

RIVEREAST

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RHAM Senior Alicia Kureczka, center, celebrates the Sachems victory over Joel Barlow last Saturday with her teammates Shelly O'Keefe, left, Molly Rathbun, number 19, and Tessa Smolinski. The victory gave RHAM the Class M State Championship, the first in the program's history.

RHAM Volleyball Team Wins State Championship

by Sarah McCoy

Six years ago, RHAM High School added football to its athletic opportunities for students in response to the community's expressed desire for the sport. In order to meet Title IX requirements, the district also introduced volleyball for female students.

And in its first year of existence, the volleyball team wasn't exactly a dominating force – it went 0-18.

But, from those humble beginnings, the team has found great success.

Last Saturday (Nov. 17), the Sachems defeated the Barlow Falcons, of Redding, to win the Class M Connecticut State Championship. The 3-0 win (by individual game scores of 25-12, 27-25 and 29-27) capped off RHAM's fantastic 23-1 season.

"It's been amazing," Coach Tim Guernsey said, struggling for words to describe the season. "We came in having only lost one senior, knowing that we could do something special. It's just incredible when you look back at how special this season truly was."

Guernsey is actually new to volleyball. He played casually at college and watched his sister, who played competitively at the high school and college level. But, other than that, the players and their coach have

spent the season learning together.

All season the team was lead by the three senior captains: Mallory Mangan, Shelly O'Keefe and Molly Rathbun. Rathbun led the Sachems with 20 kills on Saturday, a combination of blistering spikes and carefully-placed taps that seemingly always managed to find the hardwood.

O'Keefe led the team in digs with 22 on Saturday. She finishes her RHAM career as the school's record holder for both digs and kills.

Then there's Mangan, the MVP of Saturday's match and arguably the backbone of this Sachem team. Mangan doesn't deliver the whopping spikes like her fellow captains, but she sets them up, time and time again. On Saturday she delivered 38 assists, pushing her school record total above 1,700.

"You can't say enough good things about these three," Guernsey said. "They work harder than anyone I know."

Shelly, Molly and Mallory all began playing volleyball as freshmen. They were new to the sport, but not to sports in general. "I think what helped them pick the game up so quickly is they are all exceptional athletes," Guernsey said.

Over the years the three have formed a bond as friends and as teammates. That bond has since extended to the other members of the RHAM volleyball team. "Our biggest strength this year, as a team, was our team chemistry," O'Keefe said. "We are best friends off the court and that certainly helps us on the court."

Rathbun agreed. "We trust each other," she said. "There has never been a time on the court when I've been unsure of my teammates' abilities. It's very reassuring to just have to focus on myself and not have to worry about trying to do too much."

In many ways the RHAM volleyball program has come of age with the current senior class. Never has a group set so many school records, had as many wins or carried a team this far. In a sport dominated by longtime powerhouses, the six seniors have put RHAM on the volleyball map.

RHAM used that experience last Saturday to overpower and out-will the Joel Barlow Falcons. The Sachems started off slowly, with Barlow leading by as much as 8-5 in the first game. The team fought back to an 8-8 tie before RHAM senior Alicia Kureczka took over serving, leading the Sachems on a 12-0 run. RHAM

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RHAM's Tessa Smolinski digs a Joel Barlow serve during the third match of the Sachems' 3-0 victory against Barlow last Saturday while senior Alicia Kureczka looks on.

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took game one 25-12.

The Sachems continued their run into the second game and quickly surged ahead of the Falcons. With everything seemingly going RHAM's way, the crowd got a glimpse of the future as sophomore Mallory Grosso dug out a tough ball with her back to the net leading to another RHAM point. With the Sachems up 12-6 at that point, Joel Barlow snapped into action. Led by senior power hitter Kristin Hanczor, Barlow tied the Sachems at 24-24 and again at 25-25 before RHAM went on a mini-run to win the game 27-25.

Game three felt like déjà vu for RHAM. Big digs by sophomore Tessa Smolinski and Junior Kelly Stratton put the Sachems up early 13-7. But Barlow fired back with its own run, led by Barlow senior Jennifer Shinall who converted on six straight serves including two aces. The run gave Barlow its first lead since they were up 8-7 in game one. The teams battled point for point until they were knotted up at 27 all.

With Smolinski serving, the Sachems converted on the next two points, giving RHAM the Class M title.

In the final play of their careers, Rathbun tapped the ball to Mangan, who delivered a perfect set to O'Keefe, who blasted a spike for the 29-27 RHAM victory.

The Sachems' lone loss this season came at the hands of Farmington in the Northwest Conference Championships earlier this month. A defeat that, Guernsey believed, refocused the team and prepared them for their run into the State Championships.

With six seniors graduating, the RHAM volleyball team will get a whole lot younger in 2008. Look for lone junior Kelly Stratton to lead the team with help from sophomores Smolinski, Grosso and Kelsey Welling, who all received valuable playing time this year.

"We'll be fine next year as long as we continue to work hard," Guernsey said. "It's a matter of finding the right combinations."



Seth Gagnon (pictured) and his wife Jaclyn recently opened Hebron Sports Connection. The business replaces the former Hebron Sporting Goods, which closed last summer. Hebron Sports Connection will offer team and individual sports services including uniforms, equipment, and trophies.

Hebron Couple Takes Over Business

by Sarah McCoy

It's been quite a year for Seth and Jaclyn Gagnon. After getting married last month the newlyweds are tackling another adventure – running a small business.

The Gagnons are the new owners of Hebron Sports Connection, formerly Hebron Sporting Goods.

The couple moved to Hebron last year and immediately wanted to get involved in the community. Through the grapevine they heard that the former owner of Hebron Sporting Goods, Timi Bahadory, was interested in selling the business. Seth and Jaclyn inquired and before they knew it they were business owners.

"It's been great getting to know people and organizations in town," Seth said. "The hard part is finding time for everything and letting people know we are open."

After opening a year ago, Bahadory closed her doors in late summer. The Gagnons reopened the shop on Nov. 1 and are trying to get the word out that they're open.

At this point, Seth and Jaclyn are keeping their day jobs. He is an IT employee for SIGNA and she is an employee for Nutrena, an equine nutrition company. The couple hired Amanda Gallant as sales manager for the store. She handles the day-to-day operation of the business. The three reconvene most evenings to discuss their goals and plans for Hebron's newest business.

"Our number one priority for this business is meeting our community's needs," Seth said.

"We want to be seen as a place for team services. Whether that means uniforms, trophies, whatever a team needs, we are here for them."

For instance, in reaching out to the local youth athletic organizations in town, the Gagnons realized that the only place gymnasts at Patti Dunne's School of Gymnastics could get grips was online. Hebron Sports Connection now offers grips for gymnasts to come and try on, right in the store.

"We don't want people to have to drive to Manchester for a mouth guard or some tape," Seth said. "We are here to fulfill a need in Hebron."

Heat transfers and embroidery continue to be a specialty of the sporting goods shop. Local businesses, teams, or other groups can come in with a design or work with the Hebron Sports Connection staff to develop a unique concept that meets their needs.

"We can show customers samples and give them that face-to-face personalization that is often absent with large corporations," Gallant said.

Much like Hebron Sporting Goods, Hebron Sports Connection will continue to carry a wide array of footwear, apparel, and equipment for athletes.

Hebron Sports Connection is located at 17 Main St., across from the Douglas Library. It is open Tuesday-Friday from 11 a.m.-7 p.m. and Saturdays 9 a.m.-4 p.m. The store also has a web site, www.hebronsportsconnection.com.

Parents Surprised by Portland Daycare's Sudden Closing

by Michael McCoy

Parents were left bewildered last week when Babies and Up Too, a Portland daycare center and preschool, closed down suddenly.

Portland resident Sean May and his wife, Megan, have sent their daughter to Babies and Up Too, located on Route 66, for the past two years. Their eight-month old son is also enrolled at the center. Shortly after last Tuesday, Nov. 13, May said his wife got a phone call from the daycare center's director, Michelle Espinosa, who told her two men with an unmarked moving truck displaying New York plates were "taking the computers, the files, everything."

While his wife was in New Haven, May was in a training session in Glastonbury at the time, so he bolted over to Babies and Up Too, at around 2:30 p.m. When he got there, May said, "the place was trashed." By the time he arrived, the moving truck was gone, but May said a teacher had told him the two men in the truck had claimed to be making a delivery in order to gain access to the facility. (The doors are locked, and visitors need to be buzzed in.) Once inside, May said, the two men cleaned the center out, going directly for the computer and files and subsequently ripping shelves off the wall.

"By the time I got there, I didn't even recognize the place," May said, and added that he remained at the daycare until the children were picked up by their parents later that afternoon. "I wasn't about to leave the children there," he said. "They had already been traumatized."

Fortunately for May, he was off the next day, and he spent it trying to get in touch with Raka Hoyt, the owner of Babies and Up Too. After

eventually getting a hold of her, he told her that she was required to give the families 30 days' notice of closing. May said Hoyt response was, "Well, then it's open for another 30 days." A confused May asked her if the center would in fact be open up again. May said she responded, "Yeah, for 30 days, if that's what you want." Given that the place had been virtually cleaned out, May was skeptical, to say the least.

"So, I showed up the next day as a mere formality," May said, but the center was still closed.

"We both work full-time, so [finding people to watch their children during the day] has been a juggling act," he said. The Mays have been fortunate enough to get help from family and friends in watching their two children. Though they are planning to send the kids to Kiddie World in Middletown, the Mays can't afford to send them there until December, since Hoyt has not returned their money.

"The biggest problem we are facing is that this woman still owes us money," said May. The Mays pay Babies and Up Too each month at the beginning of the month. Between them having two children enrolled at the center, the fact that the center closed half-way through the month, and an initial deposit the couple put down, May said she owes them about \$900.

Noting that Hoyt lives in Florida, May said, "It's basically just an investment for her."

Though the Mays knew that Hoyt had put the business up for sale, they had no idea there was a chance the center would close anytime soon.

May said the business was foreclosed and speculated that Hoyt waited to collect all of her clients' first-of-the-month checks before shutting the place down.

May said that Hoyt told him last week that he would receive his money by this past Monday. But, on Monday the money wasn't there. Hoyt left a message on May's voicemail Tuesday morning, saying that she was traveling for the holidays and did not have the files on her but that "a bunch of checks went out last week." May checked his mailbox again Tuesday and again came up empty.

May said the missing funds especially hurt given the approaching holidays. "That's Christmas money," he said.

May said that several entities have approached him asking if he would be willing to return to the center if they reopened the business. "If they did it right," May said, "we would entertain the idea of coming back."

But, he added, "Anyone who's going to buy it is going to have to earn a lot of trust."

"It's a very unfortunate situation," he said. "It's not like you're closing a restaurant."

As for their three-year-old daughter, May said, "She looked forward to going there everyday." Not knowing how to explain the situation to her, he said, "We told her school was over."

May did contact First Selectwoman Susan Bransfield and said he "got a lot of assistance" from her. May said he also called the Department of Children and Families, the Department

of Public Health, and the offices of Gov. M. Jodi Rell and state Attorney General Richard Blumenthal.

No other families made themselves available for comment. May said the other families "prefer to lay low until they find a solution." However, May said, should the issue not resolve itself soon, "We're considering all getting together and filing a suit."

May estimated that Babies and Up Too dealt with about 30 children and 15 families. Hoyt bought the business in July 2005. When interviewed by the *Rivereast* in December 2005, then-director Deborah James estimated that 51 children and 41 families were under the care of Babies and Up Too. Prior to July 2005, the center had been known as Little Acorns Children's Center.

Hoyt lived in New York before moving to Florida. She is the mother of two and previously worked as an accounting manager for a New York publishing house called Wizard Entertainment. She did not return calls for comment for this story.

Bransfield said this week she encouraged families who are owed money by Hoyt to contact the Portland Police Department. She also said that families still looking for daycare solutions can call the Infoline at 211 to find a list of local daycare providers. Bransfield also said she has been in contact with the Department of Public Health, the state Attorney General and the Department of Labor and would continue to do so.



Secretary of State Susan Bysiewicz, far right, was in Colchester Tuesday for the swearing-in of First Selectwoman Linda Hodge, far left, and other newly-elected town officials.

Colchester Elected Officials Sworn In

by Jim Salemi

Officially, Secretary of the State of Connecticut Susan Bysiewicz was in Colchester Tuesday to ceremoniously swear in local leaders elected to office this past Election Day.

But for Bysiewicz, the ceremony served as both a "celebration of democracy" and as a mission of diplomacy as a representative of the state to tell the newly-elected officials that the state is ready to work with them.

"This is a celebration of democracy and the good that can come out of voting," Bysiewicz told the crowd, made up of new, past and present town leaders and residents who could take time out of their workday to attend the noon ceremony at Town Hall. State Rep. Linda Orange was on hand, also to get to know the officials with whom she'll be working.

Bysiewicz thanked everyone who ran for office, including those who were defeated.

"A number of brave people came forward and put themselves up for election. It's not an easy thing to do. Thanks to all the candidates who did," she said, before thanking military veterans for their service, and for preserving the freedom for citizens to choose their leaders. Bysiewicz also asked everyone in attendance to remember the 300 service personnel from Connecticut now serving in Afghanistan and Iraq, for their service.

The secretary also acknowledged candidate's families who made numerous sacrifices during the busy campaign process, and former first selectmen Jenny Contois, Stan Soby and Goldie Liverant, who Bysiewicz said "served with dis-

tingtion."

First Selectwoman Linda Hodge, whose term of office began with her swearing in Tuesday, regarded her official starting date as formality.

"I'll be moving in today, but I've already been meeting with staff and putting agendas together," Hodge said after swearing in, where she was surrounded by her immediate and extended family as she took her oath of office.

Hodge had already put her much-touted 30-day plan in motion, even before Tuesday's ceremony.

"We're already moving forward on it," she said. "Meetings are scheduled to try and put task forces together, such as the Senior Center Task Force, so reports can get done."

She has also been in touch with local contractors about what to expect with her proposed facelift for the commercial area on Lebanon Avenue.

"Then it's off to training classes," she said.

Other candidates taking the oath of office included Selectmen Greg Cordova, Stan Soby and Rosemary Coyle; Town Clerk Nancy Bray; Town Treasurer Jon Sandburg, Tax Collector Tricia Coblentz; Finance board members Brian Smith and Ron Goldstein; Board of Education member Michael Egan and Board of Assessment Appeals officials David Anderson, Tearice Peters and Nancy Riella.

Not all office holders could make the Tuesday midday ceremony.



Volunteer Sherri Ruiz-Clark helps load a Thanksgiving basket into a car to be delivered to needy families in Colchester. Over 100 Thanksgiving dinners were provided thanks to the efforts of the Colchester Rotary, volunteers and businesses.

Rotary Club Distributes Thanksgiving Baskets for Needy

by Jim Salemi

Over 100 families who would not otherwise have had a proper Thanksgiving dinner enjoyed a bird with all the fixings this week, thanks to the Colchester Rotary's annual Thanksgiving Basket Distribution event.

A total of 22 volunteers either helped put the baskets together or helped deliver the 100 meals to families in Colchester.

Asked what is involved in putting together such a drive, Rotary Chairman Robert Kennedy responded jokingly, "That's classified," and added, also in jest, "This way, I get to take the credit!"

"But really it's the volunteers, Noel's, Tritown and Liberty Bank, that do everything and make it possible," he said Monday afternoon from a bay in the Colchester-Hayward Fire Department headquarters which served as the event's distribution center. "We just coordinate it."

Noel's Supermarket in Colchester and Tritown in Portland put the baskets together, and the groceries were bought with proceeds from fundraisers and a matching grant from the Liberty Bank Foundation, which gives Connecticut Rotary Clubs 50 cents for every dollar the club raises through donations at their branch offices.

"Colchester is one of 26 Rotary Clubs we work with in Southeastern Connecticut," said Sue Murphy, vice president of Corporate Communications for Liberty, who attended the drive.

The foundation serves clubs in towns where Liberty has branch offices. In the *Rivereast* coverage area, Liberty has branches in East Hampton and Colchester.

While the Colchester Rotary has been holding the event for 30 years now, Liberty has been on board for the last four of those years.

While the partnership is relatively new, Rotary Club member Fred Brown said Liberty's involvement has allowed the club to expand the program, which proved to be crucial in current economic times.

"People are feeling the crunch this year, thanks to rising fuel prices," he said.

Kennedy said the 105 baskets distributed this year is slightly higher than average, and he too attributed it to the economy.

The Colchester Rotary raised almost \$3,600 and received \$1,800 in matching funds from the Liberty Bank Foundation.

The East Hampton Rotary Club was also involved in the drive, and raised over \$2,100 that was donated to the Marlborough and East Hampton Food Banks.

Any funds or food left over from the Colchester drive will be donated to the Colchester Food Bank, Murphy said.

Rotary is a worldwide organization of business and professional leaders. Approximately 1.2 million Rotarians belong to more than 32,000 Rotary clubs located in 200 countries and geographical areas.

Fury Dominates Division in Colchester

by Jim Salemi

Congratulations are in order for the Colchester Fury, proud new owners of the Southeast Connecticut Junior Soccer Association's girls U-11 division.

The lady Furies brought home the division Championship after an undefeated 8-0 season.

And if their season record isn't impressive enough, the Fury shut out every team it played, regardless of whether the games were home or away affairs, finishing with an unheard-of perfect season.

The U-11 team is made up of 10-year-old players.

The season's finish was beyond the team coaches' expectations.

"We didn't set out this year to win games," Coach Terry Obey said. "Really. We had it in our hearts to work towards getting better, making improvements for next year. The championship was a nice bonus."

Obey and Co-Coach Pat O'Leary led the girls to victory this season.

The Fury faced division rivals Westbrook, Ledyard, Salem, Stonington and multiple teams in Waterford and East Lyme this season.

Like any coach worth their weight in clipboards, Obey is well-aware that victory lies in the defensive strategy, not offense.

"It had a large play in our wins," he said. "They didn't give up any goals, and that's really our greatest accomplishment. I always say to the girls: 'How many goals do you need to

win?' The answer is one. Stick to defense."

The nimble and dexterous goalies for the Fury, Kylie Frink and Jessica Blais never once fell for a fake while defending their net. Frink and Blais also play center and fullback on occasion.

Middle Back Jennifer Saenz anchored the midfield line of defense providing support for her goalie.

And the Fury offense is hardly lacking, despite the focus on defense.

Obey said the girls scored 24 of their points this year as a result of improved passing. The offensive charge was lead by Forwards Brianna Holt, Rebecca Connolly and Jenna Julian and Center Midfielder Marissa Gannon.

While Obey singled out a few of the girls, he said the season would not be possible without each player's individual dedication to team effort.

"I am very proud of the girls for their commitment to team defense," Obey said. "They have all worked very hard this season to improve their soccer skills and each girl found a way to contribute to the team. This season's success was truly a team effort."

Members of Team Fury are: Center and/or fullbacks Molly Anderson, Shaylyn MacKinnon, Nadia Dallas, Olivia McGuiness and Amanda Perez; Midfielders Meghana Kulkarni Jessica Obey, Macaila O'Leary and Gabriella Rancone.

East Hampton Police News

11/9 — A 17-year-old female juvenile was issued a ticket for traveling fast, East Hampton Police report.

11/10 — A 16-year-old male juvenile was arrested for speeding, police say.

11/12 — Joseph W. Allen, 18, of 71 Roberts Rd., Marlborough, was arrested for possession of marijuana and possession of drug paraphernalia, police report.

11/12 — David E. Seely, 23, of 16 Orchard Ln., Old Saybrook, was arrested for speeding, police say.

11/13 — David Leue, of 189 Chestnut Hill Rd., and Benjie Rudinstein, 52, of 88 Castleton,

Cranston, RI, were involved in a two-vehicle accident on Route 66, 100 feet east of Browning Drive, police say, adding that Leue was issued a ticket for following too closely.

11/12 — A 17-year-old male juvenile was arrested for possession of marijuana, police report.

11/13 — Matthew Bailey, 18, of 8 Mott Hill Rd., was arrested pursuant to warrant for possession of narcotics, police say.

11/14 — Carla M. Cataldi, 44, of 87 Clark Hill Rd., was arrested pursuant to a warrant on charges of third-degree larceny, first-degree forgery and criminal impersonation.

Eleventh-hour Revelation Stalls Ladder Truck Project in Portland

by Michael McCoy

Members of the fire department were caught off guard last week, when their plans for a new ladder truck seemingly hit a snag.

The fire department has been working for the past two years to acquire a new ladder truck to replace their outdated 1980 model. According to Fire Chief Robert Shea, the department has been working with distributor Firematic out of Rocky Hill to design a new engine made by Wisconsin-based manufacturer Pierce. (Fire apparatus such as this is custom-made to suit the given municipality.)

The fire department and Board of Selectmen agreed on a \$653,723 project. The public approved the acquisition in May, when the 2007-08 town budget passed. That budget contained a line item for a down payment of \$35,000 for the truck.

Last Wednesday night, Nov. 14, a town meeting was held to address the remaining \$618,723. The plan was for the town to pay for the truck over 10 years, through a lease-to-own agreement.

However, earlier that day, Selectmen Carl Chudzik and John Anderson met with First Selectwoman Susan Bransfield and Chudzik pointed out that, as per the town charter, bonds, notes, or other means of financing exceeding \$500,000 must be voted on at a referendum.

So, at the town meeting that night, many firefighters were stunned when Bransfield announced that the selectmen had agreed it would not be prudent to go ahead with the town meeting vote that night.

According to Bransfield, Chudzik told her when they met before the town meeting that the ladder truck "is too much money" and asked her "what are you doing this for?" She then

explained the long-gestating fire truck project to Chudzik.

(The \$500,000 cap, Bransfield said this week, came from the 1983 charter. She suggested that, while that may have been a huge amount of money 24 years ago, it may be a somewhat outdated number today.)

Though Bransfield seemed to lament the project's being stalled, she said this week that "we had the wrong procedure in place" and said she was glad the oversight was caught before action was taken at the town meeting.

"I've apologized to the fire department as well as the people who attended that meeting," added Bransfield.

At a Board of Selectmen's meeting Tuesday, Bransfield said the town could either take the project to referendum, or the selectmen could authorize a larger down payment, so that the balance to be financed would be under the \$500,000 cap.

There is a time factor associated with the project that has some particularly concerned about any possible delay. Shea had worked with Pierce to secure a discounted rate for the truck; that rate initially was to become obsolete on Dec. 1. Since the Nov. 14 meeting, Shea has secured an extension until Dec. 31. However, Shea estimated that, after Jan. 1, the price would increase by \$60-70,000. In addition, the current agreement would include \$15,000 in fire equipment for the town, and that part of the deal also would expire should the town wait too long, Shea said. And should the town not hold the referendum until next November, to coincide with the Election Day voting, the truck could end up costing \$800,000.

When asked if it would be possible to

squeeze in a referendum prior to the Jan. 1 deadline, Bransfield said, "It would be a stretch, given the holiday season." Also, Bransfield doubted that 20 percent of the voting electorate, which is required for such a referendum, would show up to vote. However, Bransfield said another town meeting would be much more manageable, since only five-day's notice is required.

On Tuesday, Selectman Mark Finkelstein made a motion to appropriate \$155,000 from the capital non-recurring fund as a down payment on the truck.

Finance Director Rob Buden said, "It's really short-term borrowing from yourself. ... There's really no disadvantage."

The selectmen voted 6-0 to appropriate the money and later send the remaining \$498,723 to a town meeting on November 28 at 6:30 at the library

As for the events of the past week, Bransfield said, "There are two things I've learned from this." First, she has asked Buden to help her more exhaustively research all purchasing and borrowing procedures and present them to all department heads and elected officials, in the hopes of preventing another mishap of this sort.

Secondly, "Every year you have things that you have to get," Bransfield said, regarding the major capital improvement projects that are bound to come up. She said she hoped to establish a better system to routinely address major repairs and replacements that would streamline the process.

Shea said this week he was "totally flabbergasted that we could work on this project for two years and have this happen. ... It was very difficult to walk into that [Nov. 14] meeting and

have this sprung on us." Shea added that he wished he had received a phone call to prepare him for the news.

Shea also said that, had the fire department known that a referendum was necessary, it would have worked to place the project on the Nov. 6 ballot. The chief also wondered why Anderson, who is the Board of Selectmen's Board of Fire Commissioners liaison, did not realize the situation sooner.

But, Shea said, "It is what it is. ... We need to move forward."

The new fire truck the town is looking at is a "quint-style" single axle truck, Shea said. He said it has a shorter body than the 1980 truck it would replace, allowing it to maneuver through smaller roads and driveways. The shorter body also provides the means to get closer to a home, which Shea said was important in venting the roof before firefighters attack the fire.

Shea told the selectmen Tuesday that the 1980 truck "no longer serves us as a rescue vehicle. ... The cab is literally falling off the truck." He also speculated that the vehicle would not pass a Department of Transportation inspection.

Shea said the fire department would look into selling the vehicle to a Midwestern municipality that did not require a rescue vehicle but simply needed some sort of fire apparatus. He estimated that the town could fetch \$40-45,000 for the truck.

As for the last-minute discovery before the Nov. 14 meeting, Shea said, "I don't know if it was a political move; I kind of think it was."

But, after Tuesday's meeting, Chudzik said, "It's not political whatsoever. ... I would never politicize a safety issue for anybody."

Colchester Cougars Win Youth Football Title

by Michael McCoy

After coming in dead last in 2006, the Portland Panthers B squad came close to a complete reversal, coming within a touchdown of winning the Northern Connecticut Football League (NCFL) championship Sunday.

But close wasn't good enough, and instead the Colchester Cougars came away with the championship, winning by a score of 14-8. The win marked the Cougars' own reversal of fortune, as they finished next-to-last in 2006.

The NCFL consists of: Colchester, Coventry, Ellington, Enfield, Portland, RHAM, Stafford Springs, Tolland, Tri-Town, and Windsor Locks. The B squad includes 10- and 11-year-olds.

Eight of those 10 teams make the NCFL playoffs, and last season the Panthers and Cougars were the odd teams out. Things turned out differently this year and, by the end of the season, the Panthers and the Cougars found themselves in fourth and seventh place, respectively, good enough to go to the playoffs.

After making it through two rounds, the Cougars and Panthers went head to head at Windsor Locks High School on Sunday.

The game began with a kickoff by Colchester's Macklin O'Conner, which Takuone Geato then returned for 10 yards. This started an authoritative drive for Portland, which culminated in a 12-yard touchdown run up the middle by Joshua Scovill, followed by Josh Lafoe's two-point conversion catch.

This swift early lead seemed to signal a Portland-dominated game, but instead, the Cougars shut the Panther offense down from there on in, scoring 14 consecutive points to win the game.

In the middle of the second quarter, Colchester running back Marcus Outlow began his attack. After being handed the ball, Outlow went straight up the middle for a first down. Outlow did the same thing two more times in a row for small gains. It was not enough, however, to go all the way, and the Panthers entered the second half with an 8-0 lead.

But, whatever Outlow was suggesting in the second quarter, he came out and said in the third, when he returned the second half kickoff for a 42-yard touchdown. After Colchester failed to make the two-point conversion,

Portland's Lafoe went up over double coverage to make a 20-yard reception.

However, four plays later, the Panthers' plans were foiled by Outlow, who intercepted a pass, running it back for 35 yards. He eventually finished up the drive by running the ball the final 10 yards for a touchdown, and promptly capitalized on the two-point conversion.

Despite a striking running game for Colchester, led by Outlow, neither team scored in the last quarter, leaving the score at 14-8. When all was said and done, Outlow accounted for 161 of the Cougars' 192 yards Sunday.

Portland head coach Ken Sullivan said this week he's "very happy with the way the guys played."

Sullivan grew up in Portland and has coached the Panthers for four years. Incidentally, he has two sons in the league, one of whom, Gavin, plays on the B-Squad.

Despite the best efforts of the Panthers, Sullivan admitted, "[Colchester] deserved it. They played phenomenal football in the playoffs. They were more or less this year's Cinderella team." (The Cougars went 3-5 during the regular season.)

However, noting both finalists' dramatic reversal from last year, Sullivan added, "It was a great turnaround for both programs."

Sullivan said, "My guys did nothing wrong," adding that the Panthers played to their full potential and were simply beat by Colchester.

"They shut us down," Sullivan said. "It was tough."

On Sunday, "we just couldn't get it started," Sullivan said. "Once we got in the red zone, they stuck us. ... They produced in the second half; that's what costs us the game."

Colchester seemed to rely completely on their running game, but, Sullivan said, "We passed phenomenally."

"Basically," Sullivan continued, "it's a team effort to get where we were. ... For me to single someone out, that would go against the concept I have of who we are."

Sullivan said he'll return to coach the B-squad again next season. He reminded potential players that people from any bordering towns, such as East Hampton, East Haddam or Middletown, as well as any town within the league, are allowed to play for Portland.



Colchester Cougar quarterback Nick Hemm shovels the ball to running back Marcus Outlow during the fourth quarter of Sunday's Northern Connecticut Football League Championship held at Windsor Locks High School. The Cougars defeated the Portland Panthers to win the NCFL B-team Championship.

Three assistant coaches also helped Sullivan lead the Panthers into the championship: Brian Ferchaw, Paul Owen and Jim Sitro. Sullivan will coach the B-Squad again next year.

As for the Cougars, "I couldn't be more proud of my kids," Colchester Coach Wayne Rivera said. Rivera has coached the Cougars for nine years, though this is his first with the B squad.

When asked to explain the stark improvement over last year's results, Rivera said, "Every season we get a new crop of kids. We didn't do anything special or overly different."

As for owning the second half of the game, Rivera explained, "We saw what Portland was running, and we started making adjustments."

Rivera also said that Outlow has "been an outstanding player for us," noting his 1,800 yards and 28 touchdowns on the year.

However, when asked to account for the championship despite a 3-5 regular season record, Rivera praised the entire team. "We just

started firing on all cylinders at the right time," he said. "We just played hard-nosed football."

League Commissioner Don Herbert, whose son Stephen was on the Cougar championship team, commended both the Panthers and the Cougars, and said of Colchester, "They really proved they were better than their record shows."

Herbert also pointed out that the end of the season marked the debut of the Colchester mascot: Courage the Cougar. Courage is the first NCFL official mascot. Portland followed suit shortly thereafter, with a panther mascot of its own. "I bet you it's going to start something," Herbert said, predicting the league would see more mascots in the near future.

And now, for the Cougars, it's on to the Connecticut Bowl State Championship. Colchester will play the Windsor Giants tomorrow, Nov. 24, at 5 p.m. at Rocky Hill High School.

East Hampton Pipe Organ Business Dates Back 150 Years

by Michael McCoy

Many East Hampton residents may not know this, but the town is home to the oldest operating pipe organ builder in the country.

J.H. & C.S. Odell, located at 13 Summit St., has been based in East Hampton since 2002. But the company actually dates back to the mid-19th century.

Brothers John Henry and Caleb Sherwood Odell founded J.H. & C.S. Odell in 1859, establishing operations on 42nd Street in New York City. Success soon followed; in fact, by 1870, the company was manufacturing 10 to 12 pipe organs a year. In 1927, the company relocated to Westchester County, and remained there until the early 1980s. However, by this point the company had fallen on hard times — including the 1979 death of director William H. Odell — and in 1983 major assets of the business were sold off.

However, the company never completely went out of business; it continued to operate, with a small roster of clients. In 1993, Ed Odell, the great-great grandson of Caleb Sherwood Odell, took control of the business.

Ed had begun helping out his father with pipe organs as a child. He spent two years at Auburn University studying mechanical and architectural design. But, when control of the company shifted to him, Ed felt he still needed to know more about the business, and said there was only so much his father could teach him. “I had the will, but I didn’t have the knowledge,” he said. So, in 1995, he answered an ad in a trade magazine, and began working for Austin Organs of Hartford. (By that time, J.H. & C.S. Odell had become a part-time operation.) After three years, he was promoted to a foreman at the company.

While at Austin Ed, met his future wife, Holly; the two married in 1998. The following year, the two decided to buy their first house. They began looking in Marlborough, but wound up finding their home in East Hampton.

In 2002, Ed decided to devote himself full-time to the family business and, with Holly at his side, essentially resurrected the company. He and Holly were hoping to find someplace in East Hampton to locate the business, and they found a spot at 13 Summit St.

Because each Odell organ is custom-made, one cannot expect to order an instrument up and have it shipped from a warehouse the next day. According to Ed, the interval between the beginning of a conceptual design to its being ready for shipment to a customer is anywhere between one to three years, and added that the building process alone takes about a year.

“The stuff that we build, everything is made of solid wood,” Ed said. While the technology behind electric organs is constantly changing, pipe organs — the type of organs made by J.H.

& C.S. Odell — are a different story. “Unless they stop making cows and trees, we’ll always have what you need to make a pipe organ,” Ed joked, alluding to the fact that along with metal, wood and leather are the chief components to a pipe organ.

Pipe organs are hooked up to a blower, which shoots air into a wind reservoir, something an organ may have several of. The wooden wind reservoir represents a sort of bellows, with the two sides joined by leather. The air then moves into a wind chest — which an organ also might have several of. The wind chest contains ranks of pipes, which eventually “speak,” producing the instrument’s unique sound.

The metal pipes are usually made of “spotted metal” which is about 55 percent tin and 45 percent lead. Ed figured that about 75 percent of the pipes tend to be metal, while 25 percent are wood. “Façade pipes,” which help conceal the actual pipe, are often made of aluminum, which is much softer. Since façade pipes are clearly visible, the slightest indentation in one renders the whole pipe useless. The staff of Odell has held on to one such flawed façade pipe. Set up in the voicing room, a little face has been drawn around the mouth of the pipe. Ed has now made this pipe his personal punching bag, and has left it bruised and battered. “It’s now embossed with my anger,” Ed deadpanned.

Holly spends most of her time in the voicing room, where she takes what looks like functional pipes and turns them into the mouthpiece of the instrument. Though the pipes may look finished when she receives them, the sound they produce is not musical, and sometimes they produce no sound at all.

So, using a sort of mock organ apparatus built by Ed’s grandfather, Holly makes the subtle but necessary alterations to the mouth of the pipe, as well as the hole that rests in the windchest.

A large part of J.H. & C.S. Odell’s business is pipe organ restoration. Because many of the organs are so old, Ed said, “You can find little Easter eggs,” which are discovered once inside the instrument. Working on one 19th century organ, Ed found a message that read, “Don’t ride trolley cars.”

The company is currently restoring an organ for a church in New Rochelle, NY. The organ had not been maintained in 50 years. And, putting into perspective how durable the instruments are, Holly said, “The next time this has to be done, we’ll be dead.”

The rest of the Odell crew consists of shop foreman John Williams, cabinet maker and finisher Curt Goettlich, pipemaker Stewart Skates, and the newest addition, Tristan Bowen, who is a trainee. Richard Hamar, a contractor, often works with the team performing restoration and installation.



East Hampton is home to the nation’s oldest operating pipe organ building company, J.H. & C.S. Odell. Pictured, from left, are John Williams, Holly Odell, Ed Odell and Tristan Bowen, standing in front of a windchest for the St. Anne’s organ.

About 95 percent of the company’s work come from churches, although they have provided organs to Masonic lodges, music halls, educational institutions, and even single residents. Though the bulk of their clients is from the northeast, Odell has sent organs to Indiana, Virginia, and Florida, and even Shanghai. Ed said the majority of the company’s clientele are Episcopal, Lutheran, Methodist, and Presbyterian churches, with Roman Catholic following close behind.

One such church is located close by. In 2003, Odell did work on a 1948 pipe organ for the Lutheran Church of St. Mark’s in Glastonbury. The organ was installed in the church in July of that year, and officially dedicated in 2004.

“Most of the major churches in New York City have or have had an Odell organ in their history,” Ed said, although perhaps the company’s best-known organ is an 1883 model that sits in Troy Music Hall in Troy, NY.

Currently, the company is making an organ for St. Anne’s Roman Catholic Church in Nyack, NY. Ed described this project as a medium-sized organ. Measuring 15 ft. by 10 ft., the organ weighs about two tons, and has pipes that stand as tall as 16 feet.

Each pipe organ keyboard has 61 keys, and most organs have between two and four keyboards; some organs, though, may have as many as six. The prices for pipe organs typically start

at around \$250,000.

Odell typically has around two to four projects going on at once, and has a backlog of about two years. The company started the Nyack organ about a year ago, and Ed said he hopes to have it done by the end of this year.

Ed said that, about 100 years ago, his industry experienced a boom. But “today it’s a smaller industry, focusing on a high quality product,” he said. “It became a more artisanal craft. The ones who stayed in business are the ones who understood the changes and adapted.”

Ed said only about 400 to 500 people in U.S. are currently working in the pipe organ business, and there are just 50 or so companies similar to Odell. Furthermore, the company is just one of about a half dozen full service organ manufacturers in the northeast.

When asked just why he stuck with the industry that his great-great-grandfather pioneered, Ed said, “There’s this sense that you hate to see something in your family’s legacy disappear.”

Thanks to Ed and Holly, that does not seem likely to happen anytime soon.

J.H. & C.S. Odell can be reached by phone at 365-0552 or by e-mail at info@odellorgans.com. For more information about the business, visit odellorgans.com.

Hebron Resident Opens New Wellness Center

On Oct. 12, a new wellness center, Unwind...Body & Mind, Therapeutic Massage and Bodywork, opened at 269 Church St.

The owner is Hebron resident Mary Alice Kandefer, a licensed massage therapist and Registered Nurse.

Kandefer said her motivation for opening the wellness center was her best friend, Mary, who passed away three years ago from cancer.

“It was through Mary’s illness that I was introduced to massage,” Kandefer said. “While visiting Mary one day at Hartford Hospital a staff member came by and asked her if she would like to try either a massage or Reiki (energy healing) session as an adjunct to her traditional medical care. I thought, ‘What a great way to help others — especially those with chronic pain.’”

Kandefer said her study of massage soon began. “We all forget that we must stop and take care of ourselves before we can take care of others,” she said. “This is our goal at the wellness center — to make you stop and listen to your body and to keep you at optimal health.”

In addition to therapeutic massage and Reiki, the wellness center’s offerings include reflexology, hot stone massage and chair massage. All services aim to keep both the

body and the mind functioning optimally.

All of the business’ massage therapists are Connecticut-licensed members of the National Certification Board of Therapy for Massage and Bodywork (NCBTMB) and members of the American Massage Therapy Association (AMTA). In addition to Kandefer, the massage therapists include Ken Davis and Kari Schulze. Schulze is also a Reiki Master.

Carleen Wells, a Usui Reiki Master Practitioner and teacher, is also on staff. Wells is a member of the Windham Hospital Integrative Health Services Steering Committee and Reiki volunteer. She will offer monthly group Reiki sessions, workshops and Reiki training at the wellness center.

Additional services offered at the wellness center are nail care and yoga. Classes will be forming soon for yoga. There will also be a monthly newsletter that will help introduce the staff and offer tips on staying healthy.

Also, a Holiday Open House will be held Saturday, Dec. 8, from 8 a.m.-2 p.m. There will be complimentary chair massages or energy healing, a tour of the Yoga room and a raffle for a chance at a free massage session!

Unwind...Body & Mind’s hours of operation are Monday-Thursday, 9 a.m.-7 p.m., by appointment only, Friday 9 a.m.-7 p.m. and Saturday 8 a.m.-2 p.m. Call 228-3498 or e-mail unwind269@att.net for more information.



Unwind...Body & Mind, a new wellness center, opened in town last month. The owner is Hebron resident Mary Alice Kandefer, who is shown here with the new business’ staff. Pictured from left are Carleen Wells, Reiki Master; Kandefer; Kari Schulze, Massage Therapist and Reiki Master; and Ken Davis, Massage Therapist.



Marlborough Superintendent of Schools Sal Menzo, RHAM Superintendent Robert Siminski, Hebron Superintendent Ellie Cruz, and Board of Education members Betty O'Brien, Joe Farrell, and Maria Grove, all from Marlborough, and Jane Dube, from Hebron, sit at a tea shop outside of the Great Wall of China with representatives from eight other Connecticut towns. The trip, sponsored by the state Department of Education, offered an opportunity for state schools to partner with a Chinese school in hopes of creating more tolerant and efficient learning. Photo courtesy of Robert Siminski

Trip to China Proves Interesting for School Officials

by Sarah McCoy

Board of Education members and three Superintendents of Schools just returned from a trip to China that looks to be the start of a long relationship between local and Chinese schools.

On Nov. 2, schools superintendents Robert Siminski from RHAM, Ellie Cruz from Hebron and Sal Menzo from Marlborough, along with Hebron Board of Education member Jane Dube and Marlborough school board members Joe Farrell (who has since been elected to the RHAM school board), Maria Grove and Betty O'Brien took a 13-hour flight from Connecticut to Beijing in hopes of beginning a sister school project with a Chinese school. The trip was sponsored by the state Department of Education.

All parties are calling the trip a complete success, as school officials returned with a new partnership and once-in-a-lifetime experiences.

Earlier this fall, Chinese school and government officials traveled from their country to the tri-town region. They toured the schools and met the administration. The trip promoted cultural understanding and professional growth in the education field.

This month the sides were reversed, as a group of Nutmeggers, with representatives from 10 towns, traveled to the Shandong Province in China to get a feel for Chinese education.

"There were certainly differences," Menzo said, comparing the Chinese education to Marlborough's. "But I was surprised at just how many similarities there were."

Menzo, along with the three Marlborough school board members, partnered with Zhangqui Huiquan Primary Primary School in Zhangqui. Upon arriving the group met with teachers and school administration to learn how the Chinese school system functions. However, it was the time in the classroom that Menzo will cherish forever.

The four Marlborough representatives taught a one-hour class for 72 Chinese students. They sang "Row, Row, Row Your Boat" and did a dramatic reading of *My Lucky Day*, a children's book that tells the story of a pig and a wolf.

"The activities were in line with something we'd do with our students in Marlborough," Menzo said. "To see how these children reacted

to us was amazing. There wasn't a dry eye between the four of us."

Menzo was also pleased to observe one science lesson that coincided exactly with a new initiative just getting underway in Marlborough.

Siminski was just across town from the Marlborough contingency, at Zangqiu No. 5 High School. Unlike in the United States, Chinese students must pass a set of exams to be permitted into high school. Only 40 percent of students qualify, and even fewer go on to colleges or universities.

At the high school Siminski visited, most students lived on the school's campus. They began classes each day at 7:30 a.m. and didn't conclude until 9:30 in the evening. "It was amazing to see how much the students valued education," he said. "Students would rise when their teacher entered and tell them that they were ready to learn."

Siminski also observed that each class had, on average, 60 students and that class lessons were mainly lectures with very little student participation.

But what does all this have to do with education in Connecticut? "Partnerships like what this is becoming are, in my opinion, going to become more and more critical given China's role in the world," Siminski said. "They are sitting on \$1 trillion and more people speak Mandarin than any other language in the world."

He said that he plans on speaking in the Global Studies classes next year when students begin their lessons on China. Siminski is also exploring options for a Chinese language program at RHAM. He hopes the partnership with Zhangqiu will progress with teachers and, some day, students having the opportunity to travel to China.

Siminski also remains in contact with Chinese students he met while on the trip. Since returning, he has received a half dozen e-mails from students wanting to know more about the United States.

The Hebron contingent, Cruz and Dube, toured the Zhangqiu Shuangshan Central Primary School. Cruz was unavailable for comment at press time.

Obituaries

Hebron

Elizabeth Jane Hague

Elizabeth Jane (Merrall) Hague, 48, of Hebron, the wife of Timothy Hague, died unexpectedly Sunday, Nov. 18, at her home. Born in Wallasey, Wirral, England she was the daughter of the late Kenneth W. Merrall and survived by her mother Pauline I. (Walsh) Merrall and her companion Tom Roberts of Tolland. Elizabeth was a 1977 graduate of RHAM High School. She was employed by the Lake Grove School in Durham, where she devoted herself to her career working with developmentally and behaviorally challenged children.

She is survived by her children, Christopher and Brittany Hague of Hebron; her brother Christopher Merrall and his wife Stephanie of Ashford; her mother-in-law Norma Hague of Rocky Hill; along with many extended relatives. Liz is also survived by several dear and close friends. Liz loved laughing, dancing and being together with her family and friends.

A Mass of Christian Burial will be celebrated on Saturday, November 24, 11 a.m. at the Church of the Holy Family, 185 Church St., Hebron, followed by burial in New Hebron Cemetery. Family and friends may call at the John F. Tierney Funeral Home, 219 West Center St., Manchester on Friday from 4-8 p.m. In lieu of flowers, memorial donations may be made to the Hague Children's College Fund, c/o Webster Bank, 1041 Main Street, Manchester, CT 06040, Attention: Andrea. For online condolences visit www.tierneyfuneralhome.com.

Hebron

Linda Thibodeau

Linda (DonAroma) Thibodeau, 63, of Hebron, beloved wife of Roger E. Thibodeau, died Sunday, Nov. 18, at Middlesex Hospital. Born Nov. 15, 1944, in New Britain, daughter of Anthony Don Aroma of Hebron and late Martha (Arndt) DonAroma, she was raised in Newington and had lived in Hebron for the passed 33 years. Linda was an administrative assistant for the superintendent of schools in Hebron since 1975. She was an active member of The Church of the Holy Family where she knitted prayer shawls. Linda was a member of the Hebron Volunteer Fire Department for many years and was a member of CAEOP.

Besides her husband and father she is survived by a son Michael A. Thibodeau of Norwood, MA, a daughter and a son-in-law Michelle and Jon Lesisko of Hebron and a brother Paul DonAroma of Hebron. A Mass of Christian Burial was held Wednesday, Nov. 21 at 10 a.m. in The Church of the Holy Family, Hebron. Burial will follow in Gilead Cemetery. Friends may call at the Mulryan Funeral Home, 725 Hebron Ave., Glastonbury, Tuesday, Nov. 20 from 4-8 p.m. In lieu of flowers memorial donations may be made to the American Cancer Society, 538 Preston Ave., Meriden, CT 06450-1004.

Portland

Lauretta E. Erlick

Lauretta E. (Meckler) Erlick, 84, formerly of Main Street, Portland, wife of the late Mathew A. Erlick, died Thursday, Nov. 8, at Portland Care & Rehab Center. She was born in Chicago, IL, the daughter of the late John and Eldola Meckler. Prior to her retirement, she was employed with Middlesex Hospital. Lauretta loved to sing and was a member of the Middlesex Hospital Vocal Chords as well as the choirs at St Mary Church in Portland and St. Pius Church in Middletown. She also volunteered her own time as a CCD teacher at both parishes.

She is survived by a son, Andrew J. Erlick and his wife Debra of Merrimack, NH; a daughter, Rita Smithwick of Portland; two brothers, Ronald Meckler and his wife Margaret of Eclectic, AL, and Leonard Meckler and his wife Beverly of Des Moines, IA; five grandchildren and nine great-grandchildren. She was predeceased by two brothers, Clyde and Lester Meckler. Her family would like to extend a special thank you to the staff at Portland Care & Rehab Center for the care she was given.

Funeral services were held Tuesday from the Biega Funeral Home, 3 Silver St., Middletown, followed by a Funeral Liturgy at St. Mary's Church, 51 Freestone Ave., Portland. Burial will be in Calvary Cemetery. Friends called at the Biega Funeral Home Monday. Memorial contributions may be made to the Alzheimer's Foundation of America, 279 New Britain Rd., Kensington, CT 06037.

Marlborough

Peter Alexander Abel

Peter Abel, 68, of Marlborough, passed away on Tuesday, Nov. 13.

He is survived by his loving wife Ingrid, son Alexander, daughter Andrea and her husband Todd Bourdon, son-in-law Frank DiBacco, and grandchildren Samantha, Christopher, Zachary, Nicole, and Joseph DiBacco.

Peter lived to serve others and that others may live in his death.

Those wishing to pay their respects, please remember him kindly in your thoughts and prayers.