

RIVEREAST

News Bulletin

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

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Scouts Adopt Family... Girl Scout Junior Troop 60463 of Portland adopted a family of five from the local food bank. All girls were asked to participate by doing an extra chore to earn funds to purchase presents.

Whimsical Trail Brings Hope to Belltown

by Elizabeth Regan

In the woods of East Hampton near a Christmas tree farm, there's a little spot where Santa Claus has been said to take catnaps on his way from Boston to New York.

There was a farmhouse there once, and a couple of barns. Now Santa's naptime hideaway is nestled into the old stone remnants of one of those buildings, with a canopy of evergreens covering his bed and nightstand. Two rocking chairs sit in front of a fire pit nearby. On the opposite corner of the exposed foundation is a tiny cot for an elf named Marbles.

Kristine Hazen-Haswell, the creator of the Trail of Hope, calls the subterranean refuge "Catnap Station." It serves as the unofficial trailhead for the whimsical byway alongside Lake Drive that she established to honor her parents, Reginald and Jessie Hazen. The late couple opened Hazen Tree Farm in 1964.

Everywhere you look on the Trail of Hope, there are ornaments. They're visible from Lake Drive and White Birch Road. Green glass gleams. Silver bells turn brittle in the wind. There are no lights, but thousands of red glass balls sure can shine in the sun.

"Each ornament we put up is the symbol of hope. When one falls off the tree, someone's lost some of their hope; so we encourage people to put them back up," Kristine said last week on a clear, cold morning.

Kristine put up the inaugural ornament in

2015. It was the year Jessie died.

During that last summer, her mother's mind wasn't as clear as it used to be, Kristine said. Jessie came to believe every day was Christmas; every day was her chance to go home to Vermont.

"At night she'd say, 'Kris, did you pack the car? Did you load everything in the trunk so you could take me home for Christmas?'" Jessie's daughter recalled.

But that's not the only story about coming home associated with East Hampton's unique holiday destination.

"In 1966, Santa crashed," Kristine said, pointing to the field across from the main trail where a red sleigh sat on a rock. "My father lived down in the valley; he came running up and he found Santa was having quite an argument with his elf about who caused the crash."

Santa decided at that moment he'd had enough of Marbles the Elf, according to Kristine.

"Santa Claus turned to my father in anger and said 'The elf is staying with you, Reg,'" she retold.

So Marbles lived in East Hampton at the Hazen's farm for more than 50 years, the mythology goes.

Reginald, who owned Hazen Packaging Company in addition to running the tree farm

See Whimsical Trail page 30

You Better Not Pout, You Better Not Cry

It's that time again: Christmas is in the air.

As they do every year, the Scouts of Girl Scout Troop 65537 – Ambassador Girl Scouts from Hebron and Marlborough – collected letters to Santa from area kids. And, as they do every year, the girls let us at the *Rivereast* snag a quick peek at the letters before they were sent on their merry way up the North Pole, for inspection by the big guy himself.

This year, the Scouts received more than 150 letters, from kids in Marlborough, Hebron, Amston, East Hampton, Andover, Columbia, Lebanon, Colchester, Coventry, and North Windham. They were all great, and we selected some of our favorites to share with readers.

The cute misspellings were left in there on purpose; we found them charming. And don't worry, kids, we've got a source at Santa's Workshop and he assures us the letters did indeed receive safe passage – and old Mr. Kringle will try to fulfill as many requests as possible.

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

Dear Santa,

I have not been a perfect girl this year, but I have been good for the most part. I hope that all is well with you. Here are some things I would like for Christmas.

Santa, please make some Christmas wishes for me and my family. If you could get my mom an Ulta Beauty gift card and can you get my dad some socks it would make their Christmas.

P.S. My mom and dad said to tell you that my grades are awesome!

From, Baylee

Dear Santa,

Hi! How are you doing today? I have been working hard to be good this year. For Christmas this year it would be nice if you could get me earmuffs, Quiddler (the card game), Jenga, a flip sparkle shirt, and Kumi Kreator. If you can't get me all these things, I totally understand, I know you have a busy night ahead of you. I hope you can make it to all the houses on Christmas Eve. Good luck!

P.S. I will make sure to put carrots for the reindeer and cookies for you!

Love, Reese

Dear Santa

I hope you are having a Merry Christmas! I'm becoming more in the Christmas Spirit, the fact that it snowed here. One thing I want for Christmas is a I pod, because I want something like a phone, but bigger. One other thing I want is some Diary of a Wimpy Kid books, because reading is my favorite subject and I am into that series. One more thing I want is a surprise, because, who doesn't like surprises?

Isabella

See Santa Letters page 30



Whimsical Trail cont. from Front Page

with his wife, was active in East Hampton politics. His public service included several stints on the Town Council during the 1980s and 90s. He died in 2002 at the age of 78. Jessie was 90 years old when she passed away three years ago.

“After the death of my mother, Mrs. Claus and the elves at the North Pole said it’s time for Marbles to come home,” Kristine said.

What Marbles left behind is the Trail of Hope. It’s open to everyone.

“We want to give people a place to come to take a breath,” Kristine said. “Just take a breath.”

Further into the woods, down Cookie Cutter Lane, there’s a cafe with mismatched tables and chairs. Some are sized for humans, some for elves. Atop another stone foundation is a haphazard kitchen area spread out over dirt and twigs. Plates and tea sets and bins in every holiday print line the shelves of antique cupboards and carts. A plush snowman plays Christmas tunes on plastic piano if someone presses the “on” button.

Kristine, who is slight of stature with a cherubic face, said she starts setting up the trail each year in October.

A handful of people each weekend help her affix ornaments to leafless limbs and evergreen shrubs. You can tell children were at work in the spots where 15 brightly-colored baubles are clustered on one low bush.

“When you decorate, you get a bag and you just go at it. There isn’t really a lot of rhyme or reason to it,” she said.

Sections of the trail include Snowman Alley, Snowflake Hill, Cedar Knoll, a skating pond for fairies and a bird sanctuary.

One of the most striking features is a looming wall that was once, like other wistful vestiges on the site, a stone foundation. The Angel Wall is adorned with so many tiny winged figurines perched in its crevices; a choir of snowmen sits on top.

“This is our place where people can come and meditate,” Kristine said.

A red, wooden sign reminds visitors always to be kind. A message on a box invites them to leave their prayers in writing.

Jen LaPlant, of East Hampton, first happened upon the trail on an outing with three of her four children. They were all captivated by the whimsical layout, she said - with her 5- and 8-year-olds especially taken with the Cookie Cutter Cafe.

“The kids just loved how festive it was, and they loved serving us pretend tea and dessert,” Jen said.

For Jen herself, the most poignant section was the Angel Wall.

“The first time we went, it was a quiet place to sit and reflect with my 17-year-old,” she said. “My younger children thought it was cute, and they delighted in seeing so many different types of angels.”

When she visited again last week – this time with her 20-year-old son, who had not been on the first trip – the Angel Wall took on a new



Messages of hope mingle with thousands of ornaments and countless whimsical decorations on the Trail of Hope. Situated in the woods near Hazen Tree Farm on Lake Drive, the unique holiday destination was created by Kristine Hazen-Haswell to honor her late parents. Photos by Jen LaPlant.

meaning as the pair contemplated the imminent death of Jen’s father.

“It was the middle of the day and we were the only ones there,” she said. “This time, the same angel area brought tears to my eyes.”

There’s a sense of calm on the Trail of Hope that heightens the senses. It’s the kind of place that makes you realize air has a sound. You can see more clearly in the cold.

Jen said the meaning of the trail comes from Kristine’s ability to make joy out of grief.

“There is hope for other people healing from a painful experience in their own lives,” Jen said.

Kristine described her trail simply as a “dif-



ferent take” on Christmas.

“It’s just a story of little Marbles wanting to go home,” she said. “And he got home, so he’s happy. Everything worked out.”

The Trail of Hope runs along Lake Road near the Hazen Tree Farm, 166 Lake Drive. Parking is available at the farm during regular hours or along Lake Drive. The trail will remain up at least through the New Year.

Santa Letters cont. from Front Page

Dear Santa

What I would like for Christmas is for you, again, to surprise me. Just to give you some ideas, mabe a pig?:) I know that would be hard so do whatever you want. I’m sorry I don’t give you many ideas. I’m just not good at that. Also, please make sure that children in shelters and children that don’t get much also get toys. You can give me one less toy and give it to someone who doesn’t get much. Thank you! You get it right every single time. I really appreciate it. P.S. Please say hi to Mrs. Claus for me!

Thank you, Stella

Dear Santa

I hope you had a fun summer. If you can, please bring me slot cars app, controlled robots, and Lego troop transportation.

P.S. Please give Rudolf a hug for me. Thank you.

Love, Gabe

Dear Santa Claus,

Do you like gingerbread or sugar cookies or chocolate chip cookies. And do you like pancakes and I want a note of which cookies you want and if you like pancakes.

There is where I live on the envelope. Mary Christmas,

Love, Avery

Dear Santa

How is it in the North? How are you? My Christmas list is pretty long. I have been pretty good. My favorite season is winter because I love snow. Today we are decorating our tree. Is there a tree that you, the elves, and Mrs. Claus decorate? Can I say hi on Christmas eve? For Christmas I want a pusheen stuffed animal, a bank that says how much money is in the bank, a new football, tomodechi life, a figit cube, Instax camera, a I-pod that has music and games, and finally I want the flip video thing that holden has instead of the phone and a pool table and balls and sticks.

From, Noah

Dear Santa

The elf came to my house. Dear Santa I love you. Dear Santa, I love you very very much. Please come to my house and bring presents. I like presents. I know you will come to my house. I love you.

Love, Dustin (age 4)

Dear Santa

How are you and the reindeer, elfs and Mrs. Clause?

This is Chris. I have been good this year.

Thank you very much. I will have cookies out for you and oats for the reindeer!

Love, Chris

Dear Santa

What I want for Christmas is a Pickmi POP, a LOL Surprise and Pink Slime. I’ve been a good girl buy helping my mom get out the grocery from the car. I’ve been a good girl because I’ve been helping my mom get the christmas decorations out of the attic. I’ve been a good girl because I’ve been cleaning my room for chorese. I’ve been a good girl because I helped my mom do the grocery. I know you are real Santa.

Love, Lilliana

Dear Santa

I think I’ve been very good girl this year. (even though there have been mishaps :) What I want for Christmas is:

Lego elves fox and castle (evil), Jeans, GX pokeman cards

I still believe in you Santa! Charlie has been watching me and doing his job! (He loves the new tree. 2 in a row he’s been there!!) I hope you can make it!

Love, Sawyer

Dear Santa

I’m writing for the best kid in the world, my brother Camden. He would want a horse stable, lots of cars and trucks, one pink car and blue truck also a green truck, a teddy bear, a snake stuffed animal.

Love, Wyatt the write and Camden the kid I wrote for.

Dear Santa

We hope that you have had a great year at the North Pole with Mrs. Clause and the elves! I have had a great year, and I hope you’ll agree. I’ve been a very good boy!

Aside from the obvious; good health, happiness, and love, this year I would like: Transformers, PJ Masks, Paw Patrol, Blaze backpack, momma flashlight, a watch, new fish bath toy.

Thank you!

Your Friend, Jaxson

Dear Santa

This year we are not going to Florida. In fact, we are going to stay home. This year for Christmas, I want a couple of things. The couple of things i want is some Atic tresers, and mommys foot to get better and the last thing is for peoples whose homes got destroyed in hurricanes or even people don’t have homes get homes soon.

Thank U Santa!

Love, Charlotte

Dear Santa

I would really like a pink fire truck for Christmas the year!

I would also like a cure for congenital Heart Defects - that would be amazing.

Love Riley (Heart Warrior) Age 2



Catnap Station is nestled under a canopy of evergreens on the Trail of Hope in East Hampton. Trail creator Kristine Hazen-Haswell described the whimsical spot as a refuge for the Jolly Ol’ Elf on his way from Boston to New York - as well as a place where children and adults alike can find magic and hope.

Marlborough Salon Encourages Clients to ‘Come as You Are’

by Allison Lazur

Shades of purple, an abundance of natural light and an electric fire place welcome customers who arrive to be pampered at The Violet Lily Hair Studio, located at 8 Independence Drive.

The space is located on the lower level of Independence Plaza in a multi-use building consisting of a doctor’s office, chiropractor and future home of Marlborough Bakery.

“We all kind of have a Zen vibe,” salon owner Ashley Meyer said.

Meyer, a Marlborough resident, spent eight years working at a salon in Glastonbury before deciding to open her own hair studio to allow for more flexibility and time spent with her two daughters, Violet and Lily.

“I saw an opportunity for a salon here and being a mother of two young girls I didn’t want to miss things at school,” she said. “I did this all for my girls.”

After stumbling across the 1,000-sq.-ft. unit, Meyer said she decided to purchase the space because it supported her vision of a warm and welcoming salon.

“We are huge on relaxation [and] a cozy atmosphere,” she said.

The space – which used to house a doctor’s office – was gutted, custom windows were ordered and the salon took shape, opening in early April.

“I wanted a beautiful space that was very welcoming and people felt like they were at home,” Meyer said.

To achieve this idyllic atmosphere, Meyer obtained the most comfortable salon chairs she could find and custom-made sinks that care-

fully cradle a client’s neck making it near impossible not to drift off to sleep.

“Everyone loves to get their hair washed and there are complaints that a lot of shampoo bowls are uncomfortable so that was my main thing,” adding, “Everybody loves them.”

Meyer also offers refreshments to her clients and a cooling mask with essential oils during deep conditioning and toner treatments.

Even the studio’s Sonos sound system encourages customers to revel in relaxation.

“The sound system is zoned so I can set different levels for the lobby, the [styling] stations, the shampoo [area] and the backroom,” she said.

Meyer, two additional stylists and a salon manager are all “team players” and “get along so well.”

Because of the location, the salon is not easy to locate. Meyer said the other stylists in town have been “great,” directing people to her salon who are unsure of where to go.

Meyer also said the individual who sold her the space, Roger Boober, played a part in the endeavor.

“He gave me the opportunity of a lifetime,” she said. “I now own a piece of commercial property before the town explodes. He essentially helped me change my life.”

As Meyer’s business continues to grow she said she wants to become more involved with the community in any way she can.

“Everything was hectic in the beginning for me, but if anyone needs help with donations for charity or anything, we’re willing to help,” she said.

Meyer said she hopes her business continues to help people “escape the craziness of the



Ashley Meyer, owner of The Violet Lily Hair Studio, focuses on drawing clients in with a cozy, comfortable and welcoming atmosphere.

day” and that her current and future clients view the salon as “a forever home.”

“I wanted to create a friendly, cozy environment where people feel like they are coming home I wanted a ‘come as you are’ vibe where we all feel like family,” she said.

Anyone interested in contacting The Violet

Lily Hair Studio can call 860-365-5896, email thevioletlily@yahoo.com or visit vagar.com/thevioletlilyhairstudio to book appointments. The salon is open Mondays from 9-3 p.m.; Tuesdays-Thursdays, 9-7 p.m.; Fridays, 9-6 p.m.; and Saturdays by appointment only.

Pallets Stolen in Marlborough, Later Returned

by Allison Lazur

A number of pallets were stolen last Friday from Marlborough Plastics, located at 350 N. Main St., and the two men responsible were later identified – but the company’s heads declined to press charges.

Vice President Kevin Asklar said the incident occurred at approximately 7:45 p.m. Dec. 14 and was caught on the corporation’s surveillance footage.

The approximate 20 pallets valued at about \$80 total and stored near the company’s loading dock, were loaded into a truck by two men with beards and backwards baseball caps, Asklar said.

“It’s just the nuisance of it really; like, ‘Come on you’re gonna come steal and risk a theft charge for \$80 worth of pallets?’” he said.

Asklar said Monday they needed the pal-

lets for production this week, but neighboring businesses have stepped up and provided pallets to them.

He said Marlborough Plastics has never experienced any prior issues with theft.

The two men were identified early this week with the help of the video surveillance which was shared on social media, said President Joe Asklar.

“A conversation was had with both men by the Marlborough Police,” Joe Asklar said.

He said Marlborough Plastics decided not to press charges “because of the age and stupidity” of both men, who appeared to be in their early 20s.

Director of Public Safety Services Jay Kehoe said the two men were not Marlborough residents.

East Hampton Recycling Center Fire Deemed ‘Suspicious’

by Elizabeth Regan

A Saturday night fire at Belltown Recycling Center is being investigated as “suspicious” by the Office of the State Fire Marshal after the contents of a dumpster went up in flames.

The fire was called in at 7:43 p.m., according to East Hampton Fire Chief Greg Voelker. He said the blaze affected two dumpsters containing “light metal” from appliances like washing machines, refrigerators and stoves.

“There’s nothing in there that should have caught on fire, so the fire was suspicious in origin,” Voelker said.

The fire was contained to the two dumpsters, Voelker said.

State and local fire marshals are investigating, according to Voelker.

The Old Coach Road junkyard is located on a dead end off Route 16.

One of the recycling center’s heavy machines was used to unload the dumpster and the East Hampton Fire Department ladder truck put out the fire, Voelker said. Tanker trucks from Portland, Haddam Neck, East

Haddam, Marlborough and Colchester were brought in for water since there are no hydrants in the area.

The fire took about an hour and a half to extinguish, Voelker said. Firefighters were dousing hot spots until about 11 p.m.

Belltown Recycling Center operation manager Anthony Flannery said only one of the dumpsters and its contents were damaged in the fire. Firefighters were able to keep the fire from engulfing the second dumpster once it started to spread, according to Flannery.

“The first responders did a great job and we applaud them in keeping the fire as small as they did, to the point where we were open for business the next day at 8 a.m.,” Flannery said.

Flannery acknowledged the kind of material in the dumpsters doesn’t typically catch on fire.

“[A]t this point in time the only thing we can think of is a freak accident,” Flannery said.

Missing Christmas Tree Returned to Hebron Cemetery

by Allison Lazur

Days after they were discovered missing, a Christmas tree and some – but not all – of its ornaments returned to New Hebron Cemetery late last week.

Monica Burr has spent the last 16 years placing a Christmas tree on the gravesite of her son Kyle Harris who died Nov. 5, 2002.

Burr set up the four-foot tree on Dec. 8 and discovered it was missing Dec. 10.

After a call for help to the public was issued via social media by friends and family asking for the return of the tree, the Burrs got their wish last Thursday afternoon, shortly after the *RiverEast* went to press.

“I was filled with emotion [and] thrilled,” Burr said after discovering the tree, adding, “I couldn’t believe it.”

Burr said Monday she saw the tree, bent and “cockeyed” approximately eight sites down from her son’s gravesite.

About half the tree’s ornaments – some of which were given to Burr after her son passed away and others to her son when he was a baby – were returned. The lights were still on the tree as well, but the small solar panel at the

base of the tree, which was used to charge the lights, had been removed.

“I’m just glad we were able to get half the ornaments back,” she said.

Sexton John Celio said last week “we did not remove the tree,” revealing the last routine cemetery cleanup occurred a few weeks prior to the tree being placed on the gravesite.

Celio said last week he is familiar with the gravesite and the Burr family and allows for certain site adornments out of compassion.

Burr said Monday she is “absolutely sure” the tree was not removed by the town, adding “I personally know the sexton and people at town hall and [Celio] has personally stated to me he would not remove [the tree.]”

On Wednesday, Celio said, “All I know is the tree was returned rather quickly. ... Somebody’s conscience must have gotten the better of them.”

Burr said she took the remaining ornaments home and in the future plans to continue placing a tree at her son’s gravesite with store bought ornaments instead of those that have meaning to her and her family.

East Hampton Police News

12/5: Heath Galvin, 29, of 54 Midwood Farm Rd., turned himself in pursuant to an active warrant for his arrest and was charged with violation of a conditional discharge, East Hampton Police said.

12/8: Paul Luke Kleszcz, 49, of 56 N. Pond Rd., Amston, turned himself in pursuant to an active warrant for his arrest and was charged with disorderly conduct and second-degree threatening, police said.

From Dec. 2-9, officers responded to 17 medical calls, four motor vehicle crashes and eight alarms, and made 16 traffic stops, police said.

Portland Police News

12/10: John Larace, 39, of 269 Forrest Hills Rd., Springfield, Mass., was charged with third-degree criminal trespass, possession of controlled substance and possession of burglary tools, Portland Police said.

12/14: Joseph Walden, 45, of 24 McKenzie St., Middletown, was charged with operating under the influence and failure to drive in proper lane, police said.

12/14: Nathaniel Gauthier, 22, of 374 Main St., was charged with violation of protective order, police said.

Handcrafted Items Sold with Love in New Hebron Main Street Shop

by Sloan Brewster

When old furniture comes into Main Street Emporium in need of some TLC, John Mann takes to it.

In a workshop set up in a small room in back of the Main Street consignment shop, Mann completes restoration projects. He has shined and spruced various pieces on the sales floor, including a dining room set, a large hutch and some smaller pieces.

On a recent morning, Mann, who is business partner and husband to shop owner Jan Grigas, did some work on a cherry hutch. He removed all the corroded brass hardware, buffed it with steel wool and put it back on. He also rubbed restoration oil into the face of the wood, and lined the drawers with felt. The upper half of the cabinet was gauged when he got it, so he sanded it completely down, revealing the finely-grained wood. Finishing touches he was planning included adding a coat of polyurethane, which he explained would darken over time and bring out the natural cherry color, and restoring the rest of that component with oil.

He used a similar process on the dining room table in the front of the store, adding a step to the chair cushions.

"I took off the old cushions and found the original cushions and scrubbed them with upholstery cleaner," he said.

With a coat of restoration oil on the table and chairs the set "came back to life," he said.

Sometimes the process takes a different turn. For example, Mann sanded down an old farmhouse table and painted it with chalk paint for a different look.

The store, which opened Columbus Day weekend, has been doing well, Mann said.

"A lot of traffic," he said. "A lot of compli-

ments from the surrounding towns from the people; they are very impressed."

The store offers merchandise from a mix of vendors, some who rent space and others who sell their wares on consignment, Grigas said.

Products include beautiful handcrafted items, handmade furniture, second-hand furniture, including pieces restored by Mann, china, jewelry, knitted items ranging from mittens and scarves to afghans, collectibles, nick knacks and other sundry wares.

This is not Grigas' first time owning a consignment shop. A resident of Amston Lake in Lebanon, she's had similar establishments in Marlborough and Cape Cod. She went into retirement about 18 years ago to care for her father and recently decided to return to the fray.

She said she chose the Hebron location for a number of reasons, not the least of which was that the shop was mostly completed inside with new carpets and fresh paint and in need of very few upgrades. All Grigas had to do was install shelving and bring in cabinets and hutches to display items and rent to vendors.

"We chose the location for the fact that it's a wonderful location," she said. "Hebron really needed something like this and we were lacking a shop like this."

Sandy Martin, a neighbor of Grigas on Amston Lake makes a variety of handmade items she sells at the shop, such as afghans for people and their pets. She even offers matching sets with a throw for the human in the family and a doggie blanket; she also takes special orders.

Included in her wares are wreaths and other decorations she makes out of sandwich bags.

"[The bags] have to be folded and then you cut them in half – two pieces – and fold and tie



Lebanon resident Sandy Martin shows off one her handmade afghans, which is offered for sale, along with many other locally-crafted wares, in the new Main Street Emporium.

them to a coat hanger that's shaped," she said. "It's a lot of work."

Martin has been making crafty things from unusual items since she was a child.

"My mom used to throw something away and I'd find something to make out of it," she said.

Martin caters her designs to different clients; for example, she said, she adds a hole in a child's scarf because "little kids don't know how to tie," she said. Rather than relying on a grown up to tie it for them or having a scarf blow away in the wind, the child can thread the end of the

scarf through the hole and be on his or her merry way.

Martin came up with the idea to make doggie blankets because her son has a dog and his furniture needed to be protected, she said. She also likes to stop by the Salvation Army and pick up items to restore.

Main Street Emporium, located at 37 Main St., is open Tuesday through Sunday from 11 a.m.-5 p.m. and is closed Monday. It can be reached at 860-530-1376.

Bald Eagle Dies After Being Struck By Car in Portland

by Elizabeth Regan

A bald eagle was euthanized last week after a territorial dispute in the skies over Portland led the bird to plummet into the front of a car on Route 17.

Driver Jessica Smith, of Portland, was not injured in the Dec. 13 collision, which occurred around 6:30 a.m. She said a 911 dispatcher declined to alert Portland police until the station opened for the day.

Animal Control Officer Karen Perruccio said it wasn't until 7:30 a.m. that Portland Police Sgt. James Kelly found the animal on the side of the road. Upon receiving a call from the sergeant, Perruccio immediately picked up the eagle and brought it to birds-of-prey expert Christine Cummings of the nonprofit A Place Called Hope wildlife rehabilitation center.

Cummings told the *Rivereast* the bald eagle was euthanized after an experienced wildlife veterinarian determined the bird had internal bleeding and two broken wings. One of the wings was twisted "all the way around," according to Cummings. She described it as broken at the shoulder and detached.

Smith said she was driving northbound on the state road in the vicinity of the public works garage when she witnessed "two large birds" swooping back and forth in what it soon became clear was an aerial fight.

"It literally looked like I was watching National Geographic unfold in front of me," Smith said.

According to the state Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP), adult bald eagles can range from about 34 to 43 inches long and about 8 to 14 pounds. Their wingspan can measure 6 to 8 feet.

"Their talons were kind of out and I was in disbelief of what I was seeing," Smith said. "At that point, one of them just tucked its wings and dove straight down. Unfortunately, it dove straight into the front of my car."

The fight is typical of territorial disputes among bald eagles, according to Cummings. She said the birds will fly at each other and grab on with their talons.

"When they spiral toward the earth, whichever lets go first is actually the loser," she said. "It's how they establish who's dominant," she said.

Cummings theorized the bald eagle diverted from its flight pattern while preparing for the fight and flew straight down into the front of Smith's car.

"It was very sad. Poor Jessica," Cummings said. "Luckily she did not lose her life and did not have a more severe accident."

The Local Response

Smith said the bald eagle came to a rest on the white line at the side of the road, partly in the lane of traffic and partly on the shoulder. She immediately pulled over and dialed the Portland Police department.

But the voicemail recording she got told her that the station was not yet open for the day, she said. That's when she decided to call 911 because she saw the animal was still moving.

Smith was surprised to hear that the emergency dispatcher, who works out of the Middletown dispatch center, would not send out an officer for an injured animal.

"They said they wouldn't send anyone out unless you as a person needed assistance," she said. "And at that point, I didn't."

Smith remembered the 911 dispatcher indicating local police, who are responsible for calling in the animal control officer, would be alerted once the station opened for the day at 8 a.m. When the shaken driver asked the dispatcher what she should do, Smith said she was told she could leave.

"I thought about moving [the bald eagle], but I was worried it was an injured, wild animal," Smith said. "I wasn't going to touch it. Both for my own safety and God forbid, if I moved it and hurt it."

Smith described her last-ditch efforts to convince the dispatcher to send someone out right away.

"I said it's alive, and it's a bald eagle. It's our national bird," she said.

The bald eagle is recognized by the state as a "threatened species." Previously identified as endangered, the population experienced a resurgence and was reclassified by the state in 2010.

"Of all things, for it to be an animal that already has a dwindled population, that was rough," Smith said.

She ultimately left the site of the crash at the suggestion of the dispatcher, she said. It was only after she reached her destination and got out of her car that she discovered damage that included a cracked bumper, shattered grill and missing components on the engine compartment behind the grill.

Kelly, the police sergeant, told the *Rivereast* this week he went to the scene when he received a cell phone call from a resident who had seen the eagle on the side of the road and was aware that Kelly was on duty.

"So I responded out there and sat with the bird until the animal control officer was able to respond," he said.

Cummings said the rescue effort "came to-



Animal Control Officer Karen Perruccio last week delivered an injured bald eagle to Christine Cummings, of A Place Called Hope wildlife rehabilitation center, after the bird dove into a car on Route 17 during a territorial dispute with another bald eagle. Cummings, seen here, said it was quickly apparent the bird could not be saved.

gether in record time" once Kelly responded. But she said it was clear as soon as the bird arrived at her center that it wasn't going to be "save-able."

Even if the bird didn't have the kind of internal bleeding and respiratory symptoms it was exhibiting, she said, "it would never have been a releasable candidate. The bird would never have flown again."

Smith said she has been in contact with Cummings and Perruccio, the animal control officer, since the story gained traction on social media.

"They were very compassionate," Smith said. "I was pretty upset it had happened, but they were very kind."

She plans to take Cummings up on an invitation to visit A Place Called Hope wildlife rehabilitation center this weekend to learn more about birds of prey. She has also saved critical wildlife-related contact information in her cell phone in case she encounters an injured animal again.

Cummings reiterated the importance of calling the appropriate authorities to ensure the

quickest response possible. She said it is a good idea for drivers to carry the numbers for the local, non-emergency dispatch center and the state Department of Energy and Environmental Protection dispatch center.

Emergency 911 calls are typically reserved for human-related emergencies, she said.

DEEP spokesman Chris Collibee confirmed the agency's dispatch line is the appropriate number to call for incidents involving injured eagles and other federal- or state-listed endangered and threatened species.

Cummings said wildlife organizations like hers will also respond if contacted directly.

DEEP maintains on its website a list of state-appointed wildlife rehabilitators to contact if an animal needs help. The site emphasized it is illegal for any person other than a state-appointed rehabilitator to care for wildlife.

The Portland non-emergency dispatch number is 860-347-2541; DEEP dispatch can be reached at 860-424-3333. The DEEP list of wildlife rehabilitators can be accessed at bit.ly/2CoDTxu.

Hebron Worship Center Holds First Service in New Building

by Sloan Brewster

During the first service in The Worship Center's new church, the space burst with prayer, song and sacred movement.

Sunday the doors to the sanctuary – at 99 Marjorie Circle – opened and parishioners crowded into the pews, celebrating the new space, giving worship and offering thanks. The service began with about 20 minutes of music performed by the church's worship team.

As the melodious sound filled the sanctum, folks stood, some raising their hands in supplication; others, waving flags.

And then there was Krista Billard. Twirling a flag like a baton with every step, Billard spun gracefully in the aisle, circling in rhythmic and devote motions, worshipping through dance. She ended her moving prayer kneeling and placing her head reverently on the floor in front of the altar before standing up and backing away.

Part of the original church group that used to hold services at RHAM High School, Billard has been dancing at the Worship Center for years.

"God gave me a dance ministry for church [and] for healing," she said. "God told me a long time ago that there was healing through dance."

The flags that could be seen waving over people's heads during the music are representations of praise and worship, Billard said.

"They represent a lot of different things. Different colors represent different meanings," she said. "There's a scripture that says his banner is love, so when we wave the banner, we're proclaiming his love and inviting his spirit and his presence."

While dancing, Billard waved a white and gold flag made by her friend and fellow parish-

ioner Lisa Yopp. The white on the flag stands for purity and the gold is for the majesty of God and the refining of faith, she said.

Under construction from September 2017 – about one year after the foundation was laid – until this month, the church was the vision of the Rev. Mark Santostefano, Worship Center pastor.

In his sermon Sunday, Santostefano shared the credit.

"This vision that God put in my heart many, many years ago would not have happened if not for three people," he said.

Those people were Ken Sigfridson, builder; Sharon Gonyaw, head of the church design team; and Scott Majek, project manager.

Sigfridson was the eyes of the vision, Santostefano said. The builder was able to take the vision Santostefano had originally scratched on a napkin and see what it really was and could be and then build it.

"I remember the very first day that Sharon and Scott and I came to your office," Santostefano said. "As soon as I met you, there was no doubt that you were going to be the one to build our church."

Gonyaw, who has moved out of state, was the heart of the vision, according to Santostefano.

"Every vision has to have a heart," he said. "It's the work of the heart to make sense of the vision and surely the heart of this is Sharon."

Santostefano described the time Gonyaw spent searching for things like chandeliers and other pieces that grace the well-designed sanctuary.

Majek was the hands of the vision, the pastor said, calling his work "amazing."

"It was God's intention when he created the universe, when he created the stars that they



Krista Billard offers worship in the form of dance at the first service in the Worship Center's new church.

would speak to [people]," Santostefano said. "When we created this building we created it in a way that it should speak to you."

John Rorstrom, who joined the church in 2002, traveled all the way from his current home in New Hampshire to attend the service. He described the architecture of the building as encouraging people "to look and experience the glory of God in the space."

"It's just wonderful to see the vision that they had," he said. "Not only the building but the church itself."

Among parishioners who were "called to speak" during the service was Jessica Boucher. Boucher's grandmother Florence Boucher – who passed away in 2005 – donated the land

on which the church stands. Boucher said she heard her grandmother's voice on her way to the church.

When she was a child and her grandmother told her she wanted to donate land for a church, she did not understand why, she said.

"And this is what she said, 'When I am long gone, they are going to worship my Jesus,'" Boucher said. "Being here today and listening to the worship, I get it. This is the realization of a very long dream."

Billard said she thinks the building of the church is a step toward a spiritual awakening.

"Hebron is a tough town to break through," she said. "There's a big difference between religion and having a relationship with Jesus."

Hebron Schools Chief Floats 2 Percent Budget Increase

by Sloan Brewster

Hebron's Schools Superintendent is asking for \$11.7 million to run the district next year and proposes getting rid of three positions.

At the Dec. 13 Board of Education meeting, Superintendent Timothy Van Tassel presented his proposed budget for the 2019-2020 school year. The proposal represents an increase of \$235,644, or 2.05 percent, over the current year's \$11.4 million budget.

Van Tassel called the proposed budget austere and said it would maintain programs and services, while ensuring students get the academic, social, and emotional opportunities they need to thrive.

To get to those numbers, Van Tassel recommended cutting a classroom teacher, a special education teacher and a paraprofessional. Whenever possible, the reductions would be made through attrition and consolidation but could result in unemployment costs, he said.

The classroom teaching position on the block is a sixth grade teacher, he said. The result would be four sixth grade sections with 22 to 23 students each.

"Each year in sixth grade we do have a

number of students that go to magnet school or private school," he said, adding that if the same proves true next year, class sizes would be lower than projected.

Van Tassel said teachers were already working with the principal on how the sixth grade curriculum will look next year.

Going down to four teachers will increase instructional time in mathematics, he said. The plan also involves joining reading and writing lessons together.

"This will create a 90-minute literacy block, which is one teacher teaching the reading and writing, which is what we want," he said.

Based on school population projections for next year, Van Tassel said he anticipates five kindergarten classes, and the need for an additional teacher in that grade.

Van Tassel recommends cutting a special education teacher, he said. There are 68 special education students this year.

"Caseloads are usually much larger," he said. "We've had the benefit of having smaller caseloads."

While he included reducing a paraprofessional in his recommendation, Van Tassel said there was no guarantee the position would not

be needed.

"The budget recommendation maintains our commitment to excellence while continuing to safeguard the fiscal stability of the Town of Hebron," he said, reading from his budget transmittal letter. "I firmly believe that this represents a modest and responsible budget for the Hebron Board of Education to consider."

Budget drivers are wage and benefit increases, he told the board.

Increases resulting from recently renegotiated collective bargaining agreements include a potential 12 percent rise in insurance costs; a 3.84 percent surge in teacher salaries, plus a 2 percent step increase; a 3 percent increase for administrators and a 3 percent hike for non-affiliated staff. The increase for non-certified staff is yet to be determined.

The district is currently going to bid on a bus contract for next year. Van Tassel said he estimated a 7 percent increase for that.

"My hope is that that would come down significantly," he said.

He also anticipates salary savings, which he said generally come about when someone leaves and is replaced by a new hire with lower

pay.

"There are always salary savings," he said.

Special education outplacements remain an unknown, he said.

Van Tassel said he put nothing under property and equipment but added that it would be nice to replace the art tables at Hebron Elementary at some point.

Membership to the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE) is back in the budget after a prolonged back-and-forth during the planning process for the current budget. Though board members decided to pull out of the association in January, they ultimately restored the membership fee in July using a portion of last year's \$409,000 budget surplus.

Membership to the group - which provides training opportunities, advocacy assistance and support for boards of education - costs \$7,450.

Van Tassel, who pointed out that budget planning begins as early as the day after the budget referendum, said if the administration and board work as a team, they will be able to keep the budget down.

Bevy of Donations Proves Grinch Didn't Steal Christmas in Hebron

by Sloan Brewster

There's no room in town for the Grinch – and the number of donations to a needy family whose gifts were stolen earlier this month proves just how unwelcome he is.

This week, Maria McKeon of Senate Brook Drive collected two huge boxes full of donations for a needy New London family. The boxes, which were located at Something Simple Café, overflowed with wrapped and unwrapped presents, and there were cash donations as well.

"The generosity of the town of Hebron has been overwhelming," McKeon said.

On Dec. 6, after spending the day in court, McKeon, who is a lawyer, received video security footage from her Nest – an in-home security system – of a thief going into her house and taking all the Christmas presents she had bought, and all of her jewelry.

Many of those presents were for a needy New London family that she and her son and daughters had "sort of adopted," McKeon said. McKeon said she had performed free legal services for the family, which included a mother, a newborn baby and three other children aged 10, 5 and 3 – and realized how poor the family was.

McKeon said having her jewelry taken was bad enough, especially since some of the pieces were less valuable and more sentimental, she said. But losing the gifts she had purchased for the other family was a blow.

Jennell Koeling, who lives in the same neighborhood but had never met McKeon, heard about the crime and wanted to help fill the holes left by the gift-stealing burglar. She reached out to Jessica Dapsis, owner of Something Simple Café.

Dapsis was on board and set up a donation box in the café.

Koeling said she took advantage of the opportunity for a learning moment with her 9-year-old daughter Marley Koeling and asked her what was better, giving or receiving.

It turned out Marley didn't need the learning moment after all. Without hesitation she told her mother that giving was better.

Dapsis said the response to the quest for donations for the family was overwhelming. She described presents spilling out on the tables and floor of the café and said included with them was about \$1,000 in cash.

"We had so many donations it was crazy," she said. "It was such a beautiful turnout."

Dapsis attributed the success not only to the generous folks from in and out of town who brought donations but also to McKeon herself.

"A lot of it was Maria and her ability to see past what she went through and support the family," Dapsis said.

When Dapsis had initially approached McKeon asking if she could set up the donation box, McKeon had said it was okay as long as the collection was for the family, Dapsis said.

The burglary is still under investigation, according to State Trooper Josue Dorelus. Troopers have viewed the video footage from the scene and posted it on Facebook.

McKeon described the culprit as having a ponytail, red goatee and wearing surgical gloves and, in some shots, a hood. She also noted that he appeared to be wearing an earpiece, which she wondered if he used to communicate with someone on the outside. The man spent 10 minutes going in and out of her house stealing, according to the timeline on the video, McKeon said.

"I have camera and video footage of him coming in my house," McKeon said. "He lifts his hood up so I have a side view of him."

To view a clip of the footage with a photo of the alleged thief, visit [facebook.com/connecticutstatepolice](https://www.facebook.com/connecticutstatepolice).

Anyone with any tips on the identity of the man in the video can report them to the state police by calling 860-465-5400.



Gift donations for a needy New London family spilled onto the tables and floors at Something Simple Café this week. The donations replaced gifts for the family purchased by Maria McKeon, of Hebron and then stolen by a thief who broke into her Senate Brook Drive home earlier this month.

School Resource Officers Coming to Hebron Elementary Schools?

by Sloan Brewster

As part of its continuing effort to improve school security, the Board of Education is considering installing school resource officers at the elementary schools.

At its meeting last week, the board agreed to hold a public forum before its Jan. 10 meeting to give residents the chance to weigh in on the proposal. It is a matter the board has been discussing in executive session, school board chair Erica Bromley said.

"It warranted some budget discussion of how we felt about it," Bromley said by way of explanation for the private sessions. Superintendent of Schools Timothy Van Tassel said he anticipated installing the part-time officers would add approximately \$76,000 to the budget, effective with the 2019-20 school year.

The board also agreed to survey parents about the proposal; the survey was administered over email to parents later in the week, and by Monday, there had been more than 170 responses, Superintendent of Schools Timothy Van Tassel said, which not just answered the questions in the survey but provided "very helpful questions that will help us to frame what this forum will look like."

The survey will also be made available through the town's Facebook page, he said.

Over the past few years, the board has implemented many measures to enhance security, Van Tassel said, including changes to the way access to schools is granted. Bringing in officers is another step in that direction that the board would like to make.

Van Tassel commended the board for having the discussion.

"Schools are a different environment today," he said. "I greatly appreciate the fact that the board wanted to have an open discussion with the public."

As the proposal now stands, there would be a total of four part-time school resource officers (SROs) at the two schools in the district – Gilead Hill and Hebron Elementary.

"Both schools would have a school resource officer on site all day," Bromley said. "The plan would be to rotate through both schools so [the officers] know the schools and populations."

Van Tassel broke down the \$76,000 cost in a PowerPoint presentation – and emphasized, "these considerations are just the beginning of discussion."

Included in the costs is about \$71,000 for the officers' salaries, broken into an approximate \$18,000 for each. The officers would work just under four hours per day each and make \$26 per hour. The price also includes \$4,000 in addi-

tional costs, namely \$256 per year for Medicare for each officer, \$150 clothing allowances for each and \$1,000 each for weapons – an expense that won't be repeated after the first year.

There would also be professional development costs but Van Tassel did not attach a number to that.

Switching to a two full-time officer program would increase the overall cost to \$122,631, Van Tassel said.

Van Tassel also explained the difference between a school resource officer and a school safety officer (SSO).

The latter is an employee of the Board of Education, and not a sworn police officer, he said. He emphasized some districts, including one where Van Tassel used to work, use them. SSOs are generally retired police officers and the positions are supported and facilitated by the local Department of Safety and the police department. Hebron does not have a police department but rather has three local officers and a resident state trooper from the state police Troop K Colchester barracks – and the state police does not get involved in SSO programs, Van Tassel said.

SROs, meanwhile, are sworn police officers, who are on retirement.

"We are under the belief that this is a very desirable job," Van Tassel said.

An SRO could also direct traffic, which an SSO could not do, meaning the SRO positions would eliminate the need for traffic guards at the school, the superintendent said.

Van Tassel said other things the officers could do in the schools include offering courses or classes on "stranger danger" and giving some sort of drug education course. Van Tassel said the well-known Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE) program must be implemented by the state police, but said the Hebron district could develop its own program. Since the officers would be developing relationships with students, they could also have a presence at after school activities and sports.

Also, Van Tassel said, SROs could assist school officials with verifying students going to Hebron schools were indeed Hebron residents.

The board will not make any decisions about the officers without public input, Van Tassel said.

The forum will take place Thursday, Jan. 10, at 6 p.m., in the activity room at Gilead Hill School. The regular board meeting will follow, during which the board will continue the discussion on the potential officers.

Rocky Won't Be Home for Christmas in Portland

by Elizabeth Regan

Rocky, the Portland dog sentenced to death after an attack on a neighborhood man, remains in limbo while officials wait for proof that his owner's home insurance will cover him if he bites again.

Paul Bell, of Old Marlborough Turnpike, said it doesn't look like his dog will be home for the holidays.

"I don't think Christmas is a viable time-frame," he said. "Although it doesn't matter... I'm not trying to meet some kind of deadline."

The 90-pound pit bull mix has been impounded at the Portland animal control facility under the Arrigoni Bridge for almost three years – ever since Animal Control Officer Karen Perruccio issued a February 2016 kill order stemming from a bite incident.

According to legal documents, resident Stephen Demarest was transported to Middlesex Hospital for wounds to his left ankle, inner leg and upper thigh after he was attacked across the street from Bell's home. Demarest said the dog was unattended and unleashed at the time of the attack.

The kill order was upheld by state Department of Agriculture. Bell and his attorney, animal rights advocate Thom Page, are appealing the kill order through the state Superior Court.

First Selectman Susan Bransfield this week affirmed selectmen's commitment to resolving the issue outside of court.

"We are not going to put the dog down. What we need to do is find the best path here," Bransfield said.

Officials made the decision to walk back the kill order based on a series of negotiations that have been held over the past few months. A judge officially put the case on hold in October to give the parties time to work out the issue on their own.

Bransfield at Wednesday night's Board of Selectmen meeting said the talks have stalled because Bell and Page have not yet provided a homeowner's insurance "certificate."

Town attorney Kari Olson told Page in a Nov. 23 email that scheduling another meeting before the insurance issue is addressed would be "wasting our time and your client's money."

"Once I have proof that any injuries Rocky might cause in the future will be specifically insured under Mr. Bell's insurance policy, then we can resume discussions," Olson wrote.

Bell told the *Rivereast* he provided the homeowner's insurance policy documents to his attorney in early November. But it wasn't until Thursday morning that Page forwarded the information to Olson with a message that he "inadvertently thought the documents had been forwarded" previously.

Page's email included a copy of Bell's current insurance policy through Amica Insurance Company as well as a letter from the company confirming a \$275,000 payout in April to Stephen and Maria Demarest. The settlement was for the victim's physical injuries and his wife's mental pain and suffering.

Page noted the May 30 policy was renewed after the payout.

"The renewal policy is the same policy as before and contains no exceptions or exclusions concerning Rocky," he wrote.

It is unclear if a lack of exclusions meets Olson's criteria for "specific" proof that Rocky



Paul Bell, of Old Marlborough Turnpike, was hoping his dog Rocky would be home for the holidays. The 90-pound pit bull mix has been on death row in the Portland pound since February 2016 for an attack on a passerby that took place across the street from Bell's house, and Bell regularly visits the dog. Against the recommendation of at least one animal trainer, Bell this week finished installing at his home a rail fence covered with coated steel mesh (pictured at right) that he believes will contain his dog.

will be covered if he hurts someone again.

Bransfield said she did not know if the documentation was sufficient; Olson did not respond by press time.

Training the Owner

Another outstanding issue is who will train both dog and owner in order to safely re-introduce Rocky to life outside the pound.

Officials during an Oct. 3 meeting with Bell and Page asked them to provide a plan for how the trainer would work with Bell and how Rocky's home environment would be secured, according to Bransfield.

Bell originally selected Brian Rogers, of Leash on Life LLC, for the job. But the trainer soon determined it was best to "step away" from the case.

The Glastonbury-based trainer said this week that he recommended Rocky be returned to Bell's custody with strict precautions in place. One of the most stringent guidelines was that Bell could not take Rocky off his property for one year unless accompanied by Rogers.

Other recommendations included the installation of a 6-foot vinyl fence with a cement border in Bell's yard.

"This way, Rocky could be home with more space than he has had the last year at the pound," Rogers told the *Rivereast*. "It gives Paul a chance to prove he not only loves Rocky, but he can handle the responsibility of Rocky."

Rogers' reasons for ultimately stepping away from the situation, which were outlined in an Oct. 10 text message sent to Bell and forwarded to Bransfield, included "a lack of respect" he said was shown when Bell scheduled his participation in a meeting with town officials and then canceled five minutes before it was set to begin. He also noted Bell had installed a rail fence instead of the suggested vinyl model with a cement border.

Bell this week said he believes his 5 to 6-foot rail fence, which includes 1.5-inch steel bars drilled 12 inches into the post and 10-12 inches into the ground, is structurally superior

to vinyl fencing. Many of the posts were drilled into ledge with the help of a friend in the construction industry.

Bell affixed coated steel "goat fence" to the rails in order to keep Rocky inside.

"Goats are notorious for escaping out of their pens," Bell said.

The mesh "curls out" onto the ground inside the fenced-in area, according to Bell.

"Rocky can't dig under it. He's not a digger anyway," he said.

Bell chalked up Rogers' concerns about the scheduling issue to miscommunication with his attorney.

Rogers said this week he made the decision not to stay on because he didn't want to be part of a "political and social mess."

He said the real question is whether Bell can be trusted with Rocky.

"His job is to make sure he proves that he understands the magnitude of the town releasing Rocky back into his custody," Rogers said.

Bransfield this week described Rogers' resignation as "quite concerning."

"I felt that Mr. Rogers was highly intelligent and well-spoken in terms of how he would work, not in training Rocky, but rather training the owner in the proper care, development and ongoing work with Rocky," she said.

She noted Rogers met with the victim of the dog attack, whom she said does not want Rocky returned to the neighborhood.

"The reason we're not going to court is because we said we will work together on this once we knew that we had no intention of putting the dog down," Bransfield said. "Our intention is to do the best for all parties, including Rocky – as well as the neighbors, as well as Mr. Bell."

Page in his Thursday morning email told Olson he has spoken with a prospective trainer who is amenable to meeting with officials. The candidate is Michael Shikashio, a Mystic-based animal behaviorist who evaluated Rocky about five months after the attack on Demarest.



Shikashio is one of fewer than 200 certified dog behavior consultants in the world and has been referred by dozens of veterinary practices across New England to address behavior problems in dogs, according to his business website. He told the *Rivereast* this week he works solely with aggression cases.

He reiterated that training is as much for Bell as for Rocky.

"It's a lot of safety management. That's what I always concentrate on," Shikashio said. "[It's] making sure that Paul can manage him well, and of course the behavior modifications are a part of that as well."

Behavior modification refers to a foundation of positive reinforcement trainers use to change undesirable responses in animals, according to Shikashio.

Shikashio's initial recommendations stemming from the 2016 evaluation included home improvements such as the installation of self-closing gates, a secondary barrier to prevent escape if a door is left open, a fence of "sufficient height and strength," and a "Beware of Dog" sign.

He said Rocky must be muzzled and leashed under Bell's control at all times when outside of the fence.

The animal behaviorist this week said he would conduct another evaluation before any training begins, but he is confident Rocky "can and should come home."

"Nothing in his history other than that one incident indicates he can't come home," he said.

But he emphasized the success of the program revolves around Bell.

"Just like any other concept somebody has to learn, whether it's an animal or a power tool, it's a matter of safe handling," he said.

Bell said he's got the fence, he's got the trainer, and he's ready to get his dog back.

"I know I'm getting the dog back. I know I am," he said. "Because I'm not going to give up. It's not an option for me."

Colchester Man Dies in Lebanon Crash

by Allison Lazur

State Police said a 22-year-old Colchester man died on Dec. 14 after his vehicle collided with a rock wall and rolled over, trapping the man in his car.

Police said at approximately 11:43 p.m. Dec. 13, Michael R. Anselmo, 22, of 152 Lake Hayward Rd., was traveling southbound in a Dodge Ram 1500 Quad in the area of 223 Clubhouse Rd., near the intersection with Bascom Road in Lebanon.

Anselmo drove straight into a right curve and overcorrected to the right sliding off the road and into the right shoulder of Clubhouse

Road. The Dodge Ram subsequently struck a rock wall and rolled over, crushing the passenger side portion of the cab.

Police said as a result of the rollover, Anselmo became trapped in the vehicle and was extricated by Lebanon Fire Department and transported by Lebanon EMS to Windham Hospital.

Anselmo was pronounced dead at the hospital at approximately 12:44 a.m., police said.

Anyone with information about this incident is asked to contact Trooper Steven Loiler at 860-465-5400.

Marlborough Police News

12/14: State Police said Angelamarie Faraci, 64, of 122 Jones Hollow Rd., was arrested and charged with sixth-degree larceny for an incident dating back to September. Faraci turned herself into police pursuant to an active arrest warrant.

Obituaries

Colchester

Kyle Edward Ashley

Kyle Edward Ashley, born Sept. 3, 2011, in Hartford, died peacefully at home Tuesday, Dec. 18, surrounded by his loving family after bravely battling osteosarcoma for just over a year.

In addition to his parents, Todd and Marci Ashley, Kyle leaves behind his best buddy and older brother, Jake. He is also survived by his maternal grandfather, William Dale Haslam and his wife, Jo-Anne; his maternal grandmother, "Babcia" Maria Haslam; his "Mimi" Darlene Ashley; his paternal grandmother, Paula Ashley; his aunt, Kimberly and Uncle Trevor Nicholls; his aunt, Carey-Lynn and uncle John LeDoux; his uncle Troy; and his cousins, Taya and Shayla Nicholls, and Austyn and Breanne LeDoux.

He was predeceased by his grandfather, Harry Ashley.

Kyle had a magnetic personality and a smile that could brighten an entire room. He also had an infectious laugh and loved to play practical jokes. He was smart and, despite missing a lot of school, was one of the top readers and math students in his class. He loved building Legos, playing family laser tag, and Nerf gun wars.

Prior to his cancer diagnosis, Kyle was extremely athletic and was the star of his soccer team. When he was four years old, he participated in an eight-mile Tour de Lyme family bike ride. He also earned his junior blue belt in karate. Kyle loved camping with his family and friends in his family camper. He enjoyed traveling, hiking, biking, the beach, and swimming.

Last year, Kyle was diagnosed with bone cancer above his knee after experiencing a slight intermittent limp. He fought his battle with such strength, fortitude, and dignity, having to endure grueling chemotherapy, numerous hospital stays, a radical leg amputation, multiple surgeries, doctor's appointments, physical therapy appointments, and prosthetic appointments. We were in awe of how our superhero handled this journey.

We would like to thank the entire staff at Connecticut Children's Medical Center and staff at Southeast Center for Hospice Care for their wonderful care of our Kyle.

The family will receive guests from 2-4 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 23, at the Aurora-McCarthy Funeral Home, 167 Old Hartford Rd., Colchester. The funeral liturgy will be celebrated at 10 a.m. Monday, Dec. 24, directly at St. Andrew Church, 128 Norwich Ave., Colchester. Burial will be private immediately following Mass.

In lieu of flowers, donations can be made in Kyle's name to CASTLE, 396 Halls Hill Rd., Colchester, CT 06415, Make-A-Wish Connecticut, 126 Monroe Tpke., Trumbull, CT 06611 or the Connecticut Cancer Foundation, 15 North Main St., Old Saybrook, CT 06475.

For online condolences, visit auroramccarthy-funeralhome.com.



Colchester

Lesley Bell-Yockachonis

Lesley Bell-Yockachonis, 69, of Colchester, formerly of Hebron, widow of the late Robert Yockachonis, passed away Wednesday, Dec. 12, at Yale-New Haven Hospital, after a brave battle with cancer.

Born March 23, 1949, in Norwich, she was the daughter of the late John and Gloria (White) Bell. She grew up in Hebron and was a 1967 graduate of RHAM High School and went on to work in human resources for Pratt & Whitney for many years before her retirement.

Lesley was a devoted mother and grandmother that lived for her family. After her retirement, she was always on the move attending her grandkids sporting events, school events and concerts and being babysitter extraordinaire. From trips to Walmart for toys, Burger King for lunch and "can I have one more ice cream sandwich," she ranked above all.

For those that knew Lesley, know that it was rare for her to miss her grandkids' sporting events, especially baseball. Although she was an avid New York Yankee fan, her grandchildren rose above the rest. Her kind-hearted spirit made it easy for people to like her and her spitfire attitude and sense of humor made it hard for people not to love her. Her amazing legacy lives on in her children and grandchildren.

She leaves three children; her daughter, Lesley-Allyson Bell and fiancé Genaro Anselmo III of Hebron; two sons and daughters-in-law, Raymond and Lisa Bell and Derek and Christine Bell, all of Hebron; eight grandchildren, Jack, Addison, Landon, Colby, Cameron, Avery, Ethan and Owen; a sister and brother-in-law, Laura and Wayne Vieu of Vernon; two brothers, John Bell and his partner, Tony Manganello of Tolland, Willie Bell and his wife, Susan of Hebron, and a sister-in-law Lori Bell of Las Vegas, Nev.; and numerous extended family member and friends.

In addition to her husband and parents, she was predeceased by her brother, Bruce Bell.

Graveside services will be observed and announced in the spring of 2019.

In lieu of flowers, donations in her memory may be made to RHAM Youth Baseball, c/o Ed Lavoie, P.O. Box 699, Hebron, CT 06248 or to the Disabled American Veterans (dav.org).

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



Colchester

Frank A. Ozimek

Frank A. Ozimek, 71, of Eau Claire, Wis., died Monday, Dec. 10, at home, after battling a long-term illness. He was born Dec. 17, 1946, in New London, to Frank A. Ozimek and Elise J. Hugins, and was raised in Colchester.

Frank was a veteran of the U.S. Army, where he served five years as an artillery surveyor/instructor at Fort Belvoir, Va., and Bamberg, Germany. He also served a 10-month tour in Vietnam with the 1st Air Cavalry as an aerial forward observer.

He married Theresa A. McLendon of Stony Point, NY, on July 26, 1969. They built a home in Haverstraw, NY, and had two sons. He worked for the U.S. Postal Service, and eventually retired as station master at Grand Central Station in New York City.

He was a voracious reader and home cook who loved listening to music, especially Polka. He spent his free time hunting, fishing and collecting firearms, and took great joy in going up to Barnes, Wis., to the lake. He enjoyed taking to his sons, and, in retirement, his grandsons to Boy Scouts and teaching them about the outdoors. Frank's quick wit and sly sense of humor were matched only by his kind heart and winning charm.

He is survived by his wife of 49 years, Theresa A. Ozimek; two sons, John F. Ozimek (Kathleen) and Andrew J. Ozimek (Jessica); grandsons, Lochlain P. Ozimek and Logan J. Ozimek; sisters, Ceciel Setterstrom (Barry), Lisa Ozimek, and Annemarie Williams (Kevin and son Greg Krach); as well as many in-laws, nieces, nephews, great-nieces and great-nephews.

A memorial Mass will be held at 11 a.m. Friday, Feb. 8, at St. James the Greater Catholic Church, 2502 11th St., Eau Claire, Wis., with the Rev. Tom Krieg officiating. Visitation will be held one hour prior to the Mass at church. Burial will take place following the Mass at the Northern Wisconsin Veterans Memorial Cemetery in Spooner, Wisc.

Donations in his memory may be made to Cragin Memorial Library, 8 Linwood Ave., Colchester, CT 06415.

Chippewa Valley Cremation Services-Celebration of Life Center in Altoona, Wis., is serving the family. To offer online condolences, visit chippewavalleycremation.com.



East Hampton

Alice Carlson

Alice (Hardy) Carlson, 89, of East Hampton, was called home with the Lord, after a lengthy illness, surrounded by family and friends and her caretakers at Cobalt Lodge Healthcare and Rehab.

She was born Aug. 26, 1929, daughter of the late Herman and Lillian Hardy of North Tonawanda, N.Y., where she spent all of her life until recently moving to Connecticut to be with family. She was predeceased by her husband of 50 years, Carmen Carlson, also predeceased by her brothers, Norman, Gerald, and Herman Hardy, Jr. and her sister Delores Jaenecke.

Alice attended schools in Tonawanda, N.Y. and worked at Eddy's bakery, and at a local candy store. She was also a very good hairdresser. Alice was a faithful member for many years at St. Matthews Lutheran Church, North Tonawanda, N.Y., where they raised their family. She loved her family get-togethers and cared about all who touched her life.

She enjoyed her new friends at Greystone Retirement home, Portland, and Cobalt Lodge Healthcare, East Hampton. She felt especially blessed by her new church family at Haddam Neck Covenant Church, East Hampton.

Alice is survived by her sister, Erma VanHise of Riverside, Calif.; children, David Carlson of Jacksonville, Fla., Connie (John) Good of North Tonawanda, N.Y., and Amy and (Charlie) Delosier of East Hampton; grandchildren, Nancy (Timm) Carlson, Kristine, June and Scott Carlson, Melissa Carlson, John (Adri) Good, Alicia (Jason) Holloway, Lindsay (Brendan) Serra, and Laura Delosier; great-grandchildren, Wesley and Sam McKenney, Jaxon and Lilah Holloway, Greyson and Carmen-Marie Good; great-great-grandchildren, Austin and Gabriel McKenney; also several nieces and nephews. Her extended family included Harry and Diana Becker of Jacksonville, Fla.; half-brother Paul Hardy and family, of Pennsylvania; and half-sister Joann Scholes and family of Virginia.

Memorial services are to be held Friday and Saturday, Dec. 21 and 22, at Brunner Funeral Home, North Tonawanda, N.Y.

Alice's family would like to thank Cobalt Lodge Healthcare for the exceptional care that they provided to our mother.



Andover

Craig A. Albert

Craig A. "Skip" Albert, 44, died Thursday, Dec. 13, surrounded by his family and friends at St. Francis Hospital following a brief illness. He was born in Hartford Sept. 12, 1974, to Roger and Yveline (Viel) Albert.

Skip graduated from RHAM High School and worked for Sysco Foods as a national account executive for 20 years. He was united in marriage to Amanda Bothroyd on Sept. 21, 2001.

Skip was a great dad with a magnetic personality who was the life of the party; he loved riding his snowmobile, playing softball, soccer and volleyball. He was an avid Red Sox and New York Giants fan. He was a former soccer coach at RHAM and coached his daughter's softball team. He has touched the hearts of many people in his short life and will be greatly missed.

Craig is survived by his wife, Amanda Albert of Andover; his son, Caleb McMullin of Granby and daughter, Zoe Albert of Andover; his parents, Roger and Yveline Albert of Marlborough; his brother Brian Albert, his wife Kristina and daughter Makenzie of East Haddam.

Calling hours were Wednesday, Dec. 19, followed by a service that night at Belmont Funeral Home, 144 South Main St., Colchester.

In lieu of flowers, donations can be made at www.gofundme.com/support-for-craig-skip-alberts-family.

Visit belmontfh.com to leave condolences to the family.



Colchester

Geraldine C. Stepule

Geraldine "Geri" C. Stepule, devoted wife, mother and grandmother, passed away peacefully in her home Saturday, Dec. 8, surrounded by her loving family. Geri was born Dec. 23, 1939, in Boston, Mass., to the late Eileen Murphy Govoni and late Mario Govoni.

Geri leaves behind her loving husband William Stepule, of 55 years, and two daughters: Shari Gallant of Gloucester, Mass., and Kristi Putorti and husband Mark of Colchester, as well as six wonderful grandchildren who affectionately called her "Gammi": Carey, Matthew, Drew, Nicholas, Leah and Audra.

Geri was predeceased by her brother Edward and his wife Patricia Govoni, and is survived by her two brothers and sisters-in-law, William and Karin Govoni and Peter and Sue Govoni; two sisters and brothers-in-law, Loretta and Dennis Twohig and Marylou and Al Ouellette; her brother-in-law and sister-in-law, Eddie and Norine Stepule; and by her best friend of 61 years, Joyce Phillips.

Geri's many interests included interior design, being on the cutting edge of fashion, boating, beach walks, late night chats over wine and spoiling her grandchildren. Her enthusiasm and friendliness were contagious and everyone who knew her loved her. She will be forever missed.

In lieu of flowers, Geri's wishes were to have donations made to The American Cancer Society in hopes that others might find a cure.

Friends and family members are invited to attend a Celebration of Life Open House to honor Geri Sunday, Dec. 23, from noon-4 p.m., at North Woods Community Clubhouse, 42 Center Court, Colchester, CT 06415.



More Obituaries on Following Page

Colchester

Evelyn Barr

Evelyn (Woike) Barr, 90, of Colchester, beloved wife of John A. Barr, passed away peacefully Sunday, Dec. 2, at Middlesex Hospital, surrounded by her loving family. Born April 10, 1928, in Middletown, she was the daughter of the late Emil and Anna (Appel) Woike. She and John were married June 2, 1951, and settled in Colchester in 1957.

Early on, Evelyn had worked for SNET and in later years had worked for the Colchester Water Department as well as Gerhardt Insurance before her retirement. In her spare time, she was a talented amateur watercolor painter, quilter and knitter. Mrs. Barr was a longtime member of the Colchester Federated Church, where she had served as treasurer and Sunday School superintendent. However, her greatest joy was found in her family.

In addition to her loving husband of 67 years, she leaves her daughter and son-in-law, Debra and Reginald Martin of Colchester; her daughter-in-law, Trudy Barr (and her husband, Maurice Garipey) of Old Lyme; three granddaughters, Bridgette Duvall (and her husband, Shawn), Carolyn Hayward (and her husband, Michael) and Lindsay Barr; a great grandson, Christopher Duvall; her twin sister, Elsie Becker of Middle Haddam; her brother, Earl Woike of Middletown; and numerous extended family and friends.

She was predeceased by her son, John Barr Jr., and four siblings, Ruth Johnson, Gertude Wyer, Esther Woike and Reynolds Woike.

The family would like to extend their heartfelt gratitude to Evelyn's longtime caregivers, Akua and Katrina, who enabled her to stay in her home over her extended illness, as well as the staff of the Middlesex Hospital Hospice and Palliative Care Unit.

The family received guests Wednesday, Dec. 5, at the Aurora-McCarthy Funeral Home, 167 Old Hartford Rd., Colchester. Funeral services were observed Thursday, Dec. 6, directly at Colchester Federated Church, 60 Main St. (on the green), Colchester. Burial will follow in Linwood Cemetery, Colchester.

In lieu of flowers, donations in her memory may be made to the Colchester Federated Church, 60 Main St., Colchester.

For online condolences, visit auroramccarthyfuneralhome.com.

Colchester

Richard Stephenson Sr.

Richard "Dick" Stephenson Sr., 76, of Salem, formerly of Colchester, beloved husband of Virginia "Ginny" (Day) Stephenson, passed away unexpectedly Saturday, Dec. 15, with his beloved family by his side. Born July 9, 1942, in Pawtucket, R.I., he was the son of the late Gifford and Nellie (Wheatly) Stephenson.

Dick studied at both Bacon Academy in Colchester and Norwich Tech. After 40 years with Local 33 as a heat and frost insulator, he was part of the maintenance crew at Fox Hopyard in East Haddam for the past 10 years.

Dick was a member of the Salem Lions, B.P.O.E. in Groton and had coached baseball and Little League in Salem for many years. In his spare time, Dick enjoyed playing guitar with his friends and was an avid sports fan.

In addition to his loving wife of 58 years, he leaves four children, Richard Jr. and his wife Michelle of Salem, Robin Surprenant and her husband Scott of Oakdale, Michael and his wife Karen of Summerville, S.C., and Raymond of Colchester; his beloved niece, Wendy Warner and her husband George of Mystic; 10 grandchildren, Robert, Elizabeth, Brandon, Jonathan, Nathaniel, Micah-Ann, Luke, Ashley, Christopher and Daniel; one great-granddaughter, Ella; two siblings, Robert and wife Marsha of Cumberland, R.I., and Raymond of Providence, R.I.; and numerous extended family members and friends.

The family will receive guests from 4-7 p.m. today, Dec. 21, at the Aurora-McCarthy Funeral Home, 167 Old Hartford Rd., Colchester. A Celebration of his Life will be observed at 6:30 p.m. Burial will be private.

For online condolences, visit auroramccarthyfuneralhome.com.

Marlborough

Kathleen Larensen

Kathleen (Duffy) Larensen, 75, of Marlborough, wife of John E. Larensen III, died Wednesday, Dec. 19, at Middlesex Hospital, surrounded by her loving family. She was born Oct. 3, 1943, in Hartford, daughter of the late Joseph Gannon Duffy and Mary Abigail Murphy.



Kathy graduated from Weaver High School in 1961 and worked for the MDC in Hartford and Liberty Bank in Colchester. Kathy was married to John for 50 years and they lived three years in Hartford, four years in Windsor and 43 years in Marlborough. She enjoyed traveling around Europe, in South America, to Africa, North America and many islands. As a very accomplished cook, she entertained family and friends with dinner parties, card parties, holiday events, special occasions and summer gatherings around the swimming pool.

Kathy was devoted to her children and most recently to her grandchildren. She volunteered at the Marlborough Food Bank, the St. John Fisher CCD staff and bingo workers, was president of the Marlborough Lioness Club, assisted with the Girl Scout Troop, was active in the PTO and donated many gallons of blood to the Red Cross. Her social life included friends from Mahjong, former work colleagues and members of her high school sorority.

In addition to her husband John, Kathy is survived by a son, Keith Edward Larensen and his wife Kim of Salem, and a daughter, Kristin Marie Lagana and her husband Salvatore of Middletown; her grandchildren Meaghan, Gabrielle, John, Kasey, Alyssa, Sebastian and Anthony; her siblings, Joseph Thomas Duffy and his wife Carol, of Oldsmar, Fla., and Mariellen Cole of Saunterstown, R.I.; and several nephews and a niece.

A Mass of Christian Burial will be celebrated Saturday, Dec. 22, at 11 a.m., in St. John Fisher Church, 30 Jones Hollow Rd., Marlborough. Burial will follow in Marlboro Cemetery. Friends may call at the Mulryan Funeral Home, 725 Hebron Ave., Glastonbury, today, Dec. 21, from 4-8 p.m.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to St. Jude Children's Hospital, 262 Danny Thomas Place, Memphis, TN, 38105.

For online condolences, visit mulryanfh.com.

From the Editor's Desk

Observations & Ruminations

by Mike Thompson

When Melissa Ziobron – somewhat surprisingly, in my opinion – lost her bid for state senate last month, it meant that, once her term as the state representative for East Hampton, East Haddam and part of Colchester ended in January, she'd be out of a job. I figured, however, that she'd land on her feet. She's too smart of a person, and too much of a go-getter, not to.

And, sure enough, she landed on her feet pretty quickly.

The *CT Mirror* reported last week that Senate minority leader Len Fasano has named Melissa the new budget director for the Senate Republican Caucus.

It's a nice position for Melissa, who's been the top-ranking House Republican on the Appropriations Committee for the past four years.

"We are very excited to welcome Melissa Ziobron to the Senate Republican Office where she will serve as budget director," Fasano said, according to the *Mirror*. He added that Melissa "has demonstrated incredible work ethic and deep knowledge of the state's finances. She knows the state budget inside and out and understands a budget is more than just numbers — every part of a budget impacts people."

Also, the *Mirror* reported, Fasano called Melissa a "major force" behind the bipartisan agreement that ended a 2017 state budget debate that lasted nine months.

"As we look ahead to tackling bigger financial issues on the horizon, Melissa is the perfect candidate to assist our caucus in our efforts to move Connecticut in a new direction and bring confidence back to our state," Fasano said, according to the *Mirror*.

Congratulations, Melissa. I know you didn't get the senate seat you wanted, but this is pretty great in its own right. Like I said, I knew things would work out for you, and I'm glad they have.

If, like me, you've long since stopped having a use for the old-fashioned phone book — you know, those big fat things full of numbers — and simply do your looking up of phone numbers via Google and other Internet sources, this news may be for you.

You can now opt out of having the Greater Hartford directory and Yellow Pages book delivered.

An email I recently received at work explained how to do this. Go to YellowPagesOptOut.com, the official site that the Yellow Pages industry provides at no cost to users, cities and states. It is a free and secure way to limit or stop home delivery of telephone directories. According to the email I received — which came from the Town of Marlborough — data submitted will never be used for marketing purposes and never be given to third parties.

Residents have until Feb. 1, 2019 to opt out of the upcoming Greater Hartford directory.

Boy, do I wish that Cleveland radio station hadn't been such a blabbermouth.

Radio station Star 102 worked its way into the national headlines late last month when it announced it was yanking the 1940s Christmas chestnut "Baby It's Cold Outside" from its airwaves. The station said it had received some listener complaints, saying the lyrics of the song simply aren't appropriate in 2018, so it was giving the song a rest.

That led to huge backlash from conservative folks screaming that this was just the latest example of a politically-correct culture gone haywire, that people are too easily offended and they need to toughen up. The backlash reached epically stupid (and, really, epically offensive if you understand why people don't like the song) proportions on Sunday, when a Kentucky radio station WAKY decided to play different versions of the song for *two hours straight*.

And the thing is, if Star 102 hadn't proudly boasted about their decision to pull the song off the air, would anyone in Cleveland really have noticed? I mean, for practically the entire month I've been listening to Christmas music every time I'm in my car, and it didn't occur to me until Monday afternoon that I have yet to hear "We Need a Little Christmas." Maybe it's coincidence; maybe it's being played on those occasions I'm not in my car. Perhaps that's what folks in Cleveland would've thought — again, if they'd even no-

ted at all. There's no shortage of well-known Christmas music out there.

But, no, Star 102 wanted the press, or the liberal brownie points, or whatever, so they put their playlist news out there and, predictably, the pearl-clutchers launched their "what's the world coming to?" cries, reaching their crescendo with that stupid Kentucky stunt.

Now, in the interest of full disclosure, I personally don't feel particularly strongly either way about the song. Like most of you, I'd imagine, I'd been listening to the song as far back as I could remember, whenever it would pop up on radio station playlists at Christmas time. It always struck me as a pleasant enough, if slightly redundant, holiday trifle.

But about 10-15 years ago, my brother pointed out that, if you listen to the lyrics, the song is definitely a little creepy. A little date rape-y. I took a closer listen and, yeah, he was right. In the last year or two, as the #MeToo movement really gained traction and women began gaining long-overdue recognition and validation of their past abuses and harassments by men, the creepiness of the song really started to become noticeable.

I mean, look at the line "The answer is 'no,'" which the man quickly rebuffs by saying "But baby, it's cold outside." Also, I think Bill Cosby has permanently ruined the line "What's in this drink?"

And I'm fortunate to have never had a "no" reply not be taken seriously, or to have ever had something slipped into my drink. But unfortunately, there are plenty of women one or both things have happened to, and for whom "Baby It's Cold Outside" isn't a pleasant listen at all.

Yes, I've heard all the defenses in recent weeks about how the song was written in the 1940s, and should be taken in the context of the world back then, and that it was innocent fun and not at all written to be creepy. I fully believe that's true — but it doesn't necessarily mean the song is fine for 2018. Lots of things were accepted in their original context and environment but are now considered off-limits today. Heck, in those same 1940s, one of the most popular radio shows on the air was *Amos n' Andy*, which starred two white actors as two buffoonish black caricatures. That series wouldn't have a chance of being broadcast today, and rightly so.

So if anyone is offended by the song, it's completely understandable. No matter what the intentions were when the song was originally written, to modern ears every single line is the woman wanting to leave and the man coercing her to stay. It's easy to see how people wouldn't want to listen to it. Frankly, it's what made that Kentucky marathon stunt of the song not just insipid but mean. If you understand why people might be hurt by the song, why do you want to rub their noses in it like that?

Look, even if every radio station in the country pulled "Baby It's Cold Outside" — and I have yet to hear of any American stations following Star 102's lead — there would continue to be avenues through which to hear it. Nobody's destroying any master copies of the song or anything like that.

It's a shame the whole thing over "Baby It's Cold Outside" devolved into another conservatives vs. liberals battle, because it's made it difficult to sit down and have an actual conversation about the song and its lyrics and the world of 1944 vs. the world of 2018 — and that could be a beneficial conversation to have.

Again, I can't help but wonder: if an announcement weren't made about pulling the song, if Star 102 had just quietly removed it from the playlist, would anyone have noticed?

Speaking of Christmas, as you may have noticed, it's coming up next week. As has been the case in the past, the *Rivereast* offices are going to be closed that week and there will be no issue next Friday (Dec. 28).

We will open again on Monday, Dec. 31. However, the paper will be closed the very next day, Jan. 1, for New Year's. Therefore, there will be an early deadline for that week's issue (dated Jan. 4). All copy — including letters to the editor, event listings and press releases — must be submitted to the paper by noon Monday, Dec. 31. No exceptions will be made.

Happy holidays from all of us at the *Rivereast*.

See you next year.