

RIVEREAST

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Dressed as a pair of ducklings, Cricket Murphy and her dachshund Nubble share a precious moment after winning "Most Original Costume" during the costume contest at the 18th annual Pumpkins 'n' Pooches event in Colchester Oct 2.

Pumpkins 'n' Pooches Descend on Colchester

by Julianna Roche

Last weekend's gloomy weather wasn't enough to keep pooches or their owners away from Colchester's 18th annual Pumpkins 'n' Pooches Autumn Fair & Dog Fest, which was moved to its rain date on Oct. 2 due to inclement weather.

Though cloudy skies brewed through Sunday afternoon, and event founder and organizer Charlene Picard said attendance was down this year, the Town Green was still packed full with the usual vendors and canines in costumes — with their humans in tow.

"This time of year, the weather in Connecticut is quite unpredictable, but we were able to make the decision to go on the rain date, which was the better of the two days," Picard said this week. "The rain held off, so we held all of our activities as planned."

Picard added if it had been raining, the event wouldn't have been able to feature the bounce house or hay rides — two big draws to the festival.

As with every year, this year's event featured crafters and vendors selling the usual to attendees, including burgers, hot dogs, fries, fried dough and the ever-so-famous homemade apple crisp (which is Picard's sister-in-law's recipe).

"It was a scramble," Picard said of switching the event over to the rain date, "but we have a really good team in the Colchester Lions."

Pumpkins 'n' Pooches, which was founded in 1999, was originally created by the Lions to sponsor a guide dog, Picard explained. It went

so well however, the decision was made to keep it as a yearly event.

"In 1999, there weren't many dog-related events and certainly not many in our area of Connecticut," she said. "So it was something different."

In 2008, a photo contest was introduced "in an effort to get people excited leading up to the event," Picard explained, adding contestants submit photos of their dogs ahead of time, and the top eight get their photos on display at the event. Attendees then vote for their favorites by placing dollar bills in their favorite dog photo's jar. The dogs with the most money in their jars win, and all proceeds benefit Colchester Lions' charities. This year's top three winners were Maverick in first place, with Dodger and Daisy to follow.

According to Picard, the Colchester Lions saw a record number of donations this year from the photo contest, which she considered quite the success considering the lower than usual attendance.

The "Paint Your Own Pumpkin" station and pumpkin contest, managed by the Colchester Leos Club (the youth division of the Lions) to raise money for the event, was also a big hit. This year, the entries (which cost two dollars each) included everything from a porcupine pumpkin to a pumpkin decorated as Olaf the Snowman from the Disney movie *Frozen*.

"The one thing that we wanted to do as a

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Council Balks at School Admin Deal

by Elizabeth Regan

Despite advice from the town labor attorney that the school administrators' contract is in line with other districts and the town would not "have a chance" of getting the agreement changed through binding interest arbitration, at least some of the members of the East Hampton Town Council are talking about taking a stand.

"The administrators' contract is within the 'going rate' of current settlements," Nick Grello, of Siegel, O'Connor, O'Donnell & Beck, told town officials in an email dated Sept. 23. "It is not worth rejecting at the Town Council level since we would not have a chance of an arbitration panel modifying any of the agreed to terms."

But councilor Melissa Engel said she's "tired of being threatened by binding arbitration." She spoke in vehement opposition to the contract when it came before the council at last week's regular meeting.

Councilor Kevin Reich, who was a teacher before the state's binding arbitration process was formalized in 1979, shared some of Engel's

concerns.

"I know what it was like to sit down and negotiate a contract without binding arbitration. That was over 40 years ago. Here we have a process that's in place that really hasn't been scrutinized and reviewed all that much. It's just something that continues to happen year after year after year," Reich said.

According to a 10-year-old study from the Connecticut General Assembly Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee, binding arbitration emerged in part as a way to avoid illegal worker strikes that kept students from the classrooms and, in extreme cases, put teachers in jail.

The study found 10 percent of the 410 contracts settled under the Teacher Negotiation Act between 2002-05 used arbitration.

The binding arbitration process in education most commonly occurs between labor and the local or regional school board, according to the study. It is on "rare occasions" that a local legislative body — such as a town council — rejects the agreement after the school board and union

have already come to an agreement.

In such cases, the already-negotiated agreement is given "additional weight" in a neutral arbitrator's deliberations, according to the study.

According to Engel, all it takes is one town to stand up to a process she believes favors unions: "And I'm willing to be that one town."

State statute empowers the Town Council to accept the negotiated agreement, reject it or not to vote at all. Rejection triggers the process of binding interest arbitration. If councilors don't vote one way or the other, the contract is automatically ratified after 30 days.

Reich expressed dismay that the council did not have more information to work with as they weighed their decision to ratify or reject the negotiated agreement. Neither Superintendent of Schools Paul Smith or Board of Education Christopher Goff were at the council meeting.

Smith had provided a one-page document explaining the major changes, but did not submit any figures detailing the financial impact of the agreement.

The agreement, worked out between the East

Hampton Administrators' Association and the East Hampton Board of Education, affects nine administrators and includes a raise of 2.75 percent in the first two years and 2.5 in the third year.

The contract also includes a new retirement plan contribution of \$1,000 annually per administrator.

The general wage increase amounts to \$96,377 over three years, according to a document prepared this week by Smith in response to a request from the council. The total financial impact of the contract — including wage increases, step increases, retirement plan contributions, and a special education summer school stipend — comes to \$119,570 over three years.

The contract represents \$22,832 in savings based on lower health insurance premiums due to increased deductibles, according to Smith's figures.

In an interview Wednesday, Smith explained the district is one of two in the state that does

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not provide a board contribution toward the deductible.

Insurance costs to administrators under the agreement rose to a deductible of \$2,000 per person and \$4,000 per family. The deductible had been at \$1,500 per person and \$3,000 per family under the previous contract.

Most towns contribute 50 percent or more to employees' health savings accounts to offset the cost of the deductible, according to Smith.

"With all of our administrators, except for one, in the family plan, the contribution would be \$2,000 per administrator. With our salary increase about .41 [percent] higher than the average (2.75 vs. 2.34) it turns out that an administrator making \$135,000 would get an additional \$554 over the average (2.75 vs. 2.34). That is far less than contributing 50 percent (\$2,000) or even 25 percent (\$1,000) to the insurance savings account," he wrote.

Smith said the Board of Education's attorney advises against arbitration because administrators "have agreed to jump to [a higher-deductible plan] without a board contribution and comparative salaries and benefits are not out of line with local communities."

Because these financial details were not available when councilors met last week, they postponed a vote until their next regular meeting.

They asked Town Manager Michael Maniscalco to invite Smith and Goff to present the agreement and answer questions.

"It will make it a little easier for me to be able to walk through this community when someone asks me why '[the administrators] got two and three-quarter percent raise when I, a senior citizen, got nothing,'" Reich said.

For Engel, no amount of explanation from the school board would justify the expense of the administrators' contract.

Nodding toward Maniscalco, she said, "There's no way I can walk through this community with my head held high when I couldn't give this man, fiscally responsible, more than a 1.5 percent increase."

Maniscalco's contract was signed in August. It is subject to renewal in July.

Maniscalco said Wednesday that the three-year contract for administrative staff and employees in the public works department was negotiated last year. They were slated for a 2 percent raise the first year, a 2.25 percent raise the second year, and a 2 percent raise the third year.

The supervisors' union, which includes most department heads, agreed this year to a 2 percent raise annually for the duration of the three-year contract.

The contract for the police union was renewed for a year at a 2.25 percent increase, according to Maniscalco.

The town's non-union employees, whom Maniscalco said are barred from unionizing by the state due to the size of their budgets and number of staff they oversee, received a 2.50 percent raise for this fiscal year. They changed from a preferred provider insurance option to a high-deductible plan this year as well.

Besides Maniscalco, whose salary is overseen separately, the non-union positions are composed of the town manager's administrative assistant, the human resources director, the police chief, the Finance Department director, the Parks and Recreation Department director and the Public Works Department director.

According to Smith, the general wage increase in the administrators' contract is comparable with statistics from area towns. He gave councilors a spreadsheet from Collective Bargaining Services, Inc., of settlements reached last year showing an average increase of 2.34 percent in 2017-18 and 2.31 percent in 2018-19. That's compared to the negotiated increase of 2.75 percent and 2.50 percent for East Hamp-

ton, respectively.

A review of towns with similar populations and demographics shows administrators in Cromwell will receive general wage increases of 2.50 percent in 2017-18 and 2018-19. Rocky Hill administrators will receive a 2.03 percent increase in 2017-18 and a 1.98 percent increase in 2018-19. Administrators in Stonington will receive increases of 2.50 percent in 2017-18 and 2 percent in 2018-19.

"Attorneys always guide the board to looking at comparable settlements," Smith said. "Nothing seems to jump out as out of line when compared with local towns and comparable towns – something that the arbitration process would examine. I realize the state situation is not necessarily a pretty picture, but the arbitration process is going to consider comparisons in settlements and the town's ability to pay."

He emphasized that the financial impact of the first year of the contract is \$41,376.

"Going to arbitration at \$30,000 to fight a \$41,000 increase doesn't seem prudent at this time," Smith said.

The Town Council will discuss the issue further at their next regular meeting on Tuesday, Oct. 11, at 6:30 p.m. at Town Hall, 20 E. High St.



Janet Schultz and her pooch Bear show off their sailor and "U.S.S. Beagle" costumes, which won first place in the costume contest last weekend in the "Best Ensemble" category.

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club is to have something fun and affordable for families to enjoy," Picard said, adding a family can come and spend less than 20 dollars for a full day of entertainment and food.

Costume contests were also held mid-afternoon, for funniest, cutest and scariest costumes, as well as best ensemble and most original — with pooches and pup parents strutting their stuff through the green. Following that, the Silly Dog Contest took place, which handed out awards for "waggiest" tail, best kisser, biggest dog, smallest dog, furriest dog, biggest ears and most unusual trick.

The festival also included canine freestyle group Top Hat and Tail performed their freestyle

and Frisbee demonstration for onlookers, and the Freedom Guide Dogs and Guiding Eyes for the Blind brought some of their dogs in training to the green, including one of Picard's Labrador puppies, Dahlia.

"I'm a guide dog puppy raiser, so I'm a big fan of law enforcement canines [and] military working dogs," she said. "Every dog's job is noble even if it's just to be a loving companion... this is why we do Pumpkins 'n' Pooches. It's so much work and can be especially frustrating with the weather, but the day of the event, when I'm looking around and people are enjoying themselves with their dogs, it's so rewarding."

From the Editor's Desk

Observations & Ruminations

by Mike Thompson

In the interest of full disclosure, I'm writing this on Tuesday night.

Not that you need to know — or necessarily care — when I'm doing my observing and ruminating this week. But I share this detail to note I'm writing this column before knowing how the Mets fared in their one-game playoff against the Giants Wednesday night.

By the time you read this you'll know — and I'll know — if the Mets won the game and will face the Cubs in the Division Series, or if San Francisco prevailed. As of the time I'm writing this, though, I have no clue. But I do know this:

This 2016 Mets team was a lot of fun to watch.

You may not necessarily think so, given everything that befell the Mets this year. By the end of May, the team had lost its star third baseman, David Wright, and its star first baseman, Lucas Duda, to injury. (Wright would wind up being out for the season; Duda at one point was thought to be lost for the year as well, but came back in mid-September.)

And as the year went on, so did the injury hits. In early July, the team lost young starting pitcher Matt Harvey for the rest of the season. In August, it lost another young starting pitcher, Steven Matz, as well as slugging second baseman Neil Walker. In September, starting pitcher Jacob deGrom joined the "out for the year" club, as he, like Walker, underwent season-ending surgery. And while not season-ending, the team also lost centerfielder Juan Lagares to injury for a significant chunk of the season.

Not surprisingly, losing so many big names took its toll on the Mets' win-loss record. Over the course of the year, there were a few occasions where I discouragingly grumbled at the TV set, "This has got to be the low point of the season" — only to have that apparent nadir eclipsed several games later.

And yet, through it all, this team never, ever gave up. The stars that were left (as well as names that were brought on midseason, most notably Jose Reyes, who was drafted by the organization when he was 16, grew up with the team and remained there before leaving for free agency after the 2011 season) kept battling, grinding, scrapping.....and it paid off. By the end of the season, the Mets had won a wild card they were five and a half games away from (with three teams in front

of them) as late as mid-August.

The story of the 2016 Mets is a downright inspirational one. Watching this climb, this seemingly improbable climb, has been a blast — and, somewhat amazingly, this has become one of my all-time favorite seasons as a fan. The outcome of Wednesday's Mets-Giants game won't change this.

Speaking of baseball, the TriCounty Babe Ruth League, whose towns include Andover, Colchester, Hebron and Marlborough, will hold its annual meeting Thursday, Oct. 27, at 7:30 p.m., at Something Simple Café, 12 Main St., Hebron.

There are two open board positions: treasurer and secretary. If interested in either of them, contact the league through its website, tricitybaberuthct.org, prior to Oct. 20.

People may also run for any position on the board. Nominations will not be taken from the floor on the night of the meeting. For more information, contact any board member; board members are listed on the website.

It's October now, which means for many in *Rivereast*-land, it's time to start thinking about the annual Air Line Trail Ghost Run.

The 13.1-mile race, which will be held Saturday, Nov. 5, is a true regional event. It starts at 9 a.m. at Hebron Elementary School, follows the Air Line Trail through Colchester, and ends at Center Elementary School in East Hampton. The race will go on rain or shine.

The parks and recreation departments of Hebron, Colchester and East Hampton are coordinating the event, along with the state Department of Energy and Environmental Protection.

Cost to register is \$34 per individual; after Oct. 21, cost increases to \$40. Mail registrations to Hebron Parks and Recreation, 15 Gilead St., Hebron, CT 06248. Make checks payable to "Town of Hebron." The first 375 registered runners will receive a long-sleeved T-shirt.

Volunteers are also sought for the event. If interested in helping, or if you simply want more information, call any of the Parks and Rec. offices: Hebron, 860-530-1281; Colchester, 860-537-7297; and East Hampton, 860-267-7300.

See you next week.

Colchester Candidates Debate on Statewide Issues

by Julianna Roche

The Colchester Business Association's "Meet the Candidates" event brought together 2016 candidates Evan Evans, Art Linares, Norm Needleman, Linda Orange and Melissa Ziobron Tuesday night to debate and speak on issues such as small businesses, regionalized town services, retirement, education, and the economy.

During opening statements, Evans, who is a member of the Army National Guard and the Republican candidate for the 48th District state Representative seat (which covers Colchester, Lebanon, Windham and Mansfield) emphasized the dire need to fix state budget issues, saying the state "needs to set priorities and stick to them, just as one might with their own household budget."

"We don't have a revenue problem in this state," he added. "We have a spending problem."

Ziobron, who is running unopposed for reelection as the Republican candidate for the 34th District state Representative seat, shared a similar sentiment, stating she has been focusing on "pushing to limit the growth of the state budget" and will continue to do so. Her district covers East Hampton, East Haddam and a part of Colchester.

Even Needleman, the Democratic candidate for the 33rd District state Senate seat agreed, stating "we need to get the budget under control, cut down regulation, and look at the next generation."

The district includes the *Rivereast* towns of Colchester, East Hampton and Portland.

During the questions portion of the debate, the candidates were first asked what they would

do to help small businesses.

"The state's reliance on larger financial institutions has created a problem," said Needleman, who started his own manufacturing company, Tower Labs, in 1979 (which he said now employs about 225 people). He added if elected, he would implement apprentice programs with help from the state to help train a younger generation of workers.

Twenty-seven-year-old Art Linares, Needleman's Republican opponent and the current incumbent, said he too understands the needs of small business owners as he co-founded a solar business, Greenskies, when he was 19.

"We need folks that understand how to run a business," he said. "And I know what it's like [for small businesses] to survive in a post-great recession environment."

The candidates were next asked about their stance on implementing regionalized services between towns, which they all agreed should not be mandated.

"If they [the towns] want to share services, I think they should be able to do so," Linares said. "But that should be up to the towns to decide. Anytime we can share services and towns can see an equal benefit, I think it's good to do."

Orange (who is Evans' Democratic opponent and is currently serving her tenth term as the incumbent of the 48th District) agreed with Linares.

"I stand by the towns just as I always do. The town knows what they want, but services shouldn't be mandated," she said, mentioning Colchester's recent move to the Chatham Health District as evidence that shared services "have failed us."

Needleman also expressed his adamancy against regionalizing services, stating it's a "heavy-handed approach that won't work" and that there is no evidence it has increased efficiency.

When next asked how they would make the state more competitive for retirees, candidates took different approaches.

"We need to reduce the size of our state government because there are a lot of things the state does that the town can do themselves," Evans said, again mentioning the state's spending problem. "I think if you give the towns the ability to be self-reliant, they will amaze you with their abilities to do so."

Additionally, while Ziobron stood by the state paying off its pension debt as a solution, Linares said drawing in more Millennials was the answer. He added that programs like Learn Here, Live Here (which offers college graduates a homebuyer tax credit) would give the younger generation incentive to stay put in Connecticut after graduating.

In regards to what the candidates would do to enhance the education system, most candidates agreed there was a need to keep an eye on state funding. They referred to the state's recently proposed cost-sharing plan for distributing education aid (proposed under the administration of Gov. Dannel P. Malloy and Democratic legislative leaders) that was ultimately ruled by Superior Court Judge Thomas Moukawsher as irrational and unconstitutional in September.

Evans said the state should "get out of the town schools."

Ziobron agreed. "It's critically important that all of our small towns are engaging legislators

to make sure they're willing to go to bat for your kids," she said, adding the cost-sharing plan would have "pit urban school districts against suburban school districts."

"You can't use education funding in a political way. That's what's happening and it needs to stop," Linares agreed.

The final question posed to candidates asked what steps they would take to reduce the tax burden overall.

"In the Senate, I have stood against every single tax increase, every single spending increase, and every budget Malloy has proposed for four years," Linares said, adding that the state should instead focus on reforming its current tax code to reduce taxes, which he argued is "dumb and old."

Ziobron suggested working with municipalities to get the state budget done "way ahead of schedule" and also setting state spending according to revenue.

"That's not what's happening. I was shocked when I was elected [to see] what happens at the state level," she added. "These folks are working in vacuums. They don't talk to each other."

Needleman, on the other hand, stated the answer wasn't simple, but rather long-term.

"I'm not going to sit here and spout out simple answers, because there are no simple answers... [But] we have to grow our economy faster than the rest of the northeast and the country."

* * *

As the debate came to a close, the crowd was left reflecting on the candidates' words, some potentially deciding on a name to check off next month for the upcoming Nov. 8 election.

Animal Kingdom Comes to Portland Fair

by Elizabeth Regan

The 17th annual Portland Agricultural Fair will include a wider array of animals than usual with the introduction of a zoo that adds the likes of elephants, camels, zebras, lemurs, porcupines and Patagonian Cavies to traditional farm offerings.

The petting zoo, along with elephant, camel and pony rides, is run by the Goshen-based R.W. Commerford and Sons. The zoo's website said the company was founded over 40 years ago.

The animal attraction is not without controversy. Over the past two years, at least half a dozen petitions were posted on change.org in objection to the zoo's presence at fairs and expos.

One petition from 2015 asked for Commerford and Sons to retire its 46-year-old elephant, Beulah. The petition garnered 215,132 signatures in effort to "convince Beulah's owners to send her to an elephant sanctuary."

A 2014 petition with 6,756 signatures asked the Eastern States Exposition to "end the use of wild animal acts at the Big E."

The Portland Fair Committee announced the new act by touting the "ever-growing list of animals" at the fair and emphasizing the committee's careful selection process.

"After extensive research we firmly believe all the animals in the care of Commerford's are treated with great care and dignity. We invite you to come learn more about these magnificent creatures: what they eat, how they live, fun facts and speak directly with their caregivers," the committee said in an official statement.

The fair also features another set of animals: Mike Piazza's Flying High Frisbee Dogs. According to the act's website, the border collies perform a variety of Frisbee tricks with champion K9 Frisbee professional Piazza.

The team has performed for audiences at professional and college sporting events and has

appeared in television commercials and on magazine covers, the website said.

The crowd favorite tractor pulls on Saturday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. will be joined by the new Street Legal Truck Pull the same day at 5 p.m.

The mud will fly at noon Sunday with the return of the popular Dirty Ditch Mud Runs, instituted in 2014.

And, of course, there are the standard Portland Fair rides. Wristbands for unlimited rides on the Coleman Bros. midway will be available Friday and Sunday for \$20 each.

This year's fair will also feature traditions such as the annual baking contests for adults and juniors, and competitive exhibits in areas such as food, crafts, flowers, fiber art and photography. There will be an archery contest and a birdhouse contest as well.

On the animal side of things, there will be horse and oxen drawing contests. Many animals, including beef and dairy cattle, goats, sheep, rabbits and poultry, will be displayed and judged. A canine costume contest will be held on Sunday at 2 p.m. for dogs who are licensed and have proof of rabies vaccine. Special on-site parking will be available for those with dogs entering the show.

The musical soundtrack to the event will be delivered on Friday at 6:30 p.m. by Small Town Roots, a local country band.

On Saturday, Four Barrel Billy will bring American roots rock and roll at noon. Allman Brothers Band co-founder and drummer, Jai Johanny Johanson, will take to the stage as part of Jaimoe and Friends at 3:30 p.m. Jeff Pitchell, Texas Flood and the Jeffettes will deliver their mix of rhythm and blues, rock, soul and funk at 7 p.m.

Sunday will bring the local bluegrass and folk duo of Clara and Evan Guilmette, known as G Squared, at 11 a.m. A local favorite, Great Hill Mountain Band will perform at 1 p.m. The



With Coleman Bros. Amusements' rides providing the customary backdrop, thousands are expected to attend the Portland Agricultural Fair this weekend. In addition to the standard rides and fair fare, the three-day event will feature more animals than usual.

Truck Stop Troubadors will finish off the musical acts Sunday at 3 p.m. with their traditional country and rockabilly sound.

The fair will take place at the Exchange Club Fairgrounds where routes 17 and 17A meet, today, Oct. 7, from 5-11 p.m.; Saturday, Oct. 8, from 10 a.m.-10 p.m.; and Sunday, Oct. 9, from 10 a.m.-6 p.m.

Tickets are \$10 for adults and \$8 for seniors. Children under 10 are free. Active and reserve military members with a valid ID may enter for free.

Portland Fair Committee President Don Bascom said efforts to get the word out about

the three-day fair have been enhanced by a new website (still located at portlandfair.com) and a social media presence.

"Our website has been redone; it's 10 times better than it ever was," he said. "Anyone who wants any information, it's really easy to get it now. You can find out just about everything."

The group has also focused on a Facebook page at facebook.com/PortlandFair.

Potential fairgoers can find more information, including schedules and contest rules at portlandfair.com, and can also contact info@portlandfair.com.

East Hampton Elementary Students to Help with Playground Design

by Elizabeth Regan

Elementary school students in East Hampton will soon be architects-for-a-day as they work with designers to draw up plans for a new playground at Seamster Park.

Professionals from Play By Design, an Ithaca, N.Y.-based firm, will be at the town's two elementary schools next Thursday morning, Oct. 13, to turn the students' ideas into a concept plan. The 14,000-square-foot play space will replace the aging wooden structure adjacent to Memorial School that has been deemed unsafe by the town insurance company.

"Literally, I'll be designing it while I'm talking to them," Lisa DeShano, one of the architects, said in a phone interview Monday. "They'll have a chance to witness the design unfold right there on the paper. It's truly a magical process."

DeShano and a fellow designer will speak with students at Memorial School and Center School in 15-minute blocks. She said she will ask questions to find out what's important to them and to the East Hampton community.

"It's not going to be like any other playground in the world," she said.

Parks and Recreation Director Jeremy Hall

said the playground, slated to be built by community volunteers in April 2018, will cost approximately \$250,000. A splash pad would bring the cost to \$400,000.

Describing the water feature as something that "seems to be what the community wants," Hall said it wouldn't necessarily have to be built at the same time as the playground.

DeShano has spoken with Hall over the past few weeks to get a feel for the department's priorities in a new playground, which she said include making sure the space is accessible to children of all abilities and reflective of the town's bell-making history.

But it will be the students who decide what the playground looks like, she emphasized.

"Truly, we start with a blank piece of paper over the existing site survey and, once we talk with the kids to get their ideas, it really flows right out of the pencil," she said.

The designers will continue to work on the schematic in the open at Memorial School throughout the afternoon in preparation for the design's unveiling at a "community celebration" that evening.

The event will also serve as a rallying point

for the next phases of the project, which include fundraising and recruiting volunteers to construct the playground.

The volunteer "community build" will take a week to complete once it kicks off in 2018, according to Hall. The project would require 70 volunteers per shift for three shifts per day.

The Parks and Recreation Advisory Board selected the design firm after months of gauging resident feedback on options to replace the playground.

The board rejected a more expensive choice from the Massachusetts-based M.E. O'Brien and Sons that would have cost about \$620,000, Hall said, but would have been phased in over three years.

The need for a new playground became apparent after the town's insurance company declared the playground a safety risk in a May report. That same month, Hall made a presentation to the town council recommending the demolition and replacement of the structure.

Hall initially specified a \$160,000 price tag for the project. He told councilors 20 percent would come from fundraising events, 40 per-

cent from individual and in-kind donations, and the rest from state and town funding.

The council did not take any action on the issue at that time.

Hall said Monday that the same funding ratio applies now even though the cost is higher than anticipated when he spoke to the council in May.

In June, voters approved the annual town budget that included \$20,000 in capital funding for the playground.

Hall said the department will be asking for \$25,000 in the 2017-18 budget and \$30,000 the following year, if all goes according to plan.

A playground committee with 12 members so far is spearheading the fundraising and marketing efforts and coordinating the large-scale volunteer construction project.

The existing structure will be made "as safe as possible" and maintained through the start of construction on a new playground, Hall said.

The public is encouraged to attend the design unveiling and community celebration at 6:30 p.m. on Oct. 13 in the Memorial School cafeteria.

New Trail in Hebron Offers Opportunity to 'Enjoy, Learn, Reflect'

by Geeta S. Sandberg

Crunching leaves and insect chatter, old stone walls and deer bounding through a field; those were just some of the things heard and seen on a stroll through the new trail behind AHM Youth and Family Services Tuesday evening.

The trail, which came to be through a partnership between AHM and St. Peter's Episcopal Church, winds through approximately 16 acres of church-owned land. It's the result of efforts that started last year, when Steve Fish joined the AHM Board of Directors, started volunteering at AHM, and was asked to help the bureau with an idea they had to create a nature trail out back.

Hebron resident and St. Peter's parishioner Jack Gasper was also contacted. He asked the bureau to develop a plan of intent for the trail that he could bring before the vestry, the church's governing body, of which Gasper is a member. That plan was eventually voted on and approved, which set up an annual agreement for shared use of the land and, following that approval, work began to clear a serpentine trail throughout the property with the help of volunteers and a number of trail days – the last one took place in September.

The trail features a sign created by Eagle Scout candidate Adam Cox, steps built by resident Jon Kimball, and plans for other additions including a gathering circle; bluebird, owl and bat houses; the creation of trail guides; and the possibility of creating information stations along the trail on topics such as identifying trees and wildlife, preventing invasive species at home, and composting.

The trail takes approximately 30-45 minutes to traverse if walkers move through without stopping – but there are plenty of reasons to pause and look around throughout the diverse habitat that includes two old fields, a mixed hardwood forest, a wetlands area, milkweed to

attract Monarch butterflies, a stream, old stone walls and an old road.

As the trail evolves, it will allow for different hands-on learning projects with Fish for youth and families in the community through AHM such as identifying native plants and animal habitats, tracking animals, and creating art outdoors. The trail will also allow for nature walks, bird watching, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, and learning about Native American lore.

The opening of the trail was celebrated last weekend, and members of the community are welcome to respectfully enjoy the space; the trail is for walkers only, and those who'd like to bring their dogs are asked to keep them on a leash and clean up after them.

Speaking to the trail this week, Gasper said, "In general people in our church are really excited about the fact that this project is moving along."

He added one of the visions of St. Peter's is to become more involved in the community – something sharing the church's property aligns with.

"We want to give back to the community in any way we can."

Gasper also spoke about the trail last November, when he shared the trail "became a wonderful opportunity for us to connect with the town, teenagers, and our own parishioner base to utilize God's given resources and do some good things with it."

Meanwhile, AHM executive director Michelle Hamilton shared Tuesday, "We're always thinking about what we can do to bring people in, and healthy activities for the community, so it's really exciting to see the trail come to fruition."

Fish echoed those sentiments, saying, "It's come together real nice. I'm big on the educational side of this. Having fun and learning



AHM Youth and Family Services Board of Directors member Steve Fish stands next to his wife Linda and talks to Rich Braman during their guided walk of the new trail behind AHM last Saturday, Oct. 1. The new serpentine trail goes through approximately 16 acres of land owned by St. Peter's Episcopal Church. The trail provides the opportunity for individuals to get in touch with nature, learn about area wildlife and native plant species, and enjoy the diverse habitat found throughout the trail including two old fields, a mixed hardwood forest, a wetlands area, a stream, old stone walls and an old road.

something at the same time – that's perfect."

And that's precisely what the new trail in town provides.

"We're really pleased with the outcome," Hamilton concluded, adding the trail was a

place for visitors to do exactly what the sign urges: enjoy, learn and reflect.

The trail is accessible from AHM Youth and Family Services, 25 Pendleton Dr.

Bonding Approved for Traffic Safety at RHAM

by Geeta S. Sandberg

The State Bond Commission, as expected, approved a \$1.3 million grant-in-aid to Hebron last Friday, Sept. 30, for traffic improvements around RHAM Middle and High School.

The funds will go toward reconfiguring the traffic pattern and parking at the school, installing additional signage, relocating crosswalks, and reworking traffic control devices around RHAM to improve pedestrian and motor vehicle safety.

Securing the funding was the result of efforts by multiple entities at both the local and state level, including state Sen. Cathy Osten (D-19th District).

In a release sent Sept. 23 in anticipation of the award, Osten said she was “thrilled” about the funding, sharing, “The completion of this project will protect our students, RHAM faculty and other motorists on Route 316 from the currently dangerous situation that has led to unimaginable tragedy time and again.”

In March 2014, RHAM middle school teacher Dawn Mallory, 65, died after she was struck by a vehicle in the RHAM parking lot. Following her death, the RHAM Board of Education hired an engineering firm to study traffic at the two schools and make suggestions for improvements; temporary changes were made such as rerouting traffic and installing speed bumps, but several permanent recommendations were also brought before the board.

These include, according to the traffic assessment provided in November 2014 by the Engineering, Planning and Construction firm BETA Group, installing permanent raised sidewalks at the schools as well as additional parking to serve visitors and parent pick-up in the high school area; relocating the crosswalk on Wall Street between Veterans Memorial Park (where students are allowed to park) and the school; adding a left turn lane on Route 66 eastbound for turning onto Wall Street; and modifying the traffic signal at that intersection.

Schools Superintendent Bob Siminski said of the grant award Wednesday, “We’re pleased that we’ll be able to move forward with that. Obviously we’ve taken some temporary measures but we look forward to taking some permanent measures, and I think it will have a positive impact on staff knowing something is going to be done after the tragedy that happened” with Mallory.

Along with the incident that claimed Mallory’s life, in February 2015 Christopher Passera, 22, of Bolton died following a collision at the intersection of Route 66 and Wall Street. In the aftermath of his son’s death, Chris Passera Sr. wrote to Gov. Dannel P. Malloy asking to change the traffic lights in town so that they continuously function; although they have since been changed, the light at the intersection where the crash took place used to switch

to flashing red during the overnight hours — something the elder Passera said partially contributed to his son’s death.

“Traffic designs can be fixed. What you can’t fix is the pain our community has suffered repeatedly because of a flawed traffic system,” Osten wrote. “I am grateful that the State Bond Commission sees the value in this important project.”

The release explained Osten has been working to secure the state aid over the last two years, working closely with Malloy and the State Bonding Commission; she submitted the request for this funding in March 2015, for consideration during the current fiscal year.

“Senator Osten has always been there for us,” Town Manager Andrew Tierney shared in the release, adding, “In difficult financial times it’s a big boost in the arm for the town of Hebron and the Region 8 School District to get financial assistance to help with this project.”

Tierney also commended state Rep. Gayle Mulligan (R-55th District), who also worked to secure the award.

“Representative Mulligan has worked long and hard to try to secure funding for the traffic concerns in the center of Hebron,” he wrote in Mulligan’s Sept. 29 release.

He continued, “She has met with numerous local and state officials to ensure that our concerns were heard and that we secured the fund-

ing. This funding is a direct result of her hard work for Hebron.”

Mulligan, meanwhile, said of the award last week, “This grant is a smart investment that will help improve the safety of our students, teachers, and residents.”

She added the money will give Hebron “the necessary funding to complete additional traffic improvements at the RHAM campus. We understand the importance of having a safe campus; safety is our number one priority.”

Also speaking to the award this week was Board of Education Chairman Danny Holtsclaw. He shared, “I think the district is just very fortunate to have such an important school infrastructure safety project approved by the state bond commission.”

He went on to thank numerous individuals for their efforts.

“First, I need to thank my fellow board members and members of the Facilities and Safety Committee for their work and for working closely with the community for input on the project,” he said. “Second, I need to thank Sen. Osten and Rep. Mulligan for recognizing the urgency and importance of the project. Their contribution was huge. This was a critical project for the safety of students, faculty, staff and the community that will immediately address campus safety.”

Expert: Black Bears Shouldn’t Cause Alarm in Marlborough

by Julianna Roche

With black bear sightings on the rise statewide, Marlborough residents are used to seeing black bears roaming through backyards or eating from bird feeders — and while it’s become quite a common sight, it has also raised some concerns.

On Wednesday night, a group of 35 to 40 gathered at the senior center for a “Black Bears in Connecticut” presentation led by Paul Coburn, a certified Master Wildlife Conservationist and a graduate of the Master Wildlife Conservationist Program. The presentation focused on the natural history of black bears in the state, an overview of black bear habitat, diet and behavior, and recommendations for a peaceful coexistence with the growing black bear population.

According to Coburn, black bear sightings were actually quite uncommon in the state 20 years ago. However, that number has increased every year since. In the last 12 months, for example, he said there have been 24 black bear sightings in Marlborough alone, and over 6,100 sightings reported to the state Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (compared to 50 reported in 1994).

“Black bears are here and they’re here to stay,” he added. “But we are fortunate to have such a magnificent animal back in the state.”

According to Coburn, there are somewhere between 700 and 800 black bears currently living in Connecticut, but that shouldn’t cause alarm, the conservationist added, as black bears are rarely aggressive towards humans.

In fact, in most situations, black bears aren’t even the cause of the problems we often hear about — we are.

“We have a saying at DEEP: a fed bear is a dead bear,” Coburn said. “You never want to intentionally or unintentionally feed a black bear.”

He explained that while black bears are naturally very shy and afraid of humans, that natu-

ral fear bears have “can be upset or eroded if they start to associate food with people. That’s when habituation occurs, which is generally not a good thing for the bear.”

Black bears’ sense of smell is five to seven times better than a bloodhound, he added, so if someone has a bird feeder out in June, for example, a bear can smell that from several miles away. Because they are overwhelmingly driven by food, bears will return to homes where they know they can eat — for example, to a home where a resident is careless about leaving their trash cans out in the open.

In the past, this has caused bears to become habituated and potentially dangerous to humans. In fact, Coburn added, he has heard of a habituated bear that tried to follow a woman into her home and another breaking into a shed that had food openly stored in it. DEEP then has no choice but to mark and tag these bears as “nuisance bears” — and that is where the “fed bear is a dead bear” saying comes into play.

“DEEP is chartered with striking a balance between our needs and the needs of the wildlife in the state,” Coburn said, adding that if a nuisance bear is ultimately considered too dangerous, “unfortunately for the bear, at that point we only have one option — to euthanize them, because people don’t want to change their behavior.”

To keep both us and bears safe, Coburn said residents can change their behavior with just few simple guidelines including: removing bird feeders from late March through November; adding ammonia to trash bags and garbage cans to mask food odors, cleaning grills thoroughly after each use, and not adding meats or sweets (which is considered “a delicacy to black bears”) to compost piles.

Coburn also recommended keeping trash bags in a container with a tight lid and waiting until the morning of collection before bringing the trash out.

“If you have pets or livestock, keep their food



Master Wildlife Conservationist Paul Coburn discussed the statewide spike in black bear sightings with a group of 35-40 at the Marlborough Senior Center Wednesday night.

stored in an airtight container and keep them inside at night,” he added.

In the event of an encounter with a bear, Coburn said the first thing to do is “make your presence known” by making noise, talking to the bear, or waving your arms. If the bear stays put at its location, start backtracking or go back the way you came.

Contrary to popular belief, he added, black bears are excellent climbers and swimmers, and can run up to 30 mph over short distances — so never try to run from a bear.

“When they want to move they can,” he continued. “If you were on a football field at one goal line with a black bear at another goal line 100 yards away, it could get to you in five seconds.”

However, Coburn emphasized that these behaviors usually only occur in bears that have

been habituated and “in their natural state of affairs, black bears are very rarely aggressive.”

Concluding the presentation, Coburn said that while the black bear population has been growing 10 to 15 percent each year (and will double every five to seven years), there’s a greater chance of being hit by lightning than by being attacked by a bear — so residents should feel more at ease.

“This just makes it even more important to make the changes we talked about, so we won’t have a lot of problems even as the population increases. So if you love the species and think we’re fortunate to have them,” Coburn said, making the few recommended changes is not a huge ask, especially “if we want to keep ourselves safe and preserve a magnificent species for generations to follow.”

Andover Police News

9/27: State Police said Jose A. Marino, 24, of 171 Foster St., Meriden, was arrested and charged with improper use of license/registration, operating a motor vehicle while license/registration is suspended, and operating a motor vehicle while using a handheld mobile device.

Colchester Police News

9/27: Colchester Police said Joseph W. Sanchez, 31, of 16 Meadow Dr., Apt. 3, was arrested and charged with breach of peace: threatening, and third-degree assault.

9/29: State Police said Kevin A. Mills, 44, of 39 Wesleyan Ter., Bloomfield, was arrested and charged with speeding over 70 mph, operating a motor vehicle under the influence of drugs/alcohol, and failure to drive in the proper lane on a multiple lane highway.

9/29: Colchester Police said Matthew Peters, 28, of 803 Ennis Dr., Orange Park, Fla., was arrested and charged with reckless driving: not greater than 85 mph, use of drug paraphernalia and illegal possession of a narcotic.

Suspect Backs Truck into Garage Door in Attempted Andover Break-In

State Police said an individual attempted to break into a store in Andover last weekend by backing into the building.

According to police, at approximately 1:30 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 1, a suspect driving a red Dodge pick-up truck attempted to break into the X-Pro Motorsports shop at 5B Bunker Hill Rd.

Police said the truck had rear-end damage and should have a broken left tail light from backing into the garage door of the shop, which sustained significant damage.

Anyone with information about this incident should call Troop K in Colchester at 860-465-5400.

Obituaries

Andover

John Fitzgerald Phelps

Mr. John Fitzgerald Phelps, a lifelong resident of Andover, passed away peacefully Monday, Sept. 24, after a period of declining health.

John was born to his parents, Lewis and Helen Phelps, Jan. 31, 1919, in Andover. He attended Windham High School and earned a business degree from Morse College in Manchester.

He married his high school sweetheart, Ruth Taylor, in 1941 and resided 75 years with her in Andover, where they raised six children. He was employed as a business systems analyst by Pratt and Whitney Aircraft for over 45 years, starting during World War II. He also served in the US Navy at the end of the war.

John was very involved in town activities and organizations throughout his life. He was a founding member of the Andover Volunteer Fire Department and the Andover Sportsman's Club. He played on the successful town baseball team against surrounding towns during the 1940s and 1950s. He chaired the building committee when the elementary school was significantly expanded in the 1970s. He was a Justice of the Peace, fire commissioner and member of the town finance committee for many years. He also served until very recently on the boards of Hop River Homes senior housing and the Townsend Road Cemetery.

He was a past master of the Wooster chapter of Masonic Lodge in Colchester and was past president of the Hartford chapter of the National Association of Accountants. He was also a member of the Descendants of the Founders of Ancient Windsor (Connecticut).

John's interests included traveling the U.S. and abroad with Ruth, visiting family members, summer vacations on Cape Cod, small aircraft flying lessons, Harley-Davidson motorcycles, NASCAR, taking family members to Shady Glen in Manchester and chatting with others about many shared topics of interest.

John was predeceased by his parents, his siblings Charles and Helen and his wife Ruth.

He is survived by his six children, Sandra Czuchry and her husband Andrew of Gray, Tenn.; Roger Phelps and his wife Cheri, of Tucson, Ariz.; Charlotte Wright and her husband Jonathan of Concord, Mass.; David Phelps and his wife Sara of Merrimack, N.H.; Jonathan Phelps and his wife Genina of Easton, Mass.; and Deborah Pettinelli and her husband Darryl of Scituate, Mass. He is also survived by 15 grandchildren, 10 great-grandchildren and many beloved nieces and nephews.

Calling hours will be today, Oct. 7, from 5-7 p.m., at Potter Funeral Home, 456 Jackson St. (Route 195), Willimantic. A funeral service and committal will take place at 11 a.m. Saturday, Oct. 8, at St. Peter's Episcopal Church, 30 Church St., Hebron. A reception will follow in the church's Phelps Hall.

Memorial gifts may be made, in John's memory, to the Andover Volunteer Fire Department, 11 School Rd, Andover, CT 06232.

To sign the online guestbook, visit potterfuneralhome.com.



Colchester

Adrian Conway

Adrian (Lemieux) Conway, "Doris," 92, of Colchester, formerly of Kissimmee, Fla., Wethersfield and Windsor, died peacefully in her sleep, together with God's presence, love and peace, through Jesus Christ our Savior, Monday, Oct. 3, at home. She was the widow of the late Charles H. Conway, Jr., whom predeceased her Sept. 30, 2012, after 64 years of marriage.

Born May 18, 1924, in Hartford, she was the daughter of the late Alfred and Delia (Fournier) Lemieux.

Doris was a devoted wife and mother and had been active with the PTA when her daughters were young. She was a kind, gentle and generous woman who loved to cook and play cards in her spare time. Following her retirement from Pratt & Whitney, she enjoyed hosting family and friends at her home in Kissimmee.

She leaves her daughter and son-in-law, Janet and Chuck Scott of Colchester, with whom she had most recently made her home; four grandchildren, Charles, Grace, Laura and Evan; three great grandchildren, Wesley, Brandon and Luke; three siblings, Gail Jezouit of Jupiter, Robert Lemieux of Enfield and Nellie Molanari of Hebron; and numerous extended family members and friends.

In addition to her husband, she was predeceased by a daughter, Patricia Conway Picard; and five siblings, Yvonne Smeiga, Irene Marcia, Gloria Pepin and Raymond and Alfred Lemieux.

Friends called Thursday, Oct. 6, at the Aurora-McCarthy Funeral Home, 167 Old Hartford Rd., Colchester. The funeral will assemble starting at 10 a.m. today, Oct. 7, at the funeral home, before a chapel service at 10:30 a.m. Interment with her husband will follow at the State Veterans Cemetery, Middletown.

For more information, visit auroramccarthyfuneralhome.com.



Hebron

Kimberley Foote

Kimberley (Switzer) Foote, 56, of Hebron, passed away Friday, Sept. 30, at Hartford Hospital, after a sudden illness. Kim was born in Hartford Sept. 13, 1960, and grew up in Hebron.

She graduated from RHAM High School and attended Southern Connecticut State University. She was a med-certified CNA who devoted her life to helping others in need. She began her career employed by a nursing home and in recent years was a care giver to many fortunate residents in area group homes.

Kim's devotion, humor and intuitive personality will be sorely missed by those in her care. Kim enjoyed dirt biking, ATV riding, snowmobiling and basketball as she was growing up. In recent years she loved spending time with her granddaughter Mady, playing games, swimming and planning parties.

Kim is survived by her mother, Jean A. (Lyman) Switzer of Hebron; son, Robert E. Foote of Hebron; and her daughter Jennifer J. Foote and her partner Brian Kinghorn of Coventry; also her special granddaughter, the light of her life, Madelyn J. Foote of Hebron; two sisters and their families, Roxanne and Tom Oakley of Coventry, Tammy and Ken Keyes of Eastford; her nieces and nephews Kendra and Mark Oakley, Benjamin, Jacob and Anna Keyes. She also leaves her aunts and uncles Nancy Lyman and Sally and Steve Young, as well as many cousins and her "second set of parents," Dottie and Dick Bergeron.

Kim was predeceased by her father, Robert G. Switzer.

Relatives and friends may join the family at a memorial service to celebrate Kim's life Saturday, Oct. 29, at 11 a.m., in the Gilead Congregational Church, 672 Gilead St., Hebron. All are welcome to join the family in the Fellowship Hall at the church immediately following the service.

In lieu of flowers, the family believes Kim's desire would be simply to "pay it forward" be it with a smile, a joke, or by lending a helping hand the way she lived her life.

The family would like to express its deepest gratitude to the outstanding, compassionate staff at Hartford Hospital's Bliss 91 I.C.U. Special thanks to Chris, Amie and Dr. Jordan Kunkes.

To leave online condolences, visit spencerfuneralhomeinc.com.

Colchester

Joseph Charles Scrivano Sr.

Joseph Charles Scrivano Sr., 84, of Colchester, widower of the late Mary Ellen (O'Brien) Scrivano, passed away Monday, Oct. 3. Born Guiseppe Scrivano on Jan. 24, 1932, in Hartford, he was a son of the late Francesco and Croce (Milo) Scrivano.

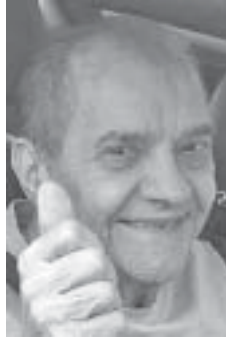
Mr. Scrivano served proudly with the U.S. Army during the Korean War and went on to become a fire fighter for both Pratt & Whitney and the Hartford Fire Department. He enjoyed golfing and football and was a die-hard New England Patriots fan.

He is survived by three children, Frank Scrivano of Scotland, Michael Scrivano and his wife, Nancy of North Carolina and Laura Scrivano and her husband, Bill Mancini of Amston; five grandchildren, Joe, Mike, Jesse, Matthew and Alexa; a great grandchild, Logan; a sister, Josephine Asquini of East Hartford; and numerous extended family and friends.

In addition to his loving wife of 59 years, who predeceased him on May 28, 2014, he was also predeceased by his son, Joseph Jr., on June 5, 2009, and a brother, Sandino.

The family will receive guests from 5-7 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 20, at the Aurora-McCarthy Funeral Home, 167 Old Hartford Rd., Colchester. A funeral home chapel service will follow at 6:30 p.m., with full military honors. Burial will be private in the New Hebron Cemetery.

For online condolences, visit auroramccarthyfuneralhome.com.



Colchester

Kathleen Fill Memorial Service

A memorial service for Kathleen (Martin) Fill of Colchester, formerly of Amston, will be observed at 2:30 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 16, at the Aurora-McCarthy Funeral Home, 167 Old Hartford Rd., Colchester.

The family will receive guests starting at 1:30 p.m. until the time of the service. Burial will be private in St. Peter's Cemetery, Hebron.

Fill, 90, the widow of the late Joseph J. Fill, passed away Saturday, Sept. 17, at the Wm. W. Backus Hospital in Norwich. Born June 6, 1926 in Natchitoches, La., she was the daughter of the late Horace and Nellie (Plummer) Martin. Mrs. Fill had worked as a school nurse for Colchester Public Schools as well as RHAM High School in Hebron. She is survived by three sons, Ted Fill of Falmouth, Mass., Tom Fill of Colchester and Kevin Fill; two siblings, Dwight Martin and Sylvia Zimmerman; and numerous extended family and friends.

In lieu of flowers, donations in her memory may be made to St. Peter's Episcopal Church, 30 Church Street, Hebron, CT 06248.

For online condolences, visit auroramccarthyfuneralhome.com.