

RIVEREAST

News Bulletin

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

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O Tannenbaum... A crowd gathered to watch the town Christmas tree light up for the season at the Portland Holiday Homecoming Sunday, Dec. 3.

Local Leaders Demand Answers from Eversource

by Elizabeth Regan

Several local leaders want answers from Eversource Energy before the next serious weather event leaves residents in the dark and out in the cold.

First Selectman Susan Bransfield and state Rep. Christie Carpino, R-32, blasted the company last week at an informational forum on the Oct. 29 wind and rain storm that knocked out power to more than 311,000 people in the state for as many as four full days.

Residents and municipal officials throughout the hard-hit eastern portion of the state have complained about the company's delayed response to electrical emergencies, inaccurate outage maps and text notifications, and long wait times on the phone.

Carpino described the utility company as "understaffed, ill-prepared" and beset with technical difficulties. She said she called for the Portland informational forum to find out what went wrong and how the company plans to address any shortcomings.

Bransfield said there was an unusual lack of information from the company as local officials worked to clear roads and ensure the safety of residents.

Despite a program employed by the utility company to communicate directly with every city and town affected by the storm, Bransfield said the Eversource liaisons did not have the answers to local leaders' questions.

"It wasn't that I didn't get communication; that was not a problem," Bransfield said. "The problem was...there was no information."

Two weeks before the Portland forum, an informational session before the state General

Assembly's Energy and Technology Committee – which was called for by Senate Majority Leader Bob Duff and state Sen. Cathy Osten, D-19 – was held to examine what the senators characterized in a press release as the company's "seeming lack of proper storm preparedness and lack of a quick, effective storm response."

Osten, who represents the *Rivereast* towns of Hebron and Marlborough, said she wants to make sure recommendations issued by a panel of emergency management officials in response to Tropical Storm Irene in 2011 and the Halloween nor'easter of 2012 are still being followed.

Osten sat on the panel with representatives of the business, military, firefighting and legal professions.

According to Osten, the biggest problems this time around stemmed from information technology issues affecting all aspects of the utility company's storm response.

The situation was articulated at the Portland informational forum when resident Don Gouin told the Eversource panel about a call to a customer service representative who was relying on inaccurate restoration data that indicated Gouin's case had already been resolved.

"I could not convince her we were out of power," Gouin said. "I assume she was not sending anyone out because her record said it was restored."

Portland Fire Chief Robert Shea said firefighters had to wait two hours for Eversource crews to shut off power to the area on Oct. 30

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Board Raises Concerns Over Special Ed Deficit

by Julianna Roche

Special education costs across the state have been rising consistently – despite a declining total public school population – and RHAM has proven to be no exception to that with the 2017-18 year leaving the district with a special education deficit that, as of Nov. 30, stands at \$440,000.

That number, however, is nearly \$320,000 less than the number Superintendent of Schools Patricia Law presented to the RHAM Board of Education just two weeks previously at its Nov. 14 meeting, which at \$759,157 marked a \$94,651 increase over the 2016-17 deficit and \$102,193 more than in 2015-16.

Law explained, however, that the fluctuating deficit number would continue changing from month to month, based on the district's needs.

"One of the things that's important for us to understand as a district and the public is the deficit itself will continue to fluctuate through-

out the year because expenses fluctuate throughout the year," she explained.

"Things happen," the superintendent continued, adding, "If you blow a tire, now you've got an unanticipated expense... it's the same thing from a school standpoint."

According to Law's Nov. 14 presentation to RHAM board members, the school district has also seen a rising number of special education outplacements – with the 2017-18 year showing a total of 55 students versus 47 in 2016-17 and 32 in 2015-16.

Law explained there could be a variety of reasons for that continually growing number, including students' choosing to attend different schools, students moving into the district, and placement of students to different schools based on a team recommendation that determined another school would better match that student's specific needs.

The superintendent emphasized, however,

that the district was in the process of "looking at why the numbers are changing like that" and "other things we should be doing differently to lessen that amount."

"The most important thing [is that] we are tracking it closely," Law said. "We want to be transparent to the public around where the issues are."

However, some school board members expressed worries about the increasing special education deficit, including Joe O'Connor.

O'Connor said Law, who took over as superintendent earlier this year from the retiring Robert Siminski, "inherited a problem from the previous administration," he said. "She's trying to get us the answers, [but] she has her work cut out for her."

O'Connor furthered that the constant fluctuation is also a serious source of concern and that the formula used for reaching that number "has some serious holes in it."

"Are we at \$400,000? Are we at \$700,000? [Law] needs to tell us," he said. "It's a moving target [and] how can you budget a moving target?"

"This is a bad situation and I don't understand how we're going to get out of it," O'Connor continued.

Board member Sue Rapelye explained that in witnessing the special education numbers fluctuate each month, she is led to believe the board will not have "a solid number until we're in the hole," which she said might not even be until sometime next year.

Rapelye furthered that she "felt strongly" the district should invest money on a special education audit from professionals "so we can understand why we continue to have so many [special education outplacement students] coming in and how we can plan accordingly for years to come."

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Demand Answers cont. from Front Page after seven homes were evacuated due to a propane tank leak caused by a downed tree. In Hebron, Town Manager Andrew Tierney said emergency responders waited about one hour for crews to de-energize a line laying on the driveway in front of a burning home so they could begin firefighting operations. *See related story on page 12.*

During the Portland informational forum, Eversource Vice President of Electric System Operations Michael Hayhurst blamed some of the problem on the unanticipated severity of the storm. The 36-hour weather event brought wind gusts up to 66 mph and five inches of rain, according to the company.

Hayhurst also cited technological problems that made it difficult for residents to report outages.

He indicated the system was overwhelmed by text messages, emails, website reports and calls to the automated telephone line that poured in when customers awoke on Monday morning with no power.

The issue was resolved by 3 p.m. Monday, according to Hayhurst. He said call center staffing levels were increased by 30 percent, to 375 representatives, to handle the influx of live calls.

A Nov. 16 storm response document prepared by Eversource said the company disabled outage restoration notifications that were bombarding customers with inaccurate and repetitive text messages, calls and emails.

Mechanisms for automated reporting and notifications will be “significantly tested” going forward, according to Hayhurst.

Despite the technology challenges, he described the response as a “very good restoration.”

Pointing to a graph that showed power outages peaking at 1 a.m. on Oct. 30 and steadily declining from there, he noted 85 percent of customers had power back by 1 a.m. Wednesday.

“That restoration curve is a work of art,” he said.

No Trucks For Days

In both Portland and Hebron, schools were closed for two days while officials waited for Eversource to make it safe for public works employees to clear the roads of downed trees.

Bransfield said she and Carpino demanded the energy company finally get some boots on the ground when it looked like the schools would be closed for a third day. Two crews came out on Tuesday and finished the job in four hours, according to Bransfield.

“It would be really nice if we had a crew assigned to this community,” she added. “To not have any trucks in town for days is very discouraging.”

Hayhurst said Portland was not heavily impacted by the storm, with just 39 identified “trouble spots.” The term refers to locations

with downed wires, broken poles, damaged transformers and other storm-related damage. It can be a single customer or an entire neighborhood.

“If one town has 10 wires down and another town has 400, resources are going to the town with 400 wires down. That’s just the way it is initially,” Hayhurst said.

There were 4,815 trouble spots across the state, according to Eversource. They had planned their initial response based on an estimate of fewer than 2,000 trouble spots and no more than 125,000 customers out of power.

When pressed by Carpino about internal staffing levels at the company now compared to five years ago, he declined to give exact numbers.

“There are less internal resources today, but we are working on adding staff,” he said.

Hayhurst said there were 560 line personnel ready to provide round-the-clock coverage when the storm began. An additional 361 line workers were called in Tuesday from all over the eastern seaboard.

“Because we may have less internal resources does not mean we have less resources to respond,” Hayhurst emphasized. “We have many, many external resources at work every single day on the system.”

Tierney said from the Hebron Town Hall this week that there has been a noticeable decrease in the number of line workers coming in and out of the regional work center in East Hampton on Route 66 since Northeast Utilities merged with NSTAR in 2012 and subsequently rebranded itself as Eversource Energy.

“There are 16 crews out of East Hampton to cover the territory. That’s a change,” he said. “When you go down in numbers, that’s never good.”

Tierney emphasized the utility company’s work crews are “good guys and hard workers” who did a great job once they were dispatched to Hebron.

“It was the managing of the resources that I think needs to be looked at,” Tierney said.

Systemic Management Issues

In East Hampton, Town Manager Michael Maniscalco chose to make his concerns known to the Public Utilities Regulatory Authority in response to an Eversource plan to increase its rates.

The Hartford Courant reported last month that the energy company is asking the state Public Utilities Regulatory Authority to approve a rate hike totaling \$336.8 million over three years.

Maniscalco said more money won’t solve what he described as the company’s serious operational deficiencies – “but common sense management will.”

He related a situation in which the utility company asked for public works crews to meet line workers in two different locations in town



State Rep. Christie Carpino, R-32, and Portland First Selectman Susan Bransfield toured an Eversource Emergency Operations Center earlier this year.

to clean up downed trees. East Hampton taxpayers are on the hook for approximately \$1,060 in overtime pay after the public works employees had to wait more than two hours for the line crews to arrive, Maniscalco said.

Maniscalco told regulators he cannot support a rate increase for infrastructure improvement and tree trimming in the midst of what he described as “systemic” management issues.

“No amount of preparation can make up for the management failures that East Hampton experienced during this event,” he said.

Gross said this week the company requested the rate review to further strengthen the electric system and continue making improvements to the grid so it’s more resilient against future storms.

“We take our role as emergency responders extremely seriously. Every storm is different and we learn from each of them,” Gross said. “That

said, we continue to make improvements to our storm response and emergency preparedness to provide reliable energy for our customers during all weather conditions.”

For Carpino, it’s still unclear what lessons the company learned from the storm.

“They never identified the cause of the technical failures, or the fix,” she said.

Osten said she is waiting for the company to provide more information to the Energy and Technology Committee. She also plans to meet with representatives of the company as an individual senator.

Carpino and Bransfield will be following up with the utility company about the technology issues to see how the process can be streamlined.

“Because when the next storm comes, we’re going to be prepared,” Bransfield said.

Outage Statistics

Heavy rain and storm gusts that struck in the overnight hours of Sunday, Oct. 29 and lingered into Oct. 30 left many Eastern Connecticut towns in the dark. According to Eversource Energy spokesman Mitch Gross, a majority of customers in *Rivereast* towns

were restored by Thursday, Nov. 2, at noon, with power substantially restored to Andover residents by Wednesday, Nov. 1, at 6 p.m.

The following breakdown shows the number of customers affected by the storm:

Andover:	242 out of 1,410 customers, or 17 percent
Colchester:	7,001 out of 7,112 customers, or 98 percent
East Hampton:	3,310 out of 6,124 customers, or 54 percent
Hebron:	3,927 out of 3,927 customers, or 100 percent
Marlborough:	2,513 out of 2,647 customers, or 95 percent
Portland:	978 out of 4,602 customers, or 21 percent

Special Ed Deficit cont. from Front Page

Law explained however, that at 14 percent, RHAM’s total special education student population for the 2017-18 school year is “considered within the normal range for school districts.”

According to the Connecticut School Finance Project, the total number of special education students in the state has increased from 12 to 14 percent over the last 10 years, with that number including students with learning disabilities, intellectual disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), autism, speech and language disabilities, emotional disturbances, and other qualifying medical diagnoses.

“In general from my perspective, I think it’s just important to know this is not just a single issue of special education,” Law said. “There are all kinds of unanticipated expenses that we as a district have to try to remember and address in any given year.”

She furthered that “the most important thing” moving forward will be focusing on “refining our budgeting process to hopefully make sure we’re doing the best we can.”

Juvenile Arrested in Connection to Stolen Mercedes

by Julianna Roche

A 17-year-old was arrested Nov. 27 in connection with a hit-and-run from early June, when the individual fled the scene after striking a police officer with a stolen motor vehicle and leaving him with minor injuries, according to the Hebron resident state trooper’s office.

Police said at approximately 6:11 p.m. June 6, they were called to East Street in Hebron to assist a Manchester police officer with an order to take the juvenile into custody, when the suspect arrived to the scene driving a black 2001 Mercedes E20 that was confirmed to be stolen out of Manchester.

Police said when the Manchester police officer tried to box the vehicle in a private driveway, the juvenile, who was known to the officer, backed the vehicle up before then driving forward, striking and injuring the officer, who was in uniform standing in between the

open car door and the driver’s compartment of an unmarked police vehicle.

According to police, the juvenile then fled the scene and was later spotted by state troopers patrolling the area, when a Bolton resident state trooper attempted to stop the vehicle, which was last seen traveling at a high speed onto I-384 heading westbound.

The Hebron resident state trooper’s office then launched an investigation, and on Nov. 27, the juvenile was caught.

The 17-year-old was charged with third-degree larceny: motor vehicle theft, second-degree criminal mischief, criminal attempt to commit first-degree assault, interfering with an officer: simple assault, assault of public safety/emergency/medical personnel, breach of peace, and attempt to commit a crime.

The teen was scheduled to appear in court this week.

Eversource Criticized for Delays in Storm Response

by Elizabeth Regan

The late-October wind and rain storm that blew through the region with up to 66 mph winds has raised public safety concerns related to the effect of downed electrical wires on fire and rescue operations.

Firefighters in Portland had to wait two hours for Eversource Energy crews to shut off power to the area on Oct. 30 after seven homes were evacuated due to a propane tank leak caused by a downed tree, according to Fire Chief Robert Shea.

Dispatchers called in the emergency to Eversource as a priority one hazard, meaning it was an immediate, life-threatening situation.

Shea told the *RiverEast* he has still not received an answer from personnel at the utility company about the reason for the delay.

“Usually when you call a priority one, you get a return call from a supervisor and the supervisor comes to the scene to start mitigating what he’s going to need for resources while they’re on their way,” Shea said. “This is something we’ve done many times, and we’ve always had a wonderful response. This particular time, there was just a breakdown in communication.”

He said there was no indication the crews

that eventually responded were forewarned about the severity of the situation.

Eversource spokesman Mitch Gross said last week the company is still looking into the response time issue.

“Our crews get there as quickly and safely as we can,” Gross said.

According to a Nov. 16 storm response document prepared by Eversource, the company received 64 priority one calls statewide. A total of 1,197 priority two and three calls were received.

Priority two status is reserved for electrical hazards that may hinder firefighting or rescue operations but are not immediately life threatening, the company said. Priority three refers to electrical hazards that don’t pose a threat to life or property.

The document said widespread telephone issues made it difficult for some municipalities to report priority two and three emergencies, which resulted in the creation of an “email solution” to allow local emergency management officials to contact their Eversource liaisons with emergency details.

Liaisons shared the information with designated customer service supervisors, according

to the storm report. The supervisors then entered each event into the company’s E911 database for response.

In Hebron, Town Manager Andrew Tierney said Eversource crews didn’t arrive at a priority two electrical fire on the night of Oct. 29 until more than an hour after local officials called the utility company to get power turned off.

The North Street fire occurred in a vacant home, with live wires dangling on the driveway. Firefighters couldn’t start extinguishing the blaze until Eversource deemed it safe for them to do so, according to Tierney.

The Connecticut Council of Small Towns (COST) and the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities provided testimony before the General Assembly’s Energy and Technology Committee last month calling for enhanced response protocols and communication efforts.

COST Executive Director Betsy Gara said town officials complained crews were not managed properly or dispatched quickly enough to areas with life-threatening emergencies. She told the committee that the Eversource response appeared to be focused on areas with widespread power outages.

“Although town officials recognize that restoring power to densely-populated areas and major intersections is and always has been a top priority, concerns were raised in several small towns that Eversource failed to respond to situations such as downed power lines which posed a direct danger to residents,” she said. “In some cases, downed power lines made critical access roads impassable, jeopardizing the ability of residents, including vulnerable populations, to access health care or obtain needed supplies.”

When asked about the delayed response time for the Hebron fire, Gross reiterated the company responds to calls as quickly and safely as it can.

“It’s also important to note, we are not able to respond as police or firefighters typically would in emergency situations with flashing lights and sirens,” he said. “Still, we make every effort to get there as fast as conditions will allow.”

Tierney said he was told the company would look into the issue. He is not optimistic that a response is forthcoming.

“They’re not going to tell you where they dropped the ball,” he said.

Marlborough Sixth-Graders Raise Over \$4K to Help Fight Poverty

by Julianna Roche

Led by reading teacher Delvine Coachman, Marlborough Elementary School’s sixth-grade class raised over \$4,000 through Heifer International’s Read to Feed program, an incentive encouraging children to practice their reading skills, while also helping to raise funds to send livestock and educational training to impoverished communities around the globe.

According to MES Assistant Principal Kim Kelley, the students’ success with the program turned out to be “a lot bigger than expected” with an original goal set to raise \$2,750. In total however, students raised \$4,147 – with \$1,923 made in donations online.

“We’re really excited about it,” she said.

Coachman explained that sixth-graders in each of the five reading sections set a class goal to reach, and over the course of seven weeks, read as many books as possible individually. With each book, students were then asked to find a sponsor to pledge various dollar amounts either per book or per page read.

“They got really involved doing it,” she said. “They watched videos of people who’ve been helped [by Read to Feed] and read books about how it started, and what we can do to help other people.”

“It was our homework for seven weeks and we worked really hard, and had a reading log,” explained sixth-grader Lilah Belanger. “It was very interesting [and] we learned a lot throughout the whole process. It’s good to know we were helping people.”

Coachman, who grew up in Jamaica and moved to the United States 27 years ago, said she learned about Read to Feed at a teaching conference and decided to bring the program

to MES this year.

“My mom used to help a lot of people out [in Jamaica],” Coachman explained, adding she tries to pass that lesson on to her students by consistently encouraging them to “always think outside of ourselves.”

“If by swiping a phone, we can connect with somebody overseas, we should make that connection count,” she added.

To sixth-grader Troy Miller and his classmates, Read to Feed was a way to do just that.

“We helped kids from all over the world that need food [and] education,” he said. “It might not make a big difference to someone else, but for those people who really need it, it makes a huge difference and it changes their lives.”

Heifer International – which serves as a global nonprofit working to eradicate poverty and hunger – distributes animals, along with agricultural and values-based training to families in need around the world as a way of becoming self-sufficient.

According to Heifer International statistics, more than 900 million people worldwide live below the international poverty line and since its founding in 1944, Heifer has distributed livestock and other resources to 20.7 million families, or more than 105 million people worldwide in more than 125 countries.

With their \$4,147 raised, MES students chose from various gifts to donate – which included two heifers, three water buffalos, enough funds to send one girl to school, a llama, goat, sheep, and pig, two trios of rabbits, one animal care kit, five honeybees, 18 flocks of chicks, and two flocks of ducks/geese.

Miller’s classmate Molly Paquette said she felt Read to Feed was “a really simple idea,”



Over the course of seven weeks, Marlborough Elementary School’s sixth grade class, led by reading teacher Delvine Coachman, shown far right, raised more than \$4,000 through Heifer International’s Read to Feed incentive program, which helps provide livestock and sustenance to struggling families around the world.

but for “a really good cause.”

“All we had to do was read a few books and us doing our responsibilities led to saving families,” she added.

Read to Feed “helped us realize that anything can help us change the world and make a big impact,” agreed classmate Erin Evans.

While students also read books from their own personal libraries, according to library media specialist Laura Rosas, during the seven-week Read to Feed period, sixth-graders alone checked out a total of 1,266 books from the

school library.

“I think [Read to Feed] is a great program and I could see the students’ enthusiasm for being able to contribute to doing something in the world through their own efforts,” Rosas said.

Coachman agreed.

“When we came up with the goal [of \$2,750], I wasn’t sure where it would go,” she said. “But within the first week, they raised over \$1,000 and [money] just kept trickling in after that. I’m just really impressed with what the kids have done.”

Shilosky Slammed Over Plan to Scrap Software in Colchester

by Julianna Roche

The Board of Finance Wednesday slammed First Selectman Art Shilosky after he announced plans to reduce town spending by cutting the \$15,100 for OpenGov transparency software from the current town budget – a small reduction but one that he said would help make up for a \$1.78 million shortfall in state aid coming to the town.

According to its website, OpenGov– which had been an item of discussion and in-depth research among finance board members for months leading up to the budget referendum – claims to not only provide citizens with easy access to the town’s financial data and records (which are then presented in interactive visualizations and graphs), but to also help town officials “save hundreds of hours” processing information requests, while still complying with transparency mandates.

However, Shilosky explained that, with the town receiving \$1,777,746 less in state aid than it had budgeted for, tough decisions need to be made. On Monday, the Board of Education voted to cut its \$40.63 million 2017-18 budget by \$825,000 – the board has yet to determine just where it would find those reductions – and Shilosky said Wednesday the town “is going to be picking up” the rest of the deficit – which accounts for approximately \$952,000 – and would need to be making reductions in its \$14.71 million general government budget.

“We’re going to do this the old-fashioned way,” the first selectman furthered, adding that while it may be “the hard way ... we have to do it.”

The reductions, Shilosky continued, have to “come from everybody.” He said he was not in favor of spending money on the transparency software – and that neither was the Board of Education.

Superintendent of Schools Karen Loisel Goodwin clarified Thursday morning that although the Board of Education was “aware” of the OpenGov software, it was not an initiative that falls under its purview and, therefore, no formal action has been taken on it.

However, the superintendent also stressed that “it is important to the Board of Education that the public have access to our budget data, which is why our documents are made available to the public through our meetings and on our website.”

Andrea Migliaccio was the first of the finance board members to question the first selectman Wednesday – asking why he “didn’t seek any counsel” from the finance board before making any decisions regarding what reductions would be made.

Shilosky explained that the Board of Selectmen was “not responsible” for doing so once a budget is voted on and approved by voters.

“I’m responsible for getting a balanced budget,” he said.

Board member Andreas Bisbikos shared similar sentiments with Migliaccio, adding that he felt “disappointed” that the first selectman had “left [the finance board] in the dark.”

“Citizens supported that software. You’re not carrying out the will of the people if you’re not going through with it,” he said, adding that “transparency, whether we like it or not, is a concern [of voters]” and that having that transparency “increases [public] trust in government at all levels.”

Board member Tom Kane also stated he felt “upset” at how Shilosky’s decision to reduce spending on the transparency software was made.

“There was no coming to us asking input,”

he said. He added that while he understood decisions on where to make reductions in town spending falls on the first selectman, he reminded Shilosky that he had ensured the finance board that if there were any changes to be made to the budget, the Board of Selectmen “would come back and ask our advice, our position, [and] our thoughts on how those cuts are being made. ... I don’t see that happening at all.”

While the potential spending reduction on the transparency software raised serious concerns among Board of Finance members, Shilosky explained Thursday morning that the decision was “not based on a particular product or an item.”

“It’s [based] on a dollar amount,” he said. “That’s what it’s about. As you know, we have to find \$952,000 [to cut] so everything’s on the table including that [software].”

At Wednesday’s meeting however, Kane also noted that the Board of Finance had emphasized to the first selectman how “important” having the transparency software was for the finance board to do its job properly.

Finance Board Vice Chairwoman Roberta Lepore said “a lot of people come to us and ask us for a lot of things for [their] departments to run effectively.

“They’re not always [our] priorities, but we trust and respect the people doing their job that when they come to us and tell us they need something, that they truly need it,” she added. “That software system would truly help us do our job.”

Board of Finance Chairman Rob Tarlov agreed, saying he felt it was “disingenuous” of Shilosky to “blame the removal” of the transparency software on the lack of state funding.

“Over the last six months, maybe longer,

we were all in agreement every step along the way,” he said, “that once we got something from the state, no matter whose decision it would be [to make cuts], we would have a tri-board meeting for input.”

Tarlov said the benefits to having the OpenGov software not only include the ability to transparently grant the public access to financial information without them having to file Freedom of Information requests, but that the software could help the board see trends in the town’s finances overtime.

“CEOs make the final decision, but they still go to their accounting department to get some feedback as a sounding board,” Tarlov said. “It never hurts to have feedback because nobody has a monopoly on great ideas.” He added there was a serious “danger” to not seeking input from others.

Even Mike Egan – a newly-elected Board of Finance member – agreed that while he couldn’t comment on the transparency software itself, he felt that seeking feedback from other boards and working together was of the utmost importance.

“Because of the situations we’re dealing with now on a state level [and] town level, it’s more critical now than ever for more parties to work together [and] for all boards to be working together,” he said. Egan added that “having feedback” would be helpful to the finance board since it is the board charged with helping to craft budgets.

The Board of Selectmen was due to discuss and possibly act on OpenGov software at its meeting Thursday, which occurred after press time. However, Shilosky stated Wednesday night he expected the Board of Selectmen would not approve spending money on it.

New East Hampton Principal Aims to Continue Fidler’s Legacy

by Elizabeth Regan

Incoming East Hampton High School principal Frank Rizzuto said carrying on late principal John Fidler’s legacy is all about forging relationships.

Fidler, an East Hampton educator for 17 years, died July 30 at the age of 60.

“It’s my plan to build strong relationships with staff, students, families, businesses, and local leaders – and to hit the ground running,” Rizzuto said in a phone interview this week.

He has already started showing up at school-related events – like a girls soccer semi-finals game, a fall concert and a multicultural fair – even though he isn’t scheduled to begin work until this Monday, he said.

Fidler was known for attending a wide range of activities and programs, in town and around the state, in support of East Hampton students.

Rizzuto, 42, comes to East Hampton from South Windsor High School, where he served as one of three associate principal for the past five years. He was a social studies teacher at the school for more than a decade before taking the administrative role.

The Board of Education unanimously appointed Rizzuto to the position on Nov. 6.

Rizzuto will work alongside Interim Principal Nancy Briere in the weeks leading to the

holiday break, according to Superintendent of Schools Paul K. Smith. He will assume the official title of principal on Jan. 2.

Superintendent of Schools Paul K. Smith said securing a replacement for Fidler was “a long and thorough” process. A pool of 30 candidates was reduced to eight administrators who were then interviewed by two committees of teachers, students and parents.

“We were looking for someone who had a very strong high school background as teacher and administrator,” he said.

Each candidate moved through two large committees, one of which revolved around academics and the other around student life. The committees consisted of a total of 13 teachers, eight students, four parents and one school board member.

Subsequent interviews were held with district administrators, including principals and assistant principals from each school as well as the district business manager, special education director, technology director, director of operations, director of curriculum and Smith. The final interviews were conducted by Board of Education members.

“Right from the start, [Rizzuto] emerged as a very strong candidate,” Smith said. “He was

the top choice in every round. He clearly understands that the school is still healing, but with a new facility has the opportunity to take a strong leap into the future.”

Rizzuto said the questions he received during the interview process showed him that people in East Hampton are looking for someone who understands today’s educational climate and the effect of societal pressure on students.

“I think they were also looking for someone that was forward thinking, someone that truly had the best interest of their students in mind, regardless of what their post-secondary plans were,” Rizzuto said. “They wanted a leader that was very much embracing of any possible future that kids may have so they are equipped with everything necessary to navigate that potential path.”

Rizzuto earned a master’s degree in teaching from Sacred Heart University in Fairfield and a bachelor’s degree in political science from the University of Connecticut.

He served as an administrative intern at Bolton High School from 2008-10 while earning his sixth-year administration certificate from the University of Connecticut.

Smith was the principal of the high school in

Bolton at the time.

The East Hampton superintendent said he made sure not to indicate to the teachers, students and parents conducting the second round of interviews that he had worked with Rizzuto previously.

“I wanted him to impress the group on his own merits, which he certainly did,” Smith said. “Knowing Frank from Bolton, I knew he would excel in East Hampton. The schools and communities are very similar. Both are smaller schools in which the students and families really want to know the principal.”

The cover letter accompanying Rizzuto’s application for the position included condolences to a community grieving the loss of its former principal.

“As I have come to understand, Mr. Fidler was a highly-regarded, beloved, and respected member of East Hampton High School and the community as a whole,” he wrote. “If fortunate enough to assume the principalship of East Hampton High School, I would strive to continue the good work Mr. Fidler was involved in, and be supportive of recognizing Mr. Fidler’s impact on the East Hampton community in whatever capacity deemed appropriate by district leadership.”

Is a Supplemental Tax Bill Coming in Portland?

by Elizabeth Regan

Whether Portland residents will receive a supplemental property tax bill remains the big question as leaders grapple with the repercussions of a state budget situation that appears to be getting worse instead of better.

Municipal aid figures from the state show Portland will receive \$855,953 less than local leaders budgeted for earlier this year.

First Selectwoman Susan Bransfield was holding out hope at Wednesday's selectmen's meeting that state lawmakers will go back into session to address what she described as unfair cuts to cities and towns throughout the state.

If not, Finance Director Tom Robinson told selectmen the town will need to take steps to manage the loss.

"Then there's the possibility we could send out a second billing," he said.

Bransfield on Thursday morning hedged on the idea of a supplemental tax bill.

"I'm not ready to say if there's going to be any extra billing, because I don't know right now," she said. "But I really want to study these numbers."

Bransfield also expressed reservations about dipping into the fund balance to mitigate the funding reduction from the state and any further impact on taxpayers.

"It is allowable," she said. "But it's something I don't like to do. Those reserves are there to deal with the rainy days that can come."

The town has a \$5.9 million fund balance – or rainy day fund – that amounts to 18 percent of the total operating budget, based on the June

2016 audit.

According to Robinson, it's "hard to say" if the fund balance will ultimately come into play as part of the solution. He said it's possible that the Board of Selectmen – which is ultimately responsible for budget decisions – might consider using some fund balance money to address the issue.

The two-year, \$41.3 billion state budget approved by the state legislature and signed into law by Gov. Dannel P. Malloy over a month ago included more than \$31.4 million in funding cuts to cities and towns across the state. That translated to a reduction of approximately \$246,285 to Portland in fiscal year 2018 compared to 2017, according to data from the state Office of Policy and Management.

The budget also left a placeholder for \$880 million in unspecified savings, according to the *Connecticut Mirror*. It was up to Malloy to figure out where to find the money, which he did about three weeks later when he announced further reductions to labor, social service programs, higher education and municipal aid.

Malloy's move to cut \$91 million in municipal aid shook out to an additional reduction of \$370,038 in Portland compared to last year, the bulk of which affects public school funding.

That brings the total funding cut from the state to \$616,323 compared to last year's municipal aid allocation.

But local officials didn't devise the Portland budget in the early months of this year by budgeting for the same amount the town received

the prior year. Instead, they based revenue estimates on municipal aid figures included in Malloy's proposed budget back in February.

That's why Portland has to make up \$855,953, not just the difference in state funding from this year to last.

Numerous state budget proposals have been submitted by the governor's office and Democrat and Republicans lawmakers since then. It was a record-breaking standoff that didn't end until October. The state legislature's delay in passing a budget outlasted any previous impasse, including the contentious summer of 1991 that resulted in the creation of a state income tax.

Both Bransfield and Robinson agreed some of the local funding reduction could be addressed by holding back on expenditures.

"You always try to do a little cutting, but gee willikers, that's substantial," Robinson said, referring to the nearly million dollar loss.

Bransfield said some of the figure could be managed – "But I don't know how much we can manage."

She suggested careful spending, some cuts and holding off on new hires as examples of a frugal approach that could help mitigate the reduction.

"I'm going to look at every dollar and not spend it if I don't have to," she said. "I've also spoken with the superintendent of schools and he is of the same mindset."

The situation is complicated by the latest state budget projections. Last week, state comp-

troller Kevin Lembo projected a \$202.8 million budget deficit for fiscal year 2018.

The forecast triggers the need for the governor to submit a deficit mitigation plan to the state legislature in order to balance the budget, according to state statute.

Bransfield emphasized the need for residents to contact their elected officials to let them know that cutting funding to towns in the middle of the budget year is unacceptable.

"We all pay taxes, and we all run the state. [For the state] to be putting us in these situations is very, very bad. I'm hopeful the legislators will go back into session and do the right thing: Put Connecticut first," she said.

The Portland Board of Selectmen in May approved the new \$32.98 mill rate – an increase of 0.47 mills over the current year – with the caveat that it could change once the state budget is approved.

A mill is \$1 tax per \$1,000 of assessed property value. Under the new mill rate, taxes paid on a home assessed at \$200,000 for the 2017-18 fiscal year would be \$6,596. That's an increase of \$94 over the current year.

The mill rate is based on the \$33.65 million spending plan approved by voters as well as an estimate of \$5.08 million in funding from the state.

Bransfield emphasized at the time that the revenue figure was only an estimate.

"We don't know – nobody knows – what the state revenues will be for this coming fiscal year," she said.

Colchester Car Crash Injures Four

by Julianna Roche

A driver and three passengers were left injured following a single-vehicle crash on Route 2 Saturday, Nov. 25, according to police.

Police said at approximately 1:53 a.m., Meisha A. Salesman, 26, of 950 Asylum Ave., Apt. 318, Hartford, was driving a Hyundai Sonata in the left lane heading westbound on Route 2, when just one tenth of a mile west of the exit 18 ramp, the vehicle went off the road and left-hand shoulder before striking an earthen embankment with its front left cor-

ner, spinning 90 degrees in a clockwise motion and subsequently striking several small trees with its left side.

Police said Salesman and three passengers were all transported to Saint Francis Hospital for suspected minor or possible injuries.

According to police, the Hyundai sustained heavy damage to its front end and left side and was towed to Desmond's Auto, while Salesman was issued an infraction for failure to drive in the proper lane and distracted driving.

East Hampton

No Supplemental Tax Bills Needed

by Elizabeth Regan

Town Manager Michael Maniscalco said there is no need to send out supplemental tax bills despite a \$1.27 million reduction in municipal aid compared to last year.

The two-year, \$41.3 billion state budget approved by the state legislature and signed into law by Gov. Dannel P. Malloy over a month ago included more than \$31.4 million in funding cuts to cities and towns across the state. That translated to a reduction of approximately \$400,000 to East Hampton in year one.

The budget also left a placeholder for \$880 million in unspecified savings, according to the *Connecticut Mirror*. It was up to Malloy to figure out where to find the money, which he did about three weeks later when he announced further reductions to labor, social service programs, higher education and municipal aid.

Malloy's move to cut \$91 million in municipal aid shook out to an additional reduction of \$624,000 in East Hampton, the bulk of which affects public school funding.

Maniscalco told town council members last week the reduction in funding from the state will be mitigated by a .44 mill increase already assessed to taxpayers in anticipation of the cut. The tax increase adds about \$495,000 to the town's bottom line.

Maniscalco said he also expects up to \$700,000 in back taxes the town is aggressively pursuing in the form of a tax sale.

The process allows municipalities to sell properties for the amount of the taxes owed.

Maniscalco has said he worked with tax at-

torney Adam Cohen, of Pullman and Comley, to establish criteria for a list of 50 delinquent taxpayers whose properties will go to auction unless their tax bills are paid in full.

The town collected \$311,000 in back taxes as of last week, according to Maniscalco. He said the payments have been coming in at a rate of \$20,000 to \$25,000 per week.

Maniscalco also pointed to a fund balance – also known as a rainy day fund – which includes more than \$5 million to cover emergencies.

"Because we are good stewards of our fiscal house, we have the revenue and cash ability to be able to handle those losses to state revenue," he told councilors.

State statute requires municipalities to issue supplemental tax bills only when revenue doesn't cover expenses.

Maniscalco said officials continue to watch the state budget situation.

Connecticut's financial picture remains bleak even after the approval of the biennial budget ended a record-breaking standoff. The state legislature's delay in passing a state budget outlasted any previous impasse, including the contentious summer of 1991 that culminated with the creation of a state income tax.

Last week, state Comptroller Kevin Lembo projected a \$202.8 million budget deficit for fiscal year 2018.

The forecast triggers the need for the governor to submit a deficit mitigation plan to the state legislature in order to balance the budget, according to state statute.

Colchester Police News

11/24: Colchester Police said Timothy K. Crowell, 41, of 123 Gill St., was arrested and charged with third-degree assault and disorderly conduct.

11/27: State Police said Malcolm Armati, 25, of 15 Haywardville Rd., East Haddam, was arrested and charged with second-degree failure to appear.

Hebron Police News

11/28: State Police said Matthew Anziano, 32, of 1045 Old Colony Rd., Meriden, was arrested and charged with risk of injury to a child, first-degree criminal trespass, and disorderly conduct.

Portland Police News

11/24: Mason Rambarose, 20, of 26 Rustic Terrace, was charged with possession of less than four ounces of marijuana and possession of drug paraphernalia, Portland Police said.

11/28: Erik Francks, 25, of 47 Oregon Ave., Meriden, was charged with credit card theft and sixth-degree larceny, police said.

11/28: Gladys Serra, 58, of 50 High St., was charged with sixth-degree larceny, police said.

12/1: Joseph Albert, 35, of 49 Grove St., was charged with misuse of marker plates, insufficient insurance and operating an unregistered motor vehicle, police said.

Obituaries

Colchester

Suzanne Griselle Picard

Suzanne Griselle Picard, "Zan," 89, of Colchester, died at home with her family by her side Wednesday, Nov. 29. Wife of the late Raymond A. Picard, Zan was born June 16, 1928, in Chestnut Hill, Pa., a suburb of Philadelphia, and was the daughter of the late Sherman and Pearl (Gilbert) Griselle.



She spent her childhood during the Great Depression moving throughout the United States from Pennsylvania to Georgia to Ohio to New York and Illinois and was ever grateful to have settled in Colchester for the last 60 years. An occupational therapist, Zan graduated from the Boston School of Occupational Therapy (now part of Tufts University) in 1951. A pioneer in her field, she moved to Connecticut to work at the Hartford Easter Seals Rehabilitation Center. Later, she worked side by side with her husband Ray at their business, Ray's Pharmacy.

Zan loved travel, Cape Cod, lighthouses, crafts, weaving, storytelling, sewing, butterflies – and chocolate. She combined her interests in the service of others as a Girl Scout leader and, after retirement, in her ministry as a clown named Papillion (Butterfly). Until her illness, Zan was also an active member in civic organizations in Colchester, serving as a member of the Colchester Historical Society and the Senior Center Intergenerational Program and was honored as Colchester's "Citizen of the Year" in 1999. She enjoyed being a grandmother to her many grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Zan was a daily communicant of Saint Andrew Church in Colchester. Devoted to her church and faith, she was a Third Order Franciscan (secular), member of the Ladies' Guild, religious education teacher, RCIA teacher for adults entering the Catholic faith, and a longtime member of the St. Andrew Choir.

Through it all, Zan always put her family first and she leaves a beautiful legacy through them and all whose lives she touched. She is survived by her five children – daughter Jeannette Picard of Storrs (her husband Ted Busky) and their children Nathaniel and Jillian Picard-Busky; son Paul Picard of Colchester (his wife Charlene and her daughter Tina Marino); daughter Sue Buckley of Glastonbury (her husband Jim and their children James and Kiera Buckley); daughter Barb Branciforte of Colchester (her husband Tony and their children Matthew Carli, Scott (Liana) Carli, Kerry (Adam) Hoyt, Amanda Branciforte and Nicholas Branciforte); and daughter Chantalle Picard of Colchester (and her stepdaughter Ginny Graichen). Zan is also survived by several great grandchildren, many nieces and nephews, and numerous loving friends.

In addition to her husband, Ray, she was predeceased by their infant son David; her sister, Grace Griselle; brothers Sherman and Lewis Griselle; and sisters-in-law, Sr. Jean Beatrice Picard, DHS, and Rita (Picard) Charpentier.

The family received guests Sunday, Dec. 3, at the Aurora-McCarthy Funeral Home, 167 Old Hartford Rd., Colchester. The funeral liturgy was celebrated Monday, Dec. 4, directly at Saint Andrew Church, 128 Norwich Ave., Colchester. Burial was private in the New St. Andrew Cemetery.

In lieu of flowers, memorial donations can be made in Zan's name to the Alzheimer's Association (alz.org), Masonicare Hospice (masonicare.org) or to the Daughters of the Holy Spirit, 72 Church St., Putnam, CT 06260.

For online condolences, visit auroramccarthyfuneralhome.com.

Colchester

Christine Ellen Walker

Christine Ellen Walker, "Chris," 63, of Colchester, formerly of West Hartford, beloved wife of Paul Barton Walker, passed away Friday, Dec. 1, after a long, valiant battle against cancer.

The beloved daughter of the late Thaddeus and Charlotte (Mazurek) Laski, she was born in Hartford on Sept. 23, 1954, and grew up in West Hartford. Chris was a graduate of Conard High School. After graduating, she and Paul married and started their family. A lover of both children and animals, she gave her time to special needs children and throughout her life was a tireless advocate for mental health care and various cancer support groups. Her first love, however, was her family, and to them she gave unwavering love and support. Her spirit will remain in their hearts and minds forever.

In addition to her husband, she leaves their three sons, Paul Jr. of Ridgway, Pa., and Blake and Kevin, both of Colchester; her sister and brother-in-law, Barbara and Arthur Carpenter of Pt. Townsend, Wash.; a brother and sister-in-law, Raymond and Colette Laske of Southington; her mother-in-law, Joan Cox of Bloomfield; her brother-in-law, Kenneth Walker and his wife Susan of West Hartford; and numerous extended family and friend.

The family wishes to thank the doctors, nurses and staff of the Middlesex Hospital Hospice Unit for the kindness, care and compassion that they showed to them and Chris during her parting from us.

In accordance with her wishes, care of private arrangements has been entrusted to the Aurora McCarthy Funeral Home of Colchester.

In lieu of flowers, donations in her memory may be made to the animal rescue charity of one's choice.

For online condolences, visit auroramccarthyfuneralhome.com.

Portland

Brian D. Faust

Brian D. Faust, 60, of Portland, beloved husband of Shannon (Rizzo) Faust, passed away unexpectedly Friday, Dec. 1. Born April 11, 1957 in Montgomery, Pa., son of Janice (Rogers) Faust of Pottstown, Pa., and the late Robert Faust, Brian lived in Glastonbury for over 30 years and settled in Portland four years ago.

Brian lived a full and active life, surrounding himself with family and loved ones as often as possible. He was an avid golfer and a member of the East Hartford and Portland Golf Clubs. In addition to being a skilled craftsman, Brian was a true outdoorsman who enjoyed fishing and sports. He always shared a warm and genuine smile, and he carried a heart of gold. Brian worked as an accountant for PW Power Systems in Glastonbury.

He will be missed dearly by many, including his son, Daniel T. Faust of Glastonbury; his daughter, Brianna K. Faust of Bridgeport; his two stepsons, Taylor A. Peterson and Aidan L. Peterson, of Portland; his two brothers, and their wives, David and Laurie Faust of Royersford, Pa., and Andrew and Audrey Faust of Pottstown, Pa., as well as his nieces and nephews.

Brian's funeral service was held Thursday, Dec. 7, in the Mulryan Funeral Home, 725 Hebron Ave., Glastonbury. Burial followed at the Old Church Cemetery, Glastonbury. Friends called at the funeral home on Wednesday, Dec. 6.

In lieu of flowers, memorial donations may be made to Donate Life Connecticut to honor Brian's choice to be an organ donor, P.O. Box 278, Durham, CT 06422 (ctorganandtissuedonation.org/money-donation).

For online condolences, visit mulryanfh.com.



Portland

Mary K. Albright

Mary K. Albright, a.k.a. Mary Albrycht, passed on to her heavenly home Saturday, Dec. 2, at the Cobalt Health and Rehab Center where she had been a resident since 2007. She was born July 7, 1919, in Burlington. She was the daughter of Katherine and Joseph Albrycht. She lived in East Hampton since 1935 making her home with the late Richard J. and Katherine Wall and their family.

Mary spent several of her earlier years in TB hospitals. In later years she became a caregiver to many others herself. She was employed for a time at Elmcrest Hospital in Portland and later worked for the Connecticut DOT Laboratory unit for over 30 years, retiring in 1988. Mary was a longtime member of St. Patrick Church where she served as trustee for several years.

She was predeceased by three brothers Henry, John and Walter and baby sister, Josephine. Also, of the Wall family she was predeceased by brothers John and wife Claire, Philip and wife Sheila, and Richard as well as nieces Judy and Jennifer L. Wall. She is survived by sister-in-law Mary Lu Wall, and many nieces and nephews on both sides of the Albrycht and Wall families.

Friends called at the Spencer Funeral Home, 112 Main St., East Hampton, Thursday, Dec. 7. A funeral liturgy was celebrated that morning in St. Patrick Church, 47 West High St., East Hampton followed by burial in St. Patrick Cemetery.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to St. Patrick Church and Oak Hill Services for the disabled, 120 Holcomb St., Hartford, CT 06112.

To leave online condolences, visit spencerfuneralhomeinc.com.

Colchester

Vincent Charles Pugh

Vincent Charles Pugh, 73, of Colchester, passed away Monday, Dec. 4, at Hartford Hospital, after a long and courageous battle with illness.

Born in The Bronx, N.Y., June 22, 1944, he was the son of the late Vincent A. and Eleanor (Wright) Pugh. Vincent was raised by his father and stepmother, Edna Pugh. He was a proud veteran, having served in the U.S. Navy.

He married Angelina Marie Florentino July 28, 1962, in Mt. Vernon, N.Y. Soon after their marriage, the couple moved to Colchester, where they made their home and raised their family. Vincent worked for Pratt and Whitney Aircraft in East Hartford for several years and later took employment at Foxwoods Casino with their security department.

Vincent was an avid fisherman who loved the outdoors, gardening and caring for his home. He was always found tinkering and taking care of things. Most importantly, he will be remembered as a hardworking, loving and devoted family man.

He will be sadly missed but always remembered by his beloved wife Angela of 55 years; a daughter, Kelly Ann and her husband Timothy Fox of Manchester; two sons; seven grandchildren, most notably his little nugget, Adeline Angelina Jean Fox; two great-grandchildren; and many friends.

Calling hours were held Thursday, Dec. 7, at the Aurora-McCarthy Funeral Home, 167 Old Hartford Rd., Colchester. A memorial service followed immediately at the funeral home, with full military honors. Burial will be held privately.

Donations in his memory may be made to Protectors of Animals in East Hartford (POA), 144 Main St., Unit O, East Hartford, CT 06118 (poainc.org).

For online condolences, visit auroramccarthyfuneralhome.com.



Andover

James P. Hurst

James P. Hurst, 92, of Hurst Farm, Andover, the husband of Patricia (Bomba) Hurst, died Friday, Nov. 17, at Manchester Memorial Hospital. Born in South Glastonbury, he was the son of the late John and Mary (Shea) Hurst and had lived in Andover for many years.

He was an Army Air Corps veteran of World War II, having served as a B-24 pilot who was the recipient of the Distinguished Flying Cross and Air Medal. He retired from the Travelers Insurance Company in 1980.

In addition to his wife, he is survived by his children, Patricia Bascom and her husband Robert of Summerville, S.C., Thomas Hurst and his wife Shari of Andover, Luciann Norton and her husband John of Hampton, Timothy Hurst of Willimantic; 22 beloved grandchildren; and 15 great-grandchildren.

Family and friends called at the John F. Tierney Funeral Home, 219 West Center St., Manchester, Monday, Nov. 20. A Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated Tuesday, Nov. 21, at St. Maurice Church, 32 Hebron Rd., Bolton, followed by burial in Bolton Center Cemetery.

For online condolences, visit tierneyfuneralhome.com.

Colchester

Francis Conrad Frazer

Francis Conrad Frazer, "Frank," 72, of Colchester, passed away Friday, Dec. 1. Born in Vermont Dec. 20, 1944, he was a son of the late David and Mary Frazer.

Frank retired several years ago, after having worked as a produce manager for various grocery stores in the area. He was an avid fan of the New England Patriots and was known to enjoy a trip or two to Mohegan Sun.

He leaves two children, Kimberley his golden girl, and her husband Moe Mailhotte of Lisbon, and Jeff Frazer of Westchester; a grandson, Timothy Mailhotte; six siblings, David and his wife Beverly Frazer of White River, Vt., Larry and his wife Jeannie Frazer of Hartland, Vt., Wesley and his wife Pat Frazer, also of White River Vt., Maxwell and his wife Diane Frazer of Ascutney, Vt., Harriet and her husband Ron Emery of Jeffersonville, Vt., and Idabelle and her husband Burt Mills of Newport, N.H.; and numerous extended family members and friends.

Friends may call 1-3 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 10, at the Aurora-McCarthy Funeral Home, 167 Old Hartford Rd., Colchester. He will be laid to rest following the visitation in the Linwood Cemetery, Colchester.

Donations in his memory may be made to Protectors of Animals in East Hartford (POA), 144 Main St., Unit O, East Hartford, CT 06118 (poainc.org).

For online condolences, visit auroramccarthyfuneralhome.com.



Obituaries continued

Portland

Robert Norton Kapitzke

Robert Norton Kapitzke, a lifetime resident of Portland, passed peacefully Thursday evening, Nov. 30. He was born in Meriden to the late Wilhelmina Caroline Weisbauer and Earl Norton Kapitzke.

Bob leaves a wife of 56 years, Carol Gustafson Kapitzke; two sons, Alan Robert and Mark Eric, their wives Sylvia and Karleen; four wonderful and amazing grandchildren, Kareena Lynne, Troy Daniel, Timothy Joseph and Matthew Eric.

Bob was a descendent of an original pilgrim from the Mayflower.

Bob graduated from Portland High School. He broadcast a radio show from there and is a member of the National Honor Society. He graduated from UConn with a degree in finance and economics.

Bob had an extensive knowledge of music, movies and the building of electronics.

Employed by the United States post office during his college years, Pratt & Whitney as a project analyst for 13 years, he then moved on to the State of Connecticut College System for 23 years where he was the Director of Informational Services.

Bob was a lifetime member of Zion Lutheran Church and was a Sunday school teacher, a Luther League counselor, taking youth to Washington D.C. along with other religious and educational places.

He served on the Church Council and was the financial secretary for nine years. He enjoyed serving on the Swedish Cemetery Association committee since 1975, with 20 years as secretary of the committee.

Bob took his family on an adventure of a lifetime, touching 46 of the lower 48 states. These memories led to a legacy that would allow his family to continue to explore and realize the amazement of life. He provided wonderful wisdom, knowledge and expectations that we all appreciate.

A 'thank you' to the personnel that worked with Bob to regain his strength. Bob was a strong individual, very supportive and loved his family. Bob was a dear husband, father and grandfather. Thank you, Bob.

Funeral services will be held at Zion Lutheran Church Saturday, Dec. 9, at 10:30 a.m.

In lieu of flowers, donations in his memory can be made to Zion Lutheran Church, 183 William St., Portland, CT 06480.

East Hampton

Mary Sypek

Mary Sypek, 84, of East Hampton died peacefully on Dec. 4, surrounded by her loving family.

Mary was born May 1, 1933, in Melilli, Sicily. She came to America when she was 16 years old where she met the love of her life, Robert Sypek. They built their lives together in East Hampton, where



she was a big part of her community. She worked at the East Hampton High School as a cook for 30-plus years, touching the hearts of everyone she came into contact with.

She leaves behind her two sons, Lance Sypek of Old Saybrook and Al Sypek of East Hampton and his wife Sheri Sypek. She had five grandchildren, Andrea, Scott, Kris, Kayla and Alexis Sypek, and three great-grandchildren, Tyler Guthrie, Isabella Sypek and Ariana Sypek-Jimenez. She also leaves behind many extended family members.

Calling hours are today, Dec. 8, from 6-8 p.m., at Spencer Funeral Home, 112 Main St., East Hampton. Funeral procession will begin at Spencer Funeral Home Saturday, Dec. 9, at 9 a.m., followed by the funeral liturgy at 10 a.m. in St. Patrick Church in East Hampton. Burial will follow at St. Patrick's Cemetery.

To leave online condolences, visit spencerfuneralhomeinc.com.

From the Editor's Desk

Observations & Ruminations

by Mike Thompson

While baseball is by far the sport I'm most interested in, I do make time for football on occasion, and specifically my New York Jets (don't laugh). So here are a few thoughts on the past week on – and off – the gridiron.

The Giants' disastrous season led them Monday to finally fire their head coach, Ben "life ain't easy for a boy named" McAdoo, and their GM, Jerry Reese. The Giants have had a disastrous 2-10 season, so perhaps the moves themselves weren't surprising; what was a little surprising was just last week, McAdoo benched Eli Manning as quarterback. If ownership knew then McAdoo was on the chopping block – and it certainly sounds like they did; co-owner John Mara said Monday "it was pointless to wait any longer to make these changes" – then why let him bench the franchise quarterback? If the move was inevitable, then it didn't make sense that McAdoo was able to end Eli's 210-game consecutive start streak, sending him to the sidelines to ponder life's big questions, like if he would enjoy Papa John's pizza more if Peyton weren't the spokesman. (Spoiler alert: Maybe?)

Across town (well, not really, as they share the same damn stadium), it looks as if the Jets may wrap up this season merely mediocre – which would be an improvement for them. They topped the Chiefs 38-31 and, at 5-7, their slight playoff hopes are still alive. Meanwhile, the Cleveland Browns continued their march toward a number-one draft pick by losing to the Chargers, 19-10.

The boring Patriots boringly won their eighth straight boring game, 23-3 – a game most notable for Rob Gronkowski being rather babyish and doing a piledriver into the back of the Bills' rookie cornerback's head. The move left the first-round pick in the concussion protocol; Gronk apologized after the game, saying he was frustrated at calls that hadn't been made. He was suspended one game, a suspension that while have precisely zero effect on the 10-2 Patriots' playoff chances (and yet a suspension Gronk has vowed to appeal). Football is a violent, violent game, folks.

Meanwhile, the president continues to be all hurt some football players are kneeling during the anthem. The president assumes it's nothing more than disrespect for the troops, but subtleties typically elude Trump's grasp (in his defense, those tiny hands can't make grasping easy). The NFL last week attempted to bribe its players to stop kneeling during the anthem, by pledging to give \$100 million over the next five-six years to "causes important to the African-American community" such as the United Negro College Fund – which shows a slightly better understanding of what the kneeling is all about, but still misses the boat.

The players balked at this bribe, so the kneeling continued, people with too much time on their hands continued to make YouTube videos of themselves lighting NFL merchandise on fire, and TV ratings continued a slide that really began before the anthem protests did – a fact no one seems to talk about. I'm not saying the protests haven't contributed to the down ratings, but so has the increasing popularity/availability of Red Zone (you never have to watch a whole football game again!), as well as the increasingly horrid CTE news. But why consider a variety of options when it's so much easier to rant and rave about only one, I guess.

It's nearing the end of the year, so Twitter

this week put out its list of the most retweeted and most liked tweets of 2017. And despite his well-known proclivity for tweeting, Donald Trump did not make either list. Barack Obama did – five times, in fact! – but not our Donald. The slight will no doubt send his Twitter thumbs a-scurrying.

Obama actually produced the most-liked tweet of 2017. Shortly after white nationalists marched in Charlottesville, Obama tweeted the words of Nelson Mandela: "No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin or his background or his religion..." That tweet, which was accompanied by a picture of Obama greeting small children of a variety of races, generated more than 4.5 million likes, and was also retweeted more than 1.7 million times, good for number three on the "top retweets" list.

Obama grabbed number three on the most-liked tweets list with this July thought about John McCain: "John McCain is an American hero & one of the bravest fighters I've ever known. Cancer doesn't know what it's up against. Give it hell, John." That very nice statement racked up more than 2.1 million likes.

Obama had the fifth-most retweeted tweet of 2017 way back in January, when he shared the final line of his farewell address: "Thank you for everything. My last ask is the same as my first. I'm asking you to believe—not in my ability to create change, but in yours."

Obama's fifth appearance on the two lists came with this tweet, sent on his very last day in office: "It's been the honor of my life to serve you. You made me a better leader and a better man." That racked up more than 630,000 retweets.

Of course, there were other people on the lists besides former presidents that I wish very much were still president today. Singer Ariana Grande nabbed the fourth-most-retweeted and second-most-liked spot for this message, sent following the horrific terrorist attack at a concert of hers in Manchester, England: "broken. from the bottom of my heart, i am so so sorry. i don't have words."

In August, the Pennsylvania State University Interfraternity Council tweeted out a pledge to donate 15 cents to hurricane relief efforts in Houston for every retweet. The gesture led to that tweet getting retweeted more than 1.16 million times – and was good enough for number three on the "most retweeted" list.

This brings me to the most retweeted thought of 2017. Was it something philosophical? Something philanthropic?

Nope. It was a teenager asking for chicken nuggets.

In April, 16-year-old Carter Wilkerson tweeted at Wendy's, asking the fast-food giant how many retweets it would take to score a year's supply of free chicken nuggets. Wendy's – apparently just picking a number out of the sky – wrote back with "18 million." Carter then tweeted out that exchange, asking for retweets. He wound up getting more than 3.6 million of them – making his message the most retweeted tweet of all time.

Along the way, Carter became something of a celebrity, even appearing on Ellen DeGeneres' talk show (Ellen had previously held the record for most retweeted tweet ever). And while he didn't get close to the 18 million, Wendy's, proving it was a good sport (and probably appreciative of all the free publicity), gave him gift cards for a year's supply of nuggets anyway.

See you next week.