

RIVEREAST

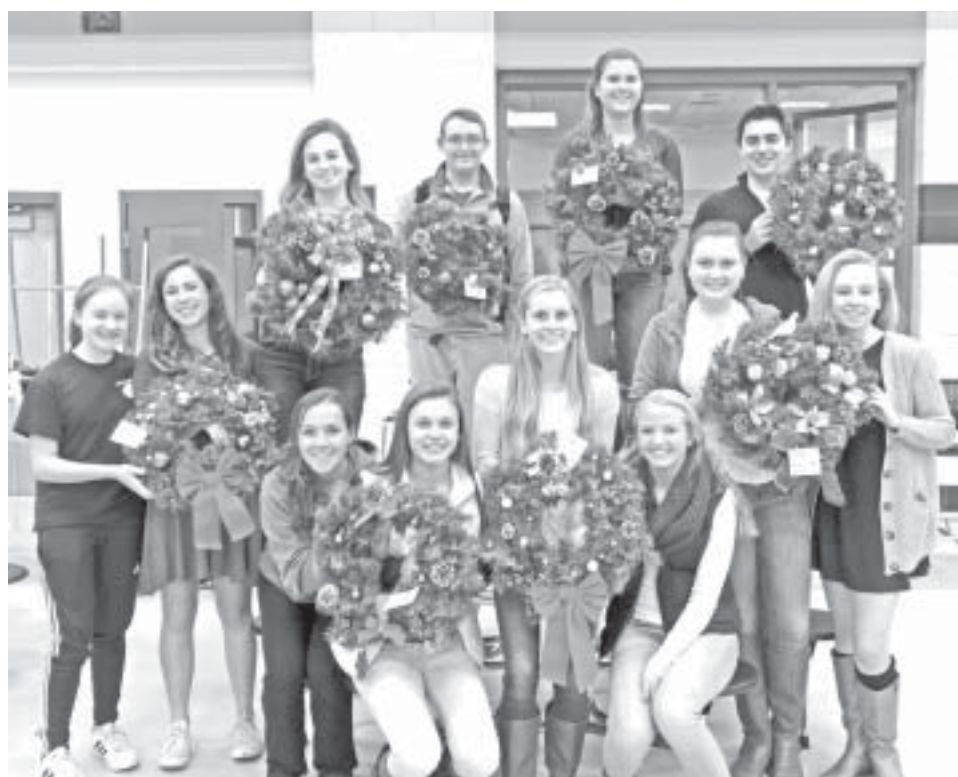
News Bulletin

Serving Amston, Andover, Cobalt, Colchester, East Hampton, Hebron, Marlborough, Middle Haddam and Portland

Volume 41, Number 14

Published by The Glastonbury Citizen

December 23, 2016



Haul Out the Holly... The RHAM Leos have been busy this holiday season. They have volunteered service time to the Senior Friends of Hebron holiday party at the Hebron Lions Den. Members of the Leos and Hebron Lions constructed Holiday Wreaths and distributed them to Hebron seniors and homebound people around the town with wishes for a happy and healthy holiday season. Pictured above are the RHAM Leos with some of the holiday wreaths that they made.

Affordable Housing Proposed for Elmcrest

by Elizabeth Regan

The Elmcrest property developer who walked away from the Portland Board of Selectmen in September after the board rejected his request for a full, seven-year tax abatement is back – this time with an alternative proposal that would turn the 14 acres into a sprawling residential complex with an emphasis on families.

Dan Bertram, of the Danbury-based BRT General Corporation, has released preliminary details on an affordable housing proposal that includes 532 apartments, 71 percent of which have two or three bedrooms.

Schematics for the affordable housing development show four 4-story complexes and one 3-story complex with 876 surface parking spaces. There is a main entrance on Marlborough Road and secondary entrances on Main Street and Perry Avenue.

The plan eliminates all the historic homes on the property.

The proposal is in stark contrast to the 238 market-rate apartments and up to 94,000 square feet of shops and offices the developer had been touting for much of the past year and a half. Bertram's mixed-use plan earned the endorsement of the Economic Development Commission and the Historical Society, largely based on his promise to preserve the site's three most

important 19th century structures.

The mixed-use plan fell apart when four out of seven selectmen voted against a tax abatement valued at \$5 to \$7 million because they didn't believe in subsidizing residential construction, especially in the absence of an approved site plan.

Bertram said in an interview Tuesday that he only has one question for Portland selectmen at this point: "Do you want the affordable housing or do you want the old plan?"

He has agreed to give the selectman until the end of January to decide.

If they can come to an agreement on a tax abatement, Bertram said he'll be ready to move forward with the mixed-use development and the preservation of the three homes.

If they can't, he said he's ready to start filing paperwork with the Planning and Zoning Commission on an affordable housing development.

The property is owned by Fred Hassan, a Shelton-based CPA, along with the heirs of Drs. Louis B. Fierman and Lane Ameen. The two Elmcrest medical directors ran the psychiatric facility before the property was leased by St. Francis Care Behavioral Health in 1997.

Hassan has said he has no plans to sell the property.

See Affordable Housing page 2

Santa Claus is Coming to Town

He's made his list, and checked it twice, and in less than 48 hours, Santa Claus will bring presents to kids across the globe.

What exactly will he bring? Well, only Santa knows for sure – but we've got a pretty good idea about some of the goodies that will be in that great big sack upon his back.

Once again this year, Marlborough Girl Scout Troop 65220 collected letters to Santa Claus, which were penned by area kids. And once again, the scouts were nice enough to share the wish lists with us at the *Rivereast*. We typed up some of our favorites – intentionally keeping the cute little kid misspellings – and are sharing them here.

After transcribing the letters, we sent them on their way up to the big guy. We've got a source at the North Pole – it pays to have friends in high places – who assures us the letters made safe passage, and that Santa will do his best to fulfill as many wishes as possible.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year from all of us at the *Rivereast News Bulletin*.

Dear Santa,

Merry Christmas Santa! Thank you for the presents you got me last year. I really enjoyed them. Snowflake has been a really good hider. We can't find him in the mornings! Like every Christmas, I want you to please surprise me. I am so excited for Christmas. It is my FAVORITE holiday! Try not to work too hard. What are your favorite kind of cookies? I want to put out your favorites on Christmas Eve. We got a new puppy so don't be surprised on Christmas. Hope you have a Merry Merry Christmas!

Love, Stella

Dear Santa,

Hello Mr. Claus. My name is Zach. You remember me from the ten years I was alive. I am here to tell you my top 4 things I want for Christmas. #1 COD advanced warfare for Xbox1; #2, a Patriots helmet, #3 a Super Bowl football, #4 Golden Air Jordans. Now you give me whatever you want But I will still be thankful for what you give me.

Love, Zach

Dear Santa,

How is everything up in the North Pole? Is global warming doing anything up there, I've heard the pack ice up there is melting. For Christmas I would like the following:

1) Nerf Mega centurion 2) Nerf accessories (examples: scopes, barrel attachments, stocks, foregrips, and/or extra nerf darts) 3) Skis 4) Rapala Skitter pop (fishing lure) 5) Ski boots and helmet 6) Plasma ball

Sincerely, Bryce

Dear Santa,

If you can get me anything I would like it most if you can get me a zombo robot. thank you, and the other stuff is a super sonic sled from L.L. Bean, a dash robot, a dot robot, a cosmo robot. Thank you for what you do.

From Alex

Dear Santa,

I want a stuffed reindeer for Christmas.

From, Amelia

Dear Santa,

For Christmas I would like a doc care cart, chocolate pen and a picture of one your elfs, can it be a girl. Grace would like a figure of Ben from Decedents, Malificent horns, an a rabbit toy. Delaney would like a talking kion, a dancing Minnie and a Minnie lunchbox

Sincerely, Aubree

Dear Santa,

All I want for Christmas is to get an Amazon gift card, or you to donate to the Red Cross! Also thank you so much for last year's presents. If you could also get me some Magic the Gathering cards (Mtg cards) that would be very nice. Thank you.

Your pal, Ethan

Dear Santa,

My name is Abbey. I would like a Beta fish!

Love, Abbey

Please bring Sabrina and Katrina a toy



See Santa Letters page 2

Affordable Housing cont. from Front Page

Bertram said repeatedly over the past several months that he would not be developing affordable housing on the property. Instead, he said all along he would give Hassan the name of a different developer if the mixed-use option fell through and it became apparent that affordable housing was the way to go.

Discussion about the future of the site was revived last Thursday when Bertram outlined his plans during a meeting with First Selectwoman Susan Bransfield, Economic Development Chairman Elwin Guild, economic development consultant Mary Dickerson, and representatives from the Lower Connecticut Valley Council of Governments (RiverCOG).

With the departure of Town Planner Deanna Rhodes for a job as city planner in Norwich earlier this year, and with no plans to replace her, Bransfield has decided to bring in RiverCOG to provide planning expertise on large projects as they arise.

A Tuesday press release from the council of governments said the purpose of the meeting was to find common ground and move the stalled project forward. The regional planning organization will work with Bertram and the town of Portland to come up with a “mutually acceptable” path that is aligned with the town’s Plan of Conservation and Development.

“Representatives of the town of Portland and BRT General Corporation believe that there still is merit in the original mixed-use proposal comprised of market rate housing and commercial space,” the press release said.

Bransfield said Monday she “just cannot accept” any plan that calls for upward of 400 or 500 apartments. Instead, she stands behind the concept of mixing residential and commercial construction as outlined in the Plan of Conservation and Development as well as a 2015 study on the community’s vision for the old hospital site.

“We have 9,300 people in the town. To increase the housing stock by 540 apartments would be very, very difficult for our community based on what we have as far as services,” she said.

A commonly-held belief around town is that Bertram’s talk of affordable housing is simply a negotiation ploy to push through the tax abatement for his original plan – but Bransfield said she doesn’t see it that way.

“I don’t call [affordable housing] a threat,” she said. “It’s allowed by state law.”

Selectman Brian Flood on Wednesday expressed skepticism that affordable housing would be the most lucrative use for the well-situated property, using the argument to underscore why he thinks the developer’s recent proposal is pure bluster.

According to Bertram, property owner Hassan stands to reap “7-figures more with affordable housing” than if the mixed-use development goes through.

Bransfield said she will be speaking to the rest of the selectmen about possibly revisiting an incremental tax abatement for the mixed-use proposal.

Bransfield last month gave the Economic Development Commission a draft of a revised tax abatement policy she came up with after reviewing guidelines from other towns. For a development with improvements of \$3 million or more, the draft specified an abatement of 100 percent of real property value for the first three years. The incentive would fall to 80 percent in year four, 60 percent in year five, 40 percent in year six and 20 percent in year seven.

But state law recently changed to allow towns to give 10-year tax abatements. That could amount to the bottom line figure a developer is looking for even if it comes through incrementally over a longer period of time.

“Look, there’s opportunity here,” Bransfield said.

Bertram said it’s a conversation he’s willing to have. He acknowledged that a 10-year, stepped approach “doesn’t sound as stark as a full abatement,” but cautioned there would be details to be worked out.

If tax abatement talks don’t yield a result that’s agreeable to both parties, he will go to the Planning and Zoning Commission with the affordable housing plan for 532 units. The move will likely put into motion a land use appeals process governed by state statute.

The state’s affordable housing statute, commonly known as 8-30g, makes it possible for developers to build a high number of apartments for which they might not otherwise get approval – but only if less than 10 percent of the housing stock in town is “affordable.”

According to the state Department of Housing, 8.36 percent of Portland’s housing stock was considered affordable in 2015.

A developer proposing an affordable housing complex in town can appeal a rejection to the Superior Court, where presumptions are in favor of the developer. It’s up to the town to prove the plan is a threat to public health and safety.

At last week’s meeting, Bertram also showed officials schematics for a third plan as an example of how his affordable housing proposal could change during the settlement process if the case goes to court.

The plan would fall into the “incentive housing” category, which requires 20 percent of the units to be marketed to households earning less than 80 percent of the area median income. Bertram’s schematics show 496 apartments, with 74 percent coming in at two or more bedrooms. It includes the restoration of the 1852 Brainerd House.

Bertram said his company would be able to restore the home in that scenario because less money would be spent subsidizing low rents under the incentive housing model than under the affordable housing model.

Since the town Planning and Zoning Commission must establish an Incentive Housing Zone (IHZ) before such a plan could move forward, Bertram said discussion on the third plan is premature.

“I only brought up the scenario now to serve as a road map to preserve the Brainerd House for the folks most serious about historical preservation,” he explained. “I have not forgotten them, but I cannot address what everyone wants without the town’s active support.”

In 2010, Concord Square Planning and Development Inc., of Boston, issued a grant-funded analysis of possible locations for an incentive housing zone and a draft of generic zoning regulations. The study did not result in any action.

According to the nonprofit *Partnership for Strong Communities*, an IHZ is an overlay that allows developers to build more housing units in exchange for creating mixed-income housing. The town retains control over the location, amount, type and design of the homes created in the zone.

Establishing an incentive housing zone back then could have potentially pushed the town’s housing stock above the ten percent affordable housing threshold. When that happens, the 8-30g statute no longer empowers developers to bring in high-density projects that don’t fit in with the town’s character.

That was the sentiment expressed by then-Planning and Zoning member Bruce Tyler, now chairman, in September 2010 when the commission discussed establishing an incentive housing zone.

“Either you’re in control of your destiny or you’re not,” Tyler said, at the time. “We ought to be planning. To wait for some developer to come in – or not – is to be passive.”

Santa Letters cont. from Front Page

Molly’s List (kind of ordered favorite to least favorite)

Puppy!=5-5 stars, Phone!=5-5 stars, Segway=4 1/2-5 stars, V.I.P. code for MSP (1 year judge)=5-5 stars, Dirt Bike=4 1/2 -5 stars, COZMO THE ROBOT!=5-5 stars, Drone=5-5 stars, New Bike=4-5 stars, Singing Kit=4-5 stars, Blow-up chair for my room=3-5 stars, Furreal friends (puppy one)=3-5 stars, Matching P.J.s with my mom=5-5 stars

Dear Santa,

How are you? I’m doing fine. I’m guessing you and your elves are busy making lots of toys! Well, did you I moved to florida? Well, is it really cold there! The stuff I want for christmas is pokemon cards (alot of them), Diary of a wimpy kid Hard Luck, a b.m.x. bike, smoke grenades, poppers, a multi-color pen, pencil sharpener, Call of Dity 3, GTA 5, and chrome spray paint. That’s all I want for Christmas. By have a nice time.

From: Hunter

Dear Santa,

I have tried to be very good this year! For Christmas I would like some blue and bright yellow soccer cleats. I would also like some shopkins. I hope you have a wonderful Christmas!

Love, Reese

Dear Santa,

I would please like a Sophia the First dress. I am three years old. I would like for you to come to my house. I have been a good girl. My sister Norah (9 months old) has been a good girl too. Thank you!

Love, Natalie

Dear Santa,

I’ve been being good this year can I have a rainbow mermaid and a Furreal Friend Pony and a Troll makeover.

From Grace

Dear Santa,

I wot all of Pokemon Kris pleas. Thanks you.

Love, Keenall

Dear Santa,

My name is Vinny. I have been a GOOD BOY. 4 Christmas I want a toy Indomanis Rex from Jurassic World, TRex, Paw Patrole Lookout center, Spinasaurus, candy, Rubbles Digger toy, trucks, Spiderman, a new water gun, a toy dragon that makes sounds, blanket, and one new pair of dinosaur claws. Thank you Santa for reading my letter.

Love Vinny

Dear Santa,

1) I want you to diliver mony to the orphans and the pour and sick. 2) I also want a few peses of coul. 3) Some games, like Fifa 17, Madden 17, Injustes for PS4, Pokemon sun and moon for 3DS. 4) a chair for my desk. 5) A seahawks ware. 6) A tablet coputer. 7) The Lego Batman Games for PS4.

Love, Aaron.

Dear Santa,

I’m really excited for Christmas and have been a good boy! I would love a pretend crane, Leggos, a glue gun, a microscope, and scooter. We will leave you yummy cookies and carrots for your reindeer so come hungry.

Love, Jack (age 4)

Dear Santa,

I have been very good this year. How have you been? I hope you are well. Please may I have a book of Dragonology? I think you should use your judgement for my second present.

Love, Daniel

For Christmas I would like a hoverboard and some crazy Aaron’s slime....P.S. I hope you are having a fun time building and working with the elf’s, tell Sammie I said hi and that I will see him soon.

Eat lots of cookies, Izabella

Remembering Diana Norton Giles

by Julianna Roche

Diana Norton Giles is a name that has run rampant through the backbone of Colchester politics for the last several decades.

Following her death from lung cancer Monday at the age of 60, that name will now leave behind a legacy not to be forgotten.

In addition to running for first selectman both in 2005 and 2007, Giles also served as chairwoman of the Zoning Board, a selectman, co-chairman of the Bacon Academy Bicentennial, a member of the Board of Assessment Appeals, and she helped manage the Memorial Day parade. At the time of her passing, she was the Republican registrar of voters and chairwoman of the Bacon Academy Board of Trustees.

According to Giles' cousin Melissa Engel, a current member and former chairwoman of East Hampton's Town Council, politics runs in her blood.

"We both have always had an affinity for politics," Engel said, "although Diana is far more skilled at running a campaign than I ever was."

From the start of her career managing the supply room in the Washington, D.C. headquarters of the Ford for President campaign, Giles eventually worked for the Buckley for Senate campaign and ran field operations for Guglielmo for Congress.

Closer to home, she ran the late Duncan Green's winning campaign for first selectman of Colchester, and also managed the campaign for current first selectman Art Shilosky.

"Politics has been in our family for generations, but Diana took it to a higher level," Engel explained, adding that "she was forceful, determined, but very nice... she did that all politely."

"She was just a very genuine, sincere person, and was very dedicated to her position," agreed Town Clerk Gayle Furman.

Democrat registrar of voters Dorothy Mrowka, who worked with Giles for four years, said she will "sorely miss" her and that "she was a wonderful person to work with [and] made working in the office a pleasure."

However, while most know Giles for her political prowess and affinity for Bacon Academy, those closest to her will also remember her love of family, passion for reading – and that she "really knew how to wear a scarf."

"She always wore a scarf and it was always matching her outfit," laughed Dolores

Sawchuck, Bacon Academy Board of Trustees member and a close friend of Giles. She added the two would both often wear Bacon's school colors of blue and gold to represent the school. "Every time I put on a scarf now, I'm going to remember Diana."

Despite their 26-year age difference, Sawchuck, 86, said the pair "just clicked" and quickly developed a "very special friendship" while working together on the Board of Trustees over the last couple of decades.

"Every time she called me, including the last conversation we had, she always said 'I love you'," Sawchuck continued, adding that Giles was "such a charming lady" and "always dignified, even leading the trustees."

"If perhaps she disagreed with something,



she might say it, but she would say it in such a dignified manner," she said laughing, adding that Giles "did so many things for the Board of Trustees that we now realize we have to pick up the slack!"

Board of Education Chairman Ron Goldstein had similar sentiments to share, stating that "with losing Diana, Colchester has lost a true treasure."

"I would say, especially with Diana, in addition to everything else – her dedication and devotion to Bacon Academy was just extraordinary," he continued. "She did so much to preserve their

history. ... She really did so much, for so many, in so many different ways."

Under Giles' leadership, for example, the board of trustees helped ensure the preservation of Old Bacon Academy, which dates to 1803 and still stands today.

Additionally, Giles was deeply involved with Bacon's annual Founder's Day event, which honors alumni who have distinguished themselves in their careers or areas of expertise.

Beyond politics however, Engel said Giles was also "very devoted" to her family, which includes her husband Greg, stepchildren Chris and Danielle, parents Nicholas and Lynn Norton, brothers Christopher, Andrew and Jeremy, and five nephews and nieces – just to name

a few.

Quipping that they were the "unofficial triplets" of the family, Engel along with cousin Brett Wasniewski Dimberg celebrated most birthdays with Giles growing up, since they were all born in 1956 and "never lived terribly far from one another."

"We all turned 60 this year, so we had a big family party this summer," she recalled fondly, adding it was "so nice we were able to do that."

"She was my mentor," Engel explained. "If I had a question, it was Diana I called and if I needed somebody to run things by, she was the girl."

Even growing up, Giles conveyed a similar demeanor.

According to Board of Trustees member Sal Saitta, who was also Diana's former biology teacher at Bacon, "she was an excellent student – dedicated to hard work, excellence and thoroughness," he continued. "And she carried those virtues into her adult life."

During her last moments, Sawchuck said Giles was surrounded by her family and a singing choir, who, per her husband's request, joined the family inside the room to sing Christmas carols while they said their warm goodbyes.

Funeral arrangements are as follows – calling hours were held Thursday, Dec. 22 at the Aurora-McCarthy Funeral Home, 167 Old Hartford Rd. The funeral liturgy will be celebrated at 10:30 a.m. today, Dec. 23 at St. Andrew Roman Catholic Church, 128 Norwich Ave. Giles will be laid to rest privately in the Norton family plot in Ponemah Cemetery, North Westchester, immediately following the Mass.

In Giles' memory, contributions may be made to the Bacon Academy Board of Trustees, P.O. Box 67, Colchester, CT 06415.

Burbank Responds to Credit Card Concerns in Andover

by Geeta S. Sandberg

After the Board of Selectmen voted unanimously Dec. 13 to cancel two town credit cards opened under First Selectman Bob Burbank's Social Security number, Burbank responded this week to the expressed concern over the redemption of rewards miles.

Burbank said Thursday that Vice First Selectman Jeff Maguire – who raised the issue at last week's meeting – was inaccurate in some of his statements surrounding the cards.

At last week's meeting, Maguire asked Burbank to share how he came to have credit cards opened using his Social Security number, to which Burbank explained the town didn't have credit that was high enough for approval at the time he applied for the cards in 2011, but he was told he'd be approved if he gave a personal guarantee via his Social Security number.

Maguire then mentioned one of the cards – a Chase Ink card – was a rewards-earning card and asked, "Who's used those miles?"

Burbank said in response he'd utilized the redemption points to purchase LifeLock, an identity theft protection service.

"I do utilize those points to pay that under my name," he stated.

Maguire, however, was not satisfied. "So when those miles are redeemed – because in the last bill 19,000 miles were redeemed – where did you redeem them to?" he asked.

"They were sent to me and I utilized them for payment for LifeLock" Burbank reiterated. "Can you prove that?" Maguire continued.

"Because according to what has been shown on the credit card there's been about 300,000 miles that have been accumulated on that card over the last three years. And that means to me that someone redeemed 300,000 miles – so that's redeeming \$3,000 to pay LifeLock?"

The service, Maguire added, amounts to approximately \$100 per year. On the website lifelock.com, the standard service is listed as \$9.99 per month, while the advantage package costs \$19.99 per month and the ultimate plus service costs \$29.99.

"There's no way that it's 300,000" Burbank stated of the rewards points. "We'll review the figures, but it's miniscule."

According to the Chase website, points earned via the Ink Card can be redeemed for cash back as a statement credit to apply toward the account balance, or can be directly deposited to most checking and savings accounts. Points can be redeemed for cash back "at a 1:1 value starting at 2,000 points for \$20 cash back."

Maguire also brought up another credit card for Sam's Club and wondered about the 1 percent cash back reward earned via purchases and who the check is sent to.

Burbank at first said "I haven't seen a check from Sam's," and then later said "It's been a long time since I got a check from Sam's" explaining when he had years before, it was cashed and used to buy lunch for town staff.

In response, Maguire said he felt the cards should be canceled because "there is nothing the town buys that can't be purchased through a vendor that will actually invoice it."

"I could care less" if the cards were canceled, Burbank replied.

Maguire went on to reiterate that no matter how few the points or how small a rewards check from Sam's, the money should go into a town account and be accounted for.

A motion to cancel the cards passed unanimously – but this week Burbank said he pulled the credit card records and the numbers Maguire shared were inaccurate.

"The total I collected from the credit card points equal \$451.38, which is far below the \$3,000 that Mr. Maguire claims," Burbank said Thursday.

He added, "I was upfront when I got this credit card in 2011; there was nothing I was trying to hide from the town, but I also stated that I utilized the majority of the money from the points for LifeLock."

Maguire had said at the meeting the town had paid for LifeLock, not Burbank, but Burbank said, "I have the document from LifeLock showing that I have paid them every year since I opened that card and it comes out to the equivalent of \$528."

He continued, "I'd be happy to make available to [the press] or anybody that requests it, the information I have that what I am saying right now is accurate and true."

Burbank added he believed the reason Maguire kept bringing up issues that had to do with his performance was related to last year's municipal election, when Maguire ran against Burbank for first selectman and lost.

"So he's exaggerating situations and trying to do whatever he can do to malign me," Burbank said. "And overall this town has been run extremely efficient. We haven't had a tax increase in quite a few years and there's not many towns that can say that."

Maguire, in response to Burbank's assertion, said his actions had nothing to do with the election, and everything to do with how the job of first selectman should be done, and how efficiently the town is run.

"This is not about the election and who won or lost; it's about how that job should be performed," Maguire said. "And the issues that I bring up are performance issues. These are items that are brought up and identified because someone now [Maguire] is looking at the records."

He furthered, "Bob is not a bad person. He's not. He just needs to get with the times. And he needs to just share everything, and he does not want to share."

Maguire added it was nothing personal, concluding, "I've not one thing personal against Bob, but if all I'm asking for is for him to explain something – then just explain it to me. I don't believe that he does anything totally maliciously, I really don't, but things are just managed in a manner that is old school."

The next Board of Selectmen meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, Jan. 10, at 7 p.m. in the Andover Town Hall Community Room, 17 School Rd.

Westchester Congregational Raises Funds for Restoration

by Julianna Roche

It took nearly four months of fundraising, but the historic Westchester Congregational Church has raised enough money (and then some) to see that the peeling paint and spots of rotting wood on its exterior finally be renewed to its true beauty.

Back in July, the congregation started a fundraiser for the restoration of the church's exterior, which will cost them about \$44,000.

There was "such an overwhelming and supportive response from the community," according to the church's pastor, the Rev. Ron Thompson, that the church actually surpassed its original goal by nearly \$12,000, hitting the \$56,000 mark.

"We started with nothing," Thompson said, adding the first step was to form a committee to plan marketing strategies for how to best raise the funds. "We looked at what we could do, what we had, what we didn't have."

In the end, the church sent out letters both to people in the congregation and the community, as well as to local businesses. They also advertised the fundraiser on Facebook and had a Go Fund Me page with video footage of the areas that need restoration work.

"From there, we started receiving checks and people were expressing so much support," Thompson said, adding the church had two considerable anonymous donors, including one donor who matched every contribution of up to \$10,000 during July and August – meaning every donation of \$10 became \$20.

The pastor estimated that about two-thirds of the donations came from members of the congregation, with the remaining one-third from the community. Many donations, he added, even came from people who no longer live in town, but whose families were raised here.

"One of the significant donors mentioned that he doesn't attend [church] here, but he drives by and thinks about what the building represents to the community," Thompson said. "I heard a lot of that from people – when they drive by this, it represents history and tradition to them."

The church, with its bright white and pillar-lined façade, is a staple of the community's history. Its roots date back to 1728, when a group of 16 residents applied to the state assembly to establish a church in Westchester so they would no longer have to make the arduous trek to the congregational church in Colchester.

In 1730, the church was built at its original location at the bottom of Cemetery Road and was used for a variety of needs in addition to

worship, such as social gatherings and town meetings. Similarly, today local groups such as the Cub Scouts, Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, a quilting group, and Al-Anon use the church space, and the hall is even rented out for weddings, showers and birthday parties occasionally.

While there are no records that show what happened to the first church building – whether it burned down or was simply abandoned – a second one was built at its current site in 1791, which sits on higher ground.

A fire in 1847 ended up destroying that building, but the Westchester community came together to rebuild it again and eventually dedicated it in 1848.

After years of wear and tear and weather damage however, the church is now in dire need of repairs, including a paint job on the building's exterior and replacement of rotting wood, which has deteriorated over the years.

Though the initial cost of the job was \$44,000, Thompson said he and other church members realized the steeple could also use some work – and plan to use the remaining funds on that.

According to Thompson, since raising the funds, the church has signed a contract with

Stevenson Services to complete the job – a Bristol-based company who he said "is very experienced all over the northeast, especially with historic churches."

Because of the building's age and condition, the pastor explained that the restoration process requires a very specialized treatment, which many contractors were not willing to do.

"The donors were all pleased that we were so careful to specify how the job is handled," Thompson said. "Some contractors saw it as 'just a paint job' and we wanted this to reflect our passion for what the building represents – a quality job that preserves this building for the next generations."

The restoration process will begin in spring 2017 and will take approximately four to six weeks to complete.

Thompson, who appeared overjoyed at the fundraiser's success, summed up the "amazing process" in a single story.

"A young man came here from the Air Force. He was 40 years old and grew up here, and he decided to help us out. He said he wants this church to be here for his kids and his grandkids," the pastor explained. "That is the kind of overwhelming response we got."

Marlborough Superintendent Presents First Draft of Budget Proposal

by Julianna Roche

At the Board of Education meeting last week, Superintendent of Schools David Sklarz introduced the first draft of what he called "the most fluid budget" he's ever presented as a superintendent – a position he's held in Marlborough since 2009 and, for 14 years prior, in West Hartford.

According to Sklarz, the "many unknown variables" going into this budget season are the reason for such a flexible budget at this stage, especially as he expects there will be even more state budget cuts this year.

"The state is in a mess and it wants the towns to get them out of this mess that we didn't create," he said. "It's been budget cut after budget cut after budget cut. ... You can't take that cumulative hit year after year, so how do we get ourselves out of this?"

Per the board's request, Sklarz went on to present a "rollover" budget, showing the cost of simply maintaining current staff and programs, as well as his proposed budget.

The "rollover" budget totaled \$7.40 million, or a 2.5 percent increase over the current year. Sklarz's proposed budget totaled \$7.58 million, a 4.98 percent increase, or \$360,346 over the current year.

"Some things we just have to make whole again," Sklarz said, referencing the impact of the many budget cuts in FY 2016-17, includ-

ing the Board of Finance's decision to cut the education budget by \$200,000 earlier this year.

While the proposed 4.98 percent increase does not include any new initiatives, it does contain two potential new additions to the budget totaling \$152,228, including \$80,000 for outplacement costs and \$72,228 for a capital improvement/building maintenance fund, which Sklarz recently started discussing with Board of Education Chairwoman Ruth Kelly, Board of Finance Chairman Doug Knowlton and First Selectwoman Amy Traversa.

At the finance board meeting last week, Knowlton noted that any maintenance-related projects done at Marlborough Elementary School are ultimately the school's own fiscal responsibility – and having a capital improvement fund, Sklarz said, would give the school a place to build up reserves to fund those facility costs, building maintenance and capital improvements.

However, crafting a maintenance plan and deciding what exactly needs to be done is still a work in progress, according to Sklarz.

"There are some pieces of the budget that are still unknown variables and that happens to be one of them," he said, acknowledging however that the school does need to "at least be putting money away" for this purpose.

According to the presentation, there has been

an increase in the needs of special education students, and the \$80,000 worth of outplacement costs are for a special education student whose needs, according to board member Louise Concodello, can't be met by the elementary school, and the child would therefore need a specialized school to aid in their development.

In the salaries line, certified personnel such as administrators and those with contracted salaries will see a 2.2 percent increase bringing the total to approximately \$4.14 million, while non-certified personnel will see a 2.05 percent increase totaling approximately \$1.04 million – as always, the salaries account makes up the largest portion of the budget.

Under the proposal, employee benefits are also expected to see a 2.3 percent increase.

Student enrollment is projected to be 511 students in pre-kindergarten through sixth grade (26 students less than this year's enrollment), which Sklarz said is likely due to smaller entering kindergarten enrollments.

According to his presentation, however, there will be four kindergarten sections next year based on the new projected enrollments, and there will be a commitment to adopted class size guidelines, which are 15-18 students per class for kindergarten, 18-23 students for grades 2-4 and 20-25 students for grades 5-6.

Sklarz also noted that while the current av-

erage class size is 20 students, the projected class size is for next year is 19.1 students.

It's also expected there will be a Board-Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) school psychologist and program next year that will allow MES to provide services in-house, "thus reducing out of district cost over time," he said.

Per the presentation, extra items which may have contractual increases, according to Sklarz, are the utilities, transportation, heating oil, diesel fuel and gasoline accounts.

Finally, items not included in the proposed budget are technology infrastructure upgrades, an update on the telephone system and a security alarm system.

Now that Sklarz's budget draft has been presented, the Board of Education will begin deliberating the spending package at their Jan. 26 meeting at 7 p.m.

According to their timeline, they have plans to submit the FY 2017-18 budget to the Board of Finance March 1, 2017.

Despite the tough budget season ahead, Sklarz ended his presentation saying he still has confidence in the town and the board (which, he said, "has always done its due diligence") and will continue to abide by his motto: "We're not two Marlboroughs; we're one Marlborough and we're working together."

Search for New RHAM Superintendent Gets Underway

by Geeta S. Sandberg

Following the RHAM Board of Education's decision last month to contract with Cooperative Educational Services as the board's superintendent search consulting firm, work is already underway in the hunt for a new schools superintendent.

Current schools superintendent Bob Siminski, who began in the district in 2005, announced in September his intent to retire at the end of the 2016-17 school year.

According to a message from the RHAM Board of Education – which is functioning as the Superintendent Search Committee – the group "recognizes the importance of communicating information regarding the search for a new superintendent to school district employees, parents, and members of the community."

To that regard, the committee explained information regarding the search process will be available on the district website and indeed, anyone who ventures to reg8.k12.ct.us will

notice the first items under the news section are "Superintendent Search" and "Superintendent Search General Survey."

Under the former link the phases of the search process – research, recruitment, selection and transition – are explained, and the search timeline is shared. The recruitment brochure for prospective applicants is also available to view on the website, and the leadership profile – which includes the criteria for selection of the new superintendent – will be posted once complete.

Press releases and search updates will be posted as well, and information on community involvement is also available.

And, in a Dec. 15 press release from the Board of Education, the importance of that community involvement was stressed.

"All members of the regional school district and extended communities are encouraged to

complete an online survey and take part in focus group meetings," the press release said. "The search consultants with CES will facilitate the focus group meetings and administer the online survey."

Board of Education Chairman Danny Holtsclaw added in the release, "The RHAM community has always had a strong involvement in our schools. The board acknowledges that participation and input of all community stakeholders is critical for guiding the search process and will be highly valued by the board."

Data from the online survey and focus group meetings will be compiled by CES and used to develop the leadership profile "of attributes and characteristics the community desires in the new superintendent," the release explains.

Once completed, that profile will be used as a framework for reviewing candidate applications and structuring interview questions and

search activities.

Although Siminski explained this week he's trying to stay "as far from the search process as possible because I don't want it to look like I'm manipulating it in any way, shape or form," he mentioned the value in looking at the information on the website and said "there's going to be some focus groups and I would encourage everyone to participate."

He furthered of whoever comes after him, "I think that what I'd like to see the next person do is just to continue the growth in student achievement that we've been able to achieve over the past years. I think that's of prime importance."

The search process is expected to conclude in the spring with the selection and appointment of a new superintendent, who will then begin the transition to the school district in late spring to begin in the role on July 1, 2017.

East Hampton Fire Highlights Concerns About Mill

by Elizabeth Regan

A Sunday fire at 13 Summit St. was successfully put out by firefighters as they worked around dangerous conditions in the vacant 19th century mill.

East Hampton Fire Chief Greg Voelker said the call came in around 11:48 a.m. for a blaze that started on the third level and then burned through the floor into the second story – “so we had two rooms burning.”

There were no injuries, Voelker said.

He said there wasn't much of a fire load in the empty rooms other than timbers in the floor and a wooden table and chairs apparently set up by vagrants.

Voelker said there are no energy sources in the building, such as gas or electrical, so the fire had to be started by a person.

Other than the fire, he said, there was no evidence anyone had been in the building immediately preceding the fire.

East Hampton Fire Marshal Richard Klotzbier said he is working with local police and state fire marshals to investigate the cause of the fire.

The blaze was under control within a half hour, according to Voelker. Mutual aid was provided by fire departments from Haddam Neck, East Haddam, Portland, Colchester and Marlborough.

Voelker described the old building, which hasn't been occupied in about five years, as a known danger.

“It's not a building we want to put firefighters in because the floors are compromised and it's been exposed to the weather,” he said.

The 45,045 square foot building on 2.1 acres was purchased by the Mercedes Zee Corpora-

tion LLC in 2011 for \$137,500, according to the town assessor's database.

When asked on Tuesday if the owner is current on taxes, Town Manager Michael Maniscalco said the limited liability corporation owed the town \$41,007.89 as of this month.

The secretary of the state's database lists the business as belonging to Haim Zahavi.

Zahavi's plan to turn the old mill into about 30 condominiums languished as a result of the town's longstanding water woes. According to the *Rivereast* archives, Zahavi had asked for access to the town's village center water system but never received the go-ahead. The town had 7,000 gallons of excess water at the time; Zahavi was seeking 6,625 gallons of water for his development.

Maniscalco said he spoke with Zahavi at the scene where he described the owner as “concerned.”

“Obviously it was a very large building and it provides a lot of concern for anybody when a facility like that is in a situation where it could have been lost or someone could have lost his life,” Maniscalco said.

The building was being boarded up by order of Building Official Glen LeConche as of Tuesday, according to Maniscalco, and will be fenced in.

“That's about as much as [the town] can do at this point because it's private property,” Maniscalco said.

With a new tax collector poised to come in next week, Maniscalco said the town will be becoming “more aggressive with people who owe taxes.”

“If you look at the state of the state of Con-

necticut and the projected reduction in revenue to the municipality, we're going to have to make sure we're collecting what we need to collect,” he said.

He cited a current collection rate of 98 percent.

Maniscalco said foreclosure is a possibility, but it has not been discussed yet.

But tax issues are separate from safety concerns, Maniscalco emphasized. If the property becomes an immediate safety hazard, the town can act to ensure public safety regardless of tax status.

He cited a home on the eastern side of Lake Pocotopaug as an example. He said a judge authorized the town to remove the building because it was a safety concern.

“We had it demolished,” Maniscalco said. “But they were paying their taxes.”

He said the 13 Summit St. property doesn't appear to rise to the level of an immediate threat at this time – “but you could claim it as an attractive nuisance.”

An attractive nuisance is a legal doctrine in which a landowner may be liable for injuries to children who trespass on land if it is shown the dangerous conditions are likely to attract youth.

“What we're going to do is abate it; you board up the building, you put fencing around to make it less of an attraction,” Maniscalco explained.

The mill was built as a silk factory in 1980 and was occupied by the Summit Thread Factory from 1882-1940, according to town documents. Uses through the 1970s included metal manufacturing and photography; in more recent decades, the building housed a dry cleaner and karate, music and dance studios.

The property is included in the town's list of potentially contaminated sites based on its industrial and dry cleaning history.

An initiative to promote redevelopment of the village center by identifying, assessing and remediating soil and groundwater contamination in the early 2000s led to the creation of the town's Brownfields Redevelopment Agency.

According to a 2015 report by the civil and environmental engineering firm of Fuss and O'Neill, there are fewer underutilized, vacant or abandoned properties within the East Hampton Village Center than there were when the initial Brownfields Initiative began.

“Only eight of the original 23 properties remain on the current Brownfield Inventory,” the report said.

Brownfields Redevelopment Agency Chairwoman Carla Sylvester said the agency has little power over 13 Summit St. because it is privately owned.

While the agency has received grant funding for projects like the demolition of town-owned 13 Watrous St., Sylvester said the town would not be able to apply any of that funding toward 13 Summit St. unless they negotiated with the owner.

There is precedent for such a partnership, however. Sylvester said the town has worked with the nonprofit Epoch Arts to help clean up the former brass company in which the organization is housed.

The subject of 13 Summit St. has not been specifically discussed at any of the agency's meetings, according to Sylvester.

“There's very limited ways the town can do anything,” she said.

Portland Police News

12/13: Lisa Magee-Corvo, 52, of 21 Oak St., Middletown, was charged with failure to maintain safe distance, evading responsibility, and failure to maintain insurance, Portland Police said.

12/13: Samuel Ellis, 21, of 167 Mt. Archer Rd., Old Lyme, was charged with second-degree criminal mischief, second-degree threatening, and second-degree breach of peace, police said.

12/18: Brandon Wyzkowski, 23, of 3 Quarry Lane, was charged with disorderly conduct and criminal damage to landlord property, police said.

East Hampton Police News

12/14: Dennis J. Lavigne III, 59, of 193 Lake Dr., was issued a summons for failure to obey a stop sign, operating an unregistered motor vehicle, failure to carry minimum insurance and non-compliance with emissions standards, East Hampton Police said.

12/14: Mario R. Nozzolini, 39, of 151 Pickeral Lake Rd., Colchester, was issued a summons for speeding, police said.

12/14: Harry Neumann III, 30, of 28 Bulkeley Hill Rd., Colchester, was issued a summons for speeding, police said.

Colchester Police News

12/14: Colchester Police said Tyler Poole, 25, of 830 Grand Ave., New Haven was arrested and charged with third-degree burglary.

12/16: State Police said Ariel R. Larned, 28, of 306 Tuckie Rd., North Windham, was arrested and charged with second-degree failure to appear.

Andover Police News

12/14: State Police said Anthony Robinson, 20, of 16 Boston Hill Rd., was arrested and charged with second-degree breach of peace, disorderly conduct: voyeurism/peeping tom, third-degree assault, second-degree strangulation, and second-degree unlawful restraint.

East Hampton School Administrators Get Their Raises

by Elizabeth Regan

Administrators in the East Hampton school district can rest assured that pay raises of 2.75 percent in the first two years of their contract and 2.5 percent in the third year will remain intact now that an arbitration panel has ruled in their favor.

The case was sent to a three-member arbitration panel in October after the town council rejected the contract negotiated between the Board of Education and the administrators' union.

According to the written arbitration decision, the difference between the salary increase offered by the school board and counterproposal from the union came to \$24,939 over three years. That's approximately \$8,300 per year.

The arbitration process is expected to cost about \$30,000 by the time all bills have been received, Superintendent of Schools Paul Smith said Tuesday. He expects a final tally early next month.

Binding arbitration allows municipalities and school districts to work with arbitrators to settle disputes using the “last best offer, issue by issue” framework. That means arbitrators must choose either the management's last offer or the union's last offer on each contested point of the contract. State statute does not allow arbitrators to work out compromises.

The school board's “last best offer” was a raise of 2 percent for each of three years.

While there were 10 issues up for negotiation when the school board and the administrators sat down for four hours in August to hash out a contract, it was only the salary issue that was contested at arbitration.

Board of Education Chairman Chris Goff told

school board members Monday that the council and Board of Finance had been notified of the opportunity to take part in the contract negotiations from the beginning, but chose not to participate.

“So we've been fighting their fight,” Goff said.

Smith described the dynamic as “kind of odd” because the school board, which had already negotiated in good faith with the administrator's union, had to turn around and tell administrators the raises they had all agreed to were too high.

Councilors had voted along party lines to reject the contract based on concerns about the salary increases and the concept of binding arbitration as a whole.

“I'm so tired of being threatened by binding arbitration,” councilor Melissa Engel said at the time.

A 2006 study by the General Assembly's Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee said it is only on “rare occasions” that a local legislative body - such as a town council - rejects a contract after the school board and union have already come to an agreement.

The councilors acted despite a warning from the town labor attorney that they didn't have “a chance” of winning their case.

Nick Grello, of Siegel, O'Connor, O'Donnell & Beck, told town officials in an email dated Sept. 23 that the contract was “within the ‘going rate’ of current settlements,” and that it was “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.”

The arbitrator's written decision upholding the pay raises said they were influenced in part by the failure of the council and finance board to participate in the negotiation process and that they also took into consideration the advice of the town attorney to the council.

The bulk of the decision, however, revolved around what the arbitrators believed the town could afford to pay.

The arbitrators cited a generous fund balance, a AAA bond rating and an overall net debt of only 2 percent of market value.

“These factors demonstrate sound business practices and a solid financial future for the town of East Hampton,” the decision said.

The decision came despite the town's argument that several issues “greatly impact” the town's future financial capability, including high school renovation debt, a reduction in state funding, the need for a new town hall and police department, and “serious” water problems.

The arbitrators found the salary increases were in line with increases in comparable school districts as well as with increases for other town employees in East Hampton.

The arbitrators concluded compromises were made by both sides during negotiations and that the agreement appears “fair and equitable.”

Administrators will be making between \$121,000 and \$149,000 per year under the new contract, according to salary information provided by Smith.

Smith told councilors the general wage increase for the district's nine administrators amounts to \$96,377 over three years. 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 teacher's contract authorized last year included a wage increase of 2.25 annually for three years.

The contract includes a higher insurance deductible than in the previous contract for a savings of about \$7,000 to \$8,000 per year over the course of the contract. Smith has said the district is one of only two in the state that do not contribute anything to employees' Health Savings Accounts.

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

Goff said the council has 25 days from last Thursday, Dec. 15, to respond to the decision.

The state General Assembly's Legislative Program Review and Investigations study explains that if the council rejects the decision, the case would go back to a random panel of arbitrators assigned by the state to review the original arbitrators' decision process.

The decision of the second arbitration panel cannot be rejected by the council, but may be appealed to the state Superior Court.

Town Council Chairwoman Patience Anderson said Wednesday the council will have to discuss how to proceed.

“I think we have way too many issues in town that deserve our attention, but we'll see what other council members feel about it,” she said. “I don't personally have an appetite for exploring it. I accept the decision. Let's move on.”

CNG Proposal Approved at RHAM District Meeting

by Geeta S. Sandberg

Plans to extend the availability of natural gas in Hebron – and to convert RHAM Middle and High School – are moving forward following the project’s approval at a district meeting Monday.

The project was approved 29-3 and is expected to cost the district approximately \$264,000.

Connecticut Natural Gas first proposed the project to the Hebron Board of Selectmen in February, presenting a plan that would install six miles of gas main from a gate station on East Street to the Hebron town center. As part of the \$4.19 million proposal, all of Hebron’s town offices along the route as well as the fire department, Hebron Elementary School and RHAM would be required to switch over to natural gas.

That original plan, however, was postponed by Hebron Town Manager Andrew Tierney after he shared he was uncertain in the town’s ability to meet the project timeline CNG provided, which sought approval in March for construction to begin over the summer.

The Hebron Board of Selectmen then voted to move forward with a second expansion proposal from CNG in November. This time around, the \$5.59 million project included the installation of two additional miles of gas main and hooks up the town’s second elementary school, Gilead Hill.

The \$264,000 to be contributed by the district includes changing oil burners to gas burners, converting hot water tanks, the kitchens and the science labs, cleaning out the old oil-fired equipment and removing underground tanks, as well as any required piping to connect the two schools to the gas main.

Approximately \$197,394 is currently spent

on fuel in Region Eight, with about 100,200 gallons of oil utilized at \$1.97 per gallon. Switching to natural gas is expected to provide annual savings around \$101,350 with annual usage costs estimated at \$96,036.

The fuel line for RHAM will at first remain about the same in the budget, however, as those savings will be used to offset the cost of the project.

Siminski said of the approval this week, “I think that going forward it has the potential to save the district a lot of money after the project is completed. I think that it also gives us a chance to renew some of the equipment in the district – for instance there’ll be all new oil burners in the high school.”

He continued, “My personal belief is when you save money from an area that does not impact instruction, that’s good for the budget, good for the community, and good for the kids.”

Meanwhile, Tierney added, “The project couldn’t move forward without RHAM High School and Middle School as part of it. That was the biggest concern. I’m very, very happy the project passed.”

He furthered, “It’s a great economic development opportunity.”

Now that the project has district approval, the Hebron Board of Finance was scheduled to discuss financing necessary to fund the town’s installation contribution of \$759,000 plus the conversion costs of \$1.1 million at its meeting Thursday, Dec. 22 after press time.

CNG is looking for contracts to be signed by the end of January, with construction expected to last from April to June; RHAM is projected to be operating on natural gas by the end of September 2017.

From the Editor’s Desk

Observations & Ruminations

by Mike Thompson

Perhaps my very favorite Christmas TV special of all time is the 1964 classic *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer*. I remember, growing up, my family had it on a VHS tape, alongside other specials we’d taped off TV like *A Garfield Christmas*, *’Twas the Night Before Christmas*, *A Claymation Christmas* and that famous classic *The He-Man and She-Ra Christmas Special*. (Hey, I was a child of the ‘80s.)

And while the joy of having them on video meant that I could watch them at any time of year, *Rudolph* is one of the few I remember watching outside of the Christmas season. Looking back, it’s easy to see why. *Rudolph* is such an enjoyable show. It’s very appealing visually, but also has a great story and some terrific, memorable songs.

It’s been years now since I’ve seen most of those Christmas specials, but *Rudolph* is one I try to make time for every December. As I got older, I learned more about the making of the show, which has a pretty interesting history (for example, the ending, where the Misfit Toys are rescued from their namesake island, wasn’t part of the original broadcast; it was added after many viewers wrote in to the network asking what happened to the Misfit Toys). And when I came across a book entitled *Stories Behind the Best-Loved Songs of Christmas*, I discovered the story behind the original “Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer” song is quite interesting itself.

It’s a tale I know I’ve shared in this space before, but it’s so heart-warming it felt right to share it again, especially in this last *Rivereast* before Christmas.

In 1938, Bob May, a copywriter for Montgomery Ward, was living in a two-room Chicago apartment with his four-year-old daughter Barbara and very sick wife Evelyn. Evelyn had been fighting cancer for two years, and wasn’t going to make it. By this point in her illness she had become basically bedridden and one night Barbara came up to Bob and asked him, “Why isn’t my mommy just like everybody else’s mommy?”

Bob was stuck looking for an answer, looking for a way to tell Barbara that her mother was very, very sick and while she desperately wanted to do all the normal mommy things with Barbara, she just couldn’t. Bob also remembered his own childhood. He was a small, thin boy, often picked on by other kids. Bob wanted to find a way to let his daughter know that just because someone was different doesn’t mean they had to be ashamed.

So, that night, Bob told Barbara the story of a reindeer with a red nose. She loved the story, so much so that he retold it every night. And while some details were a little different from the Rudolph story we know today, the crux of it was the same. Rudolph was embarrassed by his glowing nose and other rein-

deer poked fun at him for it. But then, one foggy Christmas Eve, Santa showed up at Rudolph’s door. The fog was so thick he knew he couldn’t make it to all the houses to deposit people’s presents, and he needed Rudolph and his nose, to act as a beacon to guide the way. Rudolph acquiesced, and he and that shiny red nose of his saved the day.

Not having much in the way of money, Bob decided to make a poem out of the story and transform it into a homemade book, to give to Barbara on Christmas morning. While he was finishing the book, Evelyn died. Bob completed the project anyway, and gave it to Barbara, who was thrilled.

A few days later, Bob went to a company holiday party, at the insistence of his co-workers. His colleagues also asked him to recite the Rudolph story. He did, and when he finished the crowd at the party gave him a huge ovation. Sensing there was something special in that story, the chairman of the board for Montgomery Ward purchased all of the rights to Rudolph from Bob, who desperately needed the money. Tens of thousands of copies of *Rudolph* were printed and shipped to Montgomery Ward outlets across the country. The title was a huge hit. For the next six years, every child who visited Santa in a Montgomery Ward store received a free copy of *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer*. By 1946, the company had given away six million copies of the book, and the company was getting flooded with offers from various publishing houses who wanted some of that *Rudolph* success.

This next part of the story is truly amazing. The chairman of Montgomery Ward, the same man who seven years earlier had bought up the rights to the story from Bob, turned around and gave them right back to him. A year later, a mass-market version of *Rudolph* came out, and Bob became a very rich man.

The success for Bob, who was now remarried and had a growing family, didn’t end there. His brother-in-law, Johnny Marks, turned the story into a song. Marks offered it first to Bing Crosby, who turned it down, as did Dinah Shore. Finally, Gene Autry agreed to record the song and it became, as we all know, a tremendous hit. To this day, that song is all over the radio, the *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer* television special is a tradition and numerous Rudolph toys and dolls line store shelves.

For something that was born from a tragedy – his wife’s dying of cancer – *Rudolph* became quite the success story.

* * *

And that closes the door on my “Observations” for 2016. There won’t be a *Rivereast* next week, as the offices will be closed for the holidays. So, I won’t see you next week. I’ll see you next year.

Marlborough Public Works Foremen Positions Filled

by Julianna Roche

Following the resignation of former Superintendent of Operations Chris Corsa just over two months ago, town officials decided the position would be split into two separate jobs moving forward, including a facilities and grounds foreman and a highway and fleet foreman.

At the Dec. 6 Board of Selectmen meeting, First Selectwoman Amy Traversa announced that the two positions have been filled by Tony Gallicchio and Craig Johnson, respectively.

In October, Traversa had said she viewed the restructuring of the position as a necessary measure of survival in today’s economic climate and “as the state budget worsens,” she believes there will be “additional cuts” to funding for the town.

“I’m looking to maximize every tax dollar spent in Marlborough,” she said.

Corsa had worked for the department for more than a dozen years, having been hired on as the department’s physical services foreman in August 2004 and taking over the role as the buildings and grounds supervisor soon after. When the former highway and fleet supervisor left in April 2012, Corsa took on both supervising roles for the town, which included the

combined duties of overseeing the town’s buildings, including the elementary school, as well as highway services.

In 2013, he was appointed to superintendent of operations. As the department’s superintendent, Corsa’s responsibilities included scheduling the maintenance staff, ensuring proper timing of projects, training employees, coordinating with the first selectman to schedule projects, assisting in budget development, and assisting in the planning and coordination of building or capital improvement projects – just to name a few.

Following his resignation, the town appointed John Jones (the former director of operations for Colchester’s Public Works department) as interim superintendent of operations, and according to selectman Dick Shea, he “will stay on for a while” to help with the transition.

“He will be full time through the end of the year and part time on an as needed basis depending on how quickly the new guys gain steam,” Shea stated last week during the Dec. 14 finance board meeting.

According to Traversa, there were a total of 17 applicants split between the two roles, and together with Jones, Town Planner Peter

Hughes, and a panel of Public Works professionals, they narrowed down the pool and interviewed the top candidates for the two foreman positions.

“We had a number of qualified candidates with impressive and varied backgrounds, but Craig and Tony rose to the top,” she said, adding that they were “ultimately selected unanimously” by the panel for the positions.

Johnson, who will serve as the highway and fleet foreman, “has been involved with heavy equipment and construction” for more than 15 years, Traversa said. She added he also attended Heavy Equipment Operator School for the U.S. Navy at Fort Leonard Wood in Missouri and served with the U.S. Navy Seabees, where he achieved the position of Petty Officer 2nd Class.

Additionally, the first selectwoman continued, Johnson served in Operation Iraqi Freedom and was awarded the Seabee Combat Warfare medal for his service.

Since 2009, Johnson “has progressed through the ranks of Public Works in the town of Bloomfield, becoming assistant foreman and crew leader,” Traversa said, adding the role helped give him experience with site work, road

development, utility work and pipe laying.

He’s also currently enrolled in UConn’s T2 Road Scholar and Road Master programs and is a winner of a competitive Creative Solutions award from the T2 Center, as well as a two-time T2 Equipment Challenge winner.

Gallicchio meanwhile, has served as the facilities manager/maintainer for Colchester and has managed 26 different buildings since 2004.

“[He] is knowledgeable in all aspects of municipal building maintenance and mechanicals, budgeting, estimating and equipment repair,” Traversa said. “Tony is an experienced manager of crews and we are fortunate to have someone of his caliber take on this role for Marlborough.”

Since their hiring, both foremen have officially started their positions, with Gallicchio’s start date on Dec. 12 and Johnson’s on Dec. 19.

“I fully expect that both Tony and Craig will provide the town with top-notch leadership, and will be able to help the town develop comprehensive plans of action for our equipment and grounds needs,” Traversa said, adding she was “looking forward to their new ideas and enthusiastic approach.”

Obituaries

Portland

Edward J Cyrulik Sr.

Edward J Cyrulik Sr., 93, entered into God's care Sunday, Dec. 18, after an extended illness. Born in Middletown July 14, 1923, Edward resided in Portland since the early 1950s and was a communicant of St. Mary Church in Portland.

He was predeceased in 2013 by his loving wife of 67 years, Lena Funicello Cyrulik, whom he has dearly missed.

A World War II Army veteran, he was proud to have served in the Pacific theater with the 544th Engineer Boat & Shore Regiment, supporting combat operations in New Guinea and the Philippines. Edward had a long career at Pratt & Whitney Aircraft, retiring in 1983 and was able to spend the winters in Florida with Lena for several years.

He is survived by his son, Edward J Cyrulik Jr. and wife Jeanette of Hollis, N.H., his son, Lawrence Cyrulik and his significant other, Patricia Rasch, his daughter Judith C. Grippo, his daughter Jeanmarie Charbonneau and husband Roger, all of Portland. He is survived by grandchildren Adrienne and husband Christopher Galbraith, Michael Cyrulik and wife Emily, Courtney Grippo, Andrew and Katelyn Charbonneau.

Edward was one of 10 children born to Walter and Pauline (Bish) Cyrulik. He is survived by brothers John and Stanley and sister Mary Tomczak. He was predeceased by brothers Francis, Joseph, Adolf and sisters Stephanie Bystrek, Helen Malinowski and Veronica Kolenda.

The funeral was held Thursday, Dec. 22, from the Portland Memorial Funeral Home 231 Main St., Portland, followed by a Mass of Christian Burial in St. Mary Church, Portland. Burial was in the family plot in St. Mary Cemetery, Portland. Friends called at the funeral home Wednesday evening, Dec. 21.

Those who wish may make memorial donations to St. Mary Church, 51 Freestone Ave., Portland, CT 06480.

East Hampton

William R. Norton

William R. Norton (Bill/Bub/Bunyan/Gator), 62, of East Hampton, passed away peacefully after a long illness Friday, Dec. 16. His wife Cindy and son Will were at his bedside along with his sister-in-law Jackie, best friend Kevin, and childhood friend Joe.

Bill lived an active life and was a successful entrepreneur. He was very fond of playing golf, the friendships that he made at the Portland West Golf Course and sharing the joy of the game with his son, Will. He enjoyed baseball, especially the Red Sox, but most of all he loved the time he spent watching the Eagles with his son... whether they won or lost. He loved the outdoors, being close to the ocean and sailing the coasts of Florida.

Bill was born in Bridgeport and spent his youth in Trumbull, where he leaves many friends. He graduated from Central Connecticut State University in May 1978 to pursue a teaching career but found his passion using his hands and built a successful contracting business remodeling homes and businesses as well as building bridges at the golf course he loved.

Bill met his best friend, Cindy, in October 1982, and they married in 1991. Their son Will was born in 1993. Cindy was raised in Seneca Falls, N.Y. She introduced Bill to her hometown and he immediately fell in love with it. Bill, Cindy, and Will spent many vacations and holidays in Seneca Falls with family and beloved friends, but what he loved most of all about Seneca Falls was attending the local farm show with his son.

Bill leaves two sisters, Barbara and Patricia, both of Florida; his sisters-in-law, Jackie and Michelle; and his brother-in-law, Phil; and their families. Additionally, he leaves many, many loving friends from all of the walks of life that he touched.

The family thanks the Middlesex Hospital seventh floor hospice staff for their wonderful care and compassion.

The celebration of Bill's life was shared at the Lutheran Church of St. Mark in Glastonbury, 75 Griswold St., Wednesday, Dec. 21.

For online condolences, visit mulryanfh.com.



Colchester

Diana Olivette Norton Giles

Diana Olivette Norton Giles was born Oct. 5, 1956, and died Monday, Dec. 19. Diana is survived by her loving husband, Greg Giles and her stepchildren, Chris (Kathleen) and Danielle.

She is also survived by her parents, Nicholas and Lynn (Kilbourne) Norton of Colchester, and her brothers, Christopher (Carter), Andrew (Tom), Jeremy (Jane) and her nieces Katherine (John Magovern), Alexandra and Sara and her nephews Kiley and Oliver. She also very much loved her Uncle Ira and Aunt Nan Wasniewski of Colchester and Uncle Pete and Aunt Pat (now gone) Engel of East Hampton. And she is survived by many cousins and more nieces and nephews. She especially enjoyed the last 60 years with her closest, best cousins, Melissa Engel and Brett Wasniewski Dimberg.

She was surrounded by her loving family, singing carols and reading poems, as her life came to an end. All who met her knew her to be warm, gracious, bright and full of humor. People enjoyed her and she enjoyed them. Diana was passionately devoted to her hometown of Colchester and dedicated herself to countless projects and town happenings. At her death, she was the chairman of the Bacon Academy Board of Trustees and the Republican registrar in town. She had also served as chairman of the Zoning Board, a selectman, co-chairman of the Bacon Academy Bicentennial, a member of the Board of Assessment Appeals and managed the Memorial Day Parade.

She loved politics and worked on and ran many political campaigns over many decades. She went from managing the supply room in the Washington headquarters of Ford for President to the Buckley for Senate effort to running field operations for Guglielmo for Congress and many other campaigns since. Closer to home, she ran Duncan Green's winning campaign for First Selectman of Colchester. And she was especially proud of managing Art Shilosky's successful campaign for the top job in Colchester just last year.

Calling hours were held Thursday, Dec. 22, at the Aurora-McCarthy Funeral Home, 167 Old Hartford Rd., Colchester. The funeral liturgy will be celebrated at 10:30 a.m. today, Dec. 23, at St. Andrew Roman Catholic Church, 128 Norwich Ave., Colchester (please meet directly at the church). She will be laid to rest privately in the Norton family plot in Ponemah Cemetery, North Westchester, immediately following Mass.

In Diana's memory, contributions may be made to the Bacon Academy Board of Trustees, P.O. Box 67, Colchester, CT 06415. They are hard at work preserving the third oldest public high school in Connecticut and the 12th oldest in the United States, a cause to which Diana was very committed.

Aurora McCarthy Funeral Home is in charge of the arrangements.

East Hampton

Shirley Smith Hensel

Shirley Smith Hensel, 77, of East Hampton, widow of the late John B. Hensel, passed away peacefully surrounded by her family Monday, Dec. 19, at Marlborough Health Care. Born Jan. 5, 1939, in Concord, N.H., she was the daughter of the late Edwin and Ruth (Cox) Smith.

Shirley had lived in East Hampton since 1953. She was a member of the Lions Club Women's Auxiliary, a 4-H Club Leader for many years, and a former member of the Belltown Square Dancing Club. Shirley loved gardening and bird watching.

She is survived by her son, Thomas Hensel of Marlborough; her two daughters, Brenda Vecchitto of New Jersey, Bridget Breen of Willimantic; a brother, Raymond Smith of Colorado; a sister, Barbara Swain of Maine; four grandchildren, Shannon, Melissa, April, Harry; and three great-grandchildren, Cheyenne, Sky and Thunder.

She was predeceased by her son John Hensel Jr. Funeral services will be private with burial in Connecticut State Veterans Cemetery.

To leave online condolences, visit spencerfuneralhomeinc.com.



Portland

William E. Anderson Sr.

William "Bill" E. Anderson Sr., 70, of Portland, beloved husband of Iris (Taylor) Anderson, died Friday, Dec. 16, at Middlesex Hospital after a brief illness. He was born March 4, 1946, in Middletown, son of the late Carl and Marjorie (Bailey) Anderson.

He was a graduate of Portland High School, Class of 1966. He proudly served his country in the Army and was a veteran of the Vietnam War. He was self-employed for many years before retiring in 2008. He enjoyed hunting, fishing, carpentry, maintaining his home and gardens, cooking, and watching UConn basketball. He was also an avid NASCAR fan.

Besides his loving wife Iris, he is survived by his children, Bill Anderson and his husband Tim Grogan of East Hartford, Amy Covenor and her husband Robert of Myrtle Beach, SC, and Keith Anderson of Portland; his grandchildren Joe Anderson, and Isabella and Maximus Covenor; his brother Edward of Rochester, N.Y.; and his cocker spaniel, Scooter.

Friends called at Biega Funeral Home, 3 Silver St., Middletown, on Tuesday, Dec. 20. Burial at the State Veterans' Cemetery, Middletown, was private.

In lieu of flowers, memorial donations may be made to Disabled American Veterans, Chapter 7 Middletown, 156 Prospect St., Middletown, CT 06457 or Portland Food Bank, 7 Waverly Avenue, Portland, CT 06480.

To share memories or express condolences online, visit biegafuneralhome.com.

Moodus

Bernard Henry Karl

Bernard Henry Karl died Tuesday, Dec. 20, in hospice care, at Middlesex Hospital. Born in Hamden July 15, 1932, he graduated with a master's degree in music from the Hartt School, University of Hartford, and spent his career playing drums on Broadway and the road.

Survivors include his wife, Susie Cordon Karl of Moodus, and daughter, Ann Cecilia Karl of Dallas.

The funeral service will be Tuesday, Dec. 27, at 11 a.m., at Christ Episcopal Church, 66 Middle Haddam Rd., Middle Haddam, CT 06456. Donations may be made to the church with 'Bernie Karl' written on the memo line.

East Hampton

Daniel A. Carlson

Daniel "Danny" A. Carlson, 75, of East Hampton, beloved husband of Lizbeth (Sheedy) Carlson, died Thursday, Dec. 15, at Middlesex Memorial Hospital, after a brief illness. He was born April 6, 1941, in Portland, son of the late Carl and Anita (Cebelius) Carlson of Portland.

He was the former owner of Carlson Welding, Inc. and Chatham Self Storage, both located in East Hampton. He was a lifelong Mason.

Besides his loving wife, Lizbeth, he is survived by his children, son Jamie and his wife Monica and granddaughter Samantha of Essex, daughter Ashley Carlson of Bristol; his sister Lois Brower and her husband Charlie of The Villages, Fla.; brother-in-law Bill Sheedy and wife Sharon of Middletown; brother-in-law David Sheedy and wife Sheryl of Westfield, Mass.; and sister-in-law Dorothy Carlson of Hopkinsville, Ky.; and several nieces and nephews.

He was predeceased by his brothers Paul Carlson of Hopkinsville, Ky., and Philip Carlson of Madison.

Danny was cremated and interment will be private.

To leave online condolences, visit spencerfuneralhomeinc.com.