

RIVEREAST

# News Bulletin

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**RHAM High School girls volleyball players celebrate the team's victory in the Class M State Championship last Friday, Nov. 14. The hundreds of RHAM fans in attendance rushed the court to celebrate the program's second state title in as many years.**

## RHAM Volleyball Team Repeats as Champs

by Sarah McCoy

The RHAM girls volleyball team capped off a perfect ending to their perfect season last Friday with a win in the Class M State Finals played at Newington High School. The Sachems finished the season 24-0 and won their second state title in as many years.

"It's amazing. Unbelievable. I'm at a loss for words right now," senior Kelly Stratton said just after the game. "A few years ago even we didn't know if we were capable of something like this."

A few years ago RHAM volleyball was an afterthought. It was added as a sport to fulfill the Title IX requirements when the school added football in 2002. "What these girls have achieved in such a short amount of time is extraordinary," RHAM High School Principal Scott Leslie said last Friday.

Most of this year's team hadn't played volleyball before high school. That put added pressure on coach Tim Guernsey to teach the fundamentals as well as the intricacies of the sport as well. "I've always said this has been my hardest working group," he said. "I knew we were going to be good but how good was totally up to them."

Guernsey said that when he arrives at school at 6 a.m. at least 8 girls are there working out or practicing. "It's that kind of dedication that made this season so spe-

cial," he said.

Last year, RHAM won their first state title behind their six seniors. Three of which – Mallory Mangan, Molly Rathbun and Shelley O'Keefe – were named to the All-State team.

This year's team featured a much more balanced attack. Only Junior Tessa Smolinski had more than 300 kills. Kelsey Welling, Kelly Stratton, Chelsea Fenton, and Jocelyn Taylor all proved to be viable options when the Sachems were looking for a big hit.

All of the players, except for Stratton, will return next year to defend their title.

"I assume we'll all be playing in the off-season and next summer," Smolinski said of preparing for next season. "We know we can do it and I certainly think we have a shot to be back here next year."

Smolinski was named MVP of the Northwest Conference championship and the Class M state tournament. She was also the only Sachem to be named first team All-State. Welling was named to the second team.

It was Smolinski who got the Sachems, known for lackluster starts, on a roll last Friday. Serving for the Sachems she got RHAM out to an early 9-0 lead against number 11-seed Jonathan Law High School. The Eagles battled back though, and cut the score to 20-18 when a muffed

set by Law's Chelsea Rohrig put the Sachems back on pace. RHAM took the first game 25-18.

In Game 2, RHAM built a comfortable lead only to watch Law chip away at it. At one point the score was again 20-18 but the Sachems went on to score the last five points to win, again, by a score of 25-18.

Game 3 was more back and forth. RHAM had built a slim lead (11-9) when junior Ellie Linden began serving. The pint-sized setter rattled off 6 straight service points to put the Sachems in control.

Undoubtedly the most exciting play came when a potential Law kill was dug out by RHAM libero Mallory Grosso. The ball ricocheted off Grosso, against the back wall of the Newington High School gymnasium, up the hanging system for the basketball hoop and off a ceiling light. Despite its trajectory the Sachems were able to get the ball over and win the point 20-10.

This got the hundreds of RHAM supporters in the crowd up and screaming. So much so that the officials stopped the game to insist silence during each serve.

That didn't seem to bother the Sachems as RHAM went on to win Game 3 by a score of 25-14.

Initially it appeared that the final score would be 25-13 but Smolinski was

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whistled for touching the net on a kill that would have ended the game. Smolinski wasn't fazed though, she brought her team in for a quick huddle asking them to get the ball to their lone senior, Kelly Stratton.

Stratton finished off the match, and her high school volleyball career, with a kill that bounced off one defender and out of bounds, igniting a stampede of fans

that surrounded the state championship team.

While Guernsey is savoring the victory and the undefeated season, he can't help thinking about next year. "I'm not going to say that I expect these girls to win it all again, but I believe we are capable of being a very good team next year, too," he said.

## Police Investigating Amston Home Burglary

by Sarah McCoy

Nov. 10 began like every other day for the Aramendi family of Amston. Beth Aramendi and her husband Jon went to work and their children to school. The seemingly typical day turned into a nightmare when the Aramendis came home to find their house had been burglarized.

"You feel violated," Beth Aramendi said. "It's unsettling, to say the least."

Beth Aramendi said Jon had returned home from picking up his daughter from daycare and left again, to take their son to a friend's house. In those 45 minutes, she said, thieves had used a crowbar to force open the backdoor of the Aramendis' garage. They then proceeded to rifle through and empty drawers, cabinets and closets throughout the house.

Taking everything from jewelry to leather jackets to the Dunkin' Donuts coffee the Aramendis had in their pantry, the thieves got away with over \$20,000 worth of goods, Beth Aramendi said. She said it's possible her husband interrupted the burglars because the family's 52-inch television was disassembled and left by the basement door.

If the material loss wasn't enough, Beth Aramendi said her son continues to be afraid of being at home.

Noticing the broken doorframe as he pulled into his house, Jon Aramendi called the police at 7:50 p.m. According to state police reports just three hours earlier another Hebron family had reported a home invasion. David and Theresa Knapp, of 6 Kristem Ln., called state police after being awoken by a male subject in a dark hooded sweatshirt entering their bedroom.

No arrests have been made on either case,

police said.

State Police Sgt. Sean Cox from the Troop K barracks in Colchester said the area has seen an increase in burglaries since the beginning of July. However, he said, the numbers have declined since the summer when the burglaries were at their peak.

Cox said there are pieces of evidence from both the Knapp and Aramendi homes that link the two cases, but he could not say conclusively that the same individual(s) did both incidents. He went on to note that a "smattering" of the burglaries the area has seen have been solved but Troop K continues to wait for lab tests that, Cox hopes, will glean more information.

He encourages all homeowners to look at their house a burglar might look at it. "How do you get in the house when you're locked out? These are the same ways a burglar is going to try," he said.

"Get to know your neighbors," Cox said. "Have someone watch your house when you're away. And, photographing your valuables is a great way to aid in the recovery process of stolen items."

Last night, Hebron Resident State Trooper Kelly Kraynak was scheduled to speak to the Board of Selectmen on how individuals can thwart possible burglars. The presentation was too late to be included in this week's *Rivereast*.

Individuals who notice anything suspicious in their neighborhood or who might have information on prior burglaries are urged to call the Troop K barracks in Colchester at 537-7500.

## Colchester Residents Reap Benefits of Gas Price War

by Hannah Charry

"The last time something like this happened in town was in the '70s, when there was a shortage of fuel," Bruce Hale, 25, of Colchester, said, while waiting in line Wednesday, Nov. 19, at the Phillips 66 gas station on the corner of Main Street and Halls Hill Road.

This time around, there wasn't a gas shortage, but a price war between the Phillips 66, Citgo and Sunoco — all located in the same area — and the Mobil on Old Hartford Road.

"I travel back and forth between Groton, and the lowest there is \$2.09," Hale said as he grabbed a \$1.86 a gallon deal at Phillips 66. "Obviously someone's making some money somewhere with these prices here. I think this whole price war is funny."

A clerk in Phillips 66 was instructed to abstain from commenting on increased business. She would not give her name and said, "We're not allowed to talk to the media. All calls must be referred to the main office."

At the Sunoco across the street, however, a manager named Youssef Tammo did speak, though, and said he was excited when he opened his business two weeks ago. Since then, he said he has lowered his gas prices every day. And the customers have been lining up, with as much as 6,000 gallons sold on Tuesday, Nov. 18. "It's

become a competition," he said nodding to both of his competitors across the street. "We'd like him to stay where he is."

At the Citgo station across the street, Hebron resident Brenda Schmid pumped her car for \$1.86 a gallon. She works in Norwich and passes through Colchester often. "I waited in line across the street [at Phillips 66] for awhile but got tired, so I just came here instead," she said. Employees at Citgo declined comment.

Next to the police station on Old Hartford Road, Mina Patel has owned a Mobil gas station for 14 years. She changed her prices as soon as the Sunoco opened to a cent short of \$2 a gallon. On a typical day she sells 2,800-3,000 gallons, but from Friday, Nov. 13, to Monday, Nov. 17, her business has averaged 3,500.

"People read about [the gas price wars] in the newspaper and came over," Patel said. She said she's not worried about ever running out, however, because Mobil comes to fill her tanks every other day.

"Now it's not crazy," she said on Monday, "but in the beginning when we jumped down 20 cents people went crazy."

"It's good for customers and it's good for us."

### From the Editor's Desk

## Observations & Ruminations

by Mike Thompson

One of the big items in the news this week has been the American auto industry and how it seems to be falling apart, so much so that the automakers are begging Washington for a piece of that \$700 million bailout pie. Reading about it reminded me of a rather absurd comment I heard on talk radio last week. Just for laughs, while on my way back from lunch I turned to WTIC-AM 1080, to listen to Rush Limbaugh for a few moments. Now, regular readers of this column know that Rush Limbaugh and myself are not exactly like minds. Rather, I occasionally tune in from time to time, for a few minutes anyway, just to hear what skewered viewpoints are coming out of his mouth.

The day I happened to tune in, Limbaugh was off, but his replacement fortunately appeared to be something of a Limbaugh clone, and seemed to share his penchant for absurd statements. For when I tuned in, he was talking about the crumbling Detroit auto industry, and decided to pin the blame on none other than Al Gore. He said that the SUV market was booming, and the automakers were reaping the benefits, until Al Gore and the "environmental leftists" (as well as a few Republicans who joined their cause) managed to convince people SUVs were bad. The SUV market dried up, and the Detroit automakers took a big hit. Gore and his cronies, the fill-in Limbaugh alleged, were to blame for the collapse for the American auto industry.

Well, in my opinion, he's wrong.

Did environmentalists rail against SUVs? Sure, but that's not what did them in. Environmentalists have been railing against cars with low gas mileage for years, but those gas-guzzling SUVs were still going like hotcakes. Then a funny thing happened: gas prices started climbing, fast. All of a sudden regular unleaded shot up from around \$2 a gallon in 2004 to close to \$4.50 a gallon this past summer. And somewhere along the way, people began to realize that maybe that 15-miles-per-gallon job they'd been driving might not be the most economical way to go, and instead started looking at hybrids like the Toyota Prius, or even conventional engine cars like a Honda Civic or Nissan Sentra that still offered around 30 or more m.p.g.

After all, when 10 bucks barely buys two gallons of gas, it's time to think about just how efficiently that gas is spent.

So in the end it wasn't the environmentalists that killed the SUV market; it was the out-of-control gas prices. For, in the end, it really does all come down to money. Those shiny new SUVs really were a status symbol, and one a lot of people just didn't want to give up, regardless of how Mother Nature felt about the whole thing. But once super-high gas prices entered the equation, the story changed. It's the same reason those energy-efficient home appliances are marketed not so much on how they're good for the environment, but on how they'll save electricity and in the process lower your monthly power bill. Or how you might toss that empty water bottle but save that empty bottle of beer for recycling at the supermarket (you can get money for the beer bottle; not so for the still-perfectly-recyclable water bottle). Being a friend of the environment may be the cool thing to do, but it only becomes the popular thing to do once people learn they can financially benefit from it.

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And speaking of gas prices, they're perhaps the one silver lining to this whole economic collapse the country's been suffering the past couple of months. (And even "silver lining" sounds a little strong, considering just how dreadful this collapse has been.) I've been watching with joy as gas prices have been tumbling down, closer and closer to \$2 a gallon. (Well, \$2 a gallon around here anyway. Last weekend I visited some old college friends in Poughkeepsie, NY, and when I got off the highway I let out a Frank Barone-style "Holy crap!" when I saw gas there was still \$2.49 a gallon.) When driving home Wednesday, I passed a Mobil station in Manchester that actually had gas at \$1.99 a gallon. Gas for less than \$2 a gallon. I really thought I'd never see that again.

Of course, if you live in Colchester you've seen gas lower than \$2 a gallon for about a week now. There seems to be a good old-fashioned price war going on among three gas stations in town, and cars are lined up to reap the benefits. Reporter Hannah Charry has a story about the whole thing on page 36.

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See you next week.

## Colchester Senior Center Among Tops in State in Video Bowling

by Hannah Charry

The Colchester Senior Center's Nintendo Wii bowling team finished fourth in the state at the Connecticut Health Net Cup senior virtual bowling tournament on Friday, Nov. 14 in Wallingford.

Torrington won, but according to Senior Center Program Coordinator Priscilla Clesowich, they entered with the advantage of having 18 leagues within their center. Only four people and two alternates are allowed to the finals, therefore refining the competition she said. "They come with the best of the best," Clesowich said. "We're talking about breaking into regions to address differences in sizes in the regions."

"We lost real bad," she said. "We were four out of four, but the other teams were larger communities with a bigger pool of players. The way we look at it is that we were forth in the whole state, which was darn good."

The road to the championship required beating seven other centers and took the seniors to New London and Norwich in October in preparation for the final big day.

"We started off kind of slow," Clesowich said, with practices beginning in September. "They weren't really confident with the handheld remote so in the beginning the people who were most interested were former bowlers who enjoyed the sport but could no longer physically perform the sport."

The team practiced several times a week, sometimes daily. They now own two Wii sys-

tems, with hopes of getting a donation of a television set sometime soon.

The tournament was held by Health Net, with plans to continue in January 2009. The company has plans to expand the tournament to its other states: Arizona, Oregon, California and New Mexico.

Some other centers are thinking about continuing into the spring with a World Series baseball tournament

"Part of what I like is that it's not a solitary game, such as bingo, where you're playing by yourself," Clesowich said. "This is very team-spirited."

"Something I've noticed is that it gets a lot of adrenaline as opposed to bingo where you're sitting quietly," she added. "I was telling them it's practically aerobics. It's uplifting. I don't hear them complaining about their prescriptions or ailments or upcoming doctor's appointments. It takes them out of their ordinary day in a way I don't see happening with a lot of other activities."

Frances Duka, 91, went to the tournament as an alternate and cheerleader. She started playing six months ago. "It's great exercise," she said.

Senior center administrative assistant Donna Paty said the game has served as "a bridge between them and their grandchildren. Now it can be an inter-generational activity," saying that the citizens gained initial interest by watching their younger family members play.

# Marlborough Celebrates ‘School of the Year’ Award

by Hannah Charry

Congressman Joe Courtney joined teachers, parents and students to celebrate the presentation of the 2008-09 Connecticut Association of Schools’ (CAS) Elementary School of the Year award to the Elmer Thienes-Mary Hall Elementary School. A pride rally was held on Monday, Nov. 17, at 10 a.m. in the school’s Community Room to recognize the achievement.

“The students each came in by class, just like the Olympics,” First Selectman Bill Black said. The entire student body, faculty, staff, town officials, and Board of Education members past and present attended. “It was great to see so many familiar faces,” Black said.

“What a wonderful way to start a day,” CAS representative Regina Birdsell said during the assembly. “I walked into the school this morning and immediately felt welcomed.”

The initial announcement was made Tuesday, Oct. 7. CAS uses a demanding multi-tiered system for critique, which includes a visit from an evaluation committee. Birdsell was one of the six education professionals who visited the school in the beginning of the academic year.

“We toured the school, we interviewed parents, teachers and volunteers but I have to tell you the best interviews were with the students,” Birdsell said. “The passion and drive from these students we interviewed was so evident. Nowhere else have we seen it like we saw it here.”

Superintendent of Schools Sal Menzo started working for the school system three years ago, and said he felt vast restructuring of several programs at the time helped to improve the school to what it is today. A new computer lab, implementation of a recycling and composting program, senior citizen outreach, and community projects such as the annual Town Services Fair and Stuff-A-Bus food donation drive are all examples.

Administrators have even reached out to make global connections through a partnership with the Zhang Qui Quan Primary School in China. Principal Lorraine Giannini visited the school in April and spent five days observing classes. Menzo plans on presenting research there in early December.

Patti Hahn is a math and science specialist at the school and works with all grades. When she heard of the accolade, she said she “wasn’t surprised. This just shows what we’ve known all along, that this is a wonderful place for kids and a great place for teachers. I love working here.” Hahn has worked at the school for the past 12 years.

Courtney presented the school with an American flag that once flew over the Capitol building in Washington, D.C. He said that schools such as Marlborough Elementary are crucial to the progress of the nation in difficult

times, and that the individual success and drive of its students were crucial to the combined success of the nation.

“The real long-term solution to the tough problems our nation faces is in preparing our young people to get ready and lead,” Courtney said. “Education is essential in helping our country.”

State Representative Pamela Sawyer also came to Marlborough that morning to present an official citation from the General Assembly, signed by Governor M. Jodi Rell.

“This award is not just a piece of paper,” Sawyer said. She joined other speakers, such as Principal Lorraine Giannini and Assistant Principal Maylah Uhlinger in commending the community as a whole for creating the environment in which the school could succeed.

“Marlborough itself is an amazing community, and we pride ourselves on that,” parent Maria Baronici said.

“For me and my husband, it was a choice to live here. We chose this town because of the sense of community as well as the school system. And we couldn’t be happier with that choice,” she added. “From the progressive approach the school takes to academics, to the unparalleled staff, to the opportunities the school offers the students in the areas of art,

music, and physical education, to the innumerable services the school provides, to the constant encouragement for each child to enhance their own self-confidence and self-reliance. MES has it all.”

Sixth grade teacher Darrell Netto said that when he first found out about the accolade he was “ecstatic.”

“There is great support from the town, no matter where you look it’s great to see Marlborough Elementary as the focus of the town,” he said.

Giannini said she takes pride in her school’s motto, “Children First.”

“I learned that phrase when I was a teacher, because this school is yours. It belongs to the children who came before you and the also the babies to follow,” she said.

Baroncini noted that at the assembly, “Lorraine, Maylah and Sal all spoke wonderfully about how they put ‘children first,’” Baroncini said. “And as a parent, there’s nothing else I’d rather hear.”

Of the school’s students Uhlinger said, “You are the reason we come to work with smiles on our faces.”

Giannini said that the celebration has only started, with future pride rallies to be announced.

# East Hampton Parents and Players Push for the Pigskin

by Michael McCoy

“Every town has football,” resident Joe Higgins said recently.

Well, almost every town.

Granted, Higgins hails from the Midwest, but, as far as anyone can remember, the East Hampton school system has never had a football team.

For seven years, East Hampton resident Brian Ferchaw has coached for the Portland Panthers, a youth football league that includes kids from Portland, East Hampton, East Haddam, and Middletown. The league is split up into three squads A, B and C. Once players are 15, they can no longer play.

“When we first started coming, we didn’t have a lot of kids,” Ferchaw remembered. However, this season, the A squad alone had 30 kids – and 20 of those kids were from East Hampton. Furthermore, Ferchaw estimated that about 50 percent of the whole league, which included 83 students last year, comes from East Hampton.

The Portland school system does not have a football program either, and though parents from both schools have not formally discussed the issue, many from East Hampton said they would welcome a cooperative program with Portland or another nearby school in an effort to keep costs down. Parents also seemed to agree that they would support a pay-to-play program if it came to that.

Parents also noted more creative fundraising means, such as placing a sponsor on the scoreboard. (Coca-Cola adorns the one used by the Panthers.)

Judy LaFoe, one of the Panther parents said she has been told by school officials that East Hampton is a “soccer school.” At this, she lamented the notion that, “There is no sport in East Hampton for a bigger boy.” She added, “We’re losing a lot of kids to other schools,” alluding to parents who have sent their students

elsewhere, where football is available.

“For a lot of kids,” Ferchaw said, “football is it for them. That’s all that they do.” In fact, he said of one his strongest players that “if there’s no football in East Hampton next year, he’s got to go somewhere else.”

Also, Ferchaw added, “It keeps them out of trouble.”

LaFoe brought the issue to Superintendent of Schools Judith Golden in September. She said Golden was “open to it, but not optimistic.” Around that time, she also approached State Representative Gail Hamm who suggested the players and parents start a petition, which they did last month. Parents and players have been going to door to door collecting signatures, and the group hopes to plan more centralized sign up techniques. A website, which will collect online signatures, is on the way. (The parents are still figuring out a site.) And they hope to set up a booth in front of Shaw’s in an upcoming weekend. Shaw’s has also said that they would donate to the effort once the football program is approved.

LaFoe said East Hampton schools have a field that will be quite sufficient for the program but that it’s “overbooked as it *its*.” However, she noted that if another one was built for football, “it could be used by other teams also.”

Parent Joe Higgins’ son Michael is 14 and just finished his first season with the Panthers. “He made a man out of my boy,” Higgins said of one of the A-Squad coaches.

Parent Kaz Brzostowski similarly remarked, “You see a boy go to a man in a year,” speaking about his son, Shawn. He also remarked that if he had to, “I’ll put him in Xavier or Middletown.”

While Brzostowski is not the only parent who has discussed the notion of sending their kids to other schools to allow them to play, Higgins said of his own son, “I can’t afford to



**Darius Swain evades a defender during the Portland Panthers’ win over the Tolland Eagles on Oct. 12. Of the 30 players on the Panthers’ A squad this season, 20 came from East Hampton – and this is one of the reasons Belltown parents pushing for the local school system to offer a football program. Photo by Amy Biegaj.**

send him to Xavier.” Furthermore, “he doesn’t want to go to Vinal.”

Nose tackle/runningback Tim Brogan said, “I just love football,” and said he’d be “pretty angry” if he had not place to play once he outgrows the Panthers. Brogan is 13 and has been in the program since he was 7.

LaFoe described her son, Joshua, as “quiet and shy,” but said the Panther players “took him underwing,” and brought him out of his shell.

Parent Dawn Repoli said her son Anthony has “actually asked us to move to Wethersfield.”

“I am now looking into all the possibilities,” Golden said late last month, explaining that the BOE’s finance and personnel committees were

both looking into the issue.

Furthermore, she said a cost analysis was being done. Golden remarked that several years ago, a survey was distributed to high school students, and interest was not high enough to proceed. However, speaking on the current situation, she remarked, “I’m aware of the interest in town” and called the petition “not necessary.”

A number of parents plan to make a formal presentation to the BOE in the near future. Ferchaw said this week the BOE was “all for meeting with us, which is awesome.”

Parent Jim Sitro said of Golden and the BOE, “They seem to be in support of what we’re trying to do. ... It’s awesome!”

# Company 3 Honors Longest-Serving Active Portland Fireman

by Michael McCoy

On Sunday, Nov. 16, Cliff Robinson unexpectedly found himself as the guest of honor, 45 years to the day after he joined the Portland Fire Department.

The surprise ceremony was held at the Company 3 Firehouse on Great Hill Road. Guests were asked to arrive at 1 p.m., though Robinson made his appearance about a half-hour later.

Before Robinson arrived, Company 3 Captain Ray Pont told the audience that Robinson said he was busy, and “didn’t know if he could make it out today.” Robinson later laughed as he corroborated this, explaining that he had planned to help his son rake leaves.

Fifteen or so firemen in uniform attended Sunday’s ceremony, as well as around 80 others, including a couple other Company 3 charter members: Doug Sergeant and Lloyd Johnson.

His son, Scott, also a firefighter with Company 3, and his wife, Eleanor, who Pont called, “the woman behind Cliff,” joined Robinson at the head table. The Robinsons also have a son named Brian who lives in Washington. Scott joined when he was just 16 years old.

“The crowd we have here today is surely a testament to Cliff Robinson, don’t you think?” Pont said.

When Robinson, who turns 71 next month, showed up, all uniformed firemen lined up through the aisle, to welcome him and reveal that the day was, in fact, his. “I didn’t know it till those doors were opened,” Robinson said. However, he added, “I should have picked up on it” once his wife started “getting all dressed up.”

Pont shared several brief vignettes about his friend, one of them unrelated to their duties as men in uniform. Pont remembered Robinson calling him up some years back. When Pont asked where he was, Robinson replied, “Up here at Monaco Ford,” adding that he was sitting in a brand new Ford Escape. Pont asked if he was going to buy it, and the response was, “No, I’m just sitting in it.”

Pont said two days later, they were both at the station and Robinson took him outside to show him something. That ‘something’ was a brand new Ford Escape sitting in the parking lot, which prompted Pont to say, “Eleanor won, didn’t she?”

First Selectwoman Susan Bransfield also attended the ceremony, calling the occasion a “spectacular day,” and continued, “I would say this is for a very spectacular man.” She proceeded to present Robinson with a proclamation on behalf of State Representative Jim O’Rourke and State Senator Eileen Daily. It read, “Since November 16, 1963, you have given freely of yourself in the preservation of life and the protection of property.” It also declared, “You are a credit to your community,” and was signed by President Pro Tempore Don Williams, Speaker of the House James Amann, and Secretary of State Susan Bysiewicz.

Concurring with Pont, Gandini said, “This couldn’t have been the successful fire station that it is today.” She continued, “You’re truly a role model for this community.”

Bransfield ended by remarking on the ceremony, “It all happens in an hour or less, but it represents 45 years of service.”

Robinson also received a proclamation from the town, a plaque from the company commemorating his 45 years, as well as a silver fire nozzle. Finally, he was also given the actual application that he had filled out on Nov. 16, 1963.

When the microphone was handed over to Robinson himself, he only managed, “I’m a very quiet person. I don’t have much to say. I thank everyone for coming. I never knew this was gonna happen.”

A few minutes later he thanked his wife, saying, “She put up with me all these years.” Moments later, Pont addressed Eleanor, saying, “Thank you for sharing him with us.”

Just before this, the Portland Fire Department flag on the wall was brought down to reveal a plaque that declared the room the Clifford H. Robinson III Meeting Room

The service was bookended with an invocation by Reverend Bill Hodge, and a benediction by Allen Grim, pastor of Portland United Methodist Church where Robinson attends.

“Cliff helped literally build the building,” Pont said of the Company 3 House. “Not many people can say that.” Pont was one of about a dozen charter members of Company 3, which is now home to around 25 firefighters.

Pont also noted that Robinson, even at his age, still answers calls that come in the middle of the night. Pont quipped that when he and Robinson both answer those calls, “We call it senior night.” (Pont himself has been with the company for over 40 years.)

As for Sunday’s ceremony, Gandini said, “Ray and I started talking about this in early summer.” However, with vacations always fragmenting the summer, the duo decided to put it off until the fall. Eventually, Gandini remembers thinking, “If we’re going to do something, we’ve got to do it soon.” A little research revealed Nov. 16 as the day Robinson officially came aboard. And that “made it easy to pick a date,” said Gandini.

So, Pont and Gandini gathered a list of family and friends from his wife and sent out somewhere in the neighborhood of 60 invitations.

“Needless to say, most of them came,” Pont said. When asked what he thought of the turnout, Pont said, “Oh...my...God. It’s a full house.” Pont also called the attendance “truly a credit to who Cliff is.”

Robinson’s title is engineer. In addition to driving the fire apparatus, he is also the mechanic and gives each apparatus (there are four) a checkup every week. Even since his retirement, nine years ago, Gandini said Robinson has remained “extremely active.”

“Everything I know about truck operations,



**Cliff (left), Eleanor and Scott Robinson stand tall during Sunday’s ceremony honoring Cliff Robinson for 45 years of service to the Portland Volunteer Fire Department.**

I owe to him,” Gandini said, adding that Robinson even trained Gandini’s oldest son, who is part of Company 3.

“He’s your most active citizen probably,” Gandini said, mentioning his involvement as a scout leader, member of the Grange, the Methodist Church, and the Portland Fair Association.

The ceremony was supposed to be a surprise affair and, Gandini said, “As active as [Robinson] is in town, it was that much more of an effort to keep it a secret from him.”

Every few years, the company recognizes firefighters who have contributed five, 10, 15, 20 years and so on. So Robinson thought the ceremony was for other firefighters.

“He’s been getting the firehouse ready for the ceremony for a week and a half,” Pont laughed.

Pont added that Robinson was “probably one of the most caring people you ever will meet on the job.”

“Oh, I was shocked,” said Robinson later. Robinson was born in Portland just two doors down from the Company 3 Firehouse, almost predestining his involvement. Today he lives just across the street from the station.

In 1956, he graduated from Portland High School and went to work for Strickland Farms in town, where he did everything from milking cows to delivering eggs. In 1959, he went to work for Pratt & Whitney as a machine operator, and eventually became a lead man. He retired 40 years later.

Though Robinson’s uncle, former Fire Chief

Donald Kelsey, preceded him in the department, his reason for signing up with the department in 1963 was, “Because I liked volunteering, and I liked being around people.”

Much was said Sunday of how well Robinson knew his way around a garage and his expertise in the driver’s seat, as well as his training other firefighters in these skills. When asked where the know-how came from, Robinson responded, “Just from learning from other firemen.”

The vehicle maintenance includes taking care of a 3,000-gallon tank truck, a 1,000-gallon freight liner engine, a rescue truck and a six-wheel rescue ATV used in the forest.

Toward the beginning of Sunday’s ceremony, Robinson said to Pont, “Two times in one year is too much.” This is a reference to his receiving the Sal Pitruzzello Award at a picnic in August. The award is given annually to the year’s outstanding fireman. “I was surprised that day too,” he recalled.

Robinson called his colleagues at Company 3 “a lot of great firemen.”

He also acknowledged that most firemen become fire police once they hit his age. However, he remembers saying several years ago, “I don’t like doing traffic. I’d just as soon drive fire trucks.”

A man of few words, Robinson repeatedly made clear, “I just like doing it,” as his reason for devoting so many years to the department. Also, he added, “When you’re retired, you’ve gotta have things to do.”

## Portland Police News

11/11 — William Burns, 33, of 45 East High St., East Hampton, was charged with two counts of violation of probation, Portland Police said.

# Portland Parental Emotions Run High Over Nichols Bus Service

by Michael McCoy

Between Monday and Tuesday evening, word about the Board of Education shopping around its bus contract had spread enough for more than 25 parents to attend this week's BOE meeting, usually sporting meager attendance.

But by the end of the night, the board had presented a different take than the one being circulated.

The meeting took place at the Portland High School media center, though by the end of the night, it would be operating under a different name.

The parents seemed to believe that the contract was being bid out in an effort to pinch pennies during the recession. However, the parents who spoke seemed upset that a price would be put on their child's safety.

The uniform sentiment seemed to be that Nichols Bus Service, the East Hampton outfit that has provided bus service for Portland for 40 years, had proven over and over that they were trustworthy and safe. Furthermore, parents shared stories of other bus companies that were less favorable.

Parent Lori Wright led off the public comment portion of the meeting. "I understand that Dr. Doyen is aggressively bidding out the bus contract, which is her prerogative," she said, but added that she wondered if it was a matter of "money coming before safety."

Eric Kelly, who has three children in the school system, said, "I've been in town 27 years. Half of [Nichols manager Debbie Johnson's] drivers drove me when I was in the school system." He continued, "I don't see why we're going to give up safety." He said that, during his seven years with the state police, he has seen

reports of numerous bus accidents, as well as reports of drivers behaving inappropriately.

"The safety of the children is just as important as their education as a whole," Kelly said, continuing that saving \$1,000 on the contract would not necessarily be the right thing to do.

"I'll put up a fight" for Nichols, Kelly said. "I'll come to every [school board] meeting."

"From what I've seen, the bus drivers have been wonderful," parent Lorel Czajka said. She mentioned the low turnover rate on the part of the drivers and said, "The bus drivers know my child." She explained that the drivers wake up her child if they are sleeping when the stops comes, and suggested this sort of personal touch could not be insured with a less proven company.

Parent Julie Leroux praised Nichols for offering a safe ride for the children. "I just don't think you can put a price tag on what we're getting" with Nichols, she said.

Later in the meeting, board member Honora Kenney admitted that the Nichols discussion started as a result of her proposing that the board make sure that the school system was following state guidelines when it came to bussing students. It seemed that this was just a precaution, as opposed to suspecting there was any wrongdoing on the part of Nichols.

Superintendent of Schools Sally Doyen said that she submitted an analysis of what students would qualify for bussing to Nichols in September. This was based on state guidelines that dictate such matters, including such factors as mileage, age of child, construction hazards, speed limits and traffic volume. In response, Doyen received a large packet outlining bus

routes.

Doyen explained that former Governor John Rowland's improprieties led to state scrutiny about no-bid contracts. Furthermore, the town charter requires contracts that exceed \$10,000 to go to bid. (At around \$800,000 a year for five years, this is about a \$4 million contract.)

Doyen said the BOE may ask the Board of Selectmen (BOS) for a waiver to avoid having to put the contract to bid. The school board did so in 2003, but the selectmen denied it; Nichols was eventually awarded the contract.

"We are following the same procedure that was followed five years ago," Doyen said, and said the BOE was working with a consultant during the bidding process.

Doyen also reminded the board and audience that improper bidding procedure may result in companies not awarded the bid to sue the town, which Doyen called "a legal and extremely expensive nightmare." She continued, "It behooves the town to do this right the first time."

However, Doyen noted, "The Board of Education is not required to take the lowest bidder."

Doyen said she hoped to have a pre-bid meeting in early December, though that could be pushed back. The actual bidding will not happen until early next year, and Doyen seemed hopeful to make as much progress as possible by the beginning of the budget season, so the town could have the clearest picture possible of its expenses.

"I understand everyone is very concerned about safety," continued the superintendent. "Safety is the first thing we think about in everything we do, not just the busses."

BOE chair Christopher Phelps later said, "Absolutely no decisions have been made. There is no predetermined outcome we are working toward."

School board member MaryAnne Rode lamented "the misinformation that sometimes happens," but seemed pleased at the evening's turnout, saying that it gave residents a chance to see how the BOE functions and the work they are responsible for. "I hope you come back to more meetings," she added.

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Also Tuesday, the BOE honored two of their previous members: Chris Hetrick and Donna Finkelstein.

Hetrick, a former BOE chair resigned in July after 13 years on the board. Finkelstein was BOE chair when Hetrick came aboard in 1995, and the two served together on the building committee, which culminated, with a major addition to the high school, making it the middle school/high school complex.

Finkelstein was the driving force behind this project, and at the time of his resignation, Hetrick counted her as one of his mentors.

While both received citations for their work, Finkelstein received another honor. As of around 7:05 p.m. Tuesday, the media center became officially known as the Donna J. Finkelstein Learning Center.

As expected, Finkelstein seemed quite moved and suggested the credit for this huge project did not rest sole with her. "You can accomplish great things when you're just part of a wonderful team," were among her remarks.

# Hebron Resident Opens New Kickboxing Gym

by Sarah McCoy

Hebron resident Lisa Colonna has always enjoyed working out and dreamt of owning her own business.

Her two interests united last month when Colonna celebrated the opening of Totally Kickin' Fitness in Hebron. The cardio kickboxing gym offers classes that combine aerobics, strength, and flexibility into one hell of a workout.

Earlier in her career, Colonna worked on the investment side at The Hartford. After her third son, Mikey, was born she decided to take time off. In addition to being a full-time mom, Colonna started to dabble in a couple of home-based businesses. Meanwhile, she also began taking kickboxing lessons at Marlborough Martial Arts. "I loved it immediately," Colonna said of the workout.

But kickboxing, as well as most things in her life, came to a screeching halt when Mikey, now 7, was diagnosed with leukemia in 2006. Earlier this year, with Mikey doing much better, Colonna started kickboxing again at Totally Kickin' Fitness in East Hartford. "I remember how good I felt coming out of that class," she said.

Last winter Colonna approached Kelly Kohler, owner of the East Hartford studio, and asked about opening a second location. Kohler liked the idea, and a Hebron edition of Totally Kickin' Fitness opened in October. While Kohler is still the owner, Colonna runs the Hebron location.

"When my son was sick, the outpouring of love and support I have received from this community was incredible," Colonna said. "Saying 'thank you' isn't enough. For me, this stu-

dio is a small way of saying to the community that I really care about them and want to help them get fit and get healthy in a positive environment."

Right now Totally Kickin' Fitness holds adult classes Monday, Wednesdays, and Fridays from 7:15-8:15 p.m., Tuesday and Thursdays 9-10 a.m., and Saturdays 7:30-8:30 a.m. The gym also offers a Tiny Tykes class on Tuesdays from 10:30-11:15 a.m. for 4- and 5-year-olds. Kids ages 6-10 can attend the Kickin' Kickers class held Tuesdays from 5:30-6:30 p.m. and Saturdays from 9-10 a.m.

Colonna hopes to add nutrition seminars and classes designed for teenagers in the near future. Totally Kickin' Fitness will also offer resistance training classes starting in January.

A typical adult class lasts an hour and participants should expect to walk out drenched in sweat and down at least 600 calories. "It's a workout, I'm not going to lie," Colonna said.

For the first 20 minutes of class, students stretch and work on their upper body by hitting a punching bag with combination of jabs, crosses and uppercuts. For the next 20 minutes, the focus moves southbound where participants use their lower body muscles to kick the bag.

Classes end with a departure from the boxing bag as students work both their core and lower body muscles on the ground. Colonna doesn't want anyone to be intimidated, though. "It's a self-paced workout," she said. "It's about you, the bag and your workout." Previous martial arts or boxing experience isn't necessary.

Cardio kickboxing, to Colonna, isn't about doing a routine fast. It's about form and encouraging people that they can do more than they expect out of themselves. She welcomes every-



**Lisa Colonna demonstrates a side kick during her cardio kickboxing class last Thursday morning. Colonna recently celebrated the opening of her cardio kickboxing studio Totally Kickin' Fitness. The studio is located on Main Street in Hebron and offers classes for both children and adults.**

one to try it out and is currently offering a free class to anyone willing to give it a go. After that the studio offers both three- and six-month memberships.

Totally Kickin' Fitness is located at 53 Main

St., next to the Hebron Laundry Center. The studio can be reached by calling 228-9000. More information, including updated schedule times, is available at [www.tkfhebron.com](http://www.tkfhebron.com).

# Obituaries

## East Hampton

### Dennis O'Connor Epes

Dennis O'Connor Epes, 44, of East Hampton and formerly of Ledyard, died unexpectedly Thursday, Nov. 13, at his home. Born Sept. 11, 1964 in Roanoke, VA, he was a son of Gloria "Chic" (Stroup) Epes of Ledyard and the late Travis D. Epes Sr.

Dennis was a graduate of Ledyard High School and went on to earn his associate's degree from the former Thames Valley Community College in Norwich. Mr. Epes was a mechanical engineer for Pratt & Whitney Aircraft. In his spare time, he loved animals and the outdoors, especially hiking.

In addition to his mother, he is survived by two daughters, Carinna and Krystle; a sister and brother-in-law, Cheryl and Dan Phillips of Newport News, VA; two brothers, John Epes of Vernon and Travis Epes Jr. and his wife, Donna, of Lisbon; and numerous nieces, nephews, extended family members and friends.

In addition to his father, he was predeceased by a sister, Janet Lee Epes.

Friends called Monday, Nov. 17, at the Aurora-McCarthy Funeral Home, 167 Old Hartford Road, Colchester. A Chapel Service followed. Burial private in the Avery-Stoddard Cemetery, Ledyard.

In lieu of flowers, donations in his memory may be made to the Dennis Epes Memorial Fund (to benefit his children's education), c/o Dime Bank, P.O. Box 50, Ledyard, CT 06339.

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

## Hebron

### Josephine J. Eichler

Josephine J. (Lombardo) Eichler, 56, of Hebron, passed from this life peacefully Thursday, Nov. 6, surrounded by her loving family, after a courageous eighteen month battle with cancer. Born in Hartford, she was the daughter of the late John Lombardo and Helen (Matchett) Lombardo of East Hartford.

She is survived by her husband, Stephen, her daughter Jillian, and son Kevin, of Hebron, where she made her home for the past 25 years. She was a graduate of the University of Connecticut, School of Education. Until her recent illness, she had been employed by the Glastonbury Board of Education for the past six years, and was working at Smith Middle School. She also had been previously employed at Northeast Utilities in Berlin, and had worked as a computer analyst there for over 20 years.

Besides her husband and children, she is survived by her brothers, Peter M. Lombardo and his wife Janice of Glastonbury, John P. Lombardo and his wife Anna of West Hartford, her sisters, Kathryn Lombardo of East Hartford, and Margaret and her husband Anthony Mangiafico of Manchester. She leaves her nieces and nephews, Melissa, Michelle, Peter and Jaimi Lombardo, Brendan and Alicia Mangiafico, Stephanie, Sara, Erik, Brianne, Kelly and Erin Eichler. She also leaves her aunts, Irene Brown of Andover, and Ruth Matchett of Manchester, her mother-in-law, Frances Eichler of East Hartford, and many cousins and friends.

Josie will be missed by everyone who knew her. Her enthusiastic approach to life, her ready smile, and her willingness to extend a helping hand to those in need have touched many lives.

A Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated Thursday, Nov. 13, at the Church of the Holy Family, 185 Church St., Hebron. Interment followed in the New Hebron Cemetery, Wall Street, Hebron. Her family received relatives and friends Wednesday, Nov. 12, at the Glastonbury Funeral Home, 450 New London Tpke., Glastonbury.

In lieu of flowers, memorial donations may be made to the Helen and Harry Gray Cancer Center, 85 Retreat Avenue, Hartford, CT 06106.

To send an online tribute or condolence, visit [www.mem.com](http://www.mem.com).

## East Hampton

### Stanley Frank Knotek

Stanley Frank Knotek, 89, of East Hampton, died peacefully Saturday, Nov. 15, at the Chestelm Convalescent Home.

Born on July 31, 1919, in Elizabeth, NJ, he was son of Albert Aldrich Knotek and Anna Hajek Knotek. Stanley leaves behind his beloved wife and devoted companion of 50 years, Florence Knotek. He also leaves a sister, Helen Knotek Wells of East Hampton and was predeceased by his brother William Richard Knotek, and his sister, Marie Knotek Krieger. He leaves several nieces and nephews.

A carpenter by trade, Stanley built many homes in and around the area. His passions included restoring antique cars, developing inventions, and caring for his many feline friends and other befriend wildlife.

Stanley was the founder and a charter member of the Belltown Antique Car Club and was instrumental in organizing the first annual Belltown car meet in 1968.

There will be no calling hours. Burial will be at the convenience of the family.

Memorial contributions may be made to The Belltown Antique Car Club, P.O. Box 211, East Hampton, CT 06424, or The Connecticut Humane Society, 701 Russell Road, Newington, CT 06111.

## Andover

### Ruth MacRobbie

Ruth (Bailey) Polzun MacRobbie, 75, of Andover, passed away Thursday, Nov. 13, at Hartford Hospital. She was the beloved wife of 19 years to Richard MacRobbie. She was born Nov. 22, 1932, in Salisbury to the late George and Helen (Smith) Bailey.

Ruth loved her husband, children and family but especially loved her grandchildren and great-grandchildren and enjoyed anytime she could spend with them.

Besides her husband Richard, she is survived by her son, William J. Polzun Sr. and his girlfriend, Lorraine DuBois of North Windham; her stepson, David Cobb of Texas; her daughter, JoAnn Nadeau and her husband, Rosaire of Coventry; her brother, Clarence Bailey of New York; her sister, Evelyn Kaufman of Washington; five grandchildren and six great-grandchildren. She is also survived by several nieces and nephews.

Ruth was predeceased by her former husband, Joseph A. Polzun and her beloved French poodle, Jou-Jou.

Funeral services and burial at Townsend Cemetery in Andover will be held private. A public Memorial Service will be held at 1:30 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 22, at St. Peter's Episcopal Church, 30 Church St., Hebron.

In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions may be made to the Andover Fire Department, P.O. Box 11, Andover, CT 06232 or the American Lung Association, 45 Ash St., East Hartford, CT 06108.

Arrangements have been entrusted to Coventry-Pietras Funeral Home, 2665 Boston Tpke. (Route 44), Coventry. For online condolences, visit [www.pietrasfuneralhome.com](http://www.pietrasfuneralhome.com).

## Portland

### Alice Walsh

Alice (Grzegorowicz) Walsh passed away suddenly Tuesday Nov. 11. A lifelong resident of Middlesex County, Alice was predeceased by her husband, Frank Walsh, as well as three brothers and three sisters.

Mrs. Walsh is survived by her four children, Regina Walsh of East Haddam, Brian Gregory Walsh of Portland, Francis DeSales Walsh of Chesterfield, NH, and Christopher Walsh of East Haddam. Her pride and joy were her two grandchildren, Aaron and Alexandra, and her great grandchildren, Broden, Wayland, and Honora.

There are no calling hours. A private Memorial Celebration of Alice's life will be held at the family's convenience. For those of us whose lives were touched and shaped by her; the world today is a less colorful, common place. Goodnight, Mother...you loved so well.

Memorial donations may be made in Alice's name to the Portland Memorial Library, 20 Free-stone Ave., Portland, CT 06480.

For those wishing to send their condolences or thoughts about Alice go to: [www.alicewalsh.com](http://www.alicewalsh.com). "Because I could not stop for Death, He kindly stopped for me." -Emily Dickinson.

## East Hampton

### Sandra A. Brophy

Sandra A. Brophy, 55, of East Hampton, beloved wife of Thomas F. Brophy, died Friday, Nov. 14, at Middlesex Hospital. Born June 2, 1953, in Hartford, she was the daughter of Fred R. and Linda Rose (Holton) Waterman.

Sandra had lived in Cromwell for seven years before moving to East Hampton in 1987. She had worked for the State of Connecticut as an administrative assistant.

Besides her husband she is survived by her son, Francisco Cosme Jr. and his wife Angelica Rivera of Manchester, her daughter, Cynthia Scionti of Deep River and five grandchildren.

A Funeral Liturgy was celebrated Wednesday, Nov. 19, in St. Patrick Church, East Hampton, with the Rev. Charles LeBlanc officiating. Burial at the convenience of the family. There were no calling hours.

In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions may be made to the American Cancer Society, Franklin, Commons 106, Route 32, Franklin, CT 06254-1800.

The Spencer Funeral Home, 112 Main St., East Hampton, has care of the arrangements. To leave online condolences, visit [www.spencerfuneralhomeinc.com](http://www.spencerfuneralhomeinc.com).

## Marlborough

### Gertrude Bannon

Gertrude (Newton) Bannon, 86, of Marlborough, wife of the late Raymond G. Bannon, died Nov. 12 at Middlesex Hospital. She was born in Hartford the daughter of Granville and Gertrude (Delahanty) Newton and was formerly of New Britain, living in Marlborough the past year. Gertrude was retired from the State of Connecticut Department of Education.

She leaves four sons, Raymond, Robert, Michael and Mark; four daughters, Linda, Kathleen, Eileen and Maureen; a sister, Eileen Cooney; 26 grandchildren; and 16 great-grandchildren.

There was a Mass of Christian Burial Tuesday, Nov. 18, at Corpus Christi Church, Wethersfield. Burial in the Rose Hill Memorial Park, Rocky Hill. Calling hours were Monday, Nov. 17, at the Rose Hill Funeral Home, 580 Elm St., Rocky Hill.

## Marlborough

### Mary P. DePiano

Mary P. (Geccola) DePiano, 87, of Marlborough, peacefully entered into eternal life Saturday, Nov. 15, at the Marlborough Health Care Center. Mary was the loving wife of 55 years to the late Dominic P. DePiano.

Born in Greenfield, MA on August 27, 1921, a daughter of the late Gabriel and Michelina (DeVietro) Geccola, she had resided in Florida for many years prior to moving to Marlborough seven years ago. Prior to her retirement she was employed by the East Lake Woodlands Country Club in Palm Harbor, FL. Mary enjoyed baking, cooking, knitting, and crocheting, as well as solving "jig saw" puzzles. However, Mary's greatest joy was being a grandmother and spending quality time with her grandchildren.

Along with her beloved husband and parents, Mary was predeceased by a brother, Angelo Geccola of Hartford, a sister, Lucy Geccola of Hartford, and a nephew, John Gabriel of West Hartford.

Mary is survived by two daughters, Nancy Ward and her husband, William, of Marlborough, Josephine Frost of Tarpon Springs, FL; a son, Patrick DePiano and his wife, Christine, of Colchester; six special grandchildren, Michael DePiano and his wife, Jennifer, of Lebanon, Maresa DePiano of Colchester, Barbara Ward of Ivoryton, Cheryl Rearick and her husband, Dan, of Hebron, Christina Jutz of New Port Ritchie, FL, and Joseph Nucifora of Port Ritchie, FL; six adored great-grandchildren, Sean Apostalon, Samantha Rearick, Amanda Teate, Josette Jutz, Evan Rearick, and Nicholas DePiano. Mary also leaves a brother, Jack Gabriel of West Hartford; a niece, Linda Gabriel of West Hartford; several other nieces and nephews; and many dear friends.

Private funeral services and burial will be held at the convenience of the family. There are no calling hours.

In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions in Mary's name may be made to the American Diabetes Association, 306 Industrial Park Rd., Middletown, CT 06457.

The D'Esopo-East Hartford Memorial Chapel, 30 Carter St., East Hartford, has been entrusted with the care of the funeral arrangements. For online expressions of sympathy to the family, visit [www.desopo.com](http://www.desopo.com).

## Colchester

### Lois Wilcox Firmin

Lois Wilcox Firmin, 94, of Colchester and formerly of Groton, and Waterford, died Thursday, Nov. 13, at Middlesex Hospital in Middletown. She was the wife of the late Clayton Firmin. Born April 24, 1914, in Willimantic, she was the daughter of late Charles and Evelyn Wilcox.

Lois is survived by two sons: Clayton Scott Firmin of Barefoot Bay, FL and Warren Stearns and his wife Dolores of Marlborough. She is predeceased by two sons: Robert W. Firmin and Peter Barry Firmin and is survived by 14 grandchildren and 23 great-grandchildren. She is survived by two sisters, Dorothy Chester of Coventry, and Gladys Rogers of Groton, and predeceased by two brothers, Robert Wilcox, Francis Wilcox and sister Mary Sizer.

Lois was a member of Bishop Seabury Church of Groton. Family would like to thank the staff of the Liberty Specialty Care Center of Colchester for their care and compassion during Lois' stay with them. Lois will be deeply missed by her family and many friends.

Memorial Service will be held Friday, Nov. 21, at noon at the Fulton Theroux Funeral Home, 181 Ocean Ave., New London. A visiting hour will be held one hour prior in the funeral home.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made in her memory to Hospice Palliative Care, 28 Crescent St., Middletown, CT 06457 or Connecticut VNA's Hospice Program, 12 Case St., Suite 316, Norwich, CT 06360.

Burial will be at the convenience of the family in the Marlborough Cemetery in Marlborough.

## Colchester

### Milda P. Strazdins

Milda P. Strazdins, 91, of Colchester and formerly of Stamford, widow of the late Janis E. Strazdins, passed away peacefully surrounded by her loving family on Monday evening, Nov. 17, at the Liberty Specialty Care Center in Colchester.

Born Sept. 1, 1917 in Nitaure, Latvia, (she was the daughter of the late Vilhelmina (Ozols) Karklins. Milda and Janis were married in August of 1937 and shared 71 beautiful years of marriage before he predeceased her on Sept. 29. She will be remembered fondly for the love and devotion she showed to her family and will be sadly missed and lovingly remembered.

Survivors include two daughters and their spouses, Silvija and David Wheeler of Colchester and Beata and Nicholas Vukson of Vienna, VA; five grandchildren, Beth Knapp, Matthew Wheeler, Nicholas Vukson, Michael Vukson and Karen Pittman; six great-grandchildren and numerous extended family and friends.

The family would like to extend their heartfelt gratitude to the staff at Liberty Specialty Care for the care and concern shown to both Milda and Janis during their time there.

A memorial service will be held in Stamford and announced at a later date.

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

## East Hampton

### Mary Ann Merritt

Mary Ann Merritt, 68, of East Hampton, widow of the late Philip Merritt, passed away Wednesday, Nov. 19, at the Harrington Court GHC Center in Colchester. Born Jan. 27, 1940, in West Hartford, she was the daughter of Catherine (Reisinger) Grabener of East Hampton and the late Charles Grabener.

She attended East Hampton schools, and was editor of the high school newspaper. On Jan. 12, 1957, she and Philip were married and shared 21 years of marriage before he predeceased her on Dec. 3, 1978. For several years, Mrs. Merritt had worked for Dr. Soreff's office in East Hampton. In addition, she had worked for Quality Nameplate in East Glastonbury, Colt Firearms and Mayflower Drapemasters in West Hartford as a regional manager. Mary was a communicant of St. Patrick Church in East Hampton and was also active with the East Hampton Seniors.

In addition to her mother, she is survived by four children, Jayson of East Hampton, Tyler and wife, Ann of Wethersfield, Kimberly and husband, Michael Pelletier of Colchester and Colin and his companion, Katrina of Cleveland, OH; five grandchildren, Heather, Erin, James, Jamie and Caitlin; and numerous extended family members and friends.

Friends may call Friday morning, Nov. 21, starting at 9:30 a.m. at the Aurora-McCarthy Funeral Home, 167 Old Hartford Rd., Colchester. A Chapel Service will follow at 11 a.m. with Fr. Charles LeBlanc officiating. Burial will be private.

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

## More Obituaries on Next Page

## *Colchester*

### Michael F. Sheridan

Michael F. Sheridan, “Big Mike,” of Colchester, best friend and husband of Suzanne Newman Sheridan for 45 years, died Monday, Nov. 17.

Mike served 10 years in the U.S. Army, including two Campaigns in Vietnam. He was awarded numerous medals including Combat Infantry Badge, Vietnam Cross of Gallantry with Palm, and the Bronze Star. Mike retired as the Assistant Deputy Director of Security, Northeast Region, for the U.S. Navy ending a distinguished 36-year career with the U.S. Government. He was the son of Thomas and the late Patricia Sheridan.

He is also survived by brothers and sisters-in-law: Thomas and Nancy, Philip and Kathleen, and Peter and Kimberly; his nieces and nephews, Erin Sheridan, Meghan and Rory Murray, Cara Sheridan, Kevin Sheridan, and Brett Sheridan; great nephew and namesake, Michael Sheridan; great niece, Mary Murray; “Right Hand Man,” T.J. Dominick; and special friends, Barbara and Eric Jacobson. Mike will be missed by his devoted pal Kylie.

A Memorial Mass of Christian Burial will be held Friday, Nov. 21, at 11 a.m., at St. Andrew’s Church, Colchester. Burial will follow at St. Joseph’s Cemetery, Rte. 85, Colchester. In lieu of flowers, memorial donations may be made to the CT Humane Society, Colchester Hayward Fire Department, 52 Old Hartford Rd., Colchester, CT 06415, or a charity of donor’s choice.

There are no calling hours. Belmont Funeral Home of Colchester is in care of arrangements.

## *East Hampton*

### Tina Marie Perkins

Tina Marie (Wolfe) Perkins, 39, of East Hampton, died suddenly Monday, Nov. 17, at Middlesex Hospital. Born Aug. 29, 1969, in Arizona, she is the daughter of Al and Mary (Ervin) Wolfe of Arizona. Tina has lived in East Hampton for several years.

Besides her parents she is survived by her two daughters, Kristen Perkins of East Hampton and Touria Perkins of Middletown, and many friends.

Funeral services will be private at the convenience of the family.

In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions may be made to the American Heart Assoc., 1 Union St., No. 301, Robbinsville, NJ 08691-4183.

The Spencer Funeral Home, 112 Main St., East Hampton, has care of the arrangements. To leave online condolences, visit [www.spencerfuneralhomeinc.com](http://www.spencerfuneralhomeinc.com).

## *Colchester*

### Karen Suzanne Keifer

Karen Suzanne Keifer, 30, of Bozrah, beloved mother, daughter, sister, auntie and best friend, went home to fall into the hands of the Lord Tuesday, Nov. 11. She was born June 21, 1978, a gift from God, to beloved father Alvin Clinton Keifer and mother Caroline Kress.

She had been recently living in Bozrah but grew up in Colchester with her best friend Kimberly Palmer and her family. She was a dedicated member of Curtis Corner Baptist Church in Wakefield, RI. She attended school at Bacon Academy in Colchester.

She also enjoyed working as an independent painter for 2 Girls Painting. She loved the outdoors, painting, playing piano, dancing, singling and laughing until your stomach hurt. She loved her friends and family unconditionally with all her heart. She had a smile that was like sunshine that would brighten any room. She will be sadly missed, but in all in our hearts forever. She was a true friend to everyone.

Karen is survived by her grandfather, Alvin Clinton Keifer Sr.; her father Alvin “Clint” and stepmother Janice Keifer; her mother Caroline and stepfather Thomas Kress; her beloved son, Christopher Czekala whom she adored and loved with all of her heart and several aunts, uncles, cousins and friends who all loved her dearly.

She was predeceased by her only brother Brian Clinton Keifer, her grandmother Lorna “Polly” Brant-Keifer and recently her aunt Victoria M. Schmid.

We all have comfort in knowing she is in the arms of God and her brother Brian. May we all meet again in Heaven in the arms of our Lord.

A prayer service to celebrate Karen’s life will be held on Saturday, Nov. 22, at 1 p.m. at Linwood Cemetery on Linwood Cemetery Road in Colchester. Following the service will be a gather in honor of Karen at her home at 62 Hough Rd., Bozrah.

In lieu of flowers, donations can be made to a trust fund in the name of her son, Christopher Czekala. They may be sent to 62 Hough Rd., Bozrah. Thank you all and God Bless.