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Birth Announced...Sage Reinholtz and Arlene McKelvey of Marlborough have announced the birth of their identical twin daughters, Sabrina Lily and Katrina Holly McKelvey. They were born Jan. 20 at Middlesex Hospital. Sabrina weighed six pounds and seven ounces. Katrina weighed five pounds and seven ounces. Paternal grandparents are Ted Reinholtz of Colchester and Suzanne Reinholtz of Colchester. Maternal grandparents are Don McKelvey of Winsted and Linda McKelvey of Marlborough. Maternal great-grandparents are William and Anetta Caffyn of Marlborough. The girls join a big sister, Abbey Rose, 3.

Gregg Schuster to Leave Colchester

by Melissa Roberto

Gregg Schuster has been a familiar face in Colchester. He grew up here and, since 2009, has served as the town's first selectman.

But the seasoned politician won't be seeing the end of his third term, which runs through November 2015. Schuster announced Wednesday he plans to resign, as he's accepted a township manager position in Pocono Township, Pa.

Due to his future position involving a relocation, Schuster said he does not yet know when his last day in Town Hall will be, but said he anticipates staying until the end of May.

In Pennsylvania, Schuster's new role will involve many of the same duties he has in Colchester. As a township manager he'll still act as a chief administrative officer, and, Schuster said, his responsibilities will include "running day-to-day operations just as I'm doing here in Colchester."

However, unlike the position he's used to, Schuster's new role is not elected; it's appointed. He will also report to a five-member Board of Commissioners, which serves as both the governing and legislative body of the town he is to serve. That board is also responsible for adopting a budget, which differs from Colchester's budget process Schuster has actively been involved in during his stint as first selectman.



Gregg Schuster

But what pushed Schuster to choose the Keystone State – a decision he labeled as "bittersweet" on his Facebook page – was that his new role comes with less responsibilities out-

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RHAM Board Cuts – Then Approves – Budget

by Geeta Schrayter

After much back and forth, heated comments among board members, and proposed amendments flying fast and furious, the RHAM Board of Education this week adopted a \$26.85 million 2014-15 budget – an increase of 3.49 percent over the current year – and sent it to district meeting and referendum next month.

Things began calmly enough on Monday, when the regional school board held a public hearing on the proposed spending package. Superintendent of Schools Bob Siminski presented a budget of \$27,058,069, an increase of 4.29 percent.

Of that number, he explained, 55 percent was for salaries, 13.1 percent for benefits, 9.2 percent for bonding, 4.7 percent for tuition, 4.4 percent for transportation, 2.2 percent for utilities, .9 percent for fuel and the remaining 10.5 percent for other areas.

Siminski said it was important to recognize some of the drivers in the budget, which include the cost of continuing the existing programming at the school, mandated and statutory increases, capital requests, the Common Core State Standards and teacher evaluation plans.

Siminski explained the major areas of increase were health insurance, which climbed \$190,180; special education, up \$360,649; a \$286,147 increase in funds for Capital Projects; and an increase of \$33,081 in instructional supplies.

Contracts also impacted the budget, with certified staff scheduled to receive a .5 percent general wage increase plus step and administrators slated for a 1.9 percent increase; non-certified staff is currently in negotiations.

However, the budget also features several reductions from the current year's budget, including \$183,590 less for transportation, as a result of a successful bid; \$102,667 less for textbooks; \$58,466 less for utilities, resulting from energy conservation measures like installing solar panels on the roof; a \$13,811 decrease in heating oil, due to lower fuel costs; and \$36,595 from magnet and vocational school tuition, as a result of fewer students leaving the district for the next school year.

Regarding special education, Siminski said there were currently 17 students in the district's Clinical Day Treatment (CDT) Program which also saved a substantial amount of money. The cost of the CDT program is \$204,746, compared to \$886,635 for those students to attend the Manchester Clinical Day School plus \$63,135 for transportation.

"It pays to keep those students in school, have them ride the regular bus and have the programming here," Siminski stated.

Other offsets in the budget proposal included some non-grant revenue sources such as \$833,437 from employee medical/dental premium cost shares, an estimated \$130,000 from pay-for-play sports and \$21,480 from rental

income.

Although the district receives some federal grants, Siminski said the number "continues to decline," as does the amount received through some of them, such as the IDEA grant which is decreasing \$18,884 next year.

As Siminski concluded his presentation, he mentioned the district's average per pupil expenditure – at \$11,958 per student in the year 2012-13 – was low when compared to the surrounding towns "and we have a lot more specialized activities."

After Siminski presented Monday, several individuals spoke out against the spending package. Among them was Hebron selectman Dan Larsen, who said he couldn't support the budget amount.

"I'm not saying that the needs aren't real, but the needs of the taxpayers are also real," he said. "Connecticut's economy is still terrible. ... There's got to be some sort of relief. It's just that simple."

Marlborough Board of Finance Chairwoman Evelyn Godbout shared similar feelings. She read a joint letter sent from the Marlborough boards of selectmen and finance that said the boards were "shocked" at the originally-proposed increase of 6.83 percent. She read that while historically, there have been "high positive vote levels" in Marlborough, the boards weren't sure that would be the case with this

year's budget.

"We are concerned the level of support in our town for the RHAM budget will decline, putting its approval in jeopardy," she read.

Marlborough selectman Dick Shea also spoke.

"I'm very concerned that we will be less than able to provide the level of support for the RHAM budget Marlborough provided in the past," he stated.

On the flip side, RHAM Board of Education member Rich Jacobson – who said he was speaking as an individual – offered his support of the numbers, and suggested money that has been given back to the towns over the years should have been saved for capital improvements. He said there were safety issues at the schools that have needed attention for years and urged the community to support the budget as it stands.

But when the public hearing came to an end and the Board of Education entered into its meeting, member Kevin Williams quickly offered up a motion to reduce the budget by \$207,147 to include a \$187,147 reduction from the capital budget, \$30,000 from security, \$25,000 from salaries and \$12,000 from instructional supplies while adding in \$38,000 for textbooks and \$8,000 to professional development.

The change would bring the budget down to \$26,850,922 for an increase of 3.49 percent.

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Schuster cont. from Front Page

side of the office, giving him more time to spend with his wife, Faith, and two children.

“As first selectman, I obviously have managerial duties day-to-day,” Schuster said. “I also have political duties as the political head of the town and lots of night meetings. Between working during the day, meetings during the night and events on the weekends, it’s extremely time-consuming.”

Referencing his 2-and-a-half year old son Brett and 4-and-a-half year old daughter, Leah, Schuster furthered, “I’ve missed a lot of their childhood already and I just don’t want to miss anymore.”

Schuster was born and raised in Colchester. After stints living in Fairfield County and New Jersey, he returned to town in 2005, and he has since raised a family.

And Colchester, Schuster said, “will always be my hometown.”

“I still have long-standing ties with the community,” he said. “I have so many friends here. I have family here. It was a very difficult decision for me.”

However, the Republican said the choice to leave was made with his wife and children in mind.

“I felt it was the best decision for me and my family but I will absolutely miss this community,” he continued.

Schuster reflected this week on the highlights of his career as first selectman in Colchester. He recalled the town being named the eighth “Best Community to Live In” within the Least Crowded Category by *CNN/Money Magazine* in 2013. Other highlights he’s enjoyed are the events put on by the town, from 57 Fest to the International Food Festival.

“All of those have been fantastic,” Schuster said.

Though the greatest highlight for the selectman, he said, has been “just enjoying the friendships with all the people in the community.”

Per the town charter, Schuster’s vacant seat is to be filled by one of the remaining members of the Board of Selectmen of the same political party. In this case, that would mean the seat could go to Republican selectmen Stan Soby or Denise Mizla. However, the charter stipulates if none of the members of the board of selectmen is able to assume the role of first selectman, the Board of Selectmen shall select an elector in the town to assume the role.

The last time a first selectman resigned in Colchester was in early 2007, when Jenny Contois left office with 11 months to go in her term. Stan Soby filled the seat for those 11 months, as he was also a member of the Board of Selectmen at the time.

Schuster first shared the news of his intent

to resign last week with department heads and public officials at Town Hall. This week, many who have worked with Schuster over the years commented on the news.

Town Planner Adam Turner said, “He’s been very supportive of the Planning Department. I’m sorry to see him go. I wish him the best in what he’s going to do.”

Former selectman, and now town treasurer, Greg Cordova said he was surprised by the news but is happy for his friend. “I support him in whatever he does,” Cordova said. “I’m not happy for the town but I’m very happy for him.”

As is Derrick Kennedy, Schuster’s longtime assistant who last year was hired as Enfield’s assistant town manager. Kennedy said he’s “extremely happy” for Schuster.

“He was a good role model,” said Kennedy. “In my experience the best interests of the residents was his first priority. No matter what the issue was it was making sure the residents were served in a fair and equitable manner and that was something to be admired.”

Soby also responded to the news this week, stating Schuster’s departure is “certainly a loss for Colchester but obviously a gain for Pocono.”

“A lot of good things have happened during Gregg’s time with us,” Soby said, “and we’re going to miss his energy and his great ways of looking at things differently to be more efficient and effective to delivering the citizens of Colchester.”

Soby said Schuster has succeeded in bringing economic growth to Colchester – “a real positive” for the town, in addition to negotiating contracts with employees “that have been fair to them, the town and the taxpayer.”

“Balancing all of that is not an easy thing to do and Gregg’s done a really good job with that,” Soby continued.

As for filling Schuster’s seat, Soby said the board will go through the appropriate process as dictated in the charter.

“We are all committed on the Board of Selectmen to doing our absolute best for the town of Colchester,” Soby said. “That includes how we’re going to deal with the situation of filling the vacancy and being able to go forward.”

Schuster, known to many in the community as an avid social networking user, took to his Facebook and Twitter pages this week to announce his intent to leave. To his friends and followers, he wrote, “Colchester is an amazing community and I have been honored to serve you. Over the next few weeks, I hope to have the opportunity to personally say goodbye to many of you. Until then, I’ll still be working hard at this job which I have been blessed to hold.”

RHAM Board cont. from Front Page

Williams explained that, based on public comments at meetings, communication that had been received via email and conversations with local officials, “the amount of increase we’re at, even 4.29 percent – no matter how urgent or how important an issue might be – is just too high for taxpayers.”

He called the number “not palatable,” and said in response, reductions needed to be made that were spread across the entire budget “so no one area gets hit too hard.”

Regarding the cut to the capital budget, Williams said he was aware some members felt projects had been “delayed, delayed, delayed” and couldn’t be held off any longer, but he also said the board “can’t rectify it all in one budget cycle.”

Speaking on the cut to salaries, Williams said there was still a chance more teachers would accept the early retirement incentive offered by the district and the new teachers that are hired could be Step 1 with a bachelor’s degree instead of Step 3 with a master’s degree, which would result in lower salaries.

After sharing his rationale, some members expressed support for the reductions, while others expressed concern.

Mike Turner, for example, said while he might have suggested different reductions, “overall this looks fairly reasonable for dividing up the cuts” and he’d support the motion.

But Jacobson wasn’t ready to reduce the capital budget, and made an amendment to the motion that would add back in \$159,000 for capital improvements.

In response, Turner moved to make an amendment of his own to add \$39,608 for technology and another \$30,000 for textbooks.

“If you don’t want to compromise, I don’t want to compromise,” he said to Jacobson.

To that, Board of Education Chairman Danny Holtsclaw said he felt Williams’ motion was “fair and reasonable,” and while he understood there were capital needs that had been unaddressed for years, “I’m not going to sit here and go back and forth with amendments I can’t keep track of.”

He furthered he was trying to get the board

through the budget process, and one of the issues was that members were “in all different directions.”

“I’m asking all to set aside differences and address this. If we don’t, the budget is going to get handed back to us,” he concluded. “There are tough decisions that need to be made here.”

Shortly after, board member Dieter Zimmer called Turner’s amendment to a vote; Turner’s was the only ‘yes’ vote, and the amendment failed 1-6, with Ken Lee abstaining. Jacobson’s amendment was then voted on, and it too failed, 2-6.

Two more amendments were then made to Williams’ motion. First, Jacobson moved to withdraw the total \$109,860 set aside for security. Both he and D’Amaddio said they wanted to know exactly what the money was going to be used for before including it in the budget: that amendment failed 3-3, with two abstentions.

D’Amaddio then moved to amend the motion to reduce the salary line item by \$344,723 because she felt there were too many special education teachers for the amount of special education students in the district. The amendment failed 2-6.

This brought the board back to the original motion made by Williams, which was amended by Holtsclaw to include forwarding the budget to a district meeting.

But before the motion could be voted on, Jacobson attempted to make yet another amendment to further reduce the budget by \$38,245 by removing monies added in for the STEM Program. The amendment however, received no second.

After all that, the original motion Williams’ had made at the start of the meeting came to a vote: the motion passed 6-2 with D’Amaddio and Jacobson against, bringing the budget down to \$26,850,022 for an increase of 3.49 percent.

The budget will now head to a district meeting, scheduled for Monday, May 5 at 6:30 p.m. in the RHAM High School chorus room. The referendum on the budget proposal is scheduled for the next day, May 6, in each of the three RHAM towns.

\$35.76 Million Budget Sent to Referendum in Hebron

by Geeta Schrayter

The Board of Finance held a public hearing on the proposed 2014-15 budget Tuesday night, after which they voted to forward the presented number to referendum May 6.

Board of Finance Chairman Mike Hazel went over the \$35,760,407 spending plan, an increase of \$807,118 or 2.31 percent, over the current year's budget. Included in that number is \$8,666,437 for general government, which is an increase of 4.06 percent; \$11,990,454 for the local Board of Education, for an increase of .29 percent; and \$13,699,066 for Hebron's share of the RHAM Board of Education budget, which is an increase of 3.35 percent.

In addition, the budget includes \$1,404,450 for Hebron's share of RHAM's debt, which is down .66 percent from the current year.

"From the budgets originally projected," Hazel explained, "the town is down modestly, the Hebron Board of Education was felt to be responsible, and the Hebron levy is what the RHAM board appropriated."

Hazel explained while the town has a say over the government budget, the Hebron education budget and the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) budget, "RHAM we don't have any authority over; it's solely up to the RHAM Board of Education to bring that budget forward."

And that's what the RHAM board did Monday night, when the budget was cut by \$207,147 and then approved at \$26,850,922, for an overall increase of 3.49 percent. Of that, Hebron is responsible for 56.26 percent based on the number of Hebron students attending the schools. Although that percentage is down .29 percent from the current year, the dollar amount Hebron is responsible for is going up \$434,540 due to the overall increase in the RHAM budget. (A story on the RHAM budget appears elsewhere in this issue.)

Regarding the town government budget, Hazel showed Tuesday there were a number of initiatives that had been included, such as "a modest pay-per-call" for EMS responders. Hazel said this was to entice more people to turn-out to calls.

As a volunteer town, Hazel said the town response rate is "very important."

The budget also includes \$23,736 for a part-time mechanic for the public works department; \$1,725 for a subscription to JobNow! Live Job Assistance and adult programming at Douglas Library; \$1,000 for a network-based emergency notification system; and \$1,000 for the Citizen's

Green Committee.

During public comment held at the end of the hearing, Board of Selectmen Chairwoman Gayle Mulligan spoke about these initiatives. The JobNow! subscription, she said, was only \$225, and would add value to the community and help those who were unemployed find jobs.

The same held true for the \$1,500 included for adult programming. Mulligan said it would help bring in some speakers "and hopefully help out the community a little bit better."

The emergency notification system would allow employees who felt they were in danger to use their computer to send a notification out that would reach all the town employees and the town manager or allow them to dial 9-1-1.

"So for the safety and security of the staff, we think it's very important to be added in there," Mulligan explained.

Mulligan went on to say there was currently one mechanic in town who works on all the machinery at public works, the parks and recreation department and the town cars.

"That's a lot of work" she said, adding the mechanic also has a route for plowing in the winter.

"So we felt it was important to add a part-time mechanic onto the staff so we can alleviate some of those issues," she stated.

The money for the Citizen's Green Committee would assist members in advertising and putting up more signs at the transfer station regarding recycling – particularly in view of the fact \$36,500 was included as part of CIP for the purchase of a single stream recycling compactor that would need some explaining and "signage so people understand where they need to be and where to put things," Mulligan stated.

The CIP budget totals \$946,284. Out of that, \$642,114 is included in the proposed budget (the remainder would be funded through the balance from previous appropriations, LOCIP funding, state reimbursement from asbestos abatement work done at Gilead Hill School, and money from the CIP designated fund balance).

Along with the compactor, which is a tier three item, a number of other projects were recommended under CIP. For example, in tier one, \$245,967 is included for road resurfacing and road improvements. Then there's \$105,000 for a mechanical system upgrade at the Douglas Library; \$95,000 to work on the roof of Hebron Elementary School over the 1947 wing; and \$76,370 for the lease payment on a replacement fire truck. Under tier two, projects include

\$50,000 for a salt shed at the public works department; \$45,947 to join Glastonbury in the shared purchase and use of some equipment for the parks and recreation department; and \$30,000 to put toward the restoration of the Peter's House.

"If [CIP] goes through it's budgeted to fund all of these projects. If it doesn't go through CIP will have to make decisions about what to do" Hazel said, adding "the largest [project] is road resurfacing which is a big thing in New England and we're probably several miles behind."

Along with the \$642,114 for CIP, the general government budget is made up of \$6,841,960 for town government; \$963,364 for debt service; \$125,000 for open space; a \$50,000 contribution to reevaluation; a \$34,000 contribution to the fund for capital projects between \$5,000 and \$25,000; and \$10,000 for capital non-recurring projects.

Hazel said factors in the town's cost increase include insurance, which is rising 4 percent this year; contractual raises; and an increased contribution to open space. However, he explained some of these increases were because "we're trying to make up for past cuts."

Of the proposed budget, the board estimated \$8,343,065 would come from revenue sources, leaving \$27,417,342 to come from taxes. If the budget were to pass as presented, it would result in a mill rate increase of 1.05, bringing the mill to 35.75. For a house valued at \$200,000 this would mean a \$210 increase in taxes, from \$6,940 to \$7,150.

After Hazel completed his presentation a number of individuals spoke during public comment. Most expressed their appreciation for the work of the boards, and asked that the budget not be cut any further.

Selectman Dan Larson, who said he was speaking as an individual, called the budget "very lean [and] austere but workable."

Mulligan shared Town Manager Andrew Tierney and town staff had cut the budget by over \$190,000 even before the selectmen began their review, at which point they reduced it by another \$26,000. She called the budget "very reasonable and thoughtful to the community."

Mulligan also commended the Board of Education and said they'd done "a better job being transparent, explaining the numbers and [using graphs]," which meant the budget figures were "better received by our board."

About half a dozen parents also spoke and asked the finance board not to make any cuts to the town's education budget.

Board of Education member Carol Connolly spoke as an individual and mentioned she'd moved to town because of the quality of the schools and urged the board, "Please do not make any cuts to this budget."

The same held true for other residents like Michele Zern, who said the schools were "one of the main reasons we moved to town." She asked the board to "please keep students and schools a priority when considering the budget."

After the hearing, the Board of Finance opened a meeting where Hazel immediately made a motion to forward the budget, as presented, to referendum.

Finance board member Henry Sawicki added an amendment to that motion to cut the Board of Education budget by \$239,118 to reflect declining enrollment, but other board members expressed disagreement with the idea.

"I think out of respect for the voting community we need to send it the way it is and let people talk with their votes," said member Lynn Guerriero. "Then we'll have a little more data to go on."

Hazel felt similarly. "To take a preemptive strike against a budget that is a .29 percent increase would be disrespectful to the process" he said, adding "the limited amount of comment we've had doesn't propel me to do anything but move forward," he stated.

Sawicki pointed out there had been comments during other meetings about lowering the budget, but even so, Hazel said he was going on what the board had heard at the hearing, and member Malcolm Leichter added onto that.

"The democratic process is set so we as elected officials listen to our electors," he stated. "I think to go against what we heard tonight is a perfect example of not doing what we're supposed to do as elected officials."

In the end, Sawicki's amendment failed 4-1, with just Sawicki voting in favor.

The original motion to forward the budget to referendum then passed 4-1 with Sawicki voting against.

The referendum on the proposed budget for fiscal year 2014-15 will take place Tuesday, May 6, from 6 a.m.-8 p.m. at Hebron Elementary School, 92 Church St.

Colchester Police Joins Facebook

by Melissa Roberto

The Colchester Police Department just went viral.

In recent weeks, the local police force has set up its own Facebook page as a way to communicate to the public what criminal activity is occurring in town. The idea to do so came from officers Craig Scheel and Jonathan Goss, who have each been with the local department for four years.

Scheel explained that, because the State Police Troop K barracks are located in Colchester, on Old Hartford Road, there has been some mix-up about which cases are being investigated by the local officers as opposed to state police troopers. Scheel said he hopes the sharing of information via Facebook will make the public aware of what the local officers are investigating.

"With the amount of social media that people use in the present day, we thought it would be a great outlet to submit our own press releases here," Scheel said, "and that way it would be very clear to voters and people in town what work we actually do and what criminal activity takes place in town."

Officers controlling the site post information on arrests, accidents, investigations and public safety information. And while hard copies of the releases are available for viewing at the state barracks, the Facebook page includes pictures related to investigations, which Goss said serve as an alternative resource for officers.

"There are a lot of times we talk to parents and family members who are not aware of what

some of the drugs look like," Goss used as an example. "I think it's going to be great when we get some drug arrests and put up photos of the evidence. People can be aware of what they should be looking for because a lot don't know."

Goss furthered another benefit of the Facebook page is it will help the community to get information faster.

"People are going to see what's going on in their neighborhoods faster than a newspaper," he said. "If there's a burglary in someone's neighborhood they need to know as soon as possible."

The site has been up and running for about two weeks, according to the officers. As of Wednesday afternoon, the page has received 396 "likes," a social networking tool that allows a user to show that they enjoy or support a page, without leaving a comment.

So far, the Facebook page has received positive feedback. First Selectman Gregg Schuster – who isn't a stranger to social networking – commented this week on the new page.

"It certainly is something new and I'm glad they're getting more information out to citizens," Schuster said. "It's a good project for them to take on. Anything that increases communication with the citizens is obviously beneficial."

Individuals interested in checking out the police Facebook page should log on to Facebook.com and type "Colchester Police" in the search engine. To contact the police department, visit it at Town Hall, or call 860-537-7270.



The Colchester Police Department is now on Facebook. The new page lists details on arrests, accidents and investigations, includes mug shots, and offers other pieces of public safety information.

East Hampton 'Balloon Lady' Looks Back on 30 Years of Fundraising

by Elizabeth Bowling

Most shoppers are familiar with the concept of going to the register to check out and having a cashier ask if they'd like to donate a dollar for charity. But what they may not know is one of those fundraisers – the \$1 donations to the Connecticut Children's Medical Center – was thought up by none other than a Bellringer.

Eleanor Lancey, 79 and now retired, is dubbed the creator of the Miracle Balloon project for the Connecticut-based children's hospital.

In August of 1983, Lancey had been working at the Newington Children's Hospital (now called the Connecticut Children's Medical Center) for 20 years and was the "director of fundraising by mail."

In an interview this week, she recalled receiving a piece of mail one day from the Children's Miracle Network, located in Salt Lake City, Utah. The envelope had on it the Children's Miracle Network logo, which was a red and yellow hot air balloon with two children standing in the balloon's basket.

(The image has since been updated and simplified to what is now a yellow oval atop a red square shape – still resembling a hot air balloon.)

Lancey, who was 54 at the time, considered enlarging the image of the logo and giving the balloons to local bars, restaurants and stores, which could then charge \$1 to their patrons to have their names written on the balloons and hung up on the establishments' walls.

She didn't know if her idea would take off, but she figured she'd try. So she made several hundred printouts of the balloons and went to 10 local businesses, she recalled. The first nine turned her down.

"They said 'no' to me. They just weren't interested in doing it," she said.

But then she went to the 10th business, O'Rourke's Diner in Middletown, which, at the time, was owned by Brian O'Rourke, and he agreed to participate in the fundraiser.

She left him with 300 paper balloons and

went back one week later and "was shocked to see the ceiling and walls covered with balloons," she recalled.

"I was so excited I ran back to the hospital and went to the photography department and borrowed a camera," she said.

She used the camera to take photos of the walls and ceiling of the diner. Then she made a booklet of the pictures, which she showed to other businesses and soon her idea took off.

In the first year of its existence, the program raised \$3,000. By the second year, that amount doubled, she said.

Lancey explained that each \$1 donation is "a donation into the hospital fund to help the children" at Connecticut's Children's Medical Center. She furthered that the money doesn't go to any department specifically, rather to a general fund.

Lancey recalled working at the hospital from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday and then going out after work to try and recruit businesses for the program, or to pick up money and drop off balloons. She also went out every Saturday and Sunday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. to do the same thing. Her work with the Miracle Balloon project was done strictly on a volunteer basis.

"I had the time of my life. It was so much fun," Lancey said, looking back on her volunteer work. "I was thrilled to do it."

In explaining some of her fun, she said, "I would choose a section of the state and work until I got 10 new places. I'd never go home without 10 new places."

Lancey said the program's popularity continued to grow every year in mostly local bars and restaurants, but also in big-name stores like Wal-Mart and Kmart.

With so many businesses on board, Lancey had her volunteer work cut out for her. She spent a lot of time dropping off balloons and picking up donations to be brought back to the hospital.

"I needed some way to collect the dollar bills

safely from the businesses and bars," Lancey said.

So she had inmates from the Hartford prison, as part of their community service work, build "these great big bright red boxes" that were about a foot high and a foot wide with a big slit in the middle. The prison provided the boxes free of charge and each participating business was given a box for money collection.

Lancey said she'd wait "several weeks" after dropping off balloons to a business before going back to pick up the donations.

She recalled, "The owner of the place and I would sit down and count the money."

She said she kept the cash in the back of her car and would drive it back to the hospital's finance department where it would get counted.

"I remember bringing boxloads [of dollar bills] back," she said.

Regarding Lancey's use of the Children's Miracle Network logo, she said, "There was a problem with me using [the logo initially] but somehow it got straightened out."

She said she couldn't remember exactly how it was sorted out, but she presumed it had something to do with the program's national expansion.

After three years of success in Connecticut, the Miracle Balloons program was picked up by the Children's Miracle Network on the national level in 1986 and has withstood the test of time, as it is still going strong today and raises \$88 million each year, according to childrensmiracletnetworkhospitals.org.

"The Children's Miracle Network learned of my success locally, because by then I had earned over \$75,000 locally," Lancey recalled. "That's when it went national."

Lancey earned the nickname "Balloon Lady" – a title she said she thought was funny.

Lancey has lived in East Hampton for nearly 60 years. She retired from the hospital in 1992 but continued to volunteer with the Miracle



East Hampton resident Eleanor Lancey came up with the idea for the Miracle Balloon project in 1983. Now, more than 30 years later, her initiative is still raising money for the Connecticut Children's Medical Center (formerly known as the Newington Children's Hospital) and has spread into a nationwide fundraiser for the Children's Miracle Network.

Balloon project until Scott Organek took it over in 1996. (Organek is still in charge of the Miracle Balloon project today.)

The retiree said she stayed involved in the program for "a number of years after retirement – as long as I could."

In a concluding remark regarding the future of the Miracle Balloon project, the Balloon Lady said her hope is for it "to continue."

East Hampton Town Council Discusses Budget

by Elizabeth Bowling

The Town Council discussed the 2014-15 budget as presented by the Board of Finance at its meeting Tuesday night. However, no action was taken on the spending proposal, as council members remain divided on just how much needs to be cut from it.

Board of Finance Chairman Ted Turner presented to the council his board's adopted budget. He explained that the finance board is recommending a total budget of \$40,872,675, which is a 4.17 percent, or \$1,634,700, increase from current year spending.

In relation to current year spending, Turner said the Board of Education budget would increase \$961,697 or 3.49 percent; town operations would increase \$303,152 or 3.11 percent; and debt service would increase \$54,996 or 4.99 percent.

Additionally, transfers to capital would increase \$314,855 or 38.8 percent. Turner explained, "We felt the capital has suffered for many years. We're trying to take a bite out of it."

Turner further explained that the Board of Finance reduced the town manager's proposed total budget by \$506,491. Those reductions included a \$26,584 reduction to the town manager's budget; a \$20,000 reduction to legal fees; \$37,800 from Parks and Recreation; \$142,407 from debt service; \$77,700 from transfer to capital; and \$215,000 from the Board of Education budget.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, \$13,000 was added to the senior center budget, Turner said.

Turner also relayed that the Board of Finance's proposed mill rate is 27.72 and represents a 1.09 mill increase, or 4.09 percent.

Town Council Chairwoman Barbara Moore then gave each council member a sheet of paper that listed two potential motions.

The first was to "accept the recommendation from the Board of Finance for the Capital Improvements Fund with the following changes: move \$55,346 from the Parks and Recreation Program Accounts in the Special Revenue Fund to Capital to offset improvements to the boat launch."

The first motion would leave approximately \$10,000 in the Special Revenue Account.

The second potential motion called for "reductions from the Board of Finance budget," including: the removal of the benefits clerk position from the operating budget; \$2,842 from the town manager's budget; and \$23,742 from the employee benefits total. It also called for the removal of \$45,549 from health insurance; and an offset of \$55,346 for the boat launch.

The total of those reductions would equal \$127,479. But the second motion also called for the addition of \$37,800 to the Parks and Recreation budget for mowing. Thus, the total reductions from the Board of Finance's proposed budget would be \$84,679, which would cause an increase in the mill rate of 1.01 mills or 3.79 percent.

After listening to Moore's proposal, council member Mark Philhower said, "My feeling is that it's still too high."

He furthered, for example, that increases to the Board of Education's budget should be "no more than 2 percent."

Council member Patience Anderson said she agreed with at least one aspect of the finance board's proposal.

She said, "I like the fact that we've made a commitment to really address capital. So that part of the budget I'm very pleased with. But I have a problem with using fund balance to artificially affect the mill rate."

Because she was not on board with the en-

tirety of Moore's proposal, she said she would not vote for it.

Councilman Ted Hintz said he too, would not vote in favor of the motion.

"This is an absolute irresponsible budget and I cannot support it. It is way too high," Hintz said, noting specifically, "I'm not in favor of adding any new positions."

The "new positions" to which Hintz referred are a town benefits clerk, a police captain and a facilities manager. (The Board of Finance included those three positions in the budget it moved forward to the council.)

However, council member Kevin Reich disagreed with Hintz on the matter of at least one of the new positions.

Reich said, "That [police] captain's position is needed. It's needed or we're not going to make improvements to the police department."

Similarly, councilman Phil Visintainer called the facilities manager "direly needed."

In a more general overview of the budget, council member George Pfaffenbach said, "I'm for moving the [budget] forward to get things done, get things accomplished in town."

He said the townspeople should be the ones to decide whether they can afford the proposed budget, and that's a decision they can make at referendum. He furthered that it's not up to the opinions of the Town Council members to determine what amount the people of East Hampton want to pay.

"It's up to the people to decide," Pfaffenbach said, adding, "We can't continue to pass budgets that don't meet the needs of the town."

Board of Finance member Don Coolican – who said he was speaking as an individual and not on behalf of the finance board – spoke during a public comment portion of Tuesday night's meeting.

He informed the council members that he voted against the budget that came forth to them from the Board of Finance, and said that, in his opinion, "a realistic increase would be 2.3 percent overall."

He then reminded the council, "If you don't present a reasonable budget then it's not going to pass [in the town referendum]."

The council decided to hold off on voting on the budget until its next regularly scheduled meeting, Tuesday, April 22, at 6:30 p.m. at Town Hall.

Moore explained that by waiting on the vote for two weeks, the council will have time to further look into, and better understand, the concept of bonding a fire tanker and the East Hampton High School athletic facility project, as explained by the town finance director at this week's meeting.

The extra two weeks will also give members of the council time to come up with alternative adjustments to be made to the budget.

Regardless of the Town Council's lack of action on the budget this week, members voted unanimously to hold a town meeting on the budget Monday, April 28, at 7 p.m. at Town Hall.

Also at Tuesday's meeting, East Hampton resident Sam Oliva spoke during public comment regarding an upcoming road project at the intersection of routes 66 and 196.

He expressed dissatisfaction with the town's lack of involvement in the project, which is being implemented by the state. Oliva said he is concerned with the safety implications of the project, specifically that there ought to be more sidewalks in the design. He concluded that he'd like the town manager to hold a public forum regarding the project.

\$22.23M Budget Sent to Public Hearing in Marlborough

by Melissa Roberto

A \$22.23 million Marlborough budget for the 2014-15 fiscal year was approved by the Board of Finance Wednesday, and sent to a public hearing later this month.

The budget totals \$22,230,125, which reflects an increase over the current fiscal year of 2.86 percent. That bottom line number features five components: Marlborough's portion of the RHAM budget, which stands at \$7,793,370, an increase of 6.58 percent; the local Board of Education package at \$7,271,585, an increase of 1.25 percent; the town operations budget at \$4,612,856, an increase of 3.96 percent; contingency, which stays the same as the current year at \$20,000 to be used for emergencies; and town debt at \$2,532,314, which decreases over the current year by 4.80 percent.

The recommended town budget that will head to the hearing reflects an overall tax increase of the current year's budget of 2.23 percent. In turn, that results in a proposed mill rate for the 2014-15 fiscal year going up .69 mills, from 30.76 to 31.45.

The public hearing is the next step in the budget process, to allow taxpayers the opportunity to weigh in on the bottom line totals. A Board of Finance meeting will directly follow the hearing, at which time it can vote to send off the budget to a town meeting – which is where a public vote on the budget will be taken.

Traditionally, the Marlborough budget town meeting also features a vote on capital expenses. Rather than being incorporated into the overall bottom line total of the budget, these expenses are paid for through a transfer of the general fund balance to the reserve for capital and non-

recurring fund. The finance board also approved the proposed capital expenses to go to the public hearing. Capital for the next fiscal year totals \$485,750 – which increases by \$135,750 over last year's \$350,000.

The capital items to be funded, if approved, are: \$45,000 set aside for the future capital expenditure reserve, \$40,000 for the revaluation reserve for the 2014-15 fiscal year, \$136,500 towards the engineering of rebuilding Fawn Brook Bridge, \$35,000 for design and engineering costs for repairs to Williamsburg and South roads, \$30,000 for an above ground fuel oil tank at fire house 2, \$4,200 for the replacement of a police car mounted radio, \$11,500 for three police portable radios, \$60,000 for a fuel master system at Public Works, \$73,550 for a Public Works backhoe/loader, and \$50,000 for road improvements.

A third vote to eventually be taken by the public at a town meeting is the termination of unexpended portions within the reserve for capital and non-recurring fund. Those total \$8,634, \$410 of which is to go towards the termination of a Public Works 4X4 and the remaining \$8,224 would terminate the library roof project.

* * *

The Board of Finance met Wednesday night and offered its support of the RHAM Board of Education budget. The spending plan for the regional middle and high schools was reduced by the RHAM Board of Education Monday, from an overall 4.29 percent increase to a 3.49 percent increase; this brought Marlborough's levy – the portion of the RHAM budget it pays each year – down from a 9.99 percent increase

over the current year to a 6.58 percent one.

Finance board chairwoman Evelyn Godbout said Wednesday Marlborough's overall budget total is "much better than what we were looking at" due to reductions.

In recent weeks, categories of the budget have been tweaked from the original presentations. The town operations budget, which First Selectwoman Cathi Gaudinski initially presented a draft of in early February, featured some changes. Initially, Gaudinski proposed a salary increase of \$8,500 for the administrative assistant in the selectman's office, due to be in line to other wages earned in Town Hall, and other administrative assistants in the state. However, that increase, which would have been a 24.66 percent increase over the current year, was lowered to an increase of 10 percent, or by \$3,450. Legal fees also were changed to increase by \$5,000, from the proposed \$85,000 to \$90,000 due to what finance member Ken Hjulstrom anticipated would be needed in the coming year because of union contracts approaching and legal costs rising.

The local Board of Education budget – which covers the expenses of Marlborough Elementary School – had been reduced by \$30,000 last week following a request made from the finance board to the school board. The cuts that were reduced included a net reduction of \$9,565 for the principal and assistant principal positions, which feature new hires in the coming year. Additionally, a revision was made to high deductible insurance costs from a 4 percent increase down to a 1.7 percent increase. That adjustment came from Anthem, the town's insur-

ance company, and produced a drop of \$17,696. A mere \$130 drop in social security/Medicare taxes also was made as a result of taxes due to the salary changes, and lastly, a reduction of \$2,600 was made in emergency repair contingency.

However, finance board member Susan Leser on Wednesday night pushed to revisit the local Board of Education budget, after its cuts. She said she felt the school board was "underhanded," due to the decreases coming in areas that were anticipated.

"It just kind of rubs me the wrong way that we weren't told upfront that these cuts to these salaries were possibly coming," said Leser. "We were looking at cuts that didn't affect salaries at all. I think we all agreed they could easily cut between 30 to 50,000 dollars. There's still a lot of fluff in there."

Leser made a motion to cut the local school budget by another \$20,000, which resulted in a vote of 2-3-1, with Leser and Godbout in favor, Cliff Denniss, Doug Knowlton and Ken Hjulstrom against it, and Midge Denno abstaining.

Denniss, the finance vice chairman, said he was "comfortable where it is."

The public hearing is scheduled for Monday, April 28, at 7 p.m., in the Marlborough Elementary School cafeteria. A finance meeting will directly follow, and upon the finance board's approval, the budget will eventually head to a town meeting to be voted on by the public, which is already scheduled for Monday, May 12, at 7 p.m., also in the MES cafeteria.

Marlborough Man Arrested for Subway Robbery

by Melissa Roberto

A *Rivereast* story about an armed robbery at the Subway in town last November has led to the arrest of a local man, state police said.

Patrick Meskers, 26, of 210 North Main St., was arrested March 26 and charged with first-degree robbery and sixth-degree larceny, following an investigation conducted by the Eastern District Major Crime Squad.

According to police, at approximately 12:26 p.m. last Nov. 19, a white male was reported entering the Subway, located at 1 South Main St., through the back door. The suspect, described as wearing a grey hooded sweatshirt and red bandana-type scarf over his face by witnesses, entered behind the cashier and brandished a knife while attempting to take cash out of the drawer. He then left through the same door he entered in on foot, to a vehicle that had been parked on the eastern side of the adjacent business. The vehicle was described as an "older, four-door sedan, color gold or rust, with a partial registration of EL942 or IE942."

Video footage inside of Subway also caught the suspect on tape. At the time, police said a witness reported the vehicle the suspect drove off in had a loud exhaust, and was headed east on Route 66. Police reported the suspect also left the store, having stolen \$60 in cash from the register, and no injuries were sustained.

According to an affidavit on file at Manchester Superior Court, Meskers' mother, also of Marlborough, spoke with state police on Nov. 23, after reading a story about it in that week's *Rivereast*. She told police the description of the vehicle in the story matched the vehicle she owns, which at times is driven by Meskers.

According to the affidavit, Meskers' mother told police Meskers recently got laid off from work and also has a problem with heroin. Additionally, the document furthers Meskers is a former employee of the Subway in Marlborough. The mother also stated Meskers had been driving her vehicle the day of the robbery.

The affidavit states a search warrant was executed to search the vehicle for physical evidence connected to the case. Upon the seizing of the vehicle, the document states, police determined the car "had an extremely loud exhaust," which matched the description given to them by witnesses last fall.

According to the document, digital pictures of the vehicle were taken and shown to witnesses of the robbery, who "confirmed that the vehicle in the pictures was the vehicle they saw the robbery suspect get into and flee the scene."

Two items were also located in the vehicle that were found in connection to the case, the document furthers. Those items included one pair of dark sunglasses and a bandana – two articles witnesses described the suspect to have been wearing at the time of the crime.

The affidavit furthers a Dunkin' Donuts employee visor cap was also discovered in the vehicle. A Dunkin' Donuts exists in the same plaza as the Subway in Marlborough.

The investigation linked the hat to a former employee of the Dunkin' Donuts in Marlborough, who also was identified as Meskers' girlfriend.

On Dec. 18, Meskers was arrested on motor vehicle-related charges. He was transported to Troop K in Colchester, at which time the detective investigating the Subway robbery contacted Meskers and interviewed him on his involvement in that incident. Meskers denied his involvement, but admitted to driving his mother's car "all the time" and said his girlfriend "is always with him," according to the document.

However, based on all the evidence police had collected, they arrested Meskers in connection with the Subway robbery. He is due in court on those charges on April 28.

That same day, according to the state judicial website, Meskers is due in court in relation to the Dec. 18 arrest, which was on charges of improper use of a marker, operating an unregistered motor vehicle, and illegally operating a motor vehicle without minimum insurance. He has already pled not guilty to those charges.

Also, according to the state judicial website, Meskers is also facing charges of second-degree breach of peace, third-degree criminal mischief and interfering with an officer, stemming from an April 2012 incident. Meskers was arrested on those charges last Dec. 13, and has yet to enter a plea. He is next due in court in relation to those charges May 13.

The state judicial site also lists Meskers as having been convicted on a narcotics possession charge in 2012, and a sixth-degree larceny charge this past January.

East Hampton Grand List to Grow

by Elizabeth Bowling

A calculation of East Hampton's Grand List of taxable properties for 2013 shows a .58 percent increase from the previous year.

The Oct. 1 2013 Grand List, totaling \$1,134,924,705, is a \$6,559,629 increase from last year's \$1,128,365,076 list.

The Grand List is broken down into three items: real estate, which, according to the town manager, makes up 89 percent of the list; motor vehicle, which makes up 9 percent; and personal property, which makes up 2 percent.

The total net value for real estate went up to \$1,010,728,363, compared to the previous year's \$1,006,242,382; the total for motor vehicles went up, too, from \$96,736,194 to \$98,869,097; and personal property went down from \$25,386,500 in 2012 to \$25,327,245 in 2013.

The Grand List represents the net value of assessed property in town and helps set the mill rate for the upcoming fiscal year, which is determined by dividing the town's budget by the Grand List total.

The mill rate in East Hampton for the current year is 26.63 and the Board of Finance moved forward last week with a proposed mill

rate for the 2014-15 year of 27.72.

A mill is \$1 tax per \$1,000 of assessed property value. Residents can calculate their taxes by multiplying their total assessments by the mill rate, and then dividing that number by 1,000. So, using the proposed mill rate for the coming fiscal year, a person with a house assessed at \$200,000 would pay \$5,544 in taxes on it, for example.

The proposed 1.09 mill increase is still subject to change until after the Board of Finance officially sets the mill rate following the town's approval of the budget at a town vote.

According to town assessor Carol Ann Tyler, the top 10 property owners in East Hampton are: Connecticut Light and Power, with property valued at \$14.79 million; Landmark East Hampton, at \$7.40 million; Hampton 66, at \$3.31 million; Skyline Estates, at \$2.65 million; East High St. Realty, at \$2.34 million; Global Self Storage, at \$2.29 million; Rechovos Corporation, at \$2.25 million; Jackowitz Edward, at \$2.23 million; Paul's and Sandy's Too, at \$2.07 million; and Z Inc., at \$1.77 million.

Combined, the top 10 taxpayers own \$41.10 million of taxable property in East Hampton.

Jessica's Garden Stands 10 Years Strong in Marlborough

by Melissa Roberto

Spring is approaching New England at a slower rate than usual, but Jessica's Garden in Marlborough is in full-bloom for the tenth year in a row.

Since its opening in 2004, the garden center has evolved to a hot spot for the whole family. Each year in the middle of March, the bright pink and green buildings open for business on Route 66. Customers head to the family-owned center to purchase plants and specimens or garden décor, while others are drawn in by the property's pond view and seasonal treats.

Co-owners Matthew and Jessica Carroll of Portland opened the business upon returning from their honeymoon in the fall of 2004. Jessica, who grew up in East Hampton, recalls planting specimens and watching them grow at the property her parents owned on Lake Pocotopaug. Jessica later worked as the landscape foreman at the Tournament Players Club River Highlands Golf Course in Cromwell, where her love of horticulture was confirmed. Following that, Jessica purchased the property on Route 66, where she and her brother Judson Landon, also a landscape foreman at Jessica's Garden, began to store plants.

Jessica earned her certified landscape manager's license from the University of Massachusetts Green School, and is an accredited nursery professional with the Connecticut Nursery and Landscape Association. She is also licensed by the Connecticut Agricultural Station as a Certified Landscape and Garden Design Consultant.

Jessica recalled this week what her vision was when she and Matthew opened the business 10 years ago.

"You can look at a plant on a computer but it's better just to see what the plant does and what it looks like and how to take care of it," she said. "That was my plan – to open this business so people could see all the cool plants. And then it just evolved from there."

The garden center is housed in a two-bay garage. For the first few years, only one half of the garage was used to house plants. Now, it's completely filled. The center houses cold hardy plants, shrubs, trees, annuals, perennials and Jessica's favorite, specimens, which she said are plants that "just make you go 'wow.'" When Mother's Day rolls around, the garden will sell farm-grown vegetables.

And dispersed in between the wide offerings of plants is garden décor, from chairs and lights, to iron-work from Mexico. The business also

sells bulk mulch and organic lawn care supplies.

But anyone who has stepped onto the three-acre property knows there's more to Jessica's Garden than just garden necessities. About five years ago when the housing market fell, the co-owners brought along an ice cream and lobster shack, which has since gained much popularity.

"It's a tiny little building but it packs a lot of food in it," said Jessica.

Matthew Carroll is a regional food salesman, and therefore brings to the business ice cream and lobster from Maine. Popular ice cream flavors include Toasted Coconut, Deer Tracks and Caramel Caribou – and the hot eats are just as mouth-watering. Sold in the shack are both Massachusetts lobster rolls – which are cold with mayonnaise – and Connecticut lobster rolls – hot and drawn with butter – on toasted buns. Grilled cheese sandwiches, seafood cakes made of shrimp, crab meat and scallops, cucumber sandwiches and what Jessica called "spectacular" hot dogs are also on the menu.

And the lines that form each year outside of the shack are just the response Jessica and Matthew had hoped for.

"Most of my happiest childhood memories are going places and getting ice cream with my family so I just wanted to share that with everyone," Jessica said.

This year the owners have added something new to the menu: healthy smoothies. Customers can choose from apple or orange juice or coconut milk, paired with berries, bananas, beets, peaches, carrots, kale, spinach and more.

Beyond the shack is a tent and picnic tables next to the pond, where groups can unwind and are welcome to BYOB. Customers can also enjoy sitting by the fire pit each night and kids are welcome to take advantage of the rope swing.

Furthermore, the property features a "fairy garden" often visited by the business's youngest customers. It's a place that Jessica said "brings out children's ability to believe." In full bloom it's filled with flowers and plants, and is where imaginative children often spot flying fairies.

In the months ahead, Matthew and Jessica will also work on planting along the seasonal garden path. The owners last year designed the path as a place for customers to walk through the property and take in a nice view. And like last year, it will be utilized up until the



Spring has sprung at Jessica's Garden on Route 66 in Marlborough. The garden center is officially open for business and is in its 10th year. The center welcomes residents of all ages to stop in either to purchase plants or flower décor, indulge in a seasonal treat from its popular food shack or take a walk on its grounds that offer quite a view.

business's closing day, Halloween, and by then it will be turned into a spooky trail created by the couple's children, Lilly, 8, and Laurel, 7, and son, Harley, 15, who also help out at the business.

And while the owners are only a couple weeks into their 10th year, the co-owners positively reflected this week on the ability to stay open for a decade.

"It's a real satisfaction building something up from nothing," said Matthew, who also shared what the recipe to the business's longevity is. "For us it's been not overextending ourselves and doing too much at once."

Jessica admitted the business is a lot of work, and joked that she and her husband often ask each other during the winter, "Are we crazy opening it again?" But, she continued, there's always anticipation for opening up shop when spring arrives.

"It helps that we close part of the season

because then we rejuvenate and get inspired again," said Jessica. "And it's cool to see customers after the winter. They grow! Some we don't even recognize."

And while this year's temperatures haven't peaked yet, the warm months ahead at Jessica's Garden are sure to be enjoyed. And when spring and summer do come and go, it's on to pumpkin-flavored treats, pumpkins and mums.

For now, the couple agreed they will "continue to build upon what people respond to well to make it a really good place for families to come," adding they are looking forward to greeting customers of Marlborough and its surrounding communities in the seasons ahead.

Jessica's Garden is located at 198 East Hampton Rd. (Route 66) in Marlborough. It is now open seven days a week from 9 a.m.-7 p.m. To find out more, or to wish the owners a happy 10th anniversary, call the business at 860-295-1685 or visit jessicagarden.net.

Portland Selectmen Adopt \$31.56 Million Budget

by Elizabeth Bowling

The Board of Selectmen adopted a \$31,561,273 budget – a 2.39 percent total budget increase from the current year – last Wednesday, April 2, in a unanimous vote, sending the proposed spending package to a May referendum.

The adopted budget is \$50,073 less than the first selectwoman's original proposal of \$31,611,346.

According to First Selectwoman Susan Bransfield, adjustments to her original proposal were "pretty much across the board" and included reductions in the Police, Public Works, and Parks and Recreation departments, as well as in the Board of Education, Land Use and the Fire Marshal, she said.

According to Bransfield, the revenue and expenditures adjustments equal \$134,029. (She explained that means the net effect was a change of \$134,029.)

Regarding this year's budget process, Bransfield said, "The selectmen worked hard"

and moved forward with a "modest adjustment to the mill rate."

Bransfield's original proposal called for a 2.16 percent increase in the mill rate but the selectmen's budget reduced that increase to 1.61 percent, Bransfield affirmed.

The adopted mill rate for the current fiscal year is 31.28. For the 2014-15 budget, Bransfield proposed a mill rate of 31.95, which would have been a 0.67 mill increase to last year's mill rate, but the Board of Selectmen moved forward with a proposed mill rate of 31.78, or a 0.50 increase.

For a home assessed at \$150,000, this would translate to a \$4,767 tax bill, up from this year's \$4,692 for the same home.

The proposed budget for 2014-15 can be broken down into three categories: education, total general government and total other expenditures.

The \$9,208,532 that falls under "total general government" includes: general government,

\$1,373,732; public safety, \$1,830,667; public works, \$2,153,800; planning and development, \$161,019; health and human services, \$285,455; Portland library, \$678,700; employee fringe benefits, \$2,580,159; and risk management, \$145,000.

"Total other expenditures" comes in at \$3,103,038, including \$2,061,401 for debt service.

The education budget was cut by the Board of Selectmen by \$12,000 from the superintendent's original proposal of \$19,261,703. The education budget moved forward by the selectmen totals \$19,249,703.

Selectman Fred Knous said that the budget "reflects the feelings of the townspeople – they want services but they want things to be affordable."

He also said, "I think the board as a whole – both parties – worked hard to make sure that taxes remain as affordable as possible in Port-

land and worked cooperatively to make further reductions to Susan's proposed budget."

He furthered regarding taxes, "I think that overall it was a good budget. It won't impact property taxes too severely; there will be a slight increase."

Board of Selectmen member Kathy Richards added, "I'm happy that after reducing the budget, the Board of Selectmen was able to come in at a .5 mill increase. We look forward to reviewing the budget with the voters at the upcoming public hearing."
* * *

The town budget meeting will be held Monday, May 5, at 7 p.m. at Portland High School and the budget referendum will be held Monday, May 12, between 6 a.m. and 8 p.m. at the Portland Senior Center.

The next regularly-scheduled Board of Selectmen meeting is Wednesday, April 16, at 7:30 p.m. at Portland Library.

Andover School Board Approves Incoming Principal

by Geeta Schrayter

The Board of Education Wednesday voted unanimously to approve Superintendent of Schools Andrew Maneggia's recommendation for the appointment of John P. Broidy as Principal and Director of Curriculum beginning July 1.

Broidy was recommended by a search committee which consisted of Maneggia, board members Whitney Covell and Christina Tamburro, reading teacher Lisa Handfield and Parent Teacher Association President Karen Midolo.

Maneggia and Board of Education Chairman Jay Linddy said it had been a "great committee," who Maneggia explained reviewed all the applications, reduced the pool to five that they then interviewed, after which they chose two for site visits.

And it was the site visit to Naubuc School in Glastonbury where Broidy is currently a third-grade teacher that Maneggia said "confirmed the convictions of the committee" that Broidy was the one.

Broidy has spent the last 15 years teaching in Glastonbury; he's been at Naubuc School since 2007, prior to which he taught the same grade at Hopewell School. Glastonbury Public Schools recently tabbed him as the town's Teacher of the Year for the 2013-14 school year.

He received his Bachelor of Science degree in marketing from the University of Connecticut in 1982, followed by a Master of Science degree in elementary education and teacher certification from the University of New Haven in 1999. He is expected to receive his sixth-year certificate from UConn next month.

On Wednesday, Broidy said he was excited about the opportunity.

"I am very excited, thrilled, honored to have the opportunity to – hopefully – be the next principal here," he said shortly before the board took their vote.

He went on to say he felt blessed because of his experiences in Glastonbury where he worked with "amazing staff, administration and

families" and he was looking forward to the same thing in Andover.

"I'm very eager – just a couple of months before we get started and I'm looking forward to it," he stated.

After he spoke, board member Kim Hawes asked a very important question before the board made their decision.

"Red Sox or Yankees?" she asked with a smile.

After Broidy said Red Sox, Hawes shook her head, while some of the other members cheered, and Linddy explained sarcastically, "Being a Yankee fan with Andrew [Maneggia] we just might table this..."

The vote however, was not tabled, and despite some differing views on sports, the board voted unanimously to approve the recommendation.

"For me personally, it's been an incredible week" Broidy said, with the UConn men's basketball team winning the national championship Monday night, then the women's team taking home the national title Tuesday night, "then tonight!" he said.

Broidy will be replacing Principal Dave Griffin, who announced last June he'd be retiring at the end of the school year, after 10 years in the role.

* * *

Also at the meeting, the board voted to enter into a bus contract that would save the town a significant amount of money.

"You're going to be quite pleased," Linddy told the board of the new contract.

Bidding on a potential regional bus contract between Andover, Hebron, Marlborough and RHAM took place two weeks ago, in hopes a more favorable rate would be received if a contract was sought as a group. However, Maneggia said last month there was no guarantee the contract would end up being for the entire region, and if an offer came in for Andover alone that was more favorable than as a group, that's what he would recommend.

At this week's meeting he abided by that



The Board of Education Wednesday selected a new principal to replace outgoing David Griffin. John Broidy, second from left, comes to Andover from a 15-year teaching career in Glastonbury. Also shown are, from left, Griffin, Board of Education Chairman Jay Linddy and Superintendent of Schools Andrew Maneggia.

statement, as he recommended the board approve a five-year contract with Nichols Bus Service to provide transportation for Andover students.

"We were pleasantly surprised in terms of the way the bids came in," Maneggia explained. "I was a little bit surprised that the companies were not more interested in bidding for the total package, but they really weren't."

Nichols, he said for example, only placed a bid on Andover and Marlborough.

The current rate the school is paying for regular buses is \$273.36 per bus per day, the cost of which is split in half between RHAM.

Under the first year of the new contract, that number was reduced to \$248.50 per bus per day.

"So in essence, almost \$25 savings for each

bus," Maneggia explained. "When you calculate for the whole year it comes out to about \$27,000, half of which is savings for RHAM, the other half is for the elementary school."

It won't be until the final year of the contract, 2018-19, that the cost of the buses will exceed the amount the school is currently paying, which Maneggia called "fantastic."

"So when you look at it, we did very well," he stated.

The board voted unanimously to enter into the contract with Nichols.

* * *

The next Andover Board of Education meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, May 12, at 7 p.m. in the Andover Elementary School Library.

East Hampton Police News

3/21: East Hampton Police said Fabian Zahuantitla Quiebras, 42, of 1487 Silver Ln., East Hartford, was arrested for evading, failure to yield right of way, driving under suspension, failure to display a front marker plate and failure to carry registration and insurance after he fled the scene of a motor vehicle accident that occurred on Lakeview Street near the intersection of East High Street.

3/29: Jean Maheu, 26, of 12 Summit St., was issued a summons for disorderly conduct and third-degree criminal mischief, police said.

Portland Police News

3/28: James Millett, 50, of Gayes Road, East Haddam, was charged with two counts of following too close, two counts of operating under suspension, two counts of operating an unregistered motor vehicle, and two counts of misuse of plates, Portland Police said.

4/2: Kyle Fisher, 30, of 15 Wilkes Rd., East Hampton, was charged with possession of less than half an ounce of marijuana, police said.

Marlborough Police News

4/5: State Police said Stephen C. Kissel, 52, of 64 Blood St., Lyme, was arrested for DUI and failure to drive in the right lane.

4/6: State Police said Ryan Simon, 35, of 101 Stage Harbor Rd., was arrested for disorderly conduct and risk of injury to a child.

Colchester Police News

3/31: State Police said Kyle Baltz, 27, of 89 Bush Hill Rd., Lebanon, was arrested for third-degree burglary and fifth-degree larceny.

4/2: Colchester Police said Traci A. Llewellyn, 21, of 89 Caya Ave., West Hartford, was charged with fourth-degree larceny and third-degree forgery.

4/2: State Police said Matthew Murphy, 45, of 88 Cotswold Way, Avon, was arrested on a PRAWN warrant for second-degree failure to appear.

4/2: Colchester Police said Creed Covone, 24, of 35 Heatherwood Dr., was arrested for DUI, speeding and failure to drive upon the right.

4/2: At approximately 6:49 p.m. the Colchester Police responded to Red Schoolhouse Road for report of an incident that took place at William J. Johnston Middle School earlier in the day. This incident is under investigation at this time.

4/3: State Police said Joshua A. Freitas, 26, of 294 Kettletown Rd., Southbury, was arrested for fifth-degree larceny.

4/4: State Police said David Burrell, 47, of 2 Lakeview Park West Pike, Columbia, was arrested on an active warrant for carrying a dangerous weapon. Police reported the weapon was a fully automatic knife.

4/5: State Police said Scott St. Germain, 26, of 15 Commodore Rd., Norwich, was arrested for evading, possession of narcotics, making an improper turn and operating an unregistered motor vehicle.

4/7: Colchester Police said Jonathan Jeffrey Jonah, 42, of 61 Loomis Rd., was arrested for failure to register a motor vehicle for commercial registration, misuse of plates, insurance coverage fails to meet minimum requirements and operating a motor vehicle when registration is suspended.

Obituaries

East Hampton

Catherine Santangelo

Catherine Santangelo, 89, of East Hampton, died Wednesday, April 2, at Portland Care and Rehab Center. Catherine was born Nov. 28, 1924, in Bronx, N.Y., to the late Patrick and Mary (Kelly) McNamara. She was married to the late Mario Santangelo.

She was a member of Saint Patrick Church in East Hampton. She retired after years of service as a paraprofessional in the Bronx public school system where she influenced many lives.

Catherine leaves her daughter Patricia O'Brien, of East Hampton, and her three sons and daughters-in-law, Edward and Andrea Santangelo, of Babylon, N.Y.; John and Ethel Santangelo of Mahopac, N.Y.; Joseph and Irene Santangelo of Bethel; her 10 grandchildren, Michelle, Dawn, Frank, Nicolette, Samantha, Andrew, Alexandra, Joseph, Sean and Kevin; and her 10 great-grandchildren, Zachary, Nicole, Scott, Michael, Sophia, Anna, Alexander, Benjamin, Kaya and Lacey. She also leaves behind many nieces and nephews.

She was predeceased by her brother and three sisters.

Catherine's family received relatives and friends at the Spencer Funeral Home, 112 Main St. in East Hampton, on Sunday, April 6. A funeral liturgy celebrating her life was held Monday, April 7, at Saint Patrick Church, 47 West High St., East Hampton, with burial to follow at Saint Patrick Cemetery.

Memorial contributions may be made to the Alzheimer's Association of Connecticut at 2075 Silas Deane Hwy., Suite 100, Rocky Hill, CT 06067

To leave online condolences, visit spencerfuneralhomeinc.com.

East Hampton

Richard F. Haynes

Richard F. Haynes, 79, of East Hampton, husband of Carol (Cook) Haynes passed away Wednesday, March 12, at Middlesex Health Care. Born Jan. 29, 1935, in Boston, Mass., he lived in Louisiana most of his life.

He served in the Navy during the Korean War. After obtaining his PhD at LSU, he taught history at Northeast Louisiana University. He later served as chairman of the department of history and government.

Richard authored a book on Harry Truman as commander in chief entitled *The Awesome Power*. Gardening was his favorite hobby and his garden in Louisiana was home to over 100 rose bushes. He also was a popular lector in the community and voiced radio advertisements. A member of the Lions Club of Monroe, La., for many years, he served as president and several other offices. Most of his closest lifelong friends were fellow club members.

Richard moved to Connecticut in 2001 to be closer to his grandchildren, and has been spotted at many dance recitals and soccer games in recent years.

Besides his wife, he leaves his daughters, Allison Whitaker and her husband Charles of Rockfall, and Melissa Kagan and her husband Chris of Portland and four grandchildren, Caroline and Elizabeth Whitaker and Nathaniel and Lillian Kagan.

Funeral services will be private and at the convenience of the family. To send an online expression of sympathy, visit portlandmemorialfh.net.

Colchester

Dennis Martin Hertzog

Dennis Martin Hertzog, 67, of Colchester, passed away Tuesday, March 25, at home. He was born on May 13, 1946 in Alexandria, Va.

Mr. Hertzog served proudly with the U.S. Navy during the Vietnam War. Dennis worked for Pratt and Whitney Aircraft for many years before his retirement as a supervisor. He leaves many friends both far and wide, as well as caring neighbors at Westchester Village.

Graveside services with military honors will be observed at 11 a.m. Tuesday, April 22, at the State Veterans Cemetery, Bow Lane, Middletown.

Care of arrangements has been entrusted to the Aurora-McCarthy Funeral Home of Colchester. For online condolences, visit auroramccarthyfuneralhome.com.

Colchester

Donna Wetmore

Donna (Williams) Wetmore, 65, of Colchester, passed away Tuesday, April 1, after a courageous battle with a long illness. She was born in Manchester to the late Doris Williams.

Donna will be remembered as a loving wife, mother and grandmother. Donna touched the lives of countless people and was the true embodiment of kindness and character. Always there to help her friends, family and those in need, she loved children and animals. It was her life's passion to help children and she cared for over 35 special needs children during her life. Donna worked with her daughter Denise and husband Neal at The Eyeglass Place in Glastonbury.

Donna is survived by her husband of over 40 years, Neal Wetmore, daughters Michelle Harris of California, and Denise Falbowski, son Joshua Wetmore, and grandchildren Shawn Falbowski, Alyssa Howard, and Jacob Howard, all of Colchester.

She was predeceased by her brother, Keith Williams, of Colchester.

Services were held Sunday, April 6, in the Mulryan Funeral Home, 725 Hebron Ave., Glastonbury.

In lieu of flowers donations can be made to Save the Children, 54 Wilton Rd., Westport, CT. 06880.

For online condolences, visit mulryanfh.com.

Portland

Arthur J. Hasselman

Arthur J. Hasselman of Portland, formerly of East Hampton, died at home Sunday, April 6. Art was born May 20, 1924, in New Brunswick, Canada, son of the late Edward and Domitile Hasselman.

He leaves his wife of 67 years Marie, son Gerald Hasselman and his wife Nancy, daughter Diane Higgins and son Roger Hasselman; grandchildren Tanya and AJ Beaulieu and her mother Paula Hasselman, Jennifer and Ryan McCormick; great-grandchildren Jasmine, Ciera and Kaylie Beaulieu, Nathan and Leah McCormick; sisters Flora and Doris; many nieces and nephews; extended family and friends.

He was predeceased by his daughter, Annette Hasselman; grandson, Brian Hasselman; son-in-law, Fred Higgins; brothers, Louis, Emile, Roger, Ernest, Henry, Maurice and Albert; and sisters, Julia, Irene and Rita.

Art worked at The Wiremold Company in the Elmwood section of West Hartford from 1962 until 1987. Art enjoyed playing cribbage "fifteen two," and card games with family and friends, listening to country music, hunting and fishing.

The family would like to extend their thanks to the nurses and staff of Middlesex Hospital Palliative Care and Hospice and his many doctors.

Friends and families may call at the Spencer Funeral Home, 112 Main St., East Hampton, Saturday, April 12, from 11 a.m.-1 p.m. A funeral service will be held at 1 p.m. with burial to follow in Lake View Cemetery.

The family asks that in lieu of flowers please make memorial donations to the American Cancer Society, 825 Brook St., I-91 Tech Center, Rocky Hill, CT 06067, or the Middlesex Hospital Palliative Care and Hospice c/o Middlesex Hospital Department of Philanthropy, 55 Crescent St., Middletown, CT 06457.

To leave online condolences, visit spencerfuneralhomeinc.com.

Jusqu'à ce que nous nous reverrons.



Amston

Chester D. Sargent

Chester D. Sargent, "Chet," 68, of Amston Lake, beloved husband of Judith (Townsend) Sargent, passed away Monday, April 7. Born Dec. 27, 1945, in Rumford, Maine, he was the son of the late Darold Sargent and Margaret (Brown) Braley.

Chet had worked as a machinist for Pratt & Whitney Aircraft for many years before his retirement. He was an active member and Sunday School teacher of the Abundant Life of the Assemblies of God Church in Colchester. Chet was also known for his affinity to collect penguins.

In addition to his loving wife of nearly 32 years, he leaves his stepdaughter, Carolyn Smith and companion, Howard Saulnier of Manchester; three stepsons and their spouses, Charles and Lisa Smith Jr. of Amston, Robert and Wendy Smith, Sr. of Plainfield and Timothy and Cindy Smith of Clinton; seven grandchildren; a great grandson; and many friends.

Graveside services will be observed at noon Saturday, April 12, at the New Lebanon Cemetery, Waterman Road, Lebanon. There are no calling hours.

In lieu of flowers, donations in his memory may be made to the Abundant Life Church Mission Fund, 85 Skinner Road, Colchester 06415.

Care of arrangements has been entrusted to the Aurora-McCarthy Funeral Home of Colchester. For online condolences, visit auroramccarthyfuneralhome.com.

Colchester

Stuart E. Tanguay

Stuart E. Tanguay, 80, of Colchester, died Wednesday, April 9, in New London. Born and raised in New Britain, he was the son of the late Arthur and Agnes (Dixon) Tanguay.

He was employed for many years at Impact Plastics and operated many businesses through the years. More recently, he worked at Superior Flag Company. He was a Korean War Veteran, having served in the U.S. Army and was an avid boater, motorcyclist, biker and member of the American Legion Post 156.

Mr. Tanguay is survived by three daughters, Patricia Lamont of Colchester, Maryann and her husband Victor Swanson of Middletown and Gloria Tanguay of Hartford; three grandchildren Jennifer Nadeau, Stephen Lamont and Sara Peay; a sister, Lois Miano of New Britain; and several nieces and nephews.

He was predeceased by his wife, Kathleen, and his son, Michael John Tanguay.

Funeral services will be held today, April 11, at 1 p.m., at the Farrell Funeral Home, 110 Franklin Sq., New Britain. Burial will follow in St. Mary Cemetery, New Britain. Visitation will be today from noon-1 p.m., at the funeral home.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the Alzheimer's Association (Connecticut Chapter) 2075 Silas Deane Hwy Suite 100 Rocky Hill, CT 06067.

To light a candle or send a condolence, visit FarrellFuneralHome.com.

Colchester

Stella Marie Worski

Stella Marie Worski, 89, formerly of Norwich, passed away Monday, April 7, at Harrington Court Nursing Home in Colchester. She was born Sept. 13, 1924, in Norwich, to the late Michael and Mary (Slaga) Leniart.

She is the beloved mother of Maryanne Daley and her husband George of Griswold, Michael Worski and his wife Charlene of Lisbon, and Lenoard Worski of Franklin. She also leaves behind seven grandchildren and six great-grandchildren, as well as numerous nieces and nephews.

She was predeceased by her husband, Frank Worski Sr., and her son, Frank Worski Jr., and all of her brothers and sisters.

Family and friends visited Labenski Funeral Home, 107 Boswell Ave., Thursday, April 10. A Mass of Christian Burial will be held at St. Patrick Cathedral, Norwich, today, April 11, at 10 a.m. Interment will immediately follow at St. Joseph Cemetery in Norwich.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to Center for Hospice Care, 227 Dunham St. Norwich, CT 06360.

Visit labenskifuneralhome.com to leave an online condolence for the Worski family.

East Hampton

Janice Elaine Hadley

Janice Elaine (Wright) Hadley, 82, of East Haddam, formerly of East Hampton, wife of the late Kent H. Hadley, passed away surrounded by her family on Wednesday, April 2, at Chestelm Health Care following a 15-year journey with Alzheimer's disease. Born in Providence, R.I., she was the daughter of the late James Edgar Wright and Harriet (Winsor) Wright.

Janice grew up in Providence, R.I., graduated from Katharine Gibbs Secretarial School and worked as a legal secretary. In 1952, she married the love of her life, Kent Hammond Hadley. They raised their family together in Killingworth, CT, and Janice devoted several years to being an at-home mom. She went on to graduate from Wilcox School of Nursing with high honors and work as a licensed practical nurse. In her late forties, she took up flying, owning and piloting her own Cessna 150.

For the past eight years, Janice lived in East Haddam and prior to that, Benton, Pa., and East Hampton.

Janice volunteered as a Girl Scout and Cub Scout Leader and was a gifted pianist who spent years as a church organist. She and Kent enjoyed the outdoors and raising several rescued golden retrievers.

Janice is survived by her daughter, Jacalyn Penyak and her spouse Mark of Danbury; her son, Jonathan Hadley and his spouse Tina of Haddam; four grandchildren, Katherine Cancellaro and her spouse Dana, Jeffrey Penyak, Matthew Plum, and Michelle Plum; a brother-in-law, Glen Hadley and his spouse Ruth Anne of Hebron; and several nieces and nephews.

The Hadley family would like to say a special thank you to the staff and volunteers at Chestelm for their years of loving care.

Funeral services were held Sunday, April 6, at Cromwell Funeral Home, 506 Main St., Cromwell. A time of visitation followed the service, and a reception also followed. Interment was in Winsor Family Cemetery, Johnston, RI, at the convenience of the family.

In lieu of flowers, contributions may be made in Janice's memory to Heartland Golden Retriever Rescue, 234 Morrell Rd. 118, Knoxville, TN 37919-5876; or Alzheimer's Association Connecticut Chapter, 2075 Silas Deane Highway, Suite 100, Rocky Hill, CT 06067.

To share memories or send condolences to the family, visit doolittlefuneralservice.com.

Portland

Edward Perrotti

Edward Perrotti, 74, of Bonita Springs, Fla., formerly of Portland and Cromwell, passed away Friday, April 4, with his loving family by his side.

He was employed for 38 years at Waverly Printing in Portland, and two years at Stanley Wiseson, Inc., before retiring to Florida in 2004. He married the love of his life, Beverly (Riding) Perrotti, 54 years ago on April 1.

Besides his beloved wife, Bev, Ed leaves to mourn his passing two sons and daughters-in-law: Michael and Lorraine Perrotti, William and Susan Perrotti, all of Portland; a daughter and her boyfriend, Debra (Perrotti) Petzold and Mark Roux of Middletown; three grandchildren, Heather Petzold, Abby Perrotti, and Joshua Perrotti, all of Portland; a brother, William Perrotti of St. Petersburg, Fla., a brother-in-law and sister-in-law, John and Kathy Riding of Ellington.

Ed was predeceased in 1988 by a brother, Joseph Perrotti. A memorial service for family and friends will be held at the family's convenience in Florida, and a memorial and burial service will be held at a date to be determined in Connecticut.

Walter Shikany's Bonita Funeral Home in Bonita Springs, Fla., has charge of arrangements.

Observations & Ruminations

by Mike Thompson

I was genuinely bummed to hear last week state Rep. Pam Sawyer won't be seeking reelection. I first met Pam back in 2001, when I was fresh from college and just starting out as a reporter, covering Andover and Hebron. She struck me as a genuinely nice person – and my interactions with Pam over the 13 years that have followed only bolstered that opinion of her.

Regardless of your political affiliation – and I, as a lot of you know, am a Democrat – I imagine it would be pretty difficult not to like Pam. During my time in journalism, I've met a lot of politicians – from local selectmen to state legislators to even a couple of governors (okay, one was lieutenant governor when I met her, but still) – and Pam has always been one of my favorites. She has a smiling, very pleasant demeanor and also seems very *genuine*; I never detect even a hint of phoniness. Pam always seems to care – because I think she really *does* care.

She's also quite accommodating – which is a trait reporters (and editors) like very much. She's always available for a quote, and not just an empty, canned-sounding quote either. She'll give you a reasoned, well-thought-out quote that, far more often than not, will only improve your story. A lot of times when interviewing somebody they can provide you a five- or 10-minute answer to your question without ever answering your question. That hasn't been the case with Pam.

And she's also done a lot for the towns she represents – a foursome that includes three *Rivereast* towns: Andover, Hebron and Marlborough (the fourth town Pam represents is Bolton). Geeta Schrayter touched on several of those achievements in her story on Pam last week, such as: reducing the deadly crash rate on the stretch of Route 6 from Bolton to Columbia known as “Suicide 6”; pressing for development of the East Coast and Air Line Greenway Trail; helping to pass the Safe Havens bill, which allows distressed mothers to leave their babies at hospitals without risk of arrest; and helping to establish the STEAP (Small Town Economic Assistance Program) grants, which all of our *Rivereast* towns benefit from.

Pam, as Geeta wrote last week, is not done yet. Among the issues currently on her wish list are removing the tax from over-the-counter medicines, and changing the salt the state currently uses on its roadways, which she said doesn't contain a rust inhibitor.

So it'll be a busy next several months for Pam before she leaves office in January – and I hope she accomplishes what she wants to. Pam also plans on still being involved – doing “some more community service in other ways,” as she puts it, and I hope she does. Meanwhile, it's a loss for Andover, Hebron and Marlborough – and, frankly, for newspaper reporters too.

* * *

Last week brought the big finale of *How I Met Your Mother*. And while the show was definitely popular, and ran for nine seasons, it never achieved the likes of, say, *Friends* or *Seinfeld* in the ratings. I expected a lot of people to watch the finale, but I didn't really expect it to become the talk that it did. It wound up being one of the most polarizing sitcom finales I can recall since, well, *Seinfeld* – to the point that even people who didn't watch the show were saying to me, “Wow, I hear a lot of people didn't like that last episode.”

Like most that saw it, I have my thoughts – and will share them here. So, if you haven't seen it yet, read no further, for these thoughts contain mighty spoilers. Let me just say that, as someone who's seen nearly every single episode these past nine years, I was..... disappointed. There were a lot of good parts, but at the end, I was just left shaking my head.

Here's why: over the past nine years, the show had given us ample reasons as to why Ted and Robin just wouldn't work. Just this past February, it looked like Ted finally let her go, was finally able to move on from her. The show had indicated the mother was indeed “the one.” She was the one who, as Stella had put it on the series so eloquently a few seasons ago, was running to Ted as fast as she could. The Mother wasn't some consolation prize for Ted never having ended up with Robin; she was indeed better for him than Robin, as the show had proven.

However, the ending to the series we got last Monday acts as if this is just not true. Partly because, at the time this ending (well, the part with the kids anyway) was originally

filmed, it wasn't. The ending was shot in the middle of the show's second season, and at that point in time – and heck, even for a couple seasons thereafter – it would've worked fine. But over the course of the series, it became clear Robin and Ted were not a good match; Robin was in fact a better match for Barney (and I wasn't a fan that the finale – although I'll grant you the wheels for this were set in motion this past season, when the regression of Barney's character started to unfold – ruined any growth Barney had exhibited in seasons 6-8; true, he was redeemed somewhat when he saw his new baby at the end, but that sweet-but-kinda-forced moment didn't quite make up for what the show did to Barney the rest of the hour), and Ted's inability to fully get past Robin just got a little sad, especially when you knew, since the pilot made it clear, she was not The Mother. Ted was a better match with Victoria, and with Stella, than he was with Robin.

Last Monday's ending, though, just seemed to forget the Victorias and Stellas and even Zoes Ted encountered along the way (largely because they mostly hadn't happened yet when the ending was written), and give us a Ted and Robin coupling because, hey, that's what we all would've wanted six or seven years ago. Veteran sitcom writer Ken Levine (who, as a writer for *MASH*, *Cheers* and *Frasier*, knows a thing or two about long-running sitcoms), in his review of the finale, put it quite nicely: “From what I've read, [the creators of the show] had the ending planned all along, which may or may not be such a good thing. On the one hand, it's great to have the structure in place. But on the other, a long-running TV series will take on a life of its own and you have to follow wherever it takes you. And that can sometimes be counter to what you've planned and already established.”

You can't ignore the entire second half of the series' run. Sure, that ending with the kids was shot; that doesn't mean you have to use it. Make it a DVD bonus feature.

As for The Mother dying in the final episode, I wouldn't say I liked it, but I was OK with it. One of the things that attracted me to this show way back when it first came out was that, as far as sitcoms go, the characters and the situations seemed pretty realistic. It was a very true-to-life show, and while some of that may have been diluted a bit as the show went on, the show never lost its ability to slap you with a harsh dose of reality just when you were caught up in all the screwball antics. The show not giving us a perfectly-happy ending worked. Sometimes, people get sick. Sometimes, soulmates die way too young. (I didn't even really have a problem with Barney and Robin getting divorced; in real life, people sometimes get divorced even though their wedding seemed at the time to make perfect sense – although I'll grant this too-drawn-out weekend-before-the-wedding season made their coupling seem a wee less perfect.) So, to that end, The Mother dying was OK.

What I didn't like was the way it was handled. Even if it was just a few minutes at a time, The Mother was in nearly every episode this season; we felt like we got to know her. We not only saw why Ted would fall in love with her, we fell in love with her a little too. She deserved much more of a send-off than she got.

Ultimately, the idea of Ted moving on after The Mother dies isn't a bad one. Again, it's real life, and it's something she herself even encouraged Ted to do a few episodes back, in a way. (“Life only moves forward,” she told him.) But him moving on to Robin just feels like regression, a bummer that I didn't really want to see.

And, it became apparent almost as soon as it aired, not a lot of people wanted to see it. So, for those of us, there's hope: late last week, one of the show's creators took to Twitter and said an alternate ending for the show was edited; in fact, as recently as two weeks before the airing of the finale, the co-creators were debating which one to air. They said they stand by their choice, but they'll show the rest of the world what this alternate ending looks like later this year, as a bonus feature on the DVD of the ninth season (and in the complete series box set).

There's no word on what exactly the ending is – insiders hint it's a “happy ending” – but I'm hoping it's less disappointing than the one we got last week. Like I said, the finale wasn't terrible – but it just didn't work.

* * *

See you next week.