

RIVEREAST

# News Bulletin

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**Fire Destroys Home...** An early morning fire ripped through a Middle Haddam home Saturday, leaving only the chimney standing. An excavator was brought in later the same day to knock down the last vestige of the 1735 house. See related story on page 9. Photo courtesy of Portland Fire Department.

## Approval Paves Way for 'New Elmcrest'

by Elizabeth Regan

The Portland Planning and Zoning Commission last week unanimously approved a special permit for the construction of a mixed-use development on the site of the former Elmcrest Hospital property, paving the way for the next critical step in the process: approval by the Office of the State Traffic Administration.

Property owner Fred Hassan said after the Feb. 1 meeting that work is just beginning.

"I hope it doesn't take us 10 years to build it," Hassan said. "It took us 10 years to approve it."

After Hassan shook the hand of each member of the commission, he spoke with Portland Economic Development consultant Mary Dickerson.

"It's all moving forward from here," Dickerson told Hassan. "Thank you, because you stuck with us for a lot of years."

The 15-acre property has been languishing on the corner of routes 66 and 17A since the Rushford Center stopped providing outpatient addiction treatment at the site more than a decade ago.

The special permit was approved by all five commission members with a 12-page resolution laying out a host of conditions. The document covers issues ranging from historic preservation to traffic.

The project is spearheaded by Danbury-based developer Dan Bertram of BRT General Corporation. He is working with the DiMarco Group of Rochester, N.Y., under the name BRT DiMarco PPT.

The Brainerd Place development is named after the 1852 Brainerd House located at the entrance to the site. The Italianate villa will be restored and repurposed as a clubhouse for 238

apartments. The plan also features 108,510 square feet of commercial space and includes preservation of three federally-recognized historic houses on the site.

Included in the commission's conditions is the requirement that the Brainerd House, the 1884 Sage House and the 1830 Hart-Jarvis House be preserved in "substantial conformance" with the U.S. Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties. The guidelines are a set of best practices to ensure old properties are effectively rehabilitated.

The rehabilitation of the properties is described as "an integral part" of the approval, which specifies that "preservation and reuse of the buildings is required for the applicant to receive approval for the 240 residential units."

Bertram said construction cannot begin until the state approves a traffic mitigation plan, which will ultimately allow the town to sign off on a building permit.

State Department of Transportation spokesman Kevin Nursick said this week the developer submitted "part" of a traffic mitigation plan to the Office of State Traffic Administration in November. The state responded with comments in December, but has not yet heard back from Bertram's team, according to Nursick.

Nursick did not supply a copy of the comments by press time.

The developer's plan contemplates a traffic light in front of the Marlborough Street entrance and a driveway on Main Street next to the Gulf gas station that can be accessed with a right turn only.

Once a full traffic mitigation plan is submitted, See Elmcrest page 2

## 'The Wizard of Oz' Takes Flight in Colchester

by Julianna Roche

Cackling with a broomstick in hand, the Wicked Witch of the West flies in from stage right, hovering above the ground while she devises the perfect plan for stealing Dorothy's magic ruby red slippers.

"Something with poison in it I think," she screeches. "With poison in it, but attractive to the eye – and soothing to the smell. Poppies! Poppies! Poppies!"

During an evening rehearsal for Colchester Community Theatre's (CCT's) upcoming production of *The Wizard of Oz*, CCT president Diane Ozmun, who also plays the Wicked Witch, runs through the scene several times while she works on remembering her lines, choreography, and for the first time in the community theatre group's history – how to fly.

In celebration of the theater company's 20th year, *The Wizard of Oz* – which hits the Bacon Academy stage next weekend – will feature "flying" actors with help from ZFX Flying Effects, which bills itself as "the largest flying effects service provider in the world," whose

flying directors and producers teach in-house flying effects techniques using wires and custom-built harness fabrications, as well as assist productions with custom choreography.

CCT put on *The Wizard of Oz* once before in 2005, but for director Wallis Johnson, who also serves as CCT's vice president, the special flying effects will take the production to a whole new level.

"We wanted to do a show that had a lot of appeal and a show where we could get as many cast members of varying ages on stage for our 20th anniversary," she said, adding that actor ages range from 5- and 6-year-olds playing Munchkins to 63-year-old Bob McGowan of West Hartford, who plays the Wizard.

The tale of *The Wizard of Oz* is one that has captured audiences for generations and tells the story of a Kansas farm girl named Dorothy, who travels over the rainbow and discovers the magical power of home.

Both newcomers and CCT veterans make up the cast, according to Johnson, including Rich-

ard Gallaher of Colchester, who has returned to play the Tin Man for the second time. (The first was in CCT's 2005 production of *The Wizard of Oz*.)

Johnson "tries to outdo herself every year," Gallaher said of the director, adding that of all the special effects CCT has used in past productions – including a sinking ship for *Titanic* in 2011, which "sunk" into the stage a few degrees in every scene – "the flying" is by far the best.

CCT "is just really professional," he said. "I don't know how many times people have come up to me and said 'I saw this [same] off-Broadway show and you guys were better, but I only paid \$12 rather than \$55.'"

Another returning CCT member is Jason Sedgwick of Colchester playing the Scarecrow. He started acting with the group at age 9 and will celebrate his 25th birthday on opening night, Friday, Feb. 16.

Other main actors include Colleen Kaplan as Aunt Em, Ron Goldstein as Uncle Henry,

Melvin Swinton as the Lion, and Kristina Pugatch as Glinda the Good Witch.

The lead role of Dorothy will be played by CCT first-timer Cecilia Stallone, a high school senior from Coventry who started dancing at age three and performing in children's theater groups at age 8.

"Since I was a little girl, I have always wanted to play Dorothy," she explained, adding with a laugh that as an 8-year-old she had the opportunity to be in a production of *The Wizard of Oz*, but opted out because "being a little girl, I was scared of the Wicked Witch."

Playing the role for the first time as an adult, however, Stallone said she loves "working with fellow cast members" and that the show itself has "a lot of fun components" – including over 30 children playing Munchkins, a "real, live dog" named Sadie, the small terrier playing Toto, and a professional flying company which "is adding a whole new component" to the production.

See 'The Wizard of Oz' page 2

**Elmcrest cont. from Front Page**

ted, it takes up to 60 days for the agency to approve the plan or submit modifications.

Meanwhile, Bertram said marketing efforts will go into full swing to attract commercial tenants as architectural designs are refined and construction documents are drafted.

Dickerson told reporters preliminary site work is likely to begin in the spring with such tasks as removing underground oil tanks, wrapping significant trees that will remain on the property, and cataloguing the historic houses slated to be saved in order to determine what's there and what will need to be done to preserve them.

One of the three historic houses, the Hart-Jarvis House, has been identified for relocation to the southwest corner of the site facing Main Street.

Elwin Guild, the Economic Development Commission chairman and grassroots advocate for the revitalization of the property, is in the process of forming a nonprofit venture to move the house and stabilize it. He said this week the project will cost roughly \$1 million, with about \$100,000 of the cost going toward relocation of the grand, four-columned house.

The timeline for relocation hinges on the approval of the traffic mitigation plan, according to Guild.

"We're not going to move it until we're certain it needs to be moved," he said.

Relocating the house is another condition included in the commission's resolution authorizing the special permit. It specifies Bertram will sell the house with the requirement that it be moved and renovated according to the secretary of the interior's standards.

"We haven't fully negotiated the terms of that purchase," Guild said.

Bertram last week described the negotiations as "a game of hot potato," adding that the potato is in Guild's hands now.

Bertram said the parties have until the traffic plan is authorized by the state traffic administration to get the issue "worked out."

**More Than 10 Years in the Making**

The commission's approval of the special permit, which was met with a loud round of applause from the roughly dozen audience members last Thursday night, came almost a decade after the commission authorized a doomed, commercial-heavy proposal from another developer back in 2009.

The original mixed-use development would have had 149,127 square feet of commercial space and 82 housing units if its anchor supermarket tenant didn't escape to East Hampton and if the economy didn't take a nosedive.

Bertram's involvement in town goes back to 2015, when both he and Hassan served on the Vibrant Community Initiative (VCI) steering committee to determine the best use for the property as part of a grant funded study.

The VCI report, published by the Boston-based planning and design firm The Cecil Group, recommended a mix of residential and business construction laid out around the site's

three most historically significant buildings. It also specified the town should explore zoning changes, including an increase in residential units, as a way to support the community's shared vision for the property.

What followed was several years of often-contentious debate – in front of public officials ranging from the Planning and Zoning Commission to the Board of Selectmen to the Economic Development Commission – as interested parties discussed how many apartments should be allowed, how many historic houses should be saved, and how much of the property tax bill should be forgiven.

There were times Bertram threatened to walk away and times he threatened to build as many as 532 housing units under the state's affordable housing statute.

Alternate Planning and Zoning Commission member Michael Woronoff, who has been adamant all along that the development includes too many apartments, said this week he still thinks the residential-heavy project is wrong for the town.

He added, however, that the approval does more than recently-revised zoning regulations and the tax abatement agreement to protect the historic homes from destruction.

"If you agree with that many units, the [commissioners] did a great job protecting themselves with those conditions," he said.

The commission in 2016 approved a change to mixed-use zoning regulations to allow a developer to build more apartments than allowed previously – but only if the proposal incorporates "the preservation of significant historic resources identified in the town's Plan of Conservation and Development."

Woronoff has maintained there's no definition for "preservation" in the regulations, which leaves a developer with wide discretion in carrying out the requirement.

First Selectwoman Susan Bransfield said last week the development has been "vetted very well" over the past few years.

She applauded Bertram, Hassan and the Planning and Zoning Commission for getting the plan to its current stage. She also expressed pride in the extensive grassroots network that has been advocating for the revitalization of the property all along.

"I think we're going to have a wonderful signature project in our town as you come over the bridge and you turn east toward Route 66," Bransfield said.

She noted the project will bring more tax revenue, more jobs, more shops "and, certainly, more places for people to live."

She also spoke to the significance of the property, which opened as a psychiatric hospital in 1942.

It's been known as "Elmcrest" ever since then – even after it was sold to Saint Francis Hospital and then to a group of investors that included Hassan.

"We look forward to seeing the new Elmcrest, which is Brainerd Place," Bransfield said.

**'The Wizard of Oz' cont. from Front Page**

"I just think audiences will really connect with the story," she said. "It's timeless and I think people young and old alike will enjoy it."

Johnson said Stallone "was perfect" for the part.

"In her audition, it was just her voice that was beautiful. Her character is innocent and she is just believable, she really is," the director added. "As an actor, the only way I can describe her is that she carries herself with grace. She's polite and kind at all times. She's just good [and] a wonderful, young woman."

With a talented cast and fabulous special effects, Johnson said she expects CCT's second rendition of *The Wizard of Oz* will be a hit.

"We wanted to make this as special as possible," she said, adding that hitting the 20-year mark as CCT is also very sentimental since she remembers "the exact moment" nearly 21 years ago when she and a few fellow thespians decided to start the theater company.

Johnson explained that CCT's first production in 1999, *Carousel*, drew in a total of 300 attendees – compared to today where its shows regularly pull in 2,000 to 2,400 people over a single weekend.

"I get very, very choked up talking about it. It's a very emotional thing for me," she said. "It really is a dream come true."

\* \* \*

Performance dates are Friday, Feb. 16 and Saturday, Feb. 17 at 2 and 7 p.m., and Sunday, Feb. 18 at 2 p.m. at Bacon Academy High School Auditorium, 611 Norwich Ave. in Colchester.

Tickets are \$15 for adults and \$12 for seniors and children age 12 and under. Preferred-seating tickets (a maximum of 50 at each performance) are also available, for \$25 each. Preferred-seating ticketholders will be asked to arrive at least a half hour before performance times, in order to obtain seats before the general audience. Seating for the general audience will take place 20 to 30 minutes before the performance time.

Tickets can be purchased online (credit card only) through Feb. 15; a link to purchase tick-



**The Wicked Witch of the West, played by Colchester Community Theatre President Diane Ozmun, takes "flying lessons" from ZFX Flying's flying director MarKeith Scott during a rehearsal for the theater group's production of *The Wizard of Oz*, which runs Friday, Feb. 16 through Sunday, Feb. 18 at the Bacon Academy High School Auditorium.**

ets is at [colchestercommunitytheatre.com](http://colchestercommunitytheatre.com). Tickets are also available (cash and check only) at Copies Plus...more, located at 21 Halls Hill Rd. in Colchester, and will be sold at the door, subject to availability. Advanced ticket purchase is recommended, CCT said, and all ticket sales are final – no refunds or exchanges.

# Marlborough Grand List Sees Tiny Increase

by Julianna Roche

Marlborough's 2017 Grand List increased by just .08 percent, or \$471,450, over the 2016 list – bringing the net total to \$581,411,040.

The list – which represents the net value of assessed real estate, personal property and motor vehicles in town – saw an increase only in the real estate category. That category climbed \$1,307,320, or .25 percent, amounting to a total of \$516,880,840.

According to Tax Assessor Marie Hall, while real estate did increase in 2017, growth was negatively influenced mainly by losing a user on the cell tower located at 43 N. Main. St., the consolidation of several lots, and the demolition of several buildings, including 5 East Hampton Rd., which was done in preparation for the construction of the Big Y this year.

Documents provided by Hall also stated that five taxpayers in town classified their land in the Public Act 490 Farm or Forest classification in 2017, which resulted in a \$770,000 de-

crease in assessment.

According to state law, Public Act 490 allows farms, forest, and open space land to be assessed at its use value rather than its fair market or highest and best use value – as determined by the property's most recent fair market value revaluation – for purposes of local property taxation. Without the lower use value assessment, most land owners would have to sell the land because they would not be able to afford the property taxes on farm, forest, or open space land.

Personal property decreased by 1.47 percent in 2017, dropping from \$11,727,850 to \$11,555,470, while motor vehicle assessments declined by 1.24 percent from \$53,638,220 to \$52,974,730.

According to documents provided by Hall, there were 17 personal property accounts lost and 157 motor vehicle accounts lost over the last year – which she states “is consistent in

other towns as well.”

The Grand List is used by the Board of Finance to help set the mill rate for the upcoming fiscal year. The mill rate, in turn, helps determine residents' taxes; a resident can determine their taxes by multiplying the mill rate by their total assessments. One mill is equal to \$1 in tax per \$1,000 of assessed property and under the current rate of 34.15 mills, a resident with a home assessed at \$250,000 would pay approximately \$8,537 in taxes on it.

The top 15 assessments in the 2017 Grand List included Connecticut Light & Power (now known as Eversource) at \$5,450,910; Schwartz Properties at \$3,636,850; Both, LLC at \$3,216,220; Milborough Health Care Realty, Co. at \$2,791,810; Mary C. Soleau at \$2,077,990; Leandra Knes & BFFE, LLC at \$2,007,720; C&B Marlborough Assoc., LLC at \$1,166,550; Country Barn Properties, LLC at \$1,147,580; Known Litigation Holdings,

LLC at \$986,440; TKS Holdings, LLC at \$880,390; Douglas A. and Nathalie D. Thibodeau at \$880,190; Tamara M. and Bryan T. Morytko at \$820,720; Richard R. and Carrie (Fuller) McMahon at \$771,470; Toyota Lease Trust at \$761,590; and Peter B. and Michele B. Conlon at \$750,260.

\* \* \*

If taxpayers are unhappy with their appraisal, they can appeal them in front of the Board of Assessment Appeals. The deadline to apply for an appeal is Feb. 20, with appeals taking place in March and all decisions expected to be made by the end of the month.

Appeal forms can be found online at [tinyurl.com/ybwxg7ba](http://tinyurl.com/ybwxg7ba) under “Board of Assessment Appeals Form” or in the Assessor's Office in Town Hall. Applications should then be sent to Board of Assessment Appeals, P.O. Box 29, 26 N. Main St., Marlborough, CT 06447.

## Andover Grand List Grows .9 Percent

by Sloan Brewster

With a .9 percent hike, the grand list is inching along.

The narrow increase on the 2017 list comes one year after a 3 percent drop following the 2016 revaluation.

A revaluation, which is completed every five years per state law, looks at property values based on market trends, said Board of Finance Chairman Dan Warren.

“The trend has been every five years the grand list has taken a pretty significant hit because of deteriorating property values and market trends,” he said.

The revaluation sets a baseline and the numbers are expected to go up the next year, Warren said.

“The improvement we saw this year was the result of new construction or improvements on properties,” he said.

At \$259.33 million, the 2017 grand list is \$2.23 million more than 2016's \$257.09 mil-

lion.

Real estate went up by \$1.67 million to \$225 million from last year's \$223.34 million. Personal property increased by \$204,000 to \$6.98 million from \$6.78 million.

The Board of Finance uses the grand list to help set the mill rate for the upcoming fiscal year by dividing the town's budget by the grand list total.

Residents' taxes are calculated based on \$1 per \$1,000 of assessed property. The mill rate for the 2016 grand list was 32.50. According to Assessor John Chaponis, a property worth \$200,000 would be assessed at 70 percent of that or \$140,000, and the tax bill for the property would be \$4,550.

Whispering Hill LLC takes the top on the top 10 taxpayer list, with an assessment of \$1.30 million, followed by Marita LLC at \$971,100. In third is Eastern Connecticut Housing Organization at \$780,300.

In the number four slot is 84 Route Six LLC with an assessed value of \$765,600. Next is Hillside Self Storage Center LLC at \$654,000. Robert W. and Sandra L. Beering at \$601,400 are sixth. Kenneth R. and Katherine Marcia are next at \$589,300. In eighth, is Andover Plaza LLC at \$526,100. In ninth, is Pamela B. Hatem at \$516,500 and in 10th is Abby G. and James L. Cole at \$506,600.

In personal property, the top 10 taxpayers are Connecticut Light & Power, known as Eversource with a \$4.23 million assessment; Algonquin Gas Transmission LLC at \$484,520; Scott Electrocrafts, Inc. at \$404,960; Sprint Spectrum LP at \$277,100; AT&T Mobility LLC at \$133,420; Andover Landscaping LLC at \$106,820; Drake Petroleum Co. Inc. at \$105,280; Cellco Partnership at \$95,620; ICA Donuts LLC at \$68,480; and Ronald Bisson at \$62,970.

Town Administrator Joseph Higgins said the grand list increase was in the “normal” range – but Warren said it speaks to “ever-eroding” town growth.

“Everyone in town should know that without a concerted effort on the part of the town to encourage nonresidential growth, this is the trend that we're going to be seeing,” Warren said. “If we don't grow and develop the town to increase our grand list, if we don't make our town look attractive to people that are going to grow the grand list, we're still going to be on the same trajectory, which is slow erosion.”

Without growth, the mill rate will continue to go up and property owners will pay increasingly high taxes, he said.

Warren said it is an issue some folks in town are working on and that he hopes the Long Term Planning Committee will also take on the issue.

## Hebron Grand List Climbs Less Than 1 Percent

by Sloan Brewster

Hebron's 2017 Grand List came in with a .763 percent increase over 2016.

At last Thursday's Board of Selectmen meeting, Tax Assessor Debra Gernhardt presented the grand list, stating that it went up from the previous year's net total of \$755.06 million to \$760.82 million, a \$5.7 million climb.

“At least it's going in the right direction,” Town Manager Andrew Tierney said. “I wish it were a bigger bump up but we're already seeing growth in this year's.”

The bump actually gets even smaller when adjustments are made for tax-exempt properties: \$341,670 for properties with crumbling foundations, and \$2.64 million for Colebrook Village, a senior living facility under construction. These reductions put the total taxable amount at \$757.84 million, a \$2.78 million or .367 percent increase, Gerhardt said.

In a phone call Tuesday, Gernhardt explained the reductions.

Public Act 16-45 allows individuals with crumbling foundations to have their assessments reduced for up to five years, she said. The amount of the reduction depends on the severity of the crumbling foundation.

Gerhardt followed the reduction recommendations issued by the Capitol Region Council of Governments (CRCOG).

CRCOG's guidelines, which are available online at [crog.org/crumbling-foundations](http://crog.org/crumbling-foundations), suggest a 20 percent reduction for foundations deemed defective through petrographic analysis but with no noticeable signs of problems. For foundations with minor degradation, with no repair required, a 60 percent reduction is

advised. For foundations with minor to moderate degradation with repair recommended, the reduction would be 75 percent. For foundations with moderate to severe degradation requiring significant repair, 90 percent reductions would be applied. For foundations with severe degradation and imminent threat of failure, the discount would be 100 percent off the building's value.

There are potentially 36 towns that have homes affected with crumbling foundations, according to the CRCOG website.

In Hebron, “there are three properties that are effected,” Gerhardt said. “Tolland and Vernon have hundreds of those.”

Homeowners with crumbling foundations get the reductions if they provide an engineer's report at inspection, Gerhardt said. Should they have repairs completed within five years, Gerhardt will do a reassessment then. Otherwise, the assessment will be redone upon the five year deadline.

According to the Connecticut Department of Consumer Protection's website, concrete aggregate from Becker's Quarry in Willington containing more than trace amounts of pyrrhotite was the source of the problem.

The mineral was affected by moisture and water, causing the foundations to fail, Gerhardt said. Some of the buildings with the defects have even been condemned.

The other reduction in the grand list was due to a five-year tax exemption by the Board of Selectmen for Colebrook Village or Hebron Senior Living LLC., which is being built by

Optimus Senior Management, Gerhardt said. This year, the management company gets a 100 percent exemption. Next year, the company's taxes for the facility will be slashed by 80 percent. For the 2019 assessment, it will get 60 percent off. For 2020, it will get a 40 percent decrease and for 2021, it will get a 20 percent cut.

This year, the assessment amount for the property represents unfinished construction as it is still being built.

“It's just barely a shell,” Gerhardt said of the development.

The company has slated May 1 for the opening of the facility, at which time Gerhardt will make a final assessment.

Before the adjustments, real estate went up from \$664.57 million to \$669.34 million, a \$4.77 million, or .71 percent, increase.

“There are a few new houses being built, a few for next year,” Gerhardt told selectmen.

Personal property went from \$15.71 million to \$16.22 million, a \$500,230 or 3.18 percent increase.

The Board of Finance uses the grand list to help set the mill rate for the upcoming fiscal year by dividing the town's budget by the grand list total.

Residents' taxes are calculated based on \$1 per \$1,000 of assessed property. The mill rate for the 2016 grand list was 37. According to Gerhardt, a property worth \$200,000 would be assessed at 70 percent of that, or \$140,000, and the tax bill for the property would be \$5,180.

Though the company won't be paying any-

thing this year due to the 100 percent exemption, Hebron Senior Living tops off the top 10 real estate taxpayer list with a \$2.64 million assessment and, according to Gerhardt, bumped somebody off the bottom of the list.

Hebron Lincoln LLC takes second at \$2.45 million. In third, is Village Shoppes LLC, at \$1.84 million.

Next comes Hebron Country Manor LLC, at \$1.81 million. Hebron Properties LLC, is the fifth highest taxpayer with a \$1.51 million assessment. In sixth place, is 41-61 Main Street LLC at \$1.31 million. Blackledge Country Club Inc. comes in seventh with an assessment of \$1.19 million. With an assessment of \$1 million, Grayville Estates of Hebron LLC is next. Edward A & Renee J. Ellis is the ninth top payer with an assessment of \$911,460; and in tenth, is Foothills Farm Inc., with an \$849,270 assessment.

The top three personal property tax payers are Connecticut Light & Power, known as Eversource, assessed at \$8.77 million; Connecticut Water Company with a \$1.50 million assessment and Blackledge Country Club Inc., at \$463,130.

Below those are Ted's Inc., at \$412,200; Celco Partnerships at \$377,080; Hebron Dentistry at \$226,980; CVS Health Corporation at \$201,670; Tallwood Country Club LLC at \$191,070; Distinctive Farms LLC at \$181,250; and Sunrun Inc., at \$167,060.

“The market in town is still doing very well,” Gerhardt told selectmen at last week's meeting. “We never saw a true crash in town.”



Singing and dancing took center stage at the RHAM High School auditorium last Friday, when the annual ‘Hebron’s Got Talent!’ made its return. From left, the dancing duo Caitlyn and Izzy leap in unison during a jazz number, Eileen So performs a Beyoncé song, and Sophia Bell sings “Rejection,” a song she wrote.

## ‘Hebron’s Got Talent!’ a Lot of Fun

by Sloan Brewster

A friend of mine begged me not to write this first person account of my experiences watching ‘Hebron’s Got Talent!’ Literally begged.

When I told Tiffany Ventura Thiele, a Hebron local, that I was going to critique the fifth annual talent show, which took place last Friday, she minced no words.

“Yeah, because that’s a good idea!” she exclaimed sarcastically. “Sloan please don’t do it. You’re going to be sooo harsh.”

Her fears were rightly placed. I can be unforgiving and I expected to pummel with my pen – or keyboard as the case may be – some talentless performers. Seriously, Simon Cowell’s got nothing on me.

I was wrong. Disappointingly so. I was looking forward to awakening my inner mean girl. Sadly, there was not a single talent-free moment the entire show. Not one.

I did get pretty riled at the audience when the time came for the Applause-O-Meter to measure the enthusiasm for the finalists, a measurement to determine the winner. In my opinion, they got it wrong, but that criticism will come at the end of my saga.

The show started with 12-year-old Sophia Bell, who sang and played the ukulele. I’m not much of a fan of the ukulele, but Sophia’s very grown up folksy voice, performing “Rejection,” a song she wrote, transported me into the music of memory – to long drives with the top down and Jewel casting her voice into my soul or Ani DiFranco’s “Superhero.” I think for a moment I was even watching Tom Laughlin rescuing wild horses in *The Legend of Billy Jack* as Jinx Dawson’s “One Tin Soldier” filled the background.

When I shook myself back to the RHAM High School auditorium, there was Sophia, a diminutive child, her melodious adult voice cascading over the room like birdsong. Beautiful.

The judges concurred.

Celebrity judge Cassandra “Cassie” Go, a past New England Patriots cheerleader, assured Sophia she was going places.

“You have such a powerful voice,” she said.

Jonathan Farrington, a senior at RHAM High School and winner of last year’s Hebron’s Got Talent!, said he was not only taken with Sophia’s musical talent but with her self-written song and its message that no one should be rejected.

When emcee Mark Dursin, an English teacher at Glastonbury High School, asked Sophia if the lyrics were inspired by a rejection she experienced, she said no.

She was, in fact, rejected from school activities, but the song was inspired by cold hard cash, she explained. Her mom told her she’d pay her to write a song about the experience, so she did.

Chris Ambrose, a retired educator with more than a half century of experience viewing and listening to live theater and musical acts, was also duly impressed.

“You had the audience captivated,” he said.

Next came a dance duet by “Caitlyn and Izzy” – a.k.a. Caitlyn Leahy and Isabelle Goode. They began their performance dramatically, their synced forms strikingly dark against the dimly lit backdrop. As the lights rose, the pair moved together, leaping and twirling in unison.

A dancer herself, Go said the routine was well-done.

“You killed it,” she said.

Ambrose was again captivated and Farrington noted the movements of the dancers continuously mimicked one another.

“I think I pulled muscles just watching you,” he said.

Ten-year old Eli Strecker, who played guitar and sang, put smiles on everyone’s faces, including Go’s, who told him as much. Farrington told the boy to stick with music.

“You’re really, really talented,” he said. “I think you can do great things.”

Ambrose was all about the boy’s guitar playing, which he called “special.”

The Connecticut Sun Senior Dance Team brought the fun, hobbling onto the stage with walkers and then tossing them aside to prove that you can still be limber over the age of 50.

“I think I speak for everyone, where it was the most enjoyable experience I’ve ever had,” Farrington said.

Vocalist Meg Clifton, a teacher at RHAM High School, actually brought tears to my eyes. She not only sang but emoted throughout her performance, bringing everyone present inside the story of new life conveyed by her song.

The judges were mesmerized.

“I’m breathless. Really, I’m just blown away. Fantastic,” Ambrose said. “Um, you own that song, obviously.”

After a 15-minute intermission, former Marine and Vietnam veteran Bill Johnson played guitar and sang a patriotic song he had written.

The judges thanked him for his service and complimented him on his inspiring and well-played song.

“When you share your gift with the rest of us, it’s wonderful,” Ambrose said.

The next act, “WOP!” consisted of 18 young dancers performing hip-hop.

I have to admit, hip-hop isn’t my thing and the stage was too crowded and busy for my taste. Still, the dancers did strike some powerful poses, especially when one girl stood on her hands and kicked her feet while maintaining balance.

Go said she “loved” the performance and pointed out how entertaining the dancers were when they interacted with one another.

“Very dynamic,” she said.

Eileen So, 15, performed Beyoncé’s “Listen” and, in my opinion, blew away the rest of the competition. She was untouchable. She hit

every single note, her voice rising and falling in powerful cadence.

Farrington put it best.

“You brought a Beyoncé song to ‘Hebron’s Got Talent!’,” he said. “And you smashed it.”

Honestly, I was having a hard time at that point because I had my heart set on Sophia’s clear win and there was no denying it, Eileen was going to take it.

Except, I was wrong.

The final act, Olivia Siracusa, who did a solo jazz dance, took home the grand prize – which was \$250, a trophy, and a seat at the judges’ table for Hebron’s Got Talent! 2019.

“Wow. Holy moley,” Go said. “Beautiful performance. You have it.”

To be fair, Olivia was outstanding. I can admit that I may even be one of the people to whom Go was referring when she said some folks have a tendency to dismiss dance, or fail to recognize the athleticism it takes to achieve at that level. But no. I know she was a hard-working athlete. Who could deny it? I just favored the music.

Sophia, Eileen and Olivia were named finalists by the judges. Then it was the audience’s turn. As each of the three acts was named, folks bellowed and whistled, clapped and cheered, raising the noise level for the Applause-O-Meter, which was portrayed on a screen behind them.

When Olivia took center, the room erupted with the squealing sounds of teenage girls vying for her place and, to my great dismay, the meter rose higher than it did for the other two.

I’m sorry. She was good. She was even great, but she’s no Baryshnikov. Eileen belted the notes with tremendous command and Sophia is only 12, yet rivals great folk singers.

I walked away thinking there should have been two winners: a singer and a dancer.

Apples? Oranges?

# New Academy Would Inspire Sharing of Talents in Hebron

by Sloan Brewster

If you're looking to offer your talents to the town but not sure where you fit, signing up for a leadership academy could be the answer.

There are many talented residents who would volunteer for boards, commissions and committees if they knew how to find the right place for their particular talents, Board of Selectmen member John Collins said at last week's meeting. He recommended starting a leadership academy called "We Are Hebron" to introduce residents to the ins-and-outs of town and help them find their niche.

"I think there's a wealth of talent in town," he said.

He listed folks he knows in leadership roles in business or finance, whose knowledge would be a boon to the town.

"All of them would bring talent and resources to the community if they could do it," he said.

We Are Hebron would serve as a way for them to meet local leaders and learn more about the town and how it operates, he said. Town officials could recruit volunteers for the Fire Department, EMS, the Green Committee, Parks & Recreation and other boards and commissions. Additionally it would introduce the town to young people, giving them a better appreciation for the local landscape and reasons to settle in town.

Collins said he spoke with local officials from 10 communities around the country where such academies have already popped up. They have garnered "universal praise" from employees and residents, and officials have said they no longer have difficulty finding volunteers.

"These leadership workshops fill up," Collins

said. "In fact there's always a waiting list."

Residents of Natick, Mass., were fans according to quotes Collins used in the PowerPoint presentation he gave at the meeting.

"I knew it was a good town – now I know it's a great town," was one quote.

"An overall wonderful experience," was another.

Town leaders were equally satisfied, according to the presentation.

"Best thing we ever did as a town," said Natick Director of Community Services Jenna Lambert. She added that "95 to 99 percent of residents have a more positive attitude toward the budget process and the town."

Lambert and Mark Ellis, town manager of Barnstable, Mass., which also did the program, pointed out that it costs very little.

"Always works for our benefit and very cheap," Ellis said. "Originally cost us nothing but it became so successful that we hired a coordinator half time to handle new programs that the citizens demanded. But, really, the programs have paid for themselves many times over."

The plan would be to hold two eight-week programs per year consisting of two-hour workshops, Collins said. He anticipates 30 people would participate in each session for a total of 60 participants per year.

The first workshop in each session would begin with Town Manager Andrew Tierney giving a talk about the town and finance director Elaine Griffin shedding light on the town's finances, Collins said. Other workshops would bring different officials and topics, including

members of the Historical Society talking about the town's history, branding, vision and future and the planning director talking about how the town plans and what is its vision. There would also be talks on the local Public Works Department and economic development and representatives from local schools would discuss such things as budget, curriculum and performance.

"I have talked to the high school principal," Collins said. "He's very excited about this."

The final workshop would focus on volunteer and leadership opportunities in town, Collins said. There would also be a graduation ceremony with certificates for participants.

"The idea is to recruit leaders and volunteers," he said. "It would save money. There'd be more volunteers and more community conductivity. It's simple, it's cheap."

Board of Selectmen Chairman Daniel Larson wondered who the target audience for the program would be, and suggested it might be a good fit for the school system, pointing out that Hebron was a bedroom community and that folks have little time after coming home from long days of work.

"It would fit well within RHAM, I would think," he said. "There's no time for parents to get involved."

Kaitlin Hershey of the Green Committee, who was in the audience, chimed in at that point.

"We think it's actually a great idea," she said. "I agree we are a bedroom community, but I think it's time to wake people up."

Collins said a number of the towns with the program were bedroom communities. He added, in response to Larson's comment, that

the target audience of the We Are Hebron program isn't just students; "it's all people."

"I was one of those people; I didn't know what town government did," he continued.

Board of Selectmen member Gail Richmond asked about town employees working extra hours at night to attend the meetings.

Collins indicated he wouldn't be looking to compel employees to attend the meetings; he also added different employees could tackle different subjects.

"Andy would do the town, Elaine would do finance, Mike [O'Leary, the town planner] would do planning; I think we're going to find that the boards would love to participate to tell you the truth," Collins said. "All the organizations in town that want to part and talk about what they do for the town."

Donna Lanza, director of administrative services for the town, added attending night meetings is hardly out of the ordinary for town staff anyway.

"This is my third meeting this week," she said. "But this is what we do."

Board of Selectmen member Brian O'Connell was all for it.

"I just think that this has so much opportunity for the future," he said. "Getting the word out what is Hebron about."

Collins said it would not take much to get the program up and running, save a three-ring binder and space to do the workshops.

"I hope that this would provide a nexus of new people to get involved with the town," he said.

## Colchester Grand List Sees 1.2 Percent Increase

by Julianna Roche

Following a slight decrease last year, Colchester's Grand List saw a 1.2 percent, or \$15,031,900, increase in 2017 totaling \$1,232,158,000.

According to Tax Assessor John Chaponis, the additional \$15,031,900 equates to an additional \$486,582 in tax dollars.

The Grand List – which represents the net value of assessed real estate, personal property and motor vehicles in town – saw an increase in all three categories, with real estate seeing a .77 percent increase over 2016 from \$1,029,163,100 to \$1,037,094,800, and both motor vehicles and personal property seeing increases of 2.24 percent and 5.31 percent, respectively.

Chaponis explained this week that he attributes growth in the real estate category of the Grand List to newly constructed properties and existing properties that may have built additions or made improvements to an existing structure, which then enhances the fair market value. Such improvements can include anything from a new garage or finished basement to adding central air conditioning.

Any increase in personal property from one year to the next meanwhile "is always a surprise," Chaponis said, adding that an increase in personal property, which consists predominantly of business equipment, is "an indication

of newly-purchased property and/or new accounts."

"Motor vehicles tend to increase slightly each year just due to property owners trading in an older vehicle for a newer vehicle with a higher value," he continued.

The Grand List is used by the finance board to help set the mill rate for the upcoming fiscal year and the mill rate is then used to determine residents' taxes. A resident can determine their taxes by multiplying the mill rate by their total assessments. One mill is equal to \$1 in tax per \$1,000 of assessed property and under the current mill rate of 32.37, a resident with a home assessed at \$250,000 would pay approximately \$8,093.

However, Chaponis explained compiling this year's Grand List by the Jan. 31, 2018 deadline was especially difficult as the motor vehicle bills were mailed out in late October rather than late June.

"Of course, we completely understand that without a state budget being adopted there was a need for our town to delay the mailing," he said. "What I don't believe anyone could have anticipated was how badly that could adversely impact our [the tax assessor's] office."

Chaponis said the town typically sends out over 16,000 motor vehicle bills in late June; however, because the state failed to pass a bud-

get last spring, the finance board couldn't set the mill rate and had to hold off on doing so.

Consequently, he said, from July 1 until late October when the bills were finally mailed out, the assessor's office was swamped with taxpayers every day inquiring where their bills were and when they could expect them.

"But we didn't have those answers," he said. "Each conversation lasted 10 to 15 minutes with people wanting to voice their concerns on the state budget, their frustration with the process and state taxes as a whole."

"We couldn't just walk away from our taxpayers in the middle of a conversation and regrettably, we had no real answers," Chaponis added. He said the assessor's office never anticipated "such a ripple effect," but that it "absolutely interfered" with staffers' workload and caused the office to work "a lot of nights, weekends, and holidays" to compile the 2017 Grand List before deadline.

"Odd timing of it all as the 2018 legislative session begins this week and we can only hope that this year the legislature will be able to finalize the state budget in a timely manner," he said.

The top 10 real estate property taxpayers paid a total of \$47,740,100 in taxes and included Country Place of Colchester Ltd. Partners at \$9,896,800; SS1 Colchester LLC at

\$8,337,700; City of Norwich at \$4,835,900; Gaia Colchester LLC at \$4,070,000; Sharr Realty LLC at \$3,804,300; Genesis Health Ventures of Bloomfield Inc. at \$3,570,000; GND Too of Colchester LLC at \$3,547,000; S+S Worldwide Inc. at \$3,533,100; Keystone Shoppes LLC at \$3,080,000; and Park Place Holdings LLC at \$3,065,300.

The top 10 personal property taxpayers paid a total of \$29,046,030 and included Connecticut Light & Power Co. at \$16,311,990; Alpha Q Inc. at \$3,152,260; Stop + Shop Supermarket Co. at \$2,278,180; S&S Worldwide Inc. at \$1,631,110; Hillendale Farms Conn. LLC at \$1,298,710; Cellco Partnership at \$1,123,240; Larry Messier at \$831,250; Daniel R. Zawisa at \$831,250; Richard P. Baldi Jr. at \$798,990; and International Cordage East Ltd. at \$789,050.

\* \* \*

Property owners who wish to appeal their assessment must file a written appeal to the Board of Assessment Appeals on the prescribed Board of Assessment Appeals application. The application, found at [tinyurl.com/ybthav7e](http://tinyurl.com/ybthav7e) under "Board of Assessment Appeals Application," must be in the assessor's office at Town Hall at 127 Norwich Ave. on or by Tuesday, Feb. 20.

# Belltown Takes Vested Interest in Police K9

by Elizabeth Regan

A community that rallied behind the resurrection of East Hampton Police Department's canine program is now helping ensure the safety of its four-legged officer.

The Rotary Club of East Hampton last week donated a bullet- and stab-proof vest for 3-year-old Ardo.



**Officer John Wilson**

The police canine was ceremonially dubbed "Ringer" by some of the enthusiastic supporters who helped raise \$33,000 to bring him to town a year and a half ago.

Ardo and his partner, Officer John Wilson, sat with the *Rivereast* this week in the department's interview room. That is, until Ardo nosed his way out the door on his way to grab a treat from attentive office staff.

After Wilson retrieved Ardo, he explained the dog goes on every call with him. The vest provides a layer of security when there's reason to believe they may be walking into a dangerous situation.

"It's nice to know that we have it if we need to use it. He obviously won't wear it for every scenario we're going to encounter, but it's nice to know in situations where he needs the extra protection, it's available to us," Wilson said.

The Massachusetts-based nonprofit organization Vested Interest in K9s has provided more than 2,700 protective vests to law enforcement

agencies across the country, according to a press release.

Wilson said the members of the Rotary got to meet Ardo during two of their meetings. On one of those occasions, they presented the department with a \$1,000 check.

"They seem to like him," Wilson said.

Each vest costs \$950.

In addition to resisting bullets and knives, Wilson said the four-pound piece of body armor could dull the impact of a blunt object.

Wilson has slowly been getting Ardo acclimated to the vest so the canine will be ready when it comes time to wear it in action.

"I don't want to say it's bulky, because it's pretty streamlined for what it is," Wilson explained. "But it does affect his gait a bit. You can tell he's still trying to get used to it."

While Ardo hasn't yet apprehended any suspects, Wilson credited his partner with acting as a deterrent to crime.

He pointed to an incident last year during which officers were called to a condominium complex for a report of a man who was swinging around a large stick and hitting cars. Wilson approached the man while Ardo was in the car "barking and going nuts," he said.

The man put down the stick upon Wilson's approach, later telling the officer it was because he didn't want to have anything to do with the dog.

"Who knows how many [situations] he's prevented just by his presence," Wilson said.

Ardo lives with Wilson, his wife, two children and two other dogs: a Belgian shepherd and a mixed breed.



**East Hampton Police Department K9 Ardo received a bullet- and stab-proof vest last week thanks to a donation from the Rotary Club of East Hampton.**

Wilson described Ardo as a "wild beast" when he first arrived, but said he has settled into a routine at home and work.

Ardo's partner expressed gratitude to members of the Rotary for their commitment to the

police canine's safety.

"That's how the whole program got started, was by donations and fundraisers," Wilson said. "It's nice to know that people in the community like him here and appreciate him."

## Participation Climbs 50 Percent in Colchester Budget Survey

by Julianna Roche

Following a record-low response level last year, Colchester's online survey regarding the town budget rebounded this year, with participation climbing 50 percent.

In all, 611 people responded to the survey this year, versus last year's 414.

The budget survey – which was made available to the public on the town website through Jan. 22 – is posted every year as an opportunity for residents to give feedback and voice their opinions on town and school funding levels, taxes, voting, and overall quality of life.

First Selectman Art Shilosky explained Thursday morning that while he doesn't rely solely on the online survey while crafting the town's annual budget, it does give him "a little insight into what the townspeople are thinking."

This week, Board of Finance member Andrea Migliaccio said the dramatic increase in participation might be attributed to an easier-to-navigate survey format than in years past and one that was "less numeric-centric and intimidating."

"I think it was more about the individual taking it – your age, demographic, whether or not you have children – and that is more engaging to the person doing it," she said.

She added that while she was "definitely impressed" with the increased participation, she gained the most out of the comments portion of the survey, which garnered over 1,700 responses.

Among those comments, which were all anonymous, was one respondent who suggested implementing a tax abatement program for low-

income/fixed income residents, stating it might "alleviate some of the angst around the budget and pitting one group's interests against another's."

Another respondent, meanwhile, suggested that since the senior population makes up nearly 40 percent of the town's population, the budget process should include relief for seniors in the form of tax discounts, "so they can stay in their homes and retire comfortably."

Instilling salary caps for both school and town positions was also suggested by several respondents – with one stating that caps "happen in the private sector and should also in the public sector."

The comments section "was people giving specific ideas, like building a community pool, transportation options. ... None of those were specific items in the budget, but people had ideas to share," Migliaccio said.

She added the survey itself is "only one tool," and finance board members encourage others to continue reaching out and sharing their opinions.

Shilosky said, however, that certain suggestions – such as building a community pool – were likely out of the question in the next budget cycle considering the recent \$1.77 million he had to shave off the town budget as a result of municipal holdbacks from the state.

"We just had to cut [almost] 2 million dollars from the budget. Where am I gonna get the money for a pool?" he said. "Some of the things in [the comments] I may or may not address because we just financially can't do it."

Survey results showed that approximately 70 percent of respondents were in support of a tax increase between 1 and 2 percent to maintain town services, while the remaining 30 percent voted against an increase – which Migliaccio said is "not very surprising."

"People want to know what the value of their dollars' worth," she added.

However, Migliaccio said other responses were a surprise, such as the question asking residents to rate Colchester as a place to retire. Just 4 percent of respondents rated the town as "excellent" for this purpose, while approximately 30 percent rated it as poor.

Migliaccio noted that Board of Finance Chairman Rob Tarlov – who could not be reached for comment – found that, when looking at the actual age demographics of that specific question, "seniors that are currently retired here say it's good here, but the next demographic of those who are not yet retired, but will be retiring, don't agree with those statements."

"That's super important for [finance board members] to know," she said.

Overall, survey results also showed that the majority of respondents were in support of maintaining spending levels for most town services including the fire and police departments, public works, and senior services.

With education spending however, results were almost evenly split across the board, with 182 respondents supporting a spending increase, 201 residents in favor of maintaining

spending, and 197 respondents supporting a spending decrease.

When asked how the town should handle both current and future reductions in funding from the state, the majority of survey respondents were also evenly split, with 30.63 percent in favor of reducing both town services from the town budget and education programming and services from the education budget, and 28.97 percent of respondents suggesting a combination of a tax increase and reductions to both the town and education budgets.

Regarding new building projects and initiatives, residents did not express overwhelming support for a new police station, recreation field improvements, or an increase in fire and emergency medical services and infrastructure. Those in support of building a new senior center also barely edged out the number of residents who responded they were against it, with 37 percent or 216 respondents in favor versus 36 percent or 212 respondents against.

Finance board member Andreas Bisbikos told the *Rivereast* this week he felt that while the budget survey "is a good start for discussion," it was also "taken before the governor threatened our state with tolls, a 7 percent gas tax and \$3 new tire fee."

Moving forward, Bisbikos said the town "must always be mindful of what is going on in Hartford when addressing any budget."

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To view survey results, visit [colchesterct.gov](http://colchesterct.gov) and click on "2018-2019 Budget Survey."

# Ziobron to Seek State Senate Seat

by Elizabeth Regan

State Rep. Melissa Ziobron, R-34, changed course this week with the announcement that she will be running for state Senate.

Ziobron, who represents East Hampton, East Haddam and the Westchester section of Colchester, said last month she would be seeking re-election as a state representative. But this week she told the *Rivereast* the decision has been keeping her up at night as she worried Republicans could lose their shared control of the Senate if the seat went to a Democrat.

The Senate seat for the 33rd District is currently held by Republican Art Linares. He launched his campaign for state treasurer in January.

The district covers the *Rivereast* towns of Colchester, East Hampton, and Portland as well as Chester, Clinton, Deep River, East Haddam, Essex, Haddam, Lyme, Westbrook and part of Old Saybrook.

Both Ziobron and Essex First Selectman Norm Needleman announced their state senate campaigns Tuesday.

Ziobron cited the current makeup of the Senate, which has 18 Republicans and 18 Democrats, as the main reason Republicans were able to push through some of their priorities in last year's prolonged budget process. Republicans had been stymied by a Democratic majority in place since 1996.

Ziobron currently serves as the highest ranking House Republican on the General Assembly's powerful Appropriations Committee.

Linares said this week nobody knows the state budget better than Ziobron, which makes her well-qualified to represent a district filled with people who are extremely concerned about it.

"I'm very happy that she's running and think she'll do a great job," he said.

Senate Republican President Pro Tempore Len Fasano, R-North Haven, described Ziobron's work ethic as unparalleled.

"I don't know if you'll find a harder-working and more dedicated legislator in the building," Fasano said.

Fasano said his experience working with Ziobron on the state budget has shown him she is "very bright" and committed to taking whatever time necessary to absorb complex material.

"She's done an excellent job and I am so



Ziobron

proud she's running for that seat," he said.

Fasano emphasized he will miss Linares, whom he called a "great guy" and a valuable addition to the caucus. He wished him success in his run for state treasurer.

Fasano was among leaders in the General Assembly and at the local level who urged Ziobron to run for the Senate seat, she said.

With that support shored up, she said the two weeks between her original announcement and the latest news were mostly spent in discussion with her husband, Scott, and children, Britany and Bryan. The topic was how they would manage the campaign as she works to introduce herself to the nine communities outside of her House district.

"My family was not so sure about it," she said.

Those closest to her recognize that she puts all her effort into the task at hand, she explained – which means getting elected and serving in the General Assembly leaves little time for anything else.

"This last budget cycle was the most difficult and time-consuming probably in the history of the state," Ziobron said. "It took a toll on me and certainly my family."

But her family members ultimately came around to the idea of a state senate run because they understood how much it meant to her to be in the position to help as many people as possible, according to Ziobron.

"I've thought a lot about one question: How can I best help my state first survive over the near term, and then thrive over the long term?" Ziobron wrote in her campaign announcement. "One option is to continue as a state representative. Certainly, it would be a less grueling election campaign and allow me to spend more time with my family. But I made a promise not just to the 34th House district, but all of Connecticut when I took the oath of office — and I am not ready to give up on this beautiful state!"

Ziobron said her campaign, which will begin in earnest when the General Assembly adjourns in May, has "lofty" goals when it comes to how many doors she will be knocking on across the district. While she did not specify a number, she indicated it would be in the thousands.

Portland Republican Town Committee Chairman Timothy Lavoy said Ziobron reached out to him last week about her plan to run for the state Senate.

"I think she's got a great background," he said. "I think she's a great voice for Connecticut citizens in general."

Lavoy, who has served for two years on the Portland Board of Education, noted Ziobron "cut her teeth" as a member of her local school

board.

"That's a tough role," he said. "She's demonstrated over the years she's going to work hard to make sure government is held accountable."

Colchester Republican Town Committee Vice Chairman Andreas Bisbikos put it this way: "Melissa Ziobron has demonstrated a tremendous dedication and work ethic as a state representative. I am confident that as a state senator she will continue fighting against the progressive fiscal decisions which have devastated our state."

Ziobron said her priorities are keeping small towns in the forefront in policy discussions and working across party lines to craft fiscally responsible budgets.

A self-described "different kind of Republi-

## Essex First Selectman to Run for State Senate

by Elizabeth Regan

Essex First Selectman Norm Needleman, a Democrat, has announced his candidacy for the 33rd District state senate seat.

Needleman campaigned in 2016 but lost to three-term state Sen. Art Linares, a Republican, who will not be seeking reelection. Linares is running for state treasurer.

Needleman said in a Tuesday campaign announcement he would use his experience as a business owner and small-town leader to "bring people together to get Connecticut back on track."

The mathematician and entrepreneur founded the Essex-based Tower Laboratories, which now employs more than 250 people, almost four decades ago. He's in his fourth term as the town's top official.

"Leading a small town and building a business taught me that the best way to get things done is to put people and their needs ahead of party politics," Needleman said in a press release. "I respect taxpayers' dollars because I know how hard you've worked to earn them. That's why as first selectman, I brought Democrats and Republicans together, found consensus, solved problems, and kept property taxes among the lowest in the state without cutting services. If elected state senator for the 33rd District, I will make a clean break from the decades of bickering and harmful policies that have come from Hartford, and I will get Connecticut working for the towns in our district."

The district covers the *Rivereast* towns of Colchester, East Hampton, and Portland as well as Chester, Clinton, Deep River, East Haddam,



Needleman

can," Ziobron is pro-choice, supports the legalization of marijuana and is an advocate for state parks.

Her announcement promised constituents in East Hampton, East Haddam and Colchester that they'd always be able to count on her, even as she tries to expand her reach.

She said Tuesday she's also been working to find the best possible candidate to take over her House seat. She expects an unnamed Republican candidate to come forward with an official announcement in the next few days.

"I get a little teary thinking about my House district," she said. "I just want to make sure whoever comes after me cares about it and works as hard as I have."

Reporter Julianna Roche contributed to this story.

Essex, Haddam, Lyme, Westbrook and part of Old Saybrook.

Republican state Rep. Melissa Ziobron (R-34) also announced her candidacy for the senate seat Tuesday. She originally said she would be running for re-election to her General Assembly seat but changed course this week.

Needleman boasts previous municipal experience as a selectman as well as a member of the local Zoning Board of Appeals and Economic Development Commission, according to the press release. He is a board member of the Middlesex County Chamber of Commerce and Valley Shore Emergency Communications.

Needleman also serves on the Lower Connecticut River Valley Council of Governments, a regional planning group that helps 17 member towns coordinate government functions.

East Hampton Democratic Town Committee Chairwoman Barbara Moore described Needleman as someone with an extensive education and work experience.

"He's someone we really need in Hartford. He works with both sides of the aisle. That's mainly his goal," she said.

Moore said the party is ready to lend its support to Needleman as his campaign takes him all over the district.

"He does realize that he needs to spend more time up here," she said of the shoreline Democrat.

Colchester selectwoman Rosemary Coyle said in the press release that she's seen Needleman's municipal leadership at work.

"Norm governs in a fiscally responsible manner, making sound decisions," she said. "His hands-on, small town government experience in the legislature will benefit our communities and help us build a brighter future for our children and families."

Needleman lives in Essex with Jacqueline Hubbard, the Executive Director of the Ivoryton Playhouse.

## Blaze Destroys 18th Century Home in Middle Haddam

by Elizabeth Regan

The importance of working smoke detectors became clear early Saturday morning as five people escaped a burning home on Knowles Road in Middle Haddam.

The owner of the riverfront home at 22 Knowles Rd. and her four visiting family members were not injured, according to fire officials.

The 18th century post-and-beam colonial burned to the ground. Only a fireplace was left standing, and that too was demolished for safety reasons later the same day.

Fire Marshal Richard Klotzbier said the destruction was so severe officials could not determine the cause of the fire. He called in the Office of the State Fire Marshal to help investigate due to the extent of the damage.

A smoke detector woke up those inside the home around 2:40 a.m., according to Klotzbier.

"If it wasn't for that, we would have been looking for victims," he said. "Smoke detectors do save lives."

Fire Chief Greg Voelker said firefighters from

Portland, Marlborough and Haddam Neck helped fight the blaze while numerous tanker trucks came in from area departments.

A post on the Portland Fire Department Facebook page said a dozen Portland firefighters responded to Middle Haddam while members of the Middletown's Westfield Fire Department moved onto the corner of Route 17 and Bartlett Street to fill 11 tankers.

Efforts to pull water from the Connecticut River that frigid morning were unsuccessful due to ice, Voelker said.

Public works trucks were called in to lay down salt on the slippery roads so the trucks could gain traction, according to Voelker.

The fire was already "well involved" when firefighters arrived. They knocked down the blaze in about 45 minutes.

No firefighters were injured.

"It burned faster than a lot of houses I've seen burn," Voelker said. "It was so dry. It's been there for almost 300 years."

## East Hampton Police News

1/10: Karen Lane, 55, of 129 Falls Rd., Moodus, was issued a summons for failure to drive right and operating a motor vehicle without insurance, East Hampton Police said.

1/26: After an investigation into a car vs. motorcycle evading crash that occurred at the intersection of Young Street and Route 16, a 17-year-old juvenile was issued a summons for following too close and evading responsibility, police said.

2/1: David L. Rowland, 47, of 481 East St.,

Hebron, was taken into custody pursuant to an active warrant for his arrest stemming from a one-car motor vehicle crash that had occurred Jan. 2 on Lakeview Street, police said. Rowland was charged with operating under the influence, traveling too fast for conditions and assault on a police officer, police said.

Also, from Jan. 22-28, officers responded to 10 medical calls, six motor vehicle accidents and nine alarms, and made 12 traffic stops, police said.

## Route Two Crash Injures Two in Marlborough

by **Julianna Roche**

A two-vehicle car crash last Sunday evening left two drivers with minor injuries, police said.

According to police, at approximately 6:11 p.m. on Jan. 28, Manivanh Khamphanpheng, 34, of 103 Pearl St., Enfield, was driving a Hyundai XG350 heading westbound on Route 2 when it came to a stop in the left-hand lane just west of exit 12 due to a flat tire.

Devon A. Berman, 32, of 79 Roberts Rd., Marlborough was driving a Saab 92 Aero in the left-hand lane when it struck the rear of the Hyundai with its front end, police said.

Khamphanpheng was transported by Marlborough EMS to Middlesex Hospital for minor injuries, including a bumped head, while Berman complained of right knee pain and back pain, but refused medical attention, according to police.

Police said both vehicles were towed by Northeast Auto, while Khamphanpheng was issued an infraction ticket for unsafe parking and Berman was issued an infraction ticket for failure to drive a safe distance.

## Two Injured in Colchester When Car Hits Tree

by **Julianna Roche**

A single-vehicle collision into a tree on Route 16 early Monday morning left a driver and passenger with minor injuries, police said.

According to police, at around 12:55 a.m. Feb. 5, Jose A. Colon, 54, of 1300 Trumbull Hwy., Lebanon, was driving a Hyundai Elantra east on Route 16 near the intersection with Cabin Road in Colchester when he crossed over the center line and ran off the roadway to the left of the westbound travel lane.

Police said the vehicle proceeded down an

embankment and hit a tree before coming to a final rest.

Both Colon and a single passenger – Jeannette Medina, 50, of 116 Sandy Ln., Norwich – were transported by Colchester EMS and American Ambulance, respectively, to Backus Hospital for suspected minor injuries, according to police.

Police said the Hyundai sustained disabling damage and was towed from the scene by Marvin’s Auto.

## Massachusetts Man Dies in Colchester Crash

by **Julianna Roche**

A single-vehicle crash late Monday afternoon left a Massachusetts man dead and a portion of Route 2 closed from 4:15 p.m. to approximately 6:10 p.m., according to police.

Police said Edward J. Thomas, 46, of 6 Grant St., Hadley, Mass., was driving a Pontiac GRANA traveling eastbound on Route 2 at approximately 3:55 p.m. in Colchester when he suddenly lost control of the vehicle while approaching Exit 21, sending the car off the roadway to the left shoul-

der of the road and up an embankment before striking some small trees and brush.

The vehicle continued through the median causing significant damage before it came to a final rest facing in a westerly direction, according to police.

Police said Thomas was transported to Hartford Hospital by Lifestar, where he later died.

The case remains under investigation.

## Marlborough Police News

2/1: State Police said Valerie A. Fortin, 45, of 13 Hunters Court, Colchester, was arrested and charged with operating a motor vehicle under the influence of drugs/alcohol.

2/3: State Police said Alexander C. Hanna, 28, of 11 Billy’s Lane, Freetown, Mass., was arrested and charged with reckless driving and operating a motor vehicle under the influence of drugs/alcohol.

*From the Editor’s Desk*

# Observations & Ruminations

by **Mike Thompson**

Though in a lot of ways it feels like the new year just started, it’s already time for the Christian season of Lent. The season starts with Ash Wednesday next Wednesday, Feb. 14. If, like me, you find it difficult to get out of the office on Wednesdays for a length of time sufficient to attend a church service, don’t worry; several area ministers have got you covered.

“Ashes to go” are being offered at various locations in Hebron, Portland and East Hampton next Wednesday. There will be various morning, afternoon and evening time slots so that folks going to or returning from work, or simply on a lunch break, can swing by and quickly get ashes placed on their forehead by a minister.

There have been “ashes to go” in Glastonbury for the past couple of years, and last year I partook of it. It was quick, easy, and was very rewarding. It felt nice to take a brief break in the day and receive ashes to start Lent.

Details of the when and where for the “ashes to go” in Hebron, Portland and East Hampton are in the respective town news sections this week.

\* \* \*

The death of movie star Natalie Wood is back in the news again. Wood drowned in 1981 at the age of 43. At the time, the death was ruled accidental. Her husband, Robert Wagner, and actor Christopher Walken were also on the boat at the time of Wood’s death – and over the years many people have wondered how “accidental” the death really was.

Turns out the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department has its doubts too. After reopening the case in 2011, authorities recently labeled the death as “suspicious.” Wagner is a person of interest, and Lt. John Corina, of the department’s homicide bureau, said this week the details Wagner has shared on what happened the night Wood died “really don’t add up to what we’ve found,” according to CNN.

Anyway, over the weekend I came across a story about the reopened investigation, and had to chuckle when I saw the headline: “Mystery over death of film star’s wife 35 years ago.”

Really? With the possible exception of Robert Wagner’s mother, I don’t know if any-

one ever thought of Natalie Wood as a “film star’s wife.” She was a screen legend in her own right – one who died much too soon, and I hope some answers are found regarding her death.

\* \* \*

While the outcome wasn’t what I’d hoped, last Sunday’s Super Bowl between the Eagles and Patriots was a great game. It was high-scoring, kept you on the edge of your seat – and any game where the losing team has a chance until literally the last second on the clock is a good game indeed.

However, I was somewhat taken aback when, during the final two minutes, one of the NBC announcers, in talking about how thrilling the game had been, enthused “This game has been as good as Justin Timberlake!”

Really? I’d say the game was a heck of a lot better than that. Timberlake performed the halftime show this year – his first halftime show since the famous “wardrobe malfunction” with Janet Jackson in 2004 – and boy was it a snooze-fest. It was over-produced, boring, and Timberlake’s lip-synching was not very impressive. I’m hoping for a better halftime show next year

\* \* \*

Lastly, here are a few more exchanges from that delightful old ‘60s and ‘70s game show *Hollywood Squares*, hosted by Peter Marshall:

Peter Marshall: What did the Lone Ranger always leave behind when he left town?

Paul Lynde: A masked baby.

Peter Marshall: If the draft board rejects you because you’re too fat, can you be drafted when you get skinny again?

Wally Cox: Yes, it’s called double jeopardy.

Peter Marshall: According to animal experts, what usually gets an ostrich to bury its head in the sand?

David Brenner: A falling piano.

Peter Marshall: True or false: Experts say there are only seven or eight things in the world dumber than an ant.

George Gobel: True, and I think I voted for six of ‘em.

\* \* \*

See you next week.

## Colchester Police News

1/28: Colchester Police said Mya Wilson, 18, of 26 Old Amston Rd., was arrested and charged with risk of injury to a child, third-degree criminal mischief, breach of peace, and third-degree assault.

1/30: State Police said Laura Platt, 41, of 26 Arlen Way, West Hartford, was arrested and charged for operating under the influence of drugs/alcohol.

2/5: State Police said Joseph Surwill, 51, of 40 Harrington Court, was arrested and charged with first-degree criminal mischief.

## Portland Police News

2/1: Steven Stolfi, 23, of 272 East Main St., Middletown, was charged with second-degree criminal mischief, Portland Police said.

2/3: A 16-year-old male juvenile was arrested and charged with third-degree assault third-degree criminal mischief and disorderly conduct, police said.



## Obituaries

### Colchester

#### Dean Marshall Kopp

Dean Marshall Kopp, "Pip," of Colchester, passed away unexpectedly from natural causes Wednesday, Jan. 31, at Hartford Hospital, surrounded by his children and loving wife, Raylene. Born Dec. 2, 1948, in Norwich, he was the son of the late Helen (Dean) Kopp Goulet and Franklin Kopp.



A lifelong resident of Colchester, he was a 1966 graduate of Bacon Academy. Upon his retirement from Pratt & Whitney, Dean took a position with RGBSI, a global management firm. He found joy spending time with family and friends – his greatest pride was his grandchildren. Dean enjoyed traveling with his wife and weekends he spent with friends.

In addition to his wife of 48 years, he leaves his daughter, Wendy (Kopp) Weum, her husband, Shannon and their two daughters, Sierra and Jordan, all of Lebanon; his son, Kevin, his wife Lindsey and their three children, Lyla, Addison and Chase, all of Newtown; his sister and brother-in-law, Pamela and Theodore Brown, Jr. of Lebanon; his brother and sister-in-law, Franklin and Alice Kopp of Coopers Mill, Maine; and numerous extended family members and friends.

In keeping with his wishes, services will be private.

In lieu of flowers, donations in his memory may be made to St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, 501 St. Jude Place Memphis, TN 38105 ([stjude.org](http://stjude.org)).

Care of arrangements has been entrusted to the Aurora-McCarthy Funeral Home of Colchester. For online condolences, visit [auroramccarthyfuneralhome.com](http://auroramccarthyfuneralhome.com).

### Portland

#### Rose Allen Tozier

Rose Allen Tozier, 63, formerly of Portland, passed away in the Advanced Center for Nursing and Rehabilitation in New Haven Sunday, Jan. 28. She was born June 27, 1954, in Middletown, the daughter of late Douglas O. Allen and Elizabeth L. Allen of Portland.



Rose is survived by her son, Timothy A. Tozier, formerly of East Hampton; a grandson, Timothy James Tozier of Middletown; two brothers, Arthur A. Allen of Phoenix, Ariz., and Benjamin E. Allen of Tucson, Ariz.; two sisters, Susanne Anderson-Woronoff of Portland and Nina L. Glinski of Guilford; three nieces; four nephews; and several grandnieces and grandnephews.

In addition to her parents, she was predeceased by a brother, Curt D. Allen, and a nephew, Darren D. Anderson.

Rose was a loving and generous person who will be remembered for her compassion for animals and people. She will be deeply missed.

Arrangements are under the direction of the Portland Memorial Funeral Home, 231 Main Street, Portland. The burial will be at the convenience of the family. There are no calling hours. Interment will be in the Swedish Cemetery, Portland.

Memorial donations in Rose's memory may be sent to the Connecticut Humane Society, 701 Russell Rd., Newington, CT 06111.

### Colchester

#### Rose Viti

Rose (Derda) Viti, a 30-year resident of Cocoa Beach, Fla., formerly of Colchester, passed away Wednesday, Jan. 31. Rose was born in Bronx, N.Y., on July 1, 1931.

Rose retired from her career as a teacher-reading consultant in 1989 from East Lyme Public Schools. Rose earned her bachelor's degree at Eastern Connecticut State College, Master's and 6th Degree in Professional Education from UConn.

Rose was married to Chester Derda in 1953, and in 1989 re-married to Ralph Viti.

Rose is survived by her husband Ralph; her two daughters, Kathy Standish and Nancy LaFlamme, both of Colchester; her son, Robert Derda of Ledyard; five grandchildren; and her sister, Vicki Campbell of Colchester.

A memorial service will be held Saturday, March 10, at 11 a.m., at St. Andrew Church, 128 Norwich Ave., Colchester.



### East Hampton

#### Manuel S. Mello

Manuel S. "Rocky" Mello, 86, of Burlington, formerly of East Hampton, widower of the late Maureen Mello, died Monday, Feb. 5, at Live Well in Southington. Born Jan. 27, 1932, in New Bedford, Mass., he was the son of the late Robert and Natalie Mathias.



Manuel served his country in the U.S. Army during the Korean War, with the 7th Division. He earned many awards including the Combat Infantry Badge. He participated in the following battles: "Old Baldy," "Porkchop Hill," "Hill 409," and the "Triangle." Upon his return to the States, he later joined the U.S. Marine Corps and then returned to the U.S. Army. Once he completed his term, he joined the National Guard and retired after nearly 30 years in military service.

Manuel was a resident of East Hampton for over 40 years. He was a member of the East Hampton Volunteer Fire Department for 20 years. He was a member of the VFW in East Hampton and had worked for Pratt & Whitney in Middletown for 18 years.

Manuel is survived by his son, Brian Mello and his wife Janet of Burlington; his sister-in-law, Lucy Vieira and husband John of New Bedford, Mass.; his beloved grandson, Tyler, who followed in his footsteps and joined the Marine Corps; and his loving granddaughter Sydney, whom he was proud of her accomplishment of winning the Class M State Championship in Shotgun.

Besides his parents he was predeceased by his three sons, Richard, Michael and David, and his brother, Joseph Mello.

Friends may call at the Spencer Funeral Home, 112 Main St., East Hampton, Tuesday Feb. 13, from 9:30-11 a.m. A memorial service will begin at 11 a.m., followed by burial in St. Patrick Cemetery.

In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions may be made to the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation, CT Chapter, 101 Centerpoint Dr. Suite 107, Middletown, CT 06457.

To leave online condolences, visit [spencerfuneralhomeinc.com](http://spencerfuneralhomeinc.com).

### Moodus

#### Anne Vera Walsh

Anne Vera (Jansky) Walsh, 80, of Moodus, passed from mortality on Wednesday, Jan. 31, at Chestelm, while holding her daughter's hand. Anne was born March 26, 1937, in Astoria, N.Y., daughter of the late Gaspar Jansky and Lillian Jagiello.



Anne is survived by her loving children: Darlene Martinez (Cambridge, N.Y.), Debra Anne Skinner (Moodus) and Patrick Walsh (Moodus); six grandchildren: Natalie, Jamie, Bobbi-Anna, Hannah, Johnny and Charity, two great-grandchildren: Liam and Matt; her sister, Lillian Walsh (Moodus); brother, George Jansky and his wife, Lorraine (Moodus); and pre-deceased by her son, Johnny, and brothers, Charlie and Gaspar Jansky.

Her funeral service was held Tuesday, Feb. 6, at the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, located at 130 South St., Cromwell.

In lieu of flowers, Anne requested monetary donations be made to the Missionary Fund of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and checks to be made out to the "Cromwell Ward."

### Colchester

#### Nancy Schurr

Nancy (Dupre) Schurr of Colchester, formerly of Manchester, Bolton and East Hartford, passed away Wednesday, Feb. 7, at the age of 88. Born Dec. 18, 1929, in Norwich, she was the daughter of Irvin and Henrietta (Russell) Dupre, late of Colchester.



Nancy had worked in finance for both the former Connecticut Bank & Trust as well as Northeast Utilities before her retirement. She was a longtime member of the Colchester Federated Church, where she sang in the choir. Always "on the go," she volunteered with countless groups through the years.

Nancy put her seamstress skills to work with "My Brother's Keeper" (making hats, mittens and sleeping bags for the homeless) as well as making clothing for premature infants. She had served as a Justice of the Peace and had been a member of the Women's Club of Colchester Commons and Colchester Historical and Red Hat societies. In her "spare" time, Nancy enjoyed bringing library books to the homebound, interior decorating and taking drives both near and far.

With all of that energy, style and talent, it was no surprise when she was chosen to represent Connecticut in the Ms. Senior America Pageant in 2001. Her greatest joy, however, was found in her family.

She leaves her loving husband, Ivan Schurr; two children, Susan Young and Bradley Lambert; 12 grandchildren; several great grandchildren; a sister, Aline Magnon of Goffstown, N.H.; and numerous extended family and friends.

In addition to her parents, she was predeceased by two daughters, Pamela Doughty and Nancy Lambert; her husband, Charles H. Minnich Jr.; and two siblings, Doris Reeve and Irvin Dupre.

Friends may call starting at 10 a.m. Tuesday, Feb. 13, at the Aurora-McCarthy Funeral Home, 167 Old Hartford Rd., Colchester, before a chapel service at 11 AM. Burial will follow in the Dupre family plot in Linwood Cemetery, Colchester.

Donations in her memory may be made to the Colchester Federated Church, 60 Main St., Colchester, CT 06415.

For online condolences, visit [auroramccarthyfuneralhome.com](http://auroramccarthyfuneralhome.com).

### Colchester

#### Dr. Estelle Schutzman

Dr. Estelle Schutzman (1936 – 2018) passed away peacefully this past Sabbath. She was born in Brooklyn, N.Y., on the holiday of Purim and her Hebrew name was Esther. She lived in Far Rockaway and Manhattan.

She was the beloved mother of Rabbi Ken Alter; Dr. Karen Alter-Reid (Dr. Paul Reid); Stuart Alter (Beth). She was the cherished grandmother of Joshua Alter, Amanda Alter, Daniel Alter, Emma Reid-Smith (Jonathan Smith), Zachary Alter, Melissa Alter, Claire Alter-Reid and Benjamin Alter.

She was married to Jerry Alter and Arthur Schutzman. She was an adored aunt and cousin to many. She was a passionate swimmer, tennis player, world traveler and supporter of various Jewish causes. She was a graduate of Shulajmish School, New Utrecht High School, Brooklyn College, received an MSW from Yeshiva University School of Social work and her PHD from Columbia University. She was a psychiatric social worker and a professor of Sociology at many New York colleges. She was one of the first women to organize book clubs and hosted a cable TV show in New York in the 1970s.

A graveside service was held Sunday, Feb. 4, at Mount Hebron Cemetery, Flushing, N.Y. Shiva was observed in West Hempstead, N.Y., and Stamford. There was a service at Congregation Ahavath Achim, 84 Lebanon Ave., Thursday, Feb. 8, followed by a meal of consolation.

Donations can be made in her memory to Congregation Ahavath Achim, P.O. Box 5, Colchester, CT 06415.

### Andover

#### William J. Bennett

William Joseph Bennett, 84, of Andover died Wednesday, Jan. 31. Born April 25, 1933 in Lewiston, Maine, Bill made his home in Andover with his family for the last 51 years.

A loving family man, Bill became an avid sports fan especially enjoying the Red Sox, the Giants and the UConn women's basketball games introduced to him by his wife, Beverly. Bill spent most of his time as a collector of many things, including comics, coins, stamps, antiques and other collectible items.

He is survived by his son, William "Jerry" Bennett of Andover, three grandchildren, two great-children and several nieces, nephews, other family members and friends. He was predeceased by his beloved wife, his son, David "Brian" Bennett, and his daughter, Jo-Ann Valitsky, his sister, Evelyn, and brothers, Harold, James and Gerald.

The Coventry Funeral Home is charged with Bill's care. There will be no calling hours and burial will be next to his wife and children in the Townsend Cemetery during the spring at the convenience of the family.

### East Hampton

#### Helen E. Boorning

Helen E. Boorning, 98, of East Hampton, formerly of Windsor, died Saturday, Feb. 3, at Cobalt Lodge Health Care in Cobalt. Born March 18, 1919, in East Hampton, she was the daughter of the late Olaf and Josephine (Johanson) Boorning.

Helen had worked as a secretary for Travelers Insurance Company until her retirement.

She was predeceased by her twin sister, Alice Boorning, and her sister, Olga Hall. She is survived by her nephew Rodney Hall and his wife Marlene of Middletown.

Services were held Wednesday, Feb. 7, in the Spencer Funeral Home, 112 Main St., East Hampton. Burial will be in the spring in the family plot in Lakeview Cemetery in East Hampton.