," she said.

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State Officials Examine RHAM Fields

by Geeta Schrayter

Last week, state officials stopped by RHAM High School to examine the condition of the property's athletic fields, and the consensus was they need some work.

State senators Steve Cassano and Cathy Osten and state Rep. Pam Sawyer each took a look at the school's fields and said something needs to be done to improve the situation.

"I saw fields that were in need of repair for safety reasons," said Sawyer. "I got a better feeling for the need for change at the football field that now has not one, but five different teams playing on it in the same season and six in the opposite field. Standard turf can not survive that kind of heavy pressure."

In response to these issues, Sawyer said creating a public-private partnership addressing the needs of the fields should be examined in the short term, "and then we need to come up with a long range plan."

Sawyer said she planned to get together with Cassano and Osten to discuss what kind of assistance they might be able to provide – and both senators commented on the maintenance, or lack thereof, on the fields.

"They need to be upgraded – that's clear," said Osten. "Maintenance appears to be being

deferred from our walkthrough and that clearly needs to be changed. Drainage is not being maintained on a regular basis, the grass has not been cut appropriately, it's not being treated correctly to minimize crab grass – it's just, in general, in need of sprucing up and maintaining."

Cassano felt similarly, and said the current maintenance man wasn't enough.

"First of all, it's actually impossible for one person to maintain that complex," said Cassano. "There are a lot of places, Manchester is an example, where a lot of the work on the fields is done by the town itself as opposed to the Board of Education and I think that's something that should be explored. If there's ever a ballgame down there and somebody gets hurt it's going to be a problem."

Cassano went on to call some of the pathways and field areas dangerous, and said, "I pity the poor person that has the responsibility of taking care of all those facilities."

The officials came to the fields at the request of Hebron resident Joe O'Connor, chairman of the RHAM Field Improvement Committee.

The committee formed earlier this year with the goal of bringing a synthetic turf field to the

school, but that initial purpose expanded to include improving the condition of the current fields.

"We just want our kids to be safe and play on quality fields and enjoy their tenure at the middle school and the high school," O'Connor said.

As he began to learn more about the fields, O'Connor said this week he felt Superintendent of Schools Bob Siminski and the RHAM Board of Education hadn't been doing enough for upkeep. In addition, O'Connor said he felt the administration had been making it difficult for the committee and other interested individuals to help.

But Board of Education Chairwoman Laura Steiner said that wasn't the case.

"We haven't been difficult," she said. "One of [the group's] issues was with the union, but that wasn't us being difficult that was the union."

Steiner was referring to efforts made by O'Connor and the group to formulate a volunteer clean-up day to improve the fields Aug. 3 and 4. After approaching Siminski and the board on the possibility, O'Connor said he was told only the relatives of current students could vol-

unteer to help.

"Why doesn't [Siminski] want the help of the towns in there?" O'Connor wondered. "He really fought that tooth and nail," which was part of the reason he said state officials were called in to help.

But "the union didn't want just anybody coming in and doing work because, of course, they get paid to do the work so it's their job first," Steiner explained.

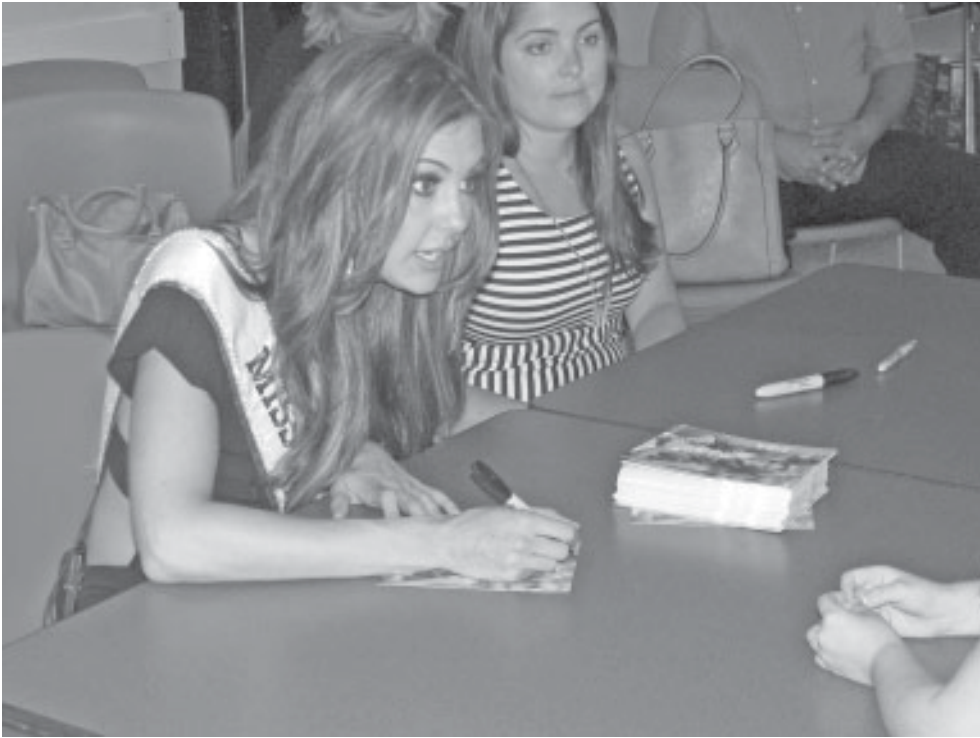
However, after Osten learned about the fields, she spoke to a union representative and O'Connor got the outcome he was hoping for: Osten received clearance for the group to work on the fields along with anyone else who wanted to volunteer.

"So neither the superintendent nor the board has been giving [the committee] a difficult time," said Steiner. "Their only issue was the union and that has been resolved."

Siminski furthered that point.

"Quite frankly, you give me a volunteer and I will take it but it's incumbent of me to make sure I don't have any issues by having volunteers come in," he said. "I can't give our union work away unless I have some kind

RHAM Fields Page 2



After taking pictures with Portland's day-campers, town officials and some of her old high school teachers, Brady served ice cream sundaes to the campers. Only then was she able to sit down to sign autographs for a throng of fans.

Welcome Home cont. from Front Page

Though it's been years since Brady lived in Portland, it's only been one month since she took on her new title and her life took a massive turn.

"It's only been a month and it's been chaotic, but the best kind of chaotic that I can possibly explain. It's just been interviews, meeting people that I've dreamt about meeting my whole life – Sandra Bullock, Melissa McCarthy – going and doing awesome things," she said, in addition to "giving my time to people, being an inspiration to people, and just being myself on a grander scale."

In sum, "It's been absolutely unbelievable," she said.

The unbelievable journey began when Brady won the Miss Connecticut USA pageant on Dec. 16, 2012. (Her first pageant ever was the Miss Connecticut USA pageant a mere one year prior – at which she was named the runner-up.) She then went on to be named Miss USA at the pageant in Las Vegas last month.

"Honestly, the first thing I said was, 'Oh my God, oh my God, oh my God,' over and over again because literally my entire life changed in seconds," she said, referring to the moment she was named "Miss USA."

"It was overnight. My whole world was upside down for the better," she went on. "I moved right from Vegas to New York City and I've been there for about a month now and it's unbelievable."

But the most monumental aspect of becoming Miss USA wasn't just the new digs in the big city – which she receives, compliments of the Miss Universe/Miss USA Organization, for the next year.

"I will never go back to just being 'Erin Brady.' Now I'm 'Erin Brady Miss USA,'" she

explained. "That is a part of a family. There's only 62 women ever, in the entire country, that have become Miss USA so it's really an honor," she said.

Her newfound fame has, indeed, changed her life forever.

"I always assumed I would go back to school for finance, which I may," she said, not wanting to rule anything out, "but now so many doors are opening, so it's kind of hard to say. I may be a model, I may be an actress."

Brady's career options certainly seem limitless. She admitted that even though she hasn't officially left her job at Prudential Financial in Hartford yet, she probably won't go back to work there any time soon.

"A lot of different doors are opening up," Brady, excited about her future, said. But for the next year, she's putting her old life on hold. One big hold-up is her wedding to Tony Capasso, which was scheduled for Nov. 9 – the same day Brady will compete in the Miss Universe pageant – but has since been postponed.

"Right now everything's on hold until after Miss USA and after Miss Universe," Brady said. "Right now the focus is really on just being here as Miss USA and enjoying my year as Miss USA."

* * *

Later Tuesday night, Brady introduced the Michael Cleary Band to a small crowd at a town-sponsored concert, which was moved indoors from the town green to the PHS auditorium, due to inclement weather. After listening backstage to the first song, which the band dedicated to her, Miss USA signed autographs at a table outside of the auditorium



During her homecoming, some of Brady's former high school teachers brought along the 2005 PHS yearbook for her to sign. Brady expressed gratitude toward everyone who supported her before she became Miss USA and continues to support her now.

for a seemingly endless line of fans.

But Brady made a lot of people happy just by being there and being charming. One fan had her cast signed by the pageant queen, another stole a kiss from her, and one happy baby nearly fell asleep in her arms. One lucky guy she went to high school with even scored her phone number.

While Brady's visit to Connecticut was only one week long, she managed to squeeze in a lot of appearances. She visited the Connecticut Science Center, Hartford Children's Hospital, Mohegan Sun Casino – where she watched a WNBA game – and even threw the first pitch at the Connecticut Tigers' game.

"Every day is jam-packed," Tiffany Delmonico, Brady's pageant consultant, said. "This is a full-time job for her."

Delmonico said Brady has a "full-packed year ahead of her," starting with preparations for the Miss Universe pageant, which will be held in Moscow this year.

She said the entire team at the Miss USA office in New York is already working with styling and wardrobe, to prepare Brady for her next bout of pageantry.

Asked about how she's feeling regarding her upcoming quest for the title of "Miss Universe," Brady said she is "very excited and I'm hoping to bring a back-to-back crown for the USA." (The reigning Miss Universe is Rhode Island resident Olivia Culpo.)

If Brady does win the Miss Universe crown – for which she'll be competing against 84 of the world's most beautiful women – then "her appearances will increase abroad," Delmonico said. But she will continue to live in her new apartment in Manhattan because "Miss USA, Miss Universe and Miss Teen USA share an

apartment together," Delmonico explained, calling them "sister queens."

In addition to preparing for Miss Universe, Brady has been busy with photoshoots, interviews, her platform and charities – for example, by becoming Miss USA she inherited the role of spokesperson for the Breast and Ovarian Cancer Association.

Brady also promised to bring awareness and help to children growing up in homes with substance abuse when she was named Miss Connecticut because "she feels very passionate about growing up in a home with substance abuse," Delmonico said.

She said winning Miss USA hasn't stopped Brady from following through with that promise. Actually, "it really helps her to pursue that because it opens doors for her to get in touch with other organizations," Delmonico said.

Despite a difficult upbringing, Brady has adapted to the role of "Miss USA" wonderfully – she never complains and she's willing to withstand the long hours, Delmonico said.

"She's really humble and because of that she knows that every day means something," she said. "She cherishes every moment."

"A year goes by like this," Brady said, snapping her fingers and encouraging her fans that "you can do it all. You can be whoever you want to be and make it happen."

And the 5'7" beauty queen wasn't just talking about walking in high heels (a strappy black pair of four-inch pumps from Chinese Laundry, to be exact).

Her secret to success? "It's because of all the hard work, and because of being nice to people, and being very respectful and being happy with who you are," she said. "That's why I'm here today."

RHAM Fields cont. from Front Page

of agreement."

Siminski went on to say "it was just about people working together," but he said "sometimes that doesn't happen as quickly as people would like."

Like the officials, O'Connor said he wanted to see another maintenance man at the school, and more money put into the fields. He noted the school usually has a budget surplus at the end of the year, and said he felt some of that money should go toward field maintenance.

"I just want to see all these ball fields back in pristine condition and then eventually, ultimately, a competition field," O'Connor said. "I want to see a lighted, synthetic turf field for our athletes."

But both Steiner and Siminski noted items for the fields – including a groundskeeper – had been attempted before, but cut due to budget constraints.

"We need to hire some other people when the budget season comes. We tried to put this in the budget before and the Hebron voters voted it down," said Steiner. "So we'll try again."

Siminski furthered that point.

"I had proposed an additional groundskeeper [in the 2011-12 year] and that was cut," he said, adding he had also attempted to create a capital

fund for field maintenance and improvements "and I was accused of creating some sort of slush fund."

Siminski said he was pleased the fields would be getting some attention during the clean-up days, "because the budget numbers for the past few years haven't had room to add a groundskeeper or anything significant for the fields."

Anyone interested in helping O'Connor and other members of the Field Improvement Committee can join them – along with Osten and Sawyer, who both said they plan to attend – during the campus clean up, Aug. 3 and 4 from 9 a.m. - 4 p.m. at RHAM High School, 85 Wall St. Volunteers are being sought for tasks such as tree trimming, brush clearing, mulching, power washing, mowing and weeding.

Donations are also being accepted for landscape materials such as clay, stone dust and mulch, trash bags, gloves and landscape tools; food and drinks for the volunteers; and monetary donations to support the clean-up effort, which can be sent to RHAM Sports Boosters, 85 Wall St., Hebron, CT 06248.

Anyone interested in volunteering can sign-up by visiting rhamsportsboosters.com.



Miss USA also posed for photos with some of Portland's town officials. Pictured from left are Superintendent of Schools Sally Doyen, selectman Frederick Knous, First Selectwoman Susan Bransfield, Brady, selectmen Mark Finkelstein and selectwoman Kathy Richards.

Marlborough GOP Slate Features Mix of Incumbents, Newcomers

by Melissa Roberto

Marlborough's Republican slate of candidates for this fall's municipal elections features a mix of both "experienced incumbents and exciting newcomers," according to Republican Town Committee Chairman Ken Hjulstrom.

The candidates were endorsed at a July 17 caucus, held at Liberty Bank.

Hjulstrom said he's "very pleased" to see first-timers like residents Susan Rapelye, Scott Fleeher, Mark Merritt and Joe Weber show an interest in volunteering to run for office.

"As in past years, we have received a great response to our requests for people to get involved," the chairman said.

Hjulstrom also said he believes each Republican candidate has unique life experiences that can be applied to public service. In addition, he said he feels the Republican slate is also capable of something he said is "critical" when it comes to local government: "that the candidates leave their personal feelings behind them and focus on the needs of the public rather than promoting specific agendas."

"I am confident that the Republican candidates will do so," the chairman furthered.

Earlier this week, Hjulstrom said he was unable to specify which candidates are placeholders – but pointed out that even placeholders could have a "change of heart." The RTC chairman explained placeholders are commonly used to hold a spot for candidates on a particular board or commission if the party is unable to find a dedicated candidate by the time of the caucus, typically held in July. After that, parties can only swap candidates or remove them; candidates cannot be added.

Though placeholders or not, every slot the RTC could fill for this year's caucus has been

filled.

Two incumbents and two newcomers were endorsed to run for the Board of Finance, which is currently a Republican majority board of 4-2. There are currently two alternates – one from each party – serving for the board and one additional alternate vacancy. Two full members and two alternates will be elected.

Current full member Susan Leser and newcomer Scott Fleeher are running as full members to the board. Leser has served on the board since 2005. Fleeher just finished over two decades as an active duty military officer for the U.S. Army and, after recently volunteering at the Marlborough Fire Department, he said he's now ready to contribute some of his time to town government. He said he's not only attended finance board meetings but several other board meetings in the last year and turned to those members to seek advice about which board he should run for.

"I asked them where the biggest need was right now and where I can contribute to the most," he said of the members he spoke with. "I told them about my background and they helped make the choice for me."

Current alternate Pasquale Amodeo is seeking re-election to his alternate seat, while Midge Denno is also seeking an alternate position on the board. Amodeo has been on the board since 2005 while Denno would be new to the board. Denno currently serves on the Commission on Aging and Planning Commission.

Another Republican member of the finance board, Cliff Denniss, the board's vice chairman, is not seeking re-election.

Voters will cast their ballot for three Board of Education candidates, and the top four will

be elected to the nine-member board. The board is currently made up of five Republicans and four Democrats. Current member Carole Shea is seeking her second term. The GOP school board ticket will also include newcomer Richard Denno as well as Susan Rapelye, who admits she is a "newbie" to Marlborough, just moving to town last August. But Rapelye has four children, and she said that has influenced her to become involved in the school district.

"I have a lot of education in kids' ideas and what they like, what they don't like and what gets them motivated and happy to go to school," Rapelye said.

Current Board of Education member Karen Tyler, however, has chosen not to run.

Board of Assessment Appeals members Riva Clark and David Morganson are looking to spend more time on the board they currently serve. Morganson will seek a second term while Clark – who filled a vacancy last fall – is up for re-election for a full term. The Board of Assessment Appeals is a three-member board with Republican majority of 2-1. Voters will cast their ballot to elect two candidates.

Three citizens were also endorsed to run for the Planning Commission – two as full members and one as an alternate. The five-member commission has Republican majority of 4-1. There is also two of three alternate positions filled, one from each party. Voters will cast their ballot for two full members and two alternates.

Current members Jim Fox and Wendy Nichols are running for re-election; Fox for a fourth term and Nichols for a second. Carl Carlson – a former Board of Finance member – is a candidate for an alternate position.

Voters will also cast ballots for three full

members and two alternates to the Zoning Commission. The five-member commission is ruled by Republicans 3-1, and also has a vacancy. The commission also currently has three alternates, also of Republican majority of 2-1.

Newcomer Mark Merritt is in the running for a seat on the Zoning Commission along with Sandy Sudduth who currently is an alternate for the Planning Commission. Current Zoning full member Susan McFarland is seeking her second term, while current alternate David Fisher is seeking a second term as an alternate. Member Jeff Tracey has chosen to not seek re-election.

Zoning Board of Appeals veteran Chris Lawson – who has served since 2007 – is running for re-election. Joining Lawson on the ticket is current member Richard Proch for a second term and newcomer Joseph Weber as an alternate. The Zoning Board of Appeals is a five-member board currently made up of three Republicans and two Democrats. There are also two vacancies for alternate positions. Voters will elect three full members and two alternates.

Current RHAM Board of Education member Judy Benson-Clarke is running for a four-year term this fall as well as Carole Shea, who is running for the RHAM board for the first time. Voters will elect two candidates to serve.

Overall, Hjulstrom viewed the Republican slate with confidence.

"I truly believe that the voters will appreciate the quality of our candidates," he said, "as they have in the last two elections."

Municipal elections will be held Nov. 5 in the Community Room of Marlborough Elementary School, 25 School Dr., from 6 a.m.-8 p.m. for eligible voters to cast their ballot.

Marlborough Democrats Endorse Candidate Slate

by Melissa Roberto

Vice Chairman of the Democratic Town Committee (DTC) Joe LaBella spoke excitedly this week about the 14 Democrats who were endorsed July 16 for this November's municipal elections.

"We're very excited," he said on behalf of himself and DTC Chairwoman Lauren Cragg. "We think we have a strong slate of candidates. We're looking forward to getting the candidates before the people of Marlborough."

LaBella and Cragg are two citizens on the Democratic ticket for the Board of Finance this year. The DTC endorsed the two as full member candidates, and newcomer Norman Swanson as an alternate. Cragg has served the finance board as an alternate since 2007. LaBella – former finance board member of 10 years and selectmen of five years – said, however, he's on the ticket for the Board of Finance as a placeholder but he's running for another commission he's interested in.

The finance board currently has Republican majority of 4-2 with one alternate from each party as well. An additional alternate vacancy is available. Two full members and two alternates will be elected.

A majority of newcomers make up this year's three Democratic candidates for the Board of Education. Voters will cast their ballot for three Board of Education candidates and the top four will be elected to the nine-member board. The board is currently of Republi-

can majority of 5-4.

Alongside current member Mimi LaPoint, who is seeking election to a second term to the school board, newcomers Theresa A. Brysgel and Wesley Skorski are in the running as well. Democrat member Shannon Bielaczyc, however, is not seeking re-election.

Brysgel and Skorski are two residents who have attended just about each Board of Education meeting over the last year. In particular, the two stood before the board many times to voice their support of bringing back a world language program to Marlborough Elementary School.

Earlier this week, LaBella voiced his support of the school board candidates.

"I think that the Board of Education has been at the forefront of people's minds in the last six months and even the last year," LaBella said. "I think that's generated a lot of attention. We're pleased to have such a strong slate of candidates for the Board of Education."

LaBella also pointed out there were actually more "qualified candidates" interested in running for the board than there were available slots – a situation he said is "always disappointing."

The ballot for the Board of Assessment Appeals will feature a newcomer, resident Matthew E. Wilson. The current three-member board has a Republican majority of 2-1. Voters

will cast their ballots for two full members.

Three candidates were also endorsed for the Planning Commission. Russell West, a current justice of the peace, is running for a seat on the commission alongside newcomers Amy Curtis and Jean Wilson. Fellow Democrats Denis Soucy, the commission chairman, and Brendon Montstream, an alternate on the commission, are not running for re-election. The planning commission currently is ruled by the Republicans 4-1. There is also two of three alternate positions filled, one from each party. Voters will cast their ballots for two full members and two alternates.

LaBella will run – not as a placeholder this time – for a seat on the Zoning Commission – a commission he said, if elected, would welcome him with exciting challenges. The DTC vice chair has been involved in town government for a total of 15 years since he moved to Marlborough 18 years ago with his wife Irene and his 15-year-old twin sons James and Michael. LaBella explained it's been a couple years since he's been away from Marlborough's political scene but said he's looking forward to serving in a new capacity if elected.

"It's not an area I've worked in extensively so if I'm elected to serve the town I hope to learn some new things," he said of the Zoning Commission, adding that he believes it is re-

sponsible for balancing "the needs of citizens versus the needs of the town."

Democratic Registrar of Voters Ann M. Kilby will join LaBella in the running for the Zoning Commission but as an alternate member. However, member Walter Jones is not seeking re-election. The five-member commission is currently ruled by Republicans by a 3-1 split and also has a member vacancy. The commission currently has three alternates, also of Republican majority of 2-1. Voters will cast their ballot for three full members and two alternates to the commission.

Zoning Board of Appeals member John Grasso – who has served on the board since 2005 – is seeking re-election for a third term. The Zoning Board of Appeals is ruled by a Republican majority of 3-2. There are two vacancies for alternate positions. Voters will elect three full members and two alternates.

Democrat Manny Catarino is also on the slate as a member of the RHAM Board of Education. He began serving the regional school board in February of this year when he filled a vacant seat. The seat Catarino filled is up for re-election.

Elections will be held Nov. 5 in the Community Room at Marlborough Elementary School, 25 School Dr., from 6 a.m.-8 p.m. for eligible voters to cast their ballot.

Portland Democratic Slate of Candidates Loaded with Experience

by Elizabeth Bowling

It seems like the theme of the Portland Democratic Town Committee's slate of candidates for this fall's municipal elections is experience.

The committee announced its slate of candidates last Thursday for the Nov. 5 election and each Democratic member on the seven-person, Democrat-controlled Board of Selectmen will run for re-election, including First Selectwoman Susan Bransfield.

Bransfield said, "Our aim is a pleasant, safe, resourceful and welcoming town."

She said her priority is to improve the overall quality of life for the citizens of Portland. One way she plans to do this is by continuing her work on several initiatives that are focused on improving Route 66, Route 17 and Main Street.

According to Bransfield, those initiatives include potential land acquisition along the riverfront, the redevelopment of the Elmcrest site and a new hotel at Saint Clements Castle, as well as the relocation of Chris Cote's Golf Shop to Route 66. Additionally, Parks and Recreation will design a major recreational facility on Route 17, Bransfield said, and Main Street will undergo improvements to its "walkability" and, essentially, its appearance.

"The economy is certainly picking up and we're hopeful that all of these projects will be brought to fruition," she said. "I believe I can contribute a great amount to their completion."

If re-elected, this would be Bransfield's sixth term in office. The Democrat has served in the role since 2003.

"I love the work of first selectman," Bransfield said. "I have an outstanding Board of Selectmen. And boards and commissions and town employees are all, I believe, outstanding in the work that they do."

DTC Chairwoman Kathy Richards – herself a member of the Board of Selectmen – said, "I am very happy to say all of our experienced Board of Selectmen candidates have decided to run for office again. We look forward to continuing the projects we have started and hope to continue to serve the town of Portland in the future."

Richards has lived in Portland for 46 years, and has served on the Board of Selectmen for 10. The Portland High School graduate said she's seeking re-election because "we've started so many projects that I'd like to see to completion."

As one of the four Democratic selectmen seeking re-election, Richards said she feels the "continuity" is a good thing.

Her fellow selectman Frederick Knous is seeking continuity, too. He said his priorities are to keep taxes affordable, make the town a pleasant place to live and focus on economic development.

"I've always thought public service is important," the long-term Portland resident of 32 years said.

Knous works as a consultant for David Evans and Associates, Inc. in Hartford and has three years of experience on the Board of Selectmen. Prior to his time as a selectman, he was the chairman of the Economic Development Com-

mission, he said.

"There's certainly a lot of challenges the town faces in terms of trying to promote more economic development," Knous said. "I enjoy the process of serving the town and trying to address problems as they come up and thinking outside of the box."

Brian Flood and Mark Finkelstein are also seeking new terms on the selectmen board.

Flood said, "I am seeking re-election to the Board of Selectmen for the simple reason that I believe that if you live in town you should give back to the town in any way you can."

Finkelstein agreed, and called his running for re-election a "civic duty." He went on to applaud the teamwork displayed by the current board members. "We have made tremendous improvements in the working relationships on the board," he said. "We all work together for the benefit of the town."

Flood said that to continue to benefit the town, the board will need to "continue to focus on the basics," like making sure there is enough funding for the police and fire departments, as well as road maintenance and education.

On the school board side, two experienced Democratic candidates and one rookie will be seeking terms on the seven-member, Democrat-controlled Board of Education; current board members MaryAnne Rode and Christopher Phelps, both Democrats, are not seeking re-election because their terms don't expire for two more years.

"We are pleased to announce that Andrea Alfano and Ben Srb will be running again for

the Portland Board of Education," Richards said. "Joining them in the race will be Christopher Darby, a newcomer to Portland politics. We are thrilled to have Chris join our Board of Education team."

There are five open seats and five people running, so all the Board of Education candidates will be elected, Richards explained.

Alfano has served on the Board of Education for five years and is seeking reelection because "there's still work to be done," she said. "I enjoyed my time on the board," she furthered. "Overall it's been a very positive experience for me."

But the self-proclaimed "strong advocate of public education" said her real interest is in the children and making sure they get the education they deserve.

Darby, a father of two, also has a vested interest in the education of children. He wants to "make sure Portland schools maintain their high standards" while keeping costs down, he said.

Darby is a high school English teacher in Middletown, and a Boy Scouts leader and soccer coach in Portland. He is very involved in his church and said he's running for election because, "I just want to be more involved in the community."

Also endorsed at the July 18 caucus was John H. Dillon and David O'Brien for the Board of Assessment Appeals, and Ben Srb and Richard Basso for the Zoning Board of Appeals.

Elections are Nov. 5 at the Portland Senior Center, 7 Waverly Ave., from 6 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Colchester Democrats Endorse Familiar, New Candidates

by Melissa Roberto

The Colchester Democratic Town Committee (DTC) caucused Tuesday and its slate of candidates consisting of familiar and first-time candidates proves that interest in participating in town government still exists in Colchester.

The 11 Democratic candidates were endorsed by the DTC Tuesday night at the Colchester Fish and Game Club. The slate features incumbents who are familiarly known by attendees of board meetings while two of the 11 candidates are pursuing new boards, and another two are entering into Colchester's political scene for the very first time.

A familiar selectman, Jim Ford, is up in the running for a seat that's just one rank higher than the position he currently holds in town: the seat of first selectman. The position is currently held by Republican Gregg Schuster, who is seeking a third term. Ford has spent the last four years on the Board of Selectmen, having first been elected in 2009. Prior to becoming a selectman, Ford was the chairman of the Planning and Zoning Commission for 10 years.

Outside of Town Hall, Ford is a professional engineer for Beta Group out of Hartford. Earlier this week, the current selectman highlighted three initiatives he'd like to take on if elected.

"First is improve services to the people and considering taxpayers first," he explained. "The second is going to center around the approach to economic development strategy and how we can improve our tax base."

The third, he added, "is basically to be really cognizant of the finances in town and how we are operating."

Ford said he realizes "any new position" comes with learning though he believes his Planning and Zoning knowledge, engineer skills and selectman experience will come in handy as well.

"I can bring that experience to the first selectman's office," Ford said, "and I'm sure it'll work well with employees, residents and businesses in town."

This fall voters will see a newcomer for the Board of Selectmen, however. Mike Caplet – former Board of Finance member and admin-

istrative assistant to former first selectwoman Linda Hodge – is in the running for a Democratic seat. Current selectwoman Rosemary Coyle will run alongside Caplet. She is seeking her fourth term.

The current five-member Board of Selectmen is ruled by Republicans by a split of 3-2 including Schuster. Voters will elect four members to the selectmen board, in addition to the first selectman who also is a member of the board.

The Democratic ticket also features three candidates for the Board of Finance, which consists of members who serve either two-, four- or six-year terms. Current member Thomas Kane is running for a six-year term; he's served as a finance member since 2011. Another current member, and veteran of the finance board, John Ringo, is running for a two-year term. Ringo has served the board since 1999.

Additionally, newcomer to the finance board, Kurt Frantzen, is running to serve a four-year term. Frantzen currently is a member of the Conservation Commission.

The Board of Finance is a six-member board currently ruled by Republicans by 4-2. Voters will cast their ballots to elect two candidates to six-year terms, one candidate to a four-year term and one candidate to a two-year term.

Voters will also cast their ballot for three Board of Education candidates though the top four will be elected to the seven-member board. It is currently ruled by Republicans by a split of 4-3. Current Vice Chairman Don Kennedy is seeking re-election. The Democrat has served on the school board since 2008. A newcomer to town politics, Linda Stoddard, is also running for a Democratic seat on the local school board.

The town's treasurer since 2009, Gregg LePage, is seeking a third term as treasurer. He will face Republican and current selectman Greg Cordova for the one seat.

The Board of Assessment Appeals is another board that consists of new and incumbent candidates. Currently the three-member appeals board features one Democrat, John Malsbenden, who has been on the board since



The Colchester Democratic Town Committee endorsed its candidates for the November municipal elections Tuesday night. Pictured from left are Linda Stoddard, Denise Turner, Jim Ford, Rosemary Coyle, John Malsbenden, Kurt Frantzen and Gregg LePage. Candidates missing from the photo are Don Kennedy, Mike Caplet, John Ringo and Tom Kane.

2011 and is seeking re-election for a second term. A newcomer to Colchester boards and commissions, Denise Turner, is also running for a seat. Voters will cast their ballots to elect three candidates to the board.

Though Turner just returned to Colchester a couple of years ago, she said she's quite familiar with the town, having grown up here. She's served on the DTC since her return. Turner said she's "always been interested in what goes on in town," and believes in the "Democratic platform."

"I thought if I could push that platform forward than I'd be happy to do my part to help my town move into a new beginning," she said of her choice to run.

The newcomer added that she believes the Board of Assessment Appeals is a good place for her to start.

"My biggest skill is my ability to have an open mind and fair judgment," she explained. "I think I can provide fair voice when people

are coming to appeal their assessments."

DTC Chairwoman Dorothy Mrowka said this week she was pleased about the "phenomenal" slate of Democratic candidates that will head before voters.

"They're really great people," she said. "I'm excited about the whole slate. Everyone brings something special to the ticket."

Mrowka added that she couldn't yet specify if there are any placeholders. But placeholder or not, Mrowka was confident in each candidate.

"They're caring people," she said. "They care about the town. I think we have people that are very capable running for each one of these offices."

Municipal elections will be held Nov. 5. Polling locations for each of the town's four districts are posted on the town website at colchesterct.gov.

New Colchester Fire Department Incentive Program ‘Off to a Good Start’

by **Melissa Roberto**

A new staffing incentive program for the Colchester Hayward Fire Department is yielding good results – and Fire Chief Walter Cox hopes to make the results even better.

Cox updated the Board of Selectmen on the incentive program at its July 18 meeting. The program, which launched March 1, was designed to help the volunteer department maintain and possibly add to its network of volunteers. Cox told the selectmen at a February meeting the department had faced difficulties of getting ambulances out the door, due to a significant spike in call volume in recent years.

At the February meeting, the selectmen approved a \$34,000 appropriation to the department’s budget to pay volunteers for the shifts worked and the number of calls they responded to. Similarly, the incentives were funded again for the first six months of the 2013-14 fiscal year budget effective on July 1, with an option for extension if found to be effective.

The incentive program has allowed volunteers to be paid \$15 per six-hour shift worked and an additional \$15 for each call the volun-

teers respond to during that shift. Additionally, any volunteers who were not on shift but responded to a call also received \$15 per call.

Cox compared statistics from December 2012 to June of this year – before and after the incentive program was implemented. The fire chief explained the total number of unfilled openings on the EMS schedule significantly dropped from December to June by about 50 percent. The number of calls to paid staff also decreased from 12 calls in December to two in June. Additionally, the number of calls to mutual aid dropped from four in December to zero for the last four months straight.

“This data shows that the paid per call program is working,” Cox told the selectmen.

However, Cox said he believes there is still room for improvement. He said the fire company still has a long-term goal of lowering the “total openings on EMS schedule” down to zero. If lowered to zero, Cox said “we can guarantee a reduction in calls to paid mutual aid.”

So, Cox has a new plan, which he outlined to the selectmen. His recommendation elimi-

nates the \$15-per-shift and \$15-per-call fee volunteers have been receiving and replaces it with a larger incentive of \$50 flat fee for each shift, worked no matter how many calls a volunteer responds to. However, the volunteers who respond to a call outside of a six-hour shift will still receive \$15 per call.

The chief said he believed the changes would develop “more of an incentive to cover each ambulance shift.”

“By increasing the overall base pay for shift coverage we can expect a positive response causing shifts to be filled thus preventing calls from going to mutual aid,” Cox furthered.

Cox also told the selectmen he believed this change would not affect the budget since volunteers have received “usually \$30-60” a shift with the initial incentives.

First Selectman Gregg Schuster communicated his support of the new approach.

“The thing I like about this is we’re going to have two different methodologies so that inevitably when we come before the boards we can have data of what methodology is better,” he

said.

However, selectwoman Rosemary Coyle, while also a fan of the new plan, foreshadowed what she believed would happen if the new pay turns out to be more costly and less effective than the previous method.

“I would assume if it comes to a point where you find that you’re really spending a lot more money, then it would have to be adjusted,” she said.

Cox said it would.

Schuster commended Cox and the entire fire department for coming up with ways to make it more effective.

“This is results,” he said. “This is getting the ambulance out the door. The program is working and I’m glad to see everyone is looking to tweak the program and make it even more effective. It looks like it’s off to a good start.”

Because the new pay does not change the budget the selectmen did not have to make a motion to approve it. The change in pay went into effect for the next pay period for the department, which started July 21.

Colchester Selectmen Approve Timetable for POCD

by **Melissa Roberto**

The Board of Selectmen last week unanimously agreed entering into a contract with a Simsbury-based consulting firm, in the hopes of having an updated Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD) in place by this time next year.

It was a topic discussed at length in March, after citizens continuously stood before the selectmen at its meetings stressing the importance of updating the town’s 2001 POCD. The state requires that a municipality’s POCD be updated once every 10 years. However, in March, Planning and Zoning Commission Chairman Joe Mathieu said the latest state statute extends the amount of time a town has to update its POCD. Colchester’s deadline is July 1, 2014.

Joint conversations continued since March between the Planning and Zoning Commission and Town Planner Adam Turner to discuss when and how the POCD would be updated. Last Thursday, Turner proposed the town enter into a \$30,000 contract with the consulting firm Planimetrics of Simsbury, which, according to the firm’s website, has expertise in planning and

zoning services.

In a July 11 memo to First Selectman Gregg Schuster by Turner, the scope of work within the contract is “consistent with the Planning Department’s proposal and is consistent with state guidelines in terms of substance and date.”

Turner told the board Planning and Zoning staff will provide Planimetrics with town statistics of housing, population and other similar issues, to bring the POCD up to date. Turner then recommended board approval so the town could enter into the contract with Planimetrics, adding that he believes the firm will do “a fabulous job.”

Though the board ultimately approved the contract, selectwoman Rosemary Coyle initially voiced her concerns. She brought up a topic that had been discussed at length months ago when the board was approached by the public. Coyle suggested the formation of a POCD subcommittee made up of town staff, related board members and citizens while referring to the town’s last update in 2001, which consisted of a similar subcommittee.

“It doesn’t seem inclusive enough to me,” she said of the lack of subcommittee in the document. “It’s limited to Planning and Zoning.”

Turner assured Coyle that the Planning and Zoning Commission has discussed inviting members of all related commissions (Open Space, Land Use, etc.) as well as one member of the Board of Selectmen to assist in the process. He added the commission decided to devote one of its regular meetings each month to the update by inviting those members to the meetings instead of establishing a separate subcommittee with its own meetings.

“That’s what their decision was,” Turner explained, adding he doesn’t usually like to speak for the commission. “I don’t think there was any attempt to leave everybody out. They wanted to handle it [with those additional members] through their regular meeting schedule.” But Coyle again stressed forming a subcommittee, as she felt it would make the process “more inclusive.”

Selectman Stan Soby, the board’s planning

and zoning commission liaison, said the commission has made it “very clear” in its meetings that it hopes to do just what Coyle is asking.

Turner told Coyle he thinks the commission’s members are “very inclusive,” and added, “You’re correct it hasn’t been written down but their decision was to invite members and work in concert with all the chairs of each of the land use committees and board of selectmen.”

Turner then assured Coyle that he will put a related discussion on the commission’s next agenda.

“I’m sure we can formalize what you want,” he furthered.

Ultimately, the selectmen unanimously agreed to the contract. The pact between the town and Planimetrics shows the timeline for the three phases (scope, strategy formulation, plan preparation and adoption) beginning this month and continuing until the July 2014 deadline. The timeline includes a public hearing for next June when residents can provide input before its adoption.

Hebron Church Nixes Sale of Land to Town

by **Geeta Schrayter**

The potential sale to the town of an 8.5-acre piece of land owned by St. Peter’s Episcopal Church is now off the table, after a recent appraisal of the property valued it at more than \$100,000 less than it was valued in 2008.

Talks on the possible purchase of the property were rekindled in February, after some initial negotiations fell through several years ago.

A portion of that land is currently being leased by the town through 2038 and features a 58-space parking lot utilized by Hebron Elementary School. The town also uses the baseball field located on the property.

In February, Town Manager Andy Tierney said the purchase would have allowed for more parking for the school, thereby remedying a safety issue on Route 85, where a traffic jam occurs during student pick-up and drop-off.

In addition to the traffic improvement, Tierney had explained the purchase would allow the town to make improvements to the ball field, and the land linked into some open space the town already owned.

But in a July 18 letter sent to Tierney by St. Peter’s pastor, the Rev. Everett Perine, Perine said after “extensive meetings” with the leadership of the Diocese of Connecticut and the church’s vestry, “we have come to the conclusion that selling the ‘ball-field property’ at this time and for the monetary figure submitted by

the Town of Hebron is not in the best interest of our parish.”

The monetary figure referenced amounts to \$132,000, which is the appraised market value as of March 14.

Tierney said this week that, after the church said they may be interested in selling the land, an independent appraiser was hired. Fishman Appraisal Services out of Dayville examined the property, and after work that included an on-site inspection, town land records and land use regulation research, investigating comparable sales based on the determined best use of the property, and analyzing sales data, the market value was concluded to be \$132,000.

That amount is less than the \$240,000 it was valued in 2008, when the town first opened discussion on the land’s purchase. Tierney attributed the dip to the economy and changes in market values.

“The price dropped a bit,” he said. “I told [Perine] when the appraisal became available I would share that with him, and that’s what we did. So we totally appreciate and understand their position. It’s their property and they have to do what they deem fit and what would be beneficial.”

Tierney said while the church had been made aware of the appraisal, the town hadn’t actually made an offer on the property – but it’s

unlikely an offer would have been any higher.

“Common sense would tell you it would be hard to offer more than the assessed value of a property using taxpayers’ money,” he furthered. “So [the church] was right in their decision. We probably couldn’t offer more.”

In Perine’s letter, he went on to say the decision revolved around “good stewardship of our resources,” referring to the land the town was looking to purchase and over 20 acres of undeveloped land across the street from the church.

“Subsequently,” Perine wrote, “we have organized a long-range planning effort to determine the most beneficial use of these properties for St. Peter’s as we seek to serve the community at large in the years ahead. As a result, we are not interested in considering any further land acquisitions or leases for the foreseeable future.”

Board of Education Chairwoman Kathy Shea expressed disappointment the purchase wouldn’t happen.

“I was disappointed to hear the outcome,” she said. “The school was hopeful that the town could purchase that land and we could improve the traffic flow and parking lot situation [at the school]. Plus the town had other reasons for the purchase like access to the ball field and open space.”

But Shea went on to say a “Band-Aid” ap-

proach had been taken through the inclusion of money in the town’s budget for a police officer to direct traffic during peak times. In addition, she said some changes had been made that could possibly aid the situation in the upcoming year.

In response to declining enrollment at the school, two buses have been eliminated for the 2013-14 year, “and less students mean less getting picked-up and dropped-off” by parents, Shea said.

Shea explained door-to-door bus service had also come to an end, and group stops would be utilized instead. The hope is this change will result in a “significant improvement” in the amount of time students spend on the bus. If that’s the case, Shea hoped parents would be more likely to have their children ride to and from school.

“There are so many factors in play,” Shea said. “It’ll be interesting to see [what happens] as we come into the picture this year.”

But even though it’s back to the drawing board, and Tierney said the boards of selectmen and education need to “regroup,” there are no hard feelings toward the church for its decision.

“We have the utmost respect for St. Peter’s Church and Father Perine, and we’ve worked well with St. Peter’s and we want to continue that relationship,” he said.

Three New Dems Look to Join Hebron School Board

by Geeta Schrayter

The Hebron Democratic Town Committee held its caucus last week to endorse candidates for the municipal elections in November. With three current members of the Board of Education making their way out and two placeholders on the Republican ticket, at this point the three Democratic candidates endorsed by the committee have an easy road ahead.

The candidates, Ramon Bieri, Erica Bromley and Carol Connolly are looking to fill the soon-to-be vacant seats of current chairwoman Kathy Shea, vice chairwoman Tina Blinn and member Will Moorcroft, all of whom will not be seeking re-election.

Bieri has lived in town for six years with his wife and two children. He is currently the secretary for the DTC and explained he was on school committees in Los Angeles, Calif., where he lived prior to Hebron.

“The idea of stellar education for the youth in order to prepare them for the future is of paramount importance to me,” he said.

Bieri added he wanted to continue providing the “top-level education” to students, that was recently recognized when Hebron Elementary School was named a 2010 National Blue Ribbon school.

“Receiving that Blue Ribbon just recently motivated me to help to continue that support and that [guidance] that would allow not only my children who are still in the Hebron school system, but all children, to be able to be given that opportunity and support for a great education,” Bieri said.

Bromley has lived in town with her husband and son since 2003. She has been involved with the RHAM lacrosse program and said she wants to stay involved with the community. In addition, she feels the knowledge and experience she’s gained as the director of youth services in Manchester and Windsor Locks as well as through working with the state Department of

Education and Connecticut Youth Services Association will aid her.

She also has a master’s degree in social work and a bachelor’s degree in psychology and education.

“I would say I understand how important the education system is and I definitely want to be part of making it as strong as possible, not only for my son but everyone in town,” she said. “I think I bring a lot to the table; a new perspective, new ideas, and working for a municipality I know the importance of being creative, especially with how the economy is.”

Bromley said she’s a strong supporter of family involvement in the educational process and added it’s important for the community as a whole to support what the schools are doing, “to see the success and be a part of the process.”

Connolly did not return calls in time to comment for this story but her face is not wholly unfamiliar, as both the current board and other individuals who attend the Board of Education meetings may have seen her in attendance, speaking out in support of educational changes like the recent expansion to all-day kindergarten.

In addition to the education board, the DTC endorsed Mark Stuart for re-election to the Board of Selectmen. (Only two of the five seats on the Republican-controlled selectmen board are up for election this year; Republican Dan Larsen is also seeking another term, it was announced at the Republican Town Committee caucus earlier this week. A full story about the caucus appears elsewhere in this week’s paper.)

Stuart, a Hebron resident for 28 years, will be completing his second term on the board in November and said this week he wanted to serve again to continue moving the town forward.

“Hebron’s a great town and I think that we’ve

made a lot of good progress over the last eight years keeping the town budget on track [and] finances in order,” he said. “Financially we’re very strong.”

In addition, Stuart noted there were some potentially exciting projects coming down the line and the town had recently begun the undertaking of revising the charter.

“These are all things I have experience with,” he said, “and I have an interest in serving the town.”

Endorsed for another term on the six-member Board of Finance is Malcolm Leichter. Leichter, who has lived in town since 1974, is currently serving his second term. He said this week he wanted to continue on the board because there’s more to be done.

“I think there’s more things that need to get done in town from a financial perspective and I think I have a very good grasp of the current status and where we need to be,” he said. “We need to be maintaining our town schools and buildings while at the same time, we need to maintain a tax rate that’s affordable for people like myself who are getting elderly,” he added with a laugh.

Based on the current Democratic slate as well as those endorsed by the Republican Town Committee, both Leichter and Stuart will retain their seats, as the races will be uncontested.

For the RHAM Board of Education, the DTC endorsed Joe O’Connor, who has lived in town for 10 years with his wife and three children.

O’Connor is currently the chair of the RHAM Field Improvement Committee and explained this week he decided to get involved as a result of recent interactions he’d had with the present board in attempting to organize some clean-up days for the athletic fields.

“I thought the process should have been a lot easier,” he said. “I think there’s a lot more

easier ways to simplify problems we encountered with the unions, the back and forth, and just the lack of direction, I thought, from the Board of Education.”

O’Connor said he had a lot of leadership qualities and while he wasn’t originally planning on running, “I think since I’ve ruffled a few feathers I owe it to the community and to myself to put my money where my mouth is.”

O’Connor said he didn’t just want to be “an angry taxpayer displeased with services” but wanted to do something about it.

“I’m willing to do that because I do think there needs to be a lot of changes on the board,” he said.

Running for the Planning and Zoning Commission on the Democratic slate are Judith Podell and Richard Marzi. Podell is currently on the commission, while Marzi will be a newcomer.

Marzi has lived in town for two years with his two sons and is currently involved with the DTC, Hebron Lions Club, Sons of the American Legion and the Hebron Senior Center.

“I believe Hebron is still looking to find its niche for growth, housing for seniors, businesses, and smart planning,” he said of his interest in running. “Agriculture and open space are very important also.”

Endorsed for the Zoning Board of Appeals is Anthony Novak, while Ted Bromley is running for the Board of Assessment Appeals and current Town Clerk Carla Pomproicz was endorsed for her fifth term.

“There’s never a day that I don’t look forward to coming to work,” Pomproicz said. “I feel very lucky and fortunate that I’ve been able to find a career path that is very suited to me – and I’m very suited to it. Not everybody is able to find that perfect fit and I think this position has been.”

Douglas Library in Hebron Now Town-Owned

by Geeta Schrayter

Following a special town meeting held July 11, and in accordance with recommendations by the Library Study Task Force, Hebron’s Douglas Library is now officially owned by the town.

The task force was established last August to study alternatives for the provision of library services, as well as the future of the library and the agreement between the town and the Douglas Library Association. (The library has been privately run since it was established in 1889. It was renamed in 1949 in honor of Dr. Charles Douglas.)

The task force gathered and reviewed historical materials on the library, and Douglas Library Association President Gail Richmond, along with executive assistant Donna Lanza, visited different libraries throughout the state and interviewed library directors and other board presidents. Afterwards, the findings were shared at a number of meetings in order to determine what model would work best for the town.

Six recommendations were then presented to the Board of Selectmen in January. In addition to making the library municipal, these were: that the name remain the Douglas Library of Hebron, in accordance with Douglas will, that the Library Association remain in existence to provide support, guidance and receive the income from the Douglas Trust; that ownership of the library property be transferred to the town; that a governing board of trustees be established; that library staff remain town employees and the library budget be funded by the town.

Regarding the library’s changes, Town Man-

ager Andy Tierney said “I think it’s a great thing.”

“This was attempted several years ago and it never got finalized and it was kind of put on a shelf,” he said, adding Richmond and Lanza “picked up the ball and ran with it.

“This was a huge undertaking,” he continued, “and in a short amount of time, their research – what they did – was just amazing.”

Tierney furthered the changes meant the town could now apply for grants for the library. He explained when the town recently had improvements made to various town buildings through an Energy Savings Performance Contract with CCM Energy/Siemens, the library wasn’t eligible because it wasn’t considered a town-owned building “and it’s in desperate need of a boiler replacement.”

In addition he said the question arose at some Capital Improvement Plan meetings as to why the town was including money for a building they didn’t own.

“We just had a partnership, or agreement, with the Board of Trustees,” he said. “So in the research the group did they found a lot of different ways they could operate [the library] but chose this model for Hebron. They felt it fit the community the best.”

Richmond agreed.

“When we first started this a year ago we did not know this was where we were going to go,” she said. “It eventually was just clear as could be that for the town and the library’s sake, we needed to transition. An association library is a great idea, but only as long as you have an endowment, and this endowment [from Dr. Charles Douglas] has been gone since

1998-99.”

As a result, Richmond explained the town has been funding the library, building maintenance has been conducted by the town, and the employees are town employees.

“So why are we an association library?” she asked rhetorically. “It makes much more sense to become a municipal library to formalize what has already happened.”

Richmond noted patrons coming into the library won’t notice a difference, and neither will employees.

“This just clarified what was already happening,” she said. “I feel great about it.”

Now that the town meeting has taken place, the next step is to establish the new governing board. The library board will consist of nine members; six members nominated by the Douglas Library of Hebron Association from their membership, and three nominated by the Board of Selectmen.

According to the ordinance adopted at the town meeting, the board will be responsible for: adopting and monitoring policies, goals and objectives for the library’s operation; forming a selection committee to work with Tierney to recruit, interview and select a library director, and work with the new director to develop an annual budget; consulting with and advising Tierney, the selectmen, finance board members and other town officials on the operation of the library; and accepting on behalf of the town gifts or donations of books, periodicals or other personal property. Also, the association will have sole and exclusive authority for the use of private funds currently held or donated in the future to the library for library purposes.

Those interested in being one of the three members appointed to the board by the selectmen should send a letter of interest to the Town Manager’s Office, Town Office Building, 15 Gilead St., Hebron, CT 06248 by Aug. 9. For more information, contact the town manager’s office at 860-228-5971 or atierney@hebronct.com.

While Richmond said patrons and employees won’t notice any differences as a result of the above changes, something they *are* likely to notice is a new interim library director. Mary Ellen Beck, the previous director, left May 24 to move to Florida and be near family. Beck had been expected to retire at the beginning of next year.

Richmond explained ads were run for a new director and a number of candidates were interviewed by a panel. However, she said, “we decided not to hire anyone, so through the contacts I had made with the state we got the name of an interim library director.”

Barbara Butler, who was previously the library director in Tolland, began working as the interim library director last week.

“She’s a pleasure,” said Richmond. “She’s knowledgeable, knows how to work and the staff feels very good with her.”

Richmond explained Butler left her position in Tolland to be able to travel with her husband for work, but was now able to acquire an interim position since the travels weren’t happening as often.

Advertisements will again be placed for a full-time director; however, Richmond said “if [Butler] took the job fulltime that’d be great.”

Hebron Republicans Endorse ‘Unique Mix’ of Candidates

by Geeta Schrayter

The Republican Town Committee caucused at the Town Office Building Monday night to announce its candidates for November’s municipal elections – and it’s a slate committee chairwoman Catherine Marx is excited about.

“I’m very excited about our slate of candidates,” she said. “We have a unique mix of incumbents and people new to the electoral process, all with the same goal of serving their community.”

Running for his second term on the five-member, Republican-controlled Board of Selectmen is Dan Larsen. (Only two of the five selectmen seats are up for election this November; Democrat Mark Stuart has already announced he will seek another term.) A resident since 1978, Larsen has also served on the Board of Finance, remains involved with the fire department and has been the burning official and fish and game constable. He has also been president of the Amston Lake Tax District.

“I feel I have an obligation to try to help the town out,” Larsen said. “It’s our home. Those who are going to make it better are those of us who stand up and do something.”

In Larsen, Marx said there was “someone well known in town who continues to devote himself to not only representational government but in so many other areas of our small rural community.”

Newcomers Terry Piggott and Henry Sawicki were endorsed Monday for the six-member, Republican-controlled Board of Finance.

Piggott is currently on the Planning and Zoning Commission, while Sawicki is presently on the Zoning Board of Appeals.

Sawicki, who has lived in Hebron since 2002, said he’s actively involved with the budget process and can frequently be found at town meetings.

He added he wanted to join the finance board “so we can fix some of the problems and issues with finances in the town.” He said the budget “needs to reflect more the majority of residents which has not always been the case.”

Piggott could not be reached for comment on this story, but Marx said both he and Sawicki “will bring a comprehensive voice and financial experience that will serve the board well.”

Based on the Democratic filings, Marx added, “it appears both the selectmen race and the Board of Finance race will be uncontested.”

Running for the RHAM Board of Education are current chairwoman Laura Steiner, incumbent Kevin Williams and newcomer Val Dalton – all of whom Marx said “the caucus overwhelmingly supported.”

Steiner is finishing up her first term and has lived in town since 1976. Both she, her husband and their two daughters are graduates of RHAM High School, and Steiner said she “really cares about what is going on with the students and the school.”

“You come to know some of the teachers and some of the students and some of the administration and other board members and it becomes an enjoyable volunteer experience,” she said. “I’ve never missed a meeting since I’ve been on the board.”

Williams joined the board last October and filled the seat left vacant after Brenda Milhomme moved out of town. He told the *Riverast* in January he had a kind of “past, present and future view” of RHAM since, like Steiner, he graduated from the district and has children still in the schools.

“I’ve got another six years of direct involvement with the RHAM system,” he said in January, adding he had “a vested interest in the future” of the district.

Dalton has lived in town for 14 years with her husband, five children – two who are still at RHAM – and two grandchildren. She is currently the president of Tri-County Baseball and Softball.

Dalton said this week she’s had an interest in running “for a while.”

“My children have all gone through RHAM and I’ve been very happy with RHAM but I’d like to see a few changes,” she said. “I just wanted to get a little bit more involved.”

As far as the Hebron Board of Education, Marx explained the committee was unable to secure commitments.

“We were unable to get commitments for the Hebron Board of Education candidates so at this time we have two placeholders,” she said – Will Moorcroft (who is currently on the school board, but doesn’t intend to seek another term) and herself. “The town committee will do everything it can to find qualified individuals to serve on this board.”

Three seats will need to be filled at the Board of Education, with the departure of current chairwoman Kathy Shea and vice chairwoman Tina Blinn, in addition to Moorcroft. The Democrats have already endorsed three for the seats. (A story on the Democratic caucus appears elsewhere in this issue.)

Other Republican candidates running this fall include three for the Planning and Zoning Commission: Natalie Wood, Loreta McDonnell and Devon Garner.

McDonnell, who has lived in town with her husband and four children for five years, is currently serving on the Planning and Zoning Commission as an alternate; she will be seeking a full term in November. She has also been involved with the bifurcation committee, the beautification committee, the Hebron PTA, is

a Boy Scout leader and is trying to start up a RHAM parents’ organization.

As an alternate on the Planning and Zoning Commission, McDonnell said she is currently working with other commissioners on the Plan of Conservation and Development for the town, as mandated every 10 years by the state. McDonnell explained it’s “a comprehensive plan that sort of lays out where we’re headed,” and is needed in part, to apply for grants. McDonnell said they’re in the middle of the process and she wants to continue working on it.

Wood has lived in town since 1998 with her husband and two sons. She will be seeking her fourth term on the Planning and Zoning Commission.

Wood said she enjoys being on the commission and has a legal background which assists her when dealing with land use laws and regulations, which she said is a big part of the commission.

“I also enjoy the town of Hebron in the fact that it’s in a unique planning stage where it’s on the cusp of realizing some new development as the economy turns,” Wood said. “The Planning and Zoning Commission is a commission that really gets to look into the future and help Hebron with this planning and zoning process to bring about a town center that will give the town a nice economic base.”

Garner did not return calls for comment on this story, but Marx said all three candidates “have solid experience to serve on this board.”

Also running in November will be Eric Brancard for Planning and Zoning Alternate; Jardo Opocensky, Michel McCormack and Jane Gollino for Zoning Board of Appeals; and Philip Lobianco, who is looking to make the switch from the Board of Finance to the Board of Assessment Appeals.

East Hampton Town Manager Celebrates One Year on the Job

by Elizabeth Bowling

Mike Maniscalco celebrated his one-year anniversary as town manager of East Hampton Tuesday, July 9. By Tuesday, July 23, his performance evaluation was completed and his four-year contract, which originally called for \$115,000 a year, saw an increase in his salary by 2 percent.

Maniscalco this week ran through some his accomplishments from his first year on the job. They included “internal personnel things like putting performance evaluations in place” and the hiring of new staff – especially major leadership roles in town like the Chief of Police. In the past year, the town also established clean energy initiatives, including the possibility for solar panel arrays on the high school.

Additionally, the town signed a 20-year contract with the Connecticut Resources Recovery Authority (CRRRA) to stabilize the community’s ability to dispose of municipal solid waste.

“I also think legislatively we’ve had some successes in terms of the Clean Energy Task Force and the Blight and Nuisance Ordinance,” Maniscalco said. He also noted progress that was made with the WPCA Ordinance and the Ethics Commission and the Tax Assessment Deferral Ordinance.

In a quick glimpse into the future, Maniscalco said, “I’m hopeful that I’ll have a Public Works director sometime next week.”

The town’s previous Public Works head, Keith Hayden, left in April, and currently serves as the town engineer in Southington.

Asked about any disappointments from the past year, Maniscalco said, “I don’t take things as disappointments.” Instead, he said he sees challenges as opportunities for improvements. When something doesn’t work out, it typically morphs into something else, he said, which is a good process because “you end up with better solutions that way.”

One initial issue he faced was his staff’s organizational chart, which he has since modified. “The way we were set up, we were really flat as an organization, which makes it very difficult to manage,” Maniscalco said.

“As long as my staff are continuously working, I have no problem,” he said. “Do I demand that they work their hardest? Yes. Do I demand that they do the best quality of work? Yes.”

Maniscalco said his staff is respectful of one another. And he, by his personality, doesn’t usually get upset over the little things. Rather, he takes everything in stride.

“When things happen you take them as they are and you work through them,” he said. “That’s really what we try to do as much as we possibly can.”

Regarding his public service job, Maniscalco said the “work doesn’t stop coming. You might be able to go home at the end of the day, but when you come back there is just as much as the day before. That’s hard. It’s a very big challenge. It’s a mental challenge you have to deal with and you need to learn to be able to pace yourself and put yourself into a position where

you can work effectively through that.”

But Maniscalco couldn’t pinpoint his biggest challenge as town manager.

“Municipal government is multi-faceted, which provides multiple challenges,” he said. “That’s one of the things that interests myself in a job like this.”

Maniscalco has seen a number of community challenges, like the availability of water in the village center and the health of the lake, “one of our natural assets,” he said. In addition to those town-specific challenges, other, more common challenges to any town, have also presented themselves. Those include staffing, labor costs and service delivery, he said.

Regarding the politics involved in the Town Council, Maniscalco said, “Politics is something that happens. I try not to get involved in it as much as I possibly can. It’s not my place to get involved in it and it’s not my job to get involved in politics. It’s my job to provide the council with information so they can make informed decisions. That’s really what it comes down to.”

He noted his “interesting scenario” that has him, by law, living in East Hampton and paying taxes to the town, yet not fully being able to voice his opinions to the people making major financial decisions on behalf of the town.

Tuesday night, Maniscalco and the Town Council turned a “priorities and goals document” into a “memorandum of agreement.” Maniscalco said he told the Town Council that

nothing on the list would be completed without the help of his staff of about half a dozen people, who haven’t been compensated for over three years.

He told the council, “Next year, I’m going to accomplish all these things on this list with [my staff], with that being said, I want to start providing them with some stability.”

That’s why the council established a merit-based system that will allow Maniscalco to provide one-time salary adjustments for his staff depending on what is accomplished from the list.

Before taking on the role of Town Manager in East Hampton, Maniscalco was the Director of Economic Development for Logan County in Illinois.

Maniscalco said he originally applied for the East Hampton position over a year ago because he was born and raised in Trumbull, and his family still lives in the state. He and his then-pregnant wife took the opportunity to move back to the east coast.

“I’d always been looking for town manager-, city manager-type jobs. I think anybody that gets a public administration degree anywhere would probably tell you that’s one of the career-defining positions that you try to achieve,” said the University of South Dakota graduate.

In a nutshell, Maniscalco said, “Let’s be honest, it’s a stressful job. It’s a 24/7 job. It doesn’t stop. But with that being said, it’s rewarding work.”

Obituaries

East Hampton

Jerry Douglas McKinney

Jerry Douglas McKinney, 72, of Great Falls, Mont., a retired FBI agent and college professor, passed away of cancer at Peace Hospice Sunday, July 14, 2013. Memorial services were held Friday, July 19, at 10 a.m., Christ United Methodist Church, 2900 9th Avenue South. Pastor Bill Jensen officiated.



Jerry was born February 9, 1941, Spruce Pine, North Carolina to Howard and Clara (Gage) McKinney. He was raised in Cherryville, N.C. He married Joyce Philbeck, they divorced in 1983, but not before they brought into this world three beautiful children.

He was well educated, attending Gardner-Webb, Western Carolina, Fairfield University and Montana State University. His degrees include Associate, Bachelor of Arts, Masters and Doctorate in Education.

He worked as a special agent for the FBI from 1962-1981, as a private investigator, and as a professor in Criminal Justice and Sociology.

His contributions to the community were immense. He was a significant contributor to the following: State Historical Society Preservation Committee, Dachshund Club, American Kennel Club, Democratic Party Committee, and he helped with Adult Women Prisoners.

A few of his hobbies and interests include numismatics (coin collecting) and philately (stamp collecting); showing, breeding and raising dachshunds; he loved teaching and going to school; he was a Treky (*Star Trek* memorabilia collector); and he was an avid researcher of organized crime.

His survivors include his children Marjé (Dennis) Trotter of Boiling Springs, SC, Mark D. (Valerie) of Chicago, Ill., and H. Jason L. (Angela) of South Daytona Beach, Fla.; siblings Ella Sewell of Cumming, GA and Maurice McKinney of Ormond Beach, Fla.; and eight grandchildren.

He is preceded in death by his parents.

Donations may be made to Peace Hospice of Montana, 1101 26th Street South, Great Falls, MT 59405.

Condolences may be shared at croxfordfuneralhome.com.

East Hampton

Maureen K. Hawkins

Maureen K. Hawkins, 74, of East Hampton, beloved wife of Gilbert A. Hawkins, died Friday, July 19, at Middlesex Hospital. Born Aug. 17, 1938, in Wethersfield, she was the daughter of the late Edward and Marjorie (Davis) Keleher.

Maureen and her husband had lived in Madison and Guilford before moving to East Hampton in 2003. Maureen had worked as a manager for the Jeffrey Norton Publishers, retiring 10 years ago. She was active in the East Hampton Senior Center and the Chatham Party in East Hampton.

Besides her husband, she is survived by her son, Dana Hawkins and his wife Denise of New Haven; three daughters, Debbie Hawkins of Clinton, Kim Hawkins of Guilford, Cindy Iasparra and her husband Rocco of East Haven; a brother, Robert Keleher and his wife Diane of Winsted; granddaughter Rachel and six other grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.

She was predeceased by her brother and sister-in-law, Richard and Audrey Keleher, and a sister, Joan Keleher.

Services will be held at a later date.

The Spencer Funeral Home has care of arrangements. To leave online condolences, visit spencerfuneralhomeinc.com.

Portland

Philip Thomas DeRing III

Philip Thomas DeRing III, of West Palm Beach, Fla., and formerly of East Haddam, Middletown and Portland, passed away Thursday, Jan. 24. He was born in Troy, N.Y., on Jan. 16, 1943. He was a graduate of New England College.

He was president of the Middletown Chamber of Commerce from 1970-76, and he owned and operated two Steelcase Office Furniture dealerships from 1976-99, at which time he retired.

He is survived by his children, Kathleen DeRing of Colchester, Kristine M. Howard, of Portland, Major P. Thomas DeRing, of Portland, Joseph DeRing of East Haddam; seven grandchildren; a cousin, Brooke Hauf of Albany, N.Y.; his first wife, Susan of Portland, and second wife, Lisa, of Singer Island, Fla.

There will be a Mass in his memory at 10:30 a.m. Sunday, July 28, at St. Mary's Church, Portland.

Donations may be made to the Michael J. Fox Parkinson's Foundation.

Hebron

Patricia M. Shea

Patricia M. Shea, 78, of Westminster, Vt., passed away Sunday, June 30. Patricia was born in Rome, N.Y., on April 25, 1935. She grew up in Fairfield and was a longtime resident of Hebron, retiring to Vermont 12 years ago.

Pat worked for 30 years for the Postal Service in Hebron, and was a letter carrier for many residents in town. She was an active member of St. Peter's Episcopal Church, serving in several capacities. She was a Christmas Fair chairperson (heading the Country Store), chairperson of the Episcopal Church Women, a member of the 1989 Preservations and Modernization Committee, co-chaired the plant sale for 25 years, and also served several years as the envelope chairperson.

Patricia loved her cats as well as working in her flower beds. She enjoyed spending time with her friends and neighbors. The family would like to extend their thanks to Arlene McAlister for the loving care she extended to Patty.

Patricia is survived by her husband, Karl Behnke of Westminster, Vt.; her brothers, Charles Marsland of Massachusetts, Peter Marsland of Arizona; and her sister, Sherry Marsland of Colorado.

She was predeceased by her parents, C.R. Marsland and Lucille Marsland, as well as her first husband Dennis Shea.

A memorial service is to be held at St. Peter's Church in Hebron Wednesday, Aug. 7, at 1 p.m. All friends and fellow parishioners are most cordially invited to attend. A reception will follow in Phelps' Hall. Burial will be at the convenience of the family.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests that donations be sent to St. Peter's Church, 30 Church Street, Hebron, CT 06248 in memory of Patricia Shea.

Portland

Lila J. Billian

Lila J. Billian, 83, of Portland, passed away Tuesday, July 23, at Portland Care and Rehab. She was the daughter of the late Henry and Violet (Nystrom) Butler.

Born on Jan. 23, 1930, in Middletown, she lived in Portland for many years, moved to Florida and then returned to East Hampton for 10 years.

She leaves her children, Christine Scheer and her husband Charles of East Hampton, Skip Billian and his wife, Cheryl of Plainville, Richard Billian and his wife, Josette of Chesterville, Maine, and Keith Billian and his wife, Lori of South Strafford, VT, a sister, Donna Ledoux of Micco, Fla.; 10 grandchildren, Brian, April, Aubry, Scott, Tara, Jessica, Becca, Matthew, Rick and Jennifer; 12 great-grandchildren and several nieces, nephews and cousins.

She was predeceased by her brother, Henry Butler.

Funeral services will be private and at the convenience of the family.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the American Cancer Society 1075 Chase Pkwy 4, Waterbury, CT 06708.

Portland Memorial Funeral Home, 231 Main St., Portland, has care of arrangements. To send an online expression of sympathy, visit portlandmemorialfh.net.

Colchester

Walter B. Orr

Walter B Orr, 92, husband of the late Regina Petliski Orr of Colchester passed away on Saturday, July 20, at his residence. He was born Sept. 1, 1920, in Jersey City, N.J.

Walter served in the U.S. Navy during World War II and he worked for many years as a Signal Supervisor for the railroad. He was a member of Colchester Fish & Game Club served on the Board of Directors for the St. Joseph Club of Colchester and was a member of the American Legion Post 54 of Colchester. He was predeceased by a daughter Carol Ann Hart and several brothers and sisters.

Surviving are his two granddaughters, Jennifer Hart and Elizabeth Regina Hart, and a brother-in-law Thomas Hart.

Visitation was held Tuesday, July 23, at the Belmont Sabrowski Funeral Home, 144 South Main St., Colchester, followed by a Mass of Christian Burial Wednesday, July 24, at St. Andrew Church, Norwich Ave., Colchester. Burial followed with full military honors in St. Joseph cemetery.

East Hampton

Anton Henry Kovacik

Anton Henry Kovacik, 83, passed away peacefully Monday evening, July 22, after watching his two favorite shows, *Jeopardy!* and *Wheel of Fortune*. He then went home to meet his maker, as he liked to say. Born Aug. 30, 1929, in New York City he was the son of the late Andrew and Caroline (Suplat) Kovacik.

Anton proudly served his country in the U.S. Navy during the Korean War. He grew up in Higganum and lived in Portland before moving to East Hampton to live with his daughter and her family. He retired from Pratt & Whitney Aircraft in 1992 after 20 years of service.

Tony, as he was known by his friends, always kept little pieces of paper in his shirt pocket with his favorite quotes, jokes and riddles. He spent numerous hours in the library reading magazines, newspapers and chronicles. He loved to try to stump us with the amazing trivia facts and tidbits he loved to share.

He loved being outdoors enjoying "God's Beauty," as he referred to nature's splendor. He hoped to be one of God's gardeners in Heaven. We believe he will. Well, I see trees of green, red roses, too. I'll watch them bloom for me and you, and I'll think to myself, what a wonderful world. Cheerio, Grandpa. XO Love, Alyssa.

He is survived by his daughter and son-in-law Lorraine and Gary Sorvillo of East Hampton and his two grandchildren, Joseph A. Sorvillo IV and Alyssa Nicole Sorvillo both of East Hampton.

He was predeceased by his two brothers, Emil Kovacik and John Kovacik.

A graveside service with Military Honors will be held Saturday, July 27, at 11 a.m., in the Connecticut State Veterans Cemetery on Bow Lane in Middletown.

The Spencer Funeral Home has care of arrangements. To leave online condolences, visit spencerfuneralhomeinc.com.

East Hampton

Gail Ann Shaknaitis

Ms. Gail Ann Shaknaitis, age 38, of East Hampton, passed away unexpectedly at her home Friday, July 19. Gail was born June 19, 1975, in Waterbury, the daughter of David and Nancy (Sofia) Shaknaitis of Waterbury.

She was a graduate of Crosby High School and received her bachelor's degree in computer science from Manhattanville College in Purchase, N.Y. She worked as a computer programmer at Allied World in Farmington and was a talented dancer with the Bonnie Hayes Dance Studio in South Windsor. She enjoyed spending time outdoors especially at the beach and was talented in many activities such as skiing, biking, and kayaking.

Gail loved to spend time with her family and friends. She especially loved spending time with her friends' children who she treated as if they were her own. Her trips to Disney brought out her inner child. She will be remembered for her infectious smile and her unforgettable laughter that could light up a room.

Besides her parents, David and Nancy, Gail leaves her grandfather, Peter Sofia of Waterbury; her sister Jennifer Shaknaitis-Hendriks and her husband Eric of Vernon; her fiancé George Wein of Texas; her aunts and uncles, Carol Gagnon and her husband Richard, Joseph Shaknaitis and his wife Dolores, Richard Shaknaitis and his wife Fran; as well as her cousins, many close friends and extended family.

Funeral services for Ms. Shaknaitis were held Wednesday, July 24, at Eastside Memorial "A Casey Family Funeral Home and Tribute Center," 1987 East Main St. at Southmayd Road, Waterbury. Relatives and friends of Gail visited with her family at the funeral home Tuesday evening, July 23.

Memorial donations may be sent to Saint Jude Children's Research Hospital P.O. Box 1000 Dept. 142 Memphis, TN 38148-0142.

To extend online expressions of sympathy to the family or for additional information kindly visit the funeral home's website at eastside.memorial.com.

Portland

David Jon Slym

David Jon Slym, son of the late David E. and Sybil (Fischer) Slym, lost his long battle with acute myeloid leukemia Wednesday, July 17, at Middlesex Hospital in Middletown. He was born in Wolverhampton, England, on May 21, 1952, and moved to Portland in 1998.

He is survived by his loving wife, Paula (Kunsey) Slym of Portland; he also leaves behind his daughter and son-in-law, Jessica and Ben White and his newborn grandson Oliver David White of York, England; his daughter, Katie Slym and her partner Jonathan Vessey, also of York, England; his stepdaughter, Amanda Rasch and her partner, Reed Hansen of Bristol; in addition, he is survived by his siblings, June (Slym) and Robert Brooks of Cass City, Mich., and Ron and Helen Slym of Tuggerah, New South Wales, Australia.

David was formerly employed by Hudson Seating and Mobility in Newington, as a service coordinator. He spent many happy hours with the employees there and spoke so highly of the company.

Memorial services were held Sunday, July 21, at Portland Memorial Funeral Home, 231 Main St., Portland. Burial was private. Relatives and friends called Sunday afternoon, before the service. The family wishes to extend its appreciation to the staff of Middlesex Oncology in Middletown, in particular for the kindness of Dr. Robert Levy who has cared for David over the last 10 years.

In lieu of flowers, it is requested that donations be made to the American Cancer Society 1075 Chase Pkwy. #4, Waterbury, CT 06708.

To send an online expression of sympathy, visit portlandmemorialfh.net.

Observations & Ruminations

by Mike Thompson

Astute readers – i.e., those who are used to reading my delightful column each week – no doubt noticed I was gone again last week, with Geeta Schrayter once again filling in at the editor's desk.

Where did I go for my second vacation in just under a month? This time, a little bit closer to home than Florida: New York City. I had tickets for Major League Baseball's All-Star Game, which was played this year at Citi Field. It was the first time since 1964 the Mets hosted the mid-summer classic, and, seeing as how I've been attending around 15 or so Mets games a year for close to 15 years, the Mets gave me the option last season to purchase tickets. Okay, so it wasn't hugely big of them, I suppose – "as a thanks for spending tons of money with us over the years, here's an opportunity to spend even more money" – but still, I jumped at the chance to buy them. It was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

Now, I didn't take the week off to go just to one game; rather, the tickets were sold as a "strip." Meaning, in addition to the All-Star Game, which was Tuesday night, you got tickets to the Home Run Derby Monday night, and, on Sunday, both the Major League Baseball "Futures" game (where the "stars of tomorrow" – a.k.a., the big names in the minor leagues – play against one another) and something I knew would be a ton of fun: the "Celebrities and Legends Softball Game," which featured celebrities and ex-baseball players.

The Futures game was fun – especially whenever an up-and-coming Met would take the field, at which point the fans would go wild – but the game I was most looking forward to on Sunday was the softball game. And it didn't disappoint. Okay, so the celebrities were of varying degrees of wattage – George Lopez, Kevin James, Alyssa Milano, Ashanti, hosts of New York-based radio talk shows – but the ex-baseball players....as a Mets fan, I was really looking forward to seeing them. They included such famous ex-Mets as John Franco, Darryl Strawberry, Dwight Gooden – and perhaps my favorite ex-Met of all, future Hall of Famer (I know it will happen one day) Mike Piazza.

Other ballplayers included Ozzie Smith (who's still got it defensively, by the way), Frank Thomas, Rickey Henderson and more.

Like I said, the game was a blast. The bases were moved in a bit, and the outfield fence greatly moved in, as this was strictly a just-for-fun affair. And fun it was – especially when Piazza uncorked a three-run homer in the bottom of the first to give his team the lead.

Monday, before Home Run Derby, brought a trip to the "All-Star FanFest," a huge gathering of baseball players, memorabilia and collectibles, and of course, lots of items to purchase. There were big names like Gooden, Strawberry, Andre Dawson and others available for autographs, but those usually involved waiting in hours-long lines. I balked at that, opting instead just to walk around and see what I could see.

One of the more fun things was I waited in a very short – less than five minutes, I think – line for a meet-and-greet with three veterans of the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League, which existed in the 1940s and early '50s, and was immortalized in the 1992 classic *A League of Their Own*. In hindsight, I should've led them in a chorus of their victory song ("We are the members of the All-American League, we come from cities near and far..."), but, alas, I didn't.

That night brought the Home Run Derby, which was a lot of fun. I'll admit that I never was that much of a Home Run Derby fan in the past. I'd rarely, if ever, watch it on TV. It felt like watching glorified batting practice to me. But I knew seeing it live would be something different entirely. And it was. Home runs are really amazing to see in person, so imagine seeing tons of them.

The stadium was packed quite more than it normally is, giving it something of a play-off atmosphere. The fans ate up the homers – at least at first. The second player to bat in the Home Run Derby, Yoenis Cespedes, who interestingly wasn't even named to the All-Star team, slugged an amazing 17 homers in the first round (there are three rounds altogether). I think that perhaps rendered the following players' home runs – more pedestrian totals of four, or five, or seven (still four, or five, or seven more than I'd hit) – something of a letdown, because the fans seemed to not be into it quite as much as the derby went on.

No matter, though; it was still a ton of fun – and set the stage for an even better day on

Tuesday.

Tuesday afternoon, before the All-Star game, the players donned their Sunday bests and rode down 42nd Street in the back of pick-up trucks for the annual All-Star Parade. I was fortunate to have a great spot for the parade, and got close-up views of the players as they rode along with their girlfriends or wives. Some brought their own kids, if they had them, which was a nice touch. A few even brought their own parents along, which I thought was an even sweeter touch. It was a steamy day in Manhattan, but I didn't mind; it was great to see former MVPs, superstar sluggers and pitchers, and even the legendary Tom Seaver (the parade's grand marshal) up close like that.

Then came the game Tuesday night. And whereas the stadium seemed packed Monday night, it was *truly* packed Tuesday. The game was sold out – in fact, standing room tickets were even sold for the game – and attendance totaled over 45,000, the largest crowd there has ever been at Citi Field. It was cool walking around before the game, seeing fans who had quite clearly come from all over – there were Red Sox and Yankees fans, sure, but also Brewers fans, Marlins fans, Indians fans, and more – and even cooler once the pre-game festivities started. The atmosphere was reminiscent of a playoff game, something I was fortunate enough to experience at Shea Stadium a few times, but never at Citi Field. There were polite cheers for the All-Stars introduced, the "hey, we're Mets fans" boos for members of the hated Braves, Phillies and Yankees – and huge cheers when the two Mets on the All-Star team – David Wright and Matt Harvey – were introduced.

After the singing of the Canadian and U.S. National Anthems (Fox, in a "that's so Fox" decision, apparently decided only to broadcast the U.S. anthem), we all settled into our seats – and me, my sister and the other Mets fans in attendance delighted in seeing our boy, Matt Harvey, take the mound in the top of the first. Harvey had been – quite justifiably – named the National League starter of the All-Star game by the squad's manager, Giants skipper Bruce Bochy (who, I'll quickly note, brought a few members of his own coaching staff to the game, including Colchester's own Ron Wotus, who I cheered quite loudly during his pre-game introduction). Harvey was just the third Mets pitcher ever to start an All-Star game – following Tom Seaver in 1970 and Dwight Gooden in 1988 – and the first one ever to start an All-Star game played right on the Mets' home turf. It was tremendously exciting.

After a rocky start – Harvey gave up a hit to the first guy he faced, then beamed Yankees' second baseman Robinson Cano – he settled down and pitched the way us Met fans have grown accustomed to seeing out of him: brilliantly. He wound up throwing two shut-out innings, striking out three, and leaving to boisterous applause from his adoring fans.

The rest of the game was a rather quiet affair, with the National League ultimately falling by a score of 3-0 – as I was walking out of the stadium my dad called me and said "sorry the Mets lost" – but there were still plenty of highlights. Perhaps the most memorable one was a long standing ovation given to Yankees reliever Mariano Rivera as he took the mound in the eighth inning. I stood and applauded too – and I'll be honest, it was a weird feeling. I've never applauded a Yankee, under any circumstances. And to do it for Mariano, who I'll never forget was the closer who got Mike Piazza to fly out to center field to end the 2000 World Series and send the Mets to defeat.... well, it all felt a little off. But as a fan of the sport, I just could not help but respect all that he's done. He's a first-ballot Hall of Famer all the way, with absolutely ridiculous numbers (as of Tuesday, he has 639 saves to go with a miniscule 2.20 lifetime ERA), and he seems like a genuine class act. Derek Jeter may be overrated, but not Mariano Rivera. He deserves just about every accolade you can give him.

After the game ended, it was time for the All-Star Game MVP trophy (and new Chevy Corvette Stingray), which were given to Rivera. Then another night at the hotel (a wonderful Sheraton right in the heart of Flushing, a mere subway stop from the stadium) and back to Connecticut on Wednesday.

It was a fantastic trip to New York, and a fantastic second vacation. In the world of once-in-a-lifetime experiences....well, that was a pretty awesome one.

* * *

See you next week.

'Irrational Male' Arrested in East Hampton

by Elizabeth Bowling

Tyler Brush, 32, of 136 Lake Drive, was arrested last Thursday. He was charged with breach of peace and possession of drug paraphernalia.

Brush was reported as an "irrational male carrying a black shotgun around an apartment complex on Lake Drive," a press release from Chief of Police Sean Cox read. Cox said the apartment complex matches Brush's own home address.

According to Cox, Brush, upon making arrangements to surrender without incident, told police officers he believed someone was in his home.

He was then arrested and officers seized his weapon – but was not charged for the weapon, as "it's not illegal to possess a shotgun in Connecticut," Cox said.

Brush's court date is scheduled for July 30 in Middletown.

East Hampton Police News

7/14: While conducting routine patrols of the East Hampton Stop & Shop Plaza on 11 East High St., police observed a male in a tan sedan drive through the parking lot erratically. Ryan Ruel, 40, of 50 Old Middletown Ave., was arrested and charged with failure to drive right, DUI, operating an unregistered and uninsured motor vehicle and operating under suspension, East Hampton Police said.

7/15: At approximately 10:47 p.m., police responded to a report of a male wielding a knife at an Old Coach Road residence. Wigberto Laboy, 32, of 17 Old Coach Rd., was arrested and charged with disorderly conduct and second-degree threatening, police said.

7/17: Police responded to a one-car motor vehicle accident in the area of 94 Colchester Ave. and reports of a domestic dispute in connection with the accident. Kristopher A. Schonagel, 24, of 29 West High St., was placed under arrest and charged with first-degree reckless endangerment and disorderly conduct, police said.

Colchester Police News

7/13: State Police said Jessica Minney, 31, of 1 Skylark Dr., was charged with third-degree assault and breach of peace.

7/15: State Police said Rance Carli, 53, of 40 Mill Ln., Salem, was arrested on an outstanding warrant for second-degree larceny.

7/16: Colchester Police said Stop & Shop located at 99 Linwood Ave. reported that unknown person(s) shoplifted numerous containers of Red Bull valued at \$110.92. The case is being investigated by the Colchester Police.

7/16: Colchester Police said Mathew McDonald, 24, of 15 Thames Terrace, Norwich, was arrested on three PRAWN warrants for three counts of first-degree failure to appear.

7/17: State Police said Michael Molinari, 23, of 51 West Coit St., New London, was charged with second-degree failure to appear.

7/17: State Police said Shannon DuBicki, 30, of 223 Norwich Ave., Taftville, was charged with criminal trespassing.

7/18: Colchester Police said Justin Mikan, 30, of 288 Lake Hayward Rd., was charged with violation of probation.

Hebron Police News

7/16: State Police said Clifford Pugliese, 42, of 85 Buck Rd., was charged with DUI and restricted turns.

Andover Police News

7/20: State Police said a one-car crash occurred on Route 6 four-tenths of a mile east of Route 87. Police said Joshua Blomberg, 22, of 54 West Park St., Apt. 2, Willimantic, was traveling on Route 6 when he crossed the double yellow lines and the westbound lane of travel and struck several trees. One of Blomberg's passengers, Fernando L. Diaz, 24, of 51 Moulton Ct., Floor 1, Willimantic, was transported to Hartford Hospital for examination, due to contusions. Police said Blomberg was issued an infraction for failure to drive upon the right.

Marlborough Police News

7/19: State Police said Edward James Simpson, 31, of 404 East Main St., Norwich, was charged with DWI and reckless driving.

7/18: State Police said Dennis Bergeron, 50, of 4 Whitman Rd., Moodus, was charged with DUI.

7/19: State Police said Michael Damato, 34, of 11 Payer Ln., Mystic, was driving erratically on Route 2 eastbound nine-tenths of a mile west of exit 16 when he left the travel lane and struck the wire rope guardrail along the left shoulder. Police said Damato sustained possible injuries and was transported to Marlborough Clinic by the Colchester Hayward Volunteer Fire Department.

7/21: State Police said David R. Martin, 23, of 121 Lebanon Ave., was arrested on three PRAWN warrants for second-degree failure to appear.

7/21: State Police said Matthew Benito, 32, of 10 Harvest Ln., East Granby, was charged with DUI and improper parking.

7/21: State Police said Brooke J. Fanion, 19, of 158 Stanavage Rd., was charged with failure to drive in proper lane, failure to renew registration, DUI and possession of alcohol by a minor.