

# RIVEREAST News Bulletin

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**Excellent Essayists...** Three area youths were honored for winning essays in the Patriot Pen competition sponsored by the United States Veterans of Foreign Wars organization on Dec 22. Christopher Lobianco (front row, center) won first place, with Chris Benken (front left) taking second and Adam Berry (front right) third. All three winners were awarded U.S. savings bonds, cash prizes and certificates. Post Adjutant Tom Sousa (rear row center) coordinates the local program for the Hebron VFW post. Sousa is joined in the photo by fellow VFW members John Gasper (rear left) and Ron Parkyn.

## Camping Out for a Cause

by Katy Nally

For one weekend, Colchester First Selectman Gregg Schuster will surrender all the comforts of home and brave the February winter in a tent. He and two others will exercise genuine empathy and be "homeless" for two nights and set up camp on the town green.

Schuster, President of the Colchester Business Association Jack Faski and Colchester Rotary Club member Fred Brown will sleep outside for one weekend and spend their time going to local businesses asking for donations to the Colchester Fuel Bank.

But there's a twist to this fundraiser. The men can't eat Saturday's breakfast until they raise \$1,000 Friday night, and for lunch they need another \$1,000 and so on for all five of the weekend meals. The goal is \$5,000, Brown said.

"I'm sure we'll find a way [to eat]," Faski said. "I'll beg if I have to."

The three men decided on the fuel bank as a benefactor of the weekend because cold temperatures, coupled with a floundering economy made this winter an especially hard one for many locals.

According to Schuster, the fuel bank, which is entirely funded on donations, had about \$11,000 as of the beginning of January. He said this may seem like a lot of money, but the average cost of a gallon of heating oil in New London County was about \$2.80 on Jan. 25, according to the state Office of Policy and Management.

Schuster said the fuel bank is intended to help residents immediately and in the short term, so its supply can reach as many people as possible. The expected \$5,000 collection from the homeless weekend will aid at minimum about 20 households, Schuster said.

"In this economy, we have people who can't afford to heat their homes or pay for electricity," Schuster said.

Not only will the trio experience what it's like to live without heat during a New England winter, they will learn what it's like to be homeless and live in a makeshift shelter.

Brown said he hopes locals will see the affects of a heat-less winter and donate to their cause.

"We want to draw attention to what it's like to be homeless," Brown said.

"It's cold out there," he emphasized.

Schuster said it would be difficult to verify the number of homeless people in Colchester. Brown was confident they are in town, but that residents rarely see them.

By being homeless for a weekend, the three men will be completely dependant on local restaurants for food. But Brown did not seem worried. "I could stand to lose a couple pounds," he said. The trio will go to different restaurants and ask to be fed free of charge, Brown said.

Faski was confident local businesses would help out with their cause. He said, "I know it's

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## Colchester Residents Discuss School, Town Budget

by Katy Nally

The hot topic of a community budget forum Wednesday night was the fate of enrichment education in Colchester. Others in attendance asked town officials to retain funds for social services and Cragin Memorial Library.

The proposed budget allocates the most money for education, using about 73 percent of its total funds. Board of Education (BOE) chair, Ron Goldstein said this percentage was about average for other, similar towns.

A distant second, at about 8 percent, is debt and coming in third is the general fund totaling 7 percent of the proposed budget.

Much of Wednesday's discussion focused on the proposed \$36 million budget for education, which is up 4.75 percent from last year. Although the budget increased from last year, Goldstein had to explain to frustrated parents why eight teachers and two paraprofessionals were proposed to be laid off.

Under the proposed budget, William J. Johnston Middle School will lose the equivalent of six teachers, including those who teach science, language arts and enrichment. At Bacon Academy the elimination of one physical education teacher and a part-time band teacher was proposed.

Superintendent of Schools Karen Loiselle said the middle school would feel the deepest

cuts because enrollment is down. Loiselle said the school is losing about 80 students, or a "team's" worth, when compared to its peak enrollment three years ago. "We really used the data," Loiselle said Tuesday. "We kept students at the center of decision-making."

The 2009-10 school budget eliminated 14 school positions, with 11 through layoffs. Toward the end of the budget season, teachers made concessions and many programs slated to be cut were reinstated. Goldstein said Wednesday Colchester was the only town in the state to get contractual concessions from all five unions last year. Other, non-union employees also took furlough days last year, to help out.

Goldstein said this year the BOE would have to hold another "difficult discussion" with teachers because only a one-year contract was negotiated in 2009.

Goldstein said the 2010-11 budget increased because it was compensating for a one-time federal grant that the BOE used up last year and this year. He also mentioned contractual obligations and increased health care costs, which have gone up about 8.5 percent, said Maggie Cosgrove, the town's chief financial officer. The insurance increase is actually lower than other surrounding communities, she added.

Resident Leslie Curtis said she recognized the need to re-negotiate contracts, but said many residents cannot afford to tackle an increased budget during these economic times. "We can't do business as usual when the populous is not keeping step," she said.

Goldstein also mentioned the purchasing of new library books for all for schools – something the education budget froze last year. Loiselle said Wednesday this was one area where administration "had to take a stand."

However, no new programs were proposed and sports and clubs will remain unchanged. "We're proud to say there isn't a single program eliminated," Goldstein said Tuesday.

Several parents of gifted children said they were upset the schools' budget proposed to retain extracurricular activities at the expense of an enrichment teacher. Resident Andrea Lamp said kids in the enrichment program are being ignored, while \$7 million per year is spent on children of "low ability." According to Lamp, the education budget does not equally cater to both ends of the spectrum.

"I think it's pitiful you've taken out enrichment teachers," Lamp said. "We can't ignore [gifted students], they're our future."

Goldstein said extracurricular activities and enrichment are both things the board has

grappled with and are items it continues to debate about. He said last year there was a substantial increase in the pay-to-play fee for sports and the board originally proposed to eliminate 13 teams from Bacon's roster, before the aforementioned teachers' concessions.

Goldstein was quick to point out the proposed budget does not eliminate enrichment, it reduces it. Classrooms would continue with differentiation, he said.

Loiselle later added students in Colchester have performed better than others in similar towns even with \$1,500 less for each pupil. "We're trying to do the job with \$4 million less than other towns," she said.

Loiselle emphasized Tuesday that Bacon seniors earned 335 college credits while still in high school. Also in state tests, Colchester students have "continued to make gains above the state average," she said Tuesday.

Still some parents continued to harp on enrichment education. Cindy Praisner, who introduced herself as an educator and a parent, compared the proposed education budget to a family's budget. When Goldstein said many students are motivated by extra curricular activities, Praisner countered with, "You're not going to cut back on meals because you really

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### Homeless cont. from Front Page

tough times for everybody,” but he, Schuster and Brown are “trying to help out as locally as possible.”

Brown said there has already been some response from the community. As a member of the Rotary Club, Brown said he’s had experience in fundraising. However, regarding the homeless weekend, Brown said he “didn’t want to do it in a boring way,” and he wanted to draw attention.

Faski said residents, as well as businesses, can help their efforts. Anyone can enter the Rockville Bank in Colchester on Linwood Av-

enue and ask to donate to the “Three Men in a Tent” fund.

For the time being, the trio will prepare for the cold to come. As of Thursday, weather.com predicts a high of 39 degrees and a low of 24 on Friday, Feb. 5. Faski said he would have to break out his “footsie warmers.” Schuster said he was not worried about snow or cold temperatures, but “if it rains it’ll be miserable.”

Brown said he can survive two nights on the green, but said it wouldn’t “be like sleeping next to my wife.”

### Residents cont. from Front Page

like your vacations.”

One parent told town officials how her gifted child was required to read a book one reading level below because some students in the same class could not keep up.

Loiselle reiterated to parents, residents and teachers that she could not personally recommend the schools’ proposed budget. “I feel it’s fiscally and educationally responsible, but I can’t say as an educator that I recommend to move this list forward,” she said Tuesday.

The forum strayed briefly from enrichment to touch on human services, which encompasses youth, social and health services. Tom St. Louis of the youth services advisory board, said the fraction of funds human services is allocated in the town’s budget cannot afford to be cut away further.

He said it would be “penny wise and pound foolish” to spend any less on these services. St. Louis noted each high school dropout costs the town hundreds of thousands of dollars, so spending minimal money on youth services is beneficial to Colchester in the long run.

St. Louis also mentioned that many of the residents that utilize human services do not have the means to attend a budget forum where their voices can be heard.

One resident made a quick plea for Cragin’s funds, saying everyone, young and old, utilize

the library.

The forum closed with a homework assignment from First Selectman Gregg Schuster. He asked those in attendance to spread the word about the budget and encourage their neighbors to speak up and vote in May. Schuster noted the pathetic turnout of voters during municipal elections, which, he said, would most directly affect residents.

Schuster, Goldstein and Bruce Hayn, chairman of the Board of Finance, genuinely thanked residents for coming out and for sharing their reservations, suggestions and questions. Schuster said at the beginning of the forum, “It’s often said decisions are made by those who show up. ... We’re very reliant on your feedback.”

Goldstein said the BOE and town officials were committed to communication throughout the budget process, adding he would write four updates over the next few months.

Goldstein said the BOE would discuss the budget further at its next regularly scheduled meeting on Thursday, Feb. 4 in Town Hall, 127 Norwich Ave.

In the meantime, residents can submit questions and comments through the town’s website, [www.colchesterct.gov](http://www.colchesterct.gov), by clicking on “Budget Information.”

# Layoffs, Slashed Hours Affect Town Employees in Marlborough

by Katy Nally

Today is the last day for the town’s coordinator of planning and development, and several other unionized town employees will also begin working fewer hours next week as budget cuts kick in.

The town employees’ union also was expected to file two labor board complaints yesterday, after press time, saying First Selectman Bill Black refused to bargain and attempted to “decimate” the two bargaining units in town – the Town Hall employees and supervisory employees, said Larry Dorman, spokesman for the Marlborough union.

In addition to the coordinator of planning and development, the town’s tax clerk, tax assessor and building inspector all had their hours reduced, Dorman, of American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), said.

One non-union employee at the senior center, Robin Hodge, was also laid off.

Part of the reason for the labor compliant, Dorman said, is because of how Chris Corsa’s position of public works supervisor was handled. According to Dorman, Black said the position was to be transferred to the Board of Education (BOE) budget. However, when Corsa spoke with Superintendent of Schools David Sklarz Wednesday morning, Corsa said Sklarz seemed unaware of this change. Corsa said Sklarz told him “no provisions have been made” to the BOE budget on his behalf.

Selectman Joe La Bella said Wednesday the BOS would have to reach an agreement with the superintendent on how that position could be restructured with the BOE. La Bella said he couldn’t “comment on the status” of Corsa’s position.

“From what I can see, there’s been no communication between the boards,” Corsa said. “The bottom line is [Corsa is] out of a job by Friday,” Dorman said.

Currently, Corsa maintains the municipal buildings including the elementary school and

town hall. He said, without him, residents will suffer. “I fully understand the economy is bad, but I also fully understand the needs of those buildings,” Corsa said.

Black did not return calls for comment.

On Tuesday, La Bella said these staff cuts and reductions were a last resort for a budget that has swelled with increased debt services and increased health insurance costs for town employees. He said Wednesday health coverage quotes for the next fiscal year have increased 10 to 30 percent.

“There’s only so much we can do to balance the budget at a level that will be acceptable during these times,” La Bella said. “These are never easy decisions to make. These are people we work with and many of whom have served the town admirably for a number of years.”

La Bella said the Board of Selectmen (BOS) is working to reduce the current budget so there will be savings for the next fiscal year. He said even with staff reductions the town must fund unemployment payout and unused sick and vacation days. “In order to reach savings we really need to act now,” La Bella said. “That’s been one of our driving forces.”

Dorman said Black and Laurie Webster, also of AFSCME, had discussed the staff reductions at a meeting on Monday, but an agreement was not reached. Dorman said Webster offered Black wage freezes and concessions totaling \$180,000. “The first selectman has made it clear he needs savings,” Dorman said, but AFSCME and Black could not agree on what to cut from this year’s budget.

“The simplest thing to do is to make deep cuts,” Dorman said. “Obviously [Black] feels the urgency in the short and long term.”

“We urge the First Selectman to reconsider his position by listening to town employees and engaging all of Marlborough’s elected officials in this discussion,” Webster said in a press release from Tuesday. “Marlborough town work-

ers are ready, willing and able to negotiate ways to save public services and jobs while providing needed savings to taxpayers.”

The coordinator of planning and development, who wished to remain anonymous, said he knew his position was up for discussion at the end of the fiscal year, but hearing the news Jan. 4, the first business day after the holidays, was a bit of a surprise.

“I expected a few months’ notice,” the coordinator said.

He said Black told him he had two to three weeks left. But after discussions with the union, the time was extended by two weeks.

The coordinator said Black “had some big budget crisis” and decided to implement the staff cuts to bring in the savings for the next fiscal year.

On Tuesday, the coordinator said he was less worried about finding another job and more worried about how the town’s sewer project would run in his absence. With the elimination of the coordinator, only three employees comprise the town’s building department, one of whom incurred hour reductions.

The town will soon begin its billing and maintenance phase for a sewer project that was initiated in 2002. “In any other town they all have WPCA administration. They need someone over seeing it,” the coordinator said. “I assumed I was good until the end of the fiscal year, which would coincide with the project.”

However, La Bella was confident the sewer project would continue as planned. “We believe we can complete the project appropriately with that reduction,” he said, adding the town would “obviously” rather have the coordinator on board.

Three other Town Hall employees faced reduced hours and two lost benefits as a result of the budget cuts, Dorman said.

Tax Assessor Marie Hall will be affected by the staff reductions beginning next week. Hall

will not work Fridays and will now clock 32 hours instead of 36. At 36 hours, Hall was a full-time employee, but beginning next week she will be part-time and will lose medical and personal benefits.

Hall said she and Black disagreed as to whether the tax assessor’s office should remain open on Fridays when she is not there. Hall said Black would like someone to fill in on Fridays and Hall said Wednesday that person will most likely be Assistant Town Clerk Sue Wallen.

The building inspector and the tax clerk were also affected. The inspector’s hours were reduced and he too will lose benefits. Dorman said the tax clerk will now work 11 weeks out of the year instead of clocking 28 hours per week.

Along with the unionized town hall employees, Hodge also lost her part-time job at the senior center. Black delivered the news on Tuesday, Jan. 5 and Hodge held her last day on Thursday, Jan. 14.

Hodge said Black told her the town was “downsizing,” and they were making cut backs across the board. However, Hodge was skeptical at this rationale since she has the fewest hours at the senior center. “My 10 hours won’t save the town a lot of money,”

After Black told her she had lost her job, Hodge said she was “in a state of shock.” She said she was “blindsided” by the news, although people had been telling her all along to expect something like this.

Hodge said she thought her layoff might be retribution for fighting with the BOS about a tax exemption. Since September, Hodge has asked the BOS to approve a property tax exemption – something her husband, a Vietnam War veteran, is entitled to by the state. “Because I stood up for my husband, this is what they’re doing to me,” Hodge said Tuesday.

Now, like the coordinator, Hodge will begin looking for another job.

# Colchester BOE Member Arrested After Breaking Up Teen Fight

by Katy Nally

A Board of Education (BOE) member turned himself in last Friday on charges stemming from a fight between two Bacon Academy students three months ago.

Mike Egan, 46, of 67 Brindlewood Path, was charged Jan. 22 with second-degree criminal mischief and disorderly conduct, according to State Police. The charges were related to an incident from Oct. 9, when Egan and his wife allegedly broke up a fight between their son and another youth, then threw a student's cell phone into the woods in attempt to keep the altercation off the Internet.

Egan's wife, Mary Fitzgerald, 44, was charged with disorderly conduct in the incident. She also turned herself into State Police Troop K on Jan. 22. Egan and Fitzgerald turned themselves in after learning a warrant had been issued for their arrests.

According to an affidavit on file at Norwich Superior Court, Egan and Fitzgerald attended a football game at Bacon Academy on Friday, Oct. 9. As the couple was leaving the game, they saw their son and another juvenile fighting, while a third student had his cell phone out and appeared to be video recording the brawl.

According to the affidavit, Egan broke up

the two boys who were fighting and Fitzgerald went to take away the cell phone. Fitzgerald told police she used profanity when asking for the cell phone and when the student did not relinquish it, she said she "grabbed him by his sleeve" and asked again, the affidavit said.

At that point, the youth threw his phone to another boy who then handed it to Egan, the affidavit said. Egan told police the student asked for his phone back, but Egan refused and said instead "You want your phone- go get it," then threw it in the nearby woods, according to the affidavit.

Fitzgerald said in her statement she wanted the cell phone because "I believe having a video of my son being beaten on You-tube or the like for the whole world to see would be harmful to him for the rest of his life."

After the fight, Egan, Fitzgerald and their son left the premises and the student who lost his cell phone soon approached Resident State Trooper Supervisor Sgt. John Thompson, who was at the field.

The student found his phone and said in his statement he noticed later a crack across the front screen, even though the device still functioned.

According to the affidavit, Egan's son and another student from Bacon decided to "play fight." However, Egan's son said he didn't know if it was a "real or play fight." Egan's son said he was hit in the head and said "I'm done," then walked away, the affidavit said. A short time later, Egan's son and the same student agreed to fight again and Egan's son said he "ended up on the ground getting beat up," the affidavit said.

Egan and Fitzgerald intervened in the fight soon after.

The Colchester Police, as well as the Superintendent of Schools Karen Loisel, looked into the incident, according to the affidavit. Egan was suspended from attending any home athletic events until April 9, 2010, the affidavit said.

Loisel told police Egan violated the student discipline policy because he tampered with a student's personal property, and in turn, he also violated the BOE's code of ethics to uphold and enforce all laws, rules and regulations, according to the affidavit.

In her statement to police, Loisel said Egan "expressed his genuine remorse" and apologized to the parent of the student who owned

the cell phone. Egan also agreed to repair or replace the phone, which was an LG enV Touch valued at \$429.99, the affidavit said.

Loisel declined to comment further on the incident for this story.

BOE Chair Ron Goldstein released a statement Monday saying the board would "closely monitor the case and should circumstances require, we will take appropriate action."

Egan told police he felt "terrible about this situation," the affidavit said. He said, "I reacted to this situation under stress and for that I am very sorry." At the time of the incident, Egan said he "thought that this was two adults breaking up a kids' fight," according to the affidavit, and added, "I didn't believe it was a police matter."

According to the affidavit, Egan's son wrote letters of apology to "all involved parties." Egan said his son, as well as the boy he was fighting, received a three-day in-school suspension for the incident. The youth with the cell phone was not punished, the affidavit said.

Egan could not be reached for comment.

Both Egan and Fitzgerald were released on promises to appear, and are due in Norwich Superior Court on Feb. 4, State Police said.

## East Hampton Boards Forecast Fiscal Future

by Joanna Smiley

The Town Council and boards of education and finance gathered Wednesday for a special tri-board meeting to discuss their objectives for the 2010-11 fiscal year and address several concerns regarding potential cuts given the economic climate.

Before getting into budget details, many of the members from all three councils made the point that it's critical they receive guidance from taxpayers and that they also need to engage residents more in the budget process.

Board of Finance member Patience Anderson said, "We need to not only explain the budget in number form, but narrative form. We need to express in words to the townspeople what our priorities are and what we have done to cut costs. We have to demonstrate this and not just by using a bunch of numbers. We're required to defend our budget to them."

Anderson also said there was a need to explain in the local newspapers what the budget numbers mean, rather than simply just printing the numbers.

Finance Director Jeff Jylkka said the town is still waiting to see what cuts there will be from the state. He said East Hampton is looking at minimally a 5 percent reduction overall, but that the state is historically slow with grants so there won't be a definite answer right now.

Town Council member John Tuttle made the point that the state grant is not the majority of the town's source of income.

"There may be some reductions in state reimbursement to towns, approximately five percent or less, but it shouldn't alarm residents too much because our main source of revenue is taxes. So while funding may be reduced, the biggest piece of state funding is the ECS (educational cost sharing), which funds education and that's going to be maintained, not cut," he said.

Jylkka did, however, say that although the total amount of the ECS grant would remain whole, the state is moving around money to make sure the grant is there, which could mean that in moving money around funding for other programs over the next two years will be reduced.

"A tsunami will hit towns in Connecticut once the stimulus money dries up," said Town Manager Jeffrey J. O'Keefe.

O'Keefe pointed out that about 14 percent of towns' ECS funds that are typically given to the towns by the state were replaced with stimulus funds for this year and next year. Once the stimulus funds are no longer available, the state will have to figure out how to replace that funding. In East Hampton's case, O'Keefe said it's

about \$1 million. This could mean that in two years, East Hampton, like many other towns in the state, could be looking at cuts in its education budget.

The unemployment rate in East Hampton is close to the state average - 8 percent. However, this number does not include people who are unemployed but ineligible for unemployment compensation.

Superintendent of Schools Judith Golden, who attended the meeting, said there are many unknowns in the education budget and that it isn't as "cut and dry" as it has been in the past. She isn't sure how she will be able to reduce the budget and how the staff retirement plan will play out, she said.

Golden also mentioned that she's concerned by the current federal census being conducted. She said she has seen that people in East Hampton are reluctant to report their situations to the census, but that poses a problem for the town's Title I funding, which is taken from census information and provides funding for disabled children in the school systems. If there are not properly-reported numbers in the census as to how many people reside in a household and if there are any disabled children living in a house, in particular, that will adversely affect the

town's ability to fund programs for disabled children in the education system. Golden said.

Town Council member Susan Weintraub ended the meeting by announcing that she is concerned about discretionary spending, especially since President Barack Obama announced his plans to scrutinize federal spending over the coming years. She said she thinks it's important for the town to be more prudent and not increase taxes more than is necessary. She asked what qualified as discretionary spending, and wondered if the council members needed to rethink how they are spending their money. She also asked to make sure the Board of Education is giving back to the town what it doesn't spend.

Tuttle said he believes the town is very conscientious with its spending.

"Some people like to be alarmist and there's no reason for it. We pass a budget not knowing what we're getting from reimbursement for the state. One year, we had \$600,000 in extra Board of Education money and we saved it. Our excess money from the Board of Ed budget goes back to the town, not the state," Tuttle said. "We don't just spend it because we're going to lose it, like [Weintraub] was saying. That's just not true or fair."

## East Hampton Residents Discuss Town at Forum

by Joanna Smiley

Nearly 60 residents showed up at the "Let's Talk East Hampton" forum held last Thursday, Jan. 21, to discuss their priorities for the town.

The point of the meeting was to determine if the residents and Town Council were on the same page with their goals. Four of the seven council members showed up.

The top priorities from residents were: Village Center redevelopment, Lake Pocotopaug, a master plan for the town, a full proposal of facilities, the water system and economic development. There was also discussion of creating a grant writing position.

The leading priorities from the Town Council were: lake improvements, roads and bridges, facilities (schools and/or Town Hall and the library) water and economic development. According to Town Manager Jeffrey J. O'Keefe, the town owns 1,000 acres of property in the town and at least 60 percent is usable for development.

Many residents at the meeting agreed that education and the village center are the two biggest attractions that bring people to the town, and both need to be enhanced so they can become more of a draw. One resident made the point that East Hampton was recently at the bottom of *Connecticut Magazine's* list rating

of town recreation departments and consequently the town needs better recreation facilities to also attract new residents. Another resident pointed out that the town needs a more visually-appealing welcoming sign and it would be wise to reinstate the design review committee.

Another issue raised was roads. A resident said that no matter how pretty buildings are or how good the schools become, if roads do not receive help then people will not be able to benefit from these improvements.

Some of the residents, as well as Town Council member Thomas M. Cordeiro, felt adamantly that the high school needs a major upgrade and that it should be a priority for the town. Although there is a \$50 million plan to rebuild the high school in the works, the money to actually rebuild it is not yet there, according to O'Keefe. Cordeiro said it is not acceptable that students right now are still using the same labs in their science classes that he used over 20 years ago.

Another major priority that residents spoke about at the meeting involved creating, and sticking to, a specific master plan for the town that involves listing goals for the next five and 10 years. The plan, according to many of the

residents in attendance at the gathering, needs to list what the town has currently and what it needs to have in the future given the economic climate in the state, which could affect funding.

On that note, O'Keefe mentioned to the residents that he just joined a statewide organization called Core-CT that will look at regionalization, which means determining if East Hampton can share resources with other similar sized towns to cut down on its costs. He said he believes this is a good idea especially in light of the grim economy. O'Keefe also noted that the state will offer financial incentives to small towns who consolidate their resources. While some residents wondered if consolidating resources will still ensure East Hampton's safety in terms of proper amounts of fire and police vehicles, for example, others thought Core-CT seemed like a smart idea.

O'Keefe also mentioned that the town needs a grant writer to make sure it's doing everything it can to bring in money. Several residents agreed including one who said he's brought in over \$350,000 for the town with no experience in grant writing, and he could only imagine what would happen if the town had a real grant

writer on its staff.

O'Keefe agreed this is a priority and said he hopes to open up at least a part-time grant writing position soon for the town, assuming there is some money to do so.

Money itself was a very hot topic at the meeting, as residents pointed out the need to be careful with spending the town's money right now since the state is watching every penny.

Finally, many residents raised the question: what happens after tomorrow? They noted that council needs to follow up on these great ideas so they don't just sit there.

Other residents noted that night time meetings make it hard for all people to show up, especially if they're working late shifts or two jobs. Cordeiro said he agrees and wants to think creatively about how to keep up the momentum of the town's involvement. He said he just started town Facebook and Twitter accounts and encourages all residents to join so they can play an active role in decision making. He said he wants to use social networking to explain things like budgets in easy-to-understand terms, so that way residents can understand exactly what the town is and isn't spending its money on.

# Acting Fire Chief in Hebron Becomes Permanent

by Lindsay Fetzner

It was a standing-room only crowd at last Thursday's meeting of the Board of Selectmen (BOS), as members of the Hebron Volunteer Fire Department came to show their support for the newly-appointed Fire Chief Frederick Speno.

"The membership deserves a leader that will listen to them and respond to the best of his or her responsibility to the member's requests," Speno said.

As a member of the department for 34 years, Speno says he hopes to meet the needs of both members of the department and the town as well. His goal early on will be to include the membership in decision making and to encourage team collaboration. With a department of close to 100 members, Speno said, "the membership is the fire department."

"I really appreciate the support," Speno said this week, reflecting on the turnout last Thursday night.

Speno had been acting fire chief since November, when Paul Burton resigned as chief just two months after his reappointment. In his resignation letter, Burton wrote that he had "witnessed a change from the professional town manager form of government" provided in the Town Charter to "a management in which the town manager(s) are ineffective decision makers." Burton went on to say that the Board of Selectmen (BOS) "micro-managed and undermined the prescribed authority of the town manager and the Town department heads." Burton told the *Rivereast* in November he was resigning due to an overarching frustration with "poor leadership."

Speno said he has a totally different outlook as fire chief than Burton did and stressed the importance that "we get the job done."

BOS Chairman Jeff Watt also said Speno's approach to the position is different than Burton's. Speno wants to involve the different areas and members of the fire department in the decision-making process, Watt said this week. He said coaching and mentoring the younger and less-experienced members of the department, as well as giving everyone the opportunity to learn and increase their skills are some of the areas Speno wants to touch on.

"I am glad to see him step forward," selectman Dan Larson said at Thursday's meeting.

"He has a lot of good ideas," selectwoman Gayle Mulligan added. "I think the fire department will benefit having him as chief."

Acting Town Manager Andy Tierney said the recent promotion within the department has caused excitement. "Change is good," he said. Burton and Speno both have expertise, he said, but in different areas. Tierney described Speno as "hands on" and "a team player."

"They are both good in their own ways," Tierney said.

Speno submitted the only application received for the position. His term will run until Sept. 30, 2012.

Other appointments at the meeting included Pamela Meliso as a regular member of the Commission on Aging, Maria Morelli-Wolfe and Cecile Piette as alternate members of the Commission on Aging, Donald Casoni as an alternate member of the Planning and Zoning Commission, and Bryan Tarbell as an alternate member of the Historic Properties Commission. William Stelzner resigned from the Water Pollution Control Authority.

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Also at the meeting, Watt gave an update on the search for a town manager. This past week-

end, three candidates were interviewed. Watt said at the meeting on Thursday, Jan. 21, the three candidates to be interviewed were a "very good mix of people," and said he felt the town is "in good shape" in terms of filling the position.

On Tuesday, Jan. 26, Watt said the interviews had gone "very good" over the weekend and had a lot of input and feedback from the groups that attended the approximately five-hour long interview process.

"It went very well as far as getting three different views," Watt said.

An employee group consisting of Tierney, Executive Assistant Donna Lanza and Town Planner Michael O'Leary were present. A community group, outside town manager and panel group, including RHAM Superintendent of Schools Robert Siminski, Hebron Superintendent of Schools Ellie Cruz, Board of Finance Chairman Michael Hazel and Planning and Zoning Commission Chairman Lewis Hinman III were also present for the interviews.

"We are pretty much on track with the hope that in the February timeframe, the Board of Selectmen can make a decision," Watt said at last Thursday's meeting.

At the next BOS meeting on Feb. 4, Watt said the Board will decide which candidates will go through the final interview process. The candidates will be narrowed down from three to at least two, he said.

Also last week, Interim Finance Director Elaine Griffin presented a summary of the fiscal year 2008-09 audit to the board. Griffin said the auditors are usually on the premises for three weeks, but this year, the process was completed in two. The auditors found three "minor observations." The first observation involved due to/

due from. Griffin said there are balances remaining on some of the due to/due froms, mainly used for money anticipated to come in and go out that often deals with grants that are applied for. The next step would be for them to be zeroed out, Griffin said.

The second observation during the audit included capital fixed assets, which are routinely updated as items are removed or added. Griffin said that they should be updated throughout the year, but sometimes get pushed aside, especially during busy times like the budget season.

The last pertained to student activity accounts. Griffin said one person should be responsible for collecting and depositing funds, while another is responsible for distributing the checks. At the present time, these responsibilities are only being done by one person due to health related problems, Griffin said.

Tierney said Thursday night that Griffin is a "dedicated employee" who should be recognized for her hard work.

"We are very fortunate to have our financial staff," Larson said.

Also at the meeting, the BOS accepted Griswold Lane, part of the Griswold Farms subdivision, as a town road. Tierney described the road as a fairly-new development and said that road construction and inspections have all been completed.

"We have had great luck with accepting roads," Tierney said.

A \$32,000 maintenance bond will be held for a one-year maintenance period to ensure that the repairs made to the road before winter will be found acceptable in the spring.

The next meeting of the BOS will be held on Feb. 4 at 7:30 p.m. in the Town Office building, located at 15 Gilead St.

## New Fund Established to Help Keep Power On in Andover

by Lindsay Fetzner

Cold temperature is one indicator that the winter season is upon us; a higher heating bill is yet another stark reminder.

In an effort to help residents that have received a shut-off notice from Connecticut Light & Power (CL&P), Andover Social Services has stepped in and started a new fund to keep the power on in those residences.

"Once in a while, we get a call," Social Services Director Dawn Quint said. But this year, Quint received at least four calls from Andover residents having trouble paying their bills. "The phone just kept ringing," she said.

In August, Quint became the new director of social services, replacing Heidi Donnelly. In the past, Donnelly received only occasional calls from residents raising concerns about their bills, but "there was a rash this fall," Quint said. Those who called in were primarily from middle to lower middle-class families, people Quint said she would not normally expect to call in. Quint says the situation many residents are in is a direct result of the present state of the economy.

From November to April, CL&P will not turn off power to those with outstanding balances. However, any unpaid balances will be due in May to prevent a future shut-off. "Come May, those people who received shut-off notices in the fall more than likely won't be able to pay the huge balances they incurred over the year," Quint said. As a result, Quint said she also fears shut-offs in the spring.

The goal for the program is to raise \$1,000. Quint hopes to stop shut-offs for at least four families in town with the money that is raised. Members of Social Services have volunteered their time to help raise funds for the program. Around the holidays, Quint said, there is a volunteer pool that assists the town Social Services department. Staff from the Andover Elementary School has also helped, donating approximately \$585, money that would have been put toward buying presents for one another.

"People in town are very good about taking care of each other," Quint said.

Because this was not something the town budgeted for, First Selectman Bob Burbank said

the funding is dependent on contributions. Each situation will be held on a case-by-case basis, he said.

"People are down and out," Burbank said. "We are hoping this will be a stop-gap."

To help raise money for the fund, a spaghetti dinner will take place Saturday, Feb. 20, from 5:30-7 p.m., in the cafeteria at Andover Elementary School, 35 School Rd. Spaghetti and meatballs will be served. Tickets are \$10 for adults, \$8 for seniors and \$5 for children ages 5-12. Children under age 5 are free. Tickets are available at Hop River Café and Bakery, 144 Route 6, or at the Andover Town Clerk's office, located at Town Hall, 17 School Rd. Hop River Café will also prepare the food for the dinner. All proceeds will go directly to the Social Services fund.

For more information and/or reservations, call Andover Social Services at 860-798-6583 or Joan Foran at 860-742-8585.

Quint said the lack of resources for people having trouble paying bills is a concern. "What [help was available] was a one-time shot, so I thought we needed something else," she said.

CL&P spokesman Mitch Gross said he is aware that some customers are going through difficult times, especially during the winter months, but wants people to know that help is out there.

"We encourage customers to call us first if they are having problems," Gross said. "The worst thing a customer can do is nothing."

Last year, CL&P saw a noticeable increase in customers calling and asking for help, Gross said. "This is good because the last thing we want to do is shut the customer's service off," he said.

Becoming involved in state programs such as Operation Fuel and working with both local and social service agents are other options Gross recommended for those in need.

Gross said he was not aware of any other towns that are instating similar funds to help residents out.

Donations to the fund can be made to Andover Social Services, Electric Fund; Town of Andover, 17 School Rd., Andover, CT 06232.

## Hebron Women Seek to Update Town Phone Book

by Lindsay Fetzner

Over 12 years have passed since the last edition of the Hebron Phone Book has been published. Residents will be delighted to learn that this year a new edition will be available, thanks to the hard work and collaboration of Judy Podell, Gayle Mulligan and Beth Fitzgerald.

"It is where people turn first," said Podell, advertising coordinator. "It is a wonderful resource."

The Hebron Business Association published the last phone directory in April 1997. A good resource for locating area businesses and a way to support of local community, Podell says many people still have their original copies.

"I still have mine and it's incredibly dog-eared," Podell said.

The free publication is distributed to all Hebron residents and businesses that advertise. All residents are listed free of charge, alphabetically by street name. Forms are available at the town hall and senior center if residents choose to be listed. People can also elect not be published. The front of the book will contain a directory listing, grouped by category. Local contacts and businesses as well as town maps will comprise the directory.

Mulligan said she received her copy of the phone book, now "totally ripped apart," when she moved to town about 13 years ago. She said she referred to the map and resident directory countless times in her first few years living in Hebron.

The last book had 72 pages, but the updated version will have close to 100 pages, Podell said. There have been an increase of at least five streets over the past 12 years, Fitzgerald said, and town residents, two of the major con-

tributors to the expansion of the book's size. Another big modification will be a cover printed in color, a change Podell said will make it stand out in a drawer.

The total cost to print, bind and mail the updated phone book will fall between \$15,000 and \$16,000, Podell said, citing the ads as the primary resource of funding the book. Podell hopes businesses that advertised in the last book will continue their support in the updated one. Ads run from \$125 for a quarter page to \$425 for a full page. Businesses both in town and out of town are encouraged to advertise.

Podell, Mulligan and Fitzgerald have been working on the project for about a year and plan on completing the phone book sometime this year. Mulligan said it has been "a long time coming," but Fitzgerald hopes to finish "sooner rather than later." Currently, Podell says about one-third of the ads they need have been purchased. The remaining ad space is in the interior of the book, as the covers sold within the first week. The team is also looking for volunteers, which Fitzgerald says they have had no problem finding.

"It's such a great tool and won't become obsolete," she said. "We've had all sorts of positive responses."

Parties interested in placing an ad in the phone book can contact Podell at 860-228-1172 or at hebronphonebook@comcast.net. Business ads will continue to be accepted until enough money has been raised to print, bind and distribute the book.

"If people want to put money in the local community, this is a great way to do it," Podell said. "It's the first place people look."

## East Hampton Town Council Discusses Lake, Water System

by Joanna Smiley

At Tuesday night's Town Council meeting, council members discussed two key issues regarding vessel restrictions and quiet hours on Lake Pocotopaug, as well as a heated talk regarding the water connection policy for the village water system.

Parks and Recreation Advisory Board Chairman Richard Norkun said he felt that it's great there might be restrictions on the size of boats that can travel on the lake. Norkun felt that, especially with kayaks and canoes on the lake, it's important that the lake, which he says is becoming quite crowded with pontoon boats, has quiet hours. He said residents who are as far away as one and a quarter mile from the edge of the lake can still hear boats.

Scott Sanicki, an East Hampton resident and engineer, did question whether limiting boat size would necessarily change the noise situation. He pointed out that any exhaust from boats above the water line will be loud.

Another issue raised regarding the lake had to do with snow machines traveling on the water during the winter. Although as one resident pointed out, a sign on the lake specifically says "no snow machines," the snow mobiles still come out in high numbers causing further noise disruption for residents.

Town Council member John Tuttle said the issue is "complicated." He admitted he hears boats and planes on the lake from where he lives, but wouldn't want to prevent planes from landing on the lake since he enjoys watching them and says his kids do as well. He also made the point, "Who are we to say our residents can't enjoy snowmobiling? Lots of them enjoy that in the winter."

East Hampton Police Chief Matthew A.

Reimondo, who attended the meeting, said he lacks the financial resources and manpower to patrol the lake during the winter and can only patrol it during the summer. "The bottom line is that we're not going to go out and chase a snowmobile across a frozen lake," he said.

Town Council member Susan Weintraub wondered how many boats come in to the lake from other areas. She also said she would like to explore how other towns in the state handle their lake noise issues.

Ultimately, Town Council member Thomas M. Cordeiro made a motion to create a task force to review the navigation ordinance. The motion passed unanimously.

Tuttle then moved on to discussing the village water system issue. He said so far the system has increased water content by 50 percent and has allowed the town to take on new properties. Currently, 26 users are on the village water system. However, questions were raised at the meeting regarding how to determine which properties qualify for the water system. One resident wondered what would happen if a developer comes in and wants to use the system; do they then pay the cost for water? Tuttle said this was likely what would happen.

Council members did agree that properties with contaminated water, however, needed to be priorities for having access to the village water system, first and foremost, before any developers.

Weintraub and Cordeiro were not prepared to vote on Tuesday on the village water system and said they needed until the next council meeting to review the details of the system that is currently in place.

## Portland Resident Charged With Chasing Bar Patrons With Knife

by Joanna Smiley

A local man was arrested on multiple charges Sunday after, according to Portland Police, he chased area bar patrons with a knife.

Samuel Bitcon, 22, of 10 Russell Ave., was charged with attempted first-degree assault, first-degree threatening, possession of marijuana, possession of drug paraphernalia and breach of peace, police said.

According to Sgt. Scott Cunningham, at about 2 a.m. on Sunday, Jan. 24, police responded to a call that an individual with a knife was chasing patrons at Cafe 66. Cunningham said Bitcon was "already flying high" before he arrived at the bar, and that the employees at Cafe 66 did not serve Bitcon alcohol.

Cafe 66 would not comment on the incident for this story.

Cunningham said police learned Bitcon had entered Cafe 66 shortly after midnight and began arguing with restaurant patrons. After being escorted out by employees before police arrived, Bitcon reportedly stood on the sidewalk staring inside the restaurant through a

large picture window. Patrons later noticed him walking toward a south side alley.

According to the police report, one of the patrons noticed him in the alley, crouching and holding up a knife next to his head, ready to slash or stab someone. The patron ran back towards Main Street to warn the others, Cunningham said, at which time Bitcon swung the knife wildly, threatening to kill the patrons.

Upon arrival at the bar, police observed Bitcon standing on the sidewalk, yelling obscenities, Cunningham said. He added that Bitcon attempted to hide the knife in his rear pocket. Portland officers, assisted by Middletown Police, wrestled Bitcon to the ground, at which time he was secured, Cunningham said.

No one was injured in the incident, Cunningham said.

Bitcon is not allowed contact with the bar, and is presently being held at the Hartford Correctional Center.

## Hebron Resident Strikes Tree, Flown to Hospital

by Lindsay Fetzner

A resident was transported via LifeStar to Hartford Hospital last Saturday, Jan. 23, after he drove his car off Crouch Road and struck a tree, according to State Police.

Kenneth White, 53, of 36 Crouch Rd, was driving his 2007 Corvette down the dead-end road at around 5 p.m. when the accident occurred, State Police said.

Hebron Volunteer Fire Department Lieutenant Kevin McDonnell said both doors of White's Corvette were "pretty damaged." When the fire department arrived, the car was running in gear. In an effort to shut the car off, McDonnell said the hood was pried open and the battery cables were cut. White was extracted from his car within 10 minutes.

McDonnell said there were no hazardous conditions at the time of the accident, and that

the crash occurred on level ground, at 81 Crouch Rd. When White struck the tree off the left shoulder of the road, he ended up on the front lawn of a house.

White sustained non-life-threatening injuries. He broke his arm and fractured his neck, but was wearing his seatbelt, according to State Police. McDonnell said the Fire Department has not made any recent calls to LifeStar.

State Trooper Gregory DeCarli, the investigating officer, said the accident was not weather related and was most likely due to excessive speeding. There is a posted speed limit of 25 miles per hour on the road, State Police said.

As of Jan. 25, White was in stable condition, according to Hartford Hospital. State Police said the case is still under investigation.

## Middletown Resident Charged with Altering Hebron Check

by Lindsay Fetzner

A Middletown resident turned herself in to State Police Jan. 20 on charges related to an altered Town of Hebron check.

Stephanie Ramirez, 27, of 259 William St., Middletown, was charged with first-degree forgery, according to State Police. Police said a warrant had been issued Jan. 5 for her arrest.

Acting Town Manager Andrew Tierney confirmed that Ramirez is not a town employee. The Town of Hebron purchases their time cards from the company Amano, located in Wallingford, according to Interim Finance Director Elaine Griffin. Ramirez took the check from Amano's mailbox and altered the amount from \$94.20 to \$940.00.

An Amano employee, who did not wish to be named, confirmed that previous to the incident their mailboxes were not locked, but currently they do lock them.

The town has checks and balances in place with Webster Bank and utilizes the fraud control system, Positive Pay, Griffin said. Any checks that are sent out are compared to those presented for payment. Check numbers, amounts, dates and names on the check are

among those compared by the system. Griffin said if any of these are not correct at the time a check is presented for payment, a message is sent from the bank to confirm the payment and the choice to confirm or deny the payment is given.

In this instance, the check number did not match the dollar amount the check was originally made out for.

Ramirez tried to cash the altered check at Shaw's in Hamden. Griffin said it was clear that the check was fraudulent in nature and "very evident it was altered."

Griffin said that there was "no loss incurred to the town of Hebron." The check was kicked back and the payment was denied. There have been no prior instances like this in town, Griffin said, and have always had checks and balances in place. Amano also confirmed they have not experienced similar incidents as well. The town filed a claim shortly after the incident with the town's former resident state trooper, Kelly Kraynak.

Ramirez is due in court in Meriden on Feb. 10 and bond is set at \$5,000.

## Colchester Police News

1/21: Jennifer Sanford, 26, of 1 Aime St., Baltic, turned herself in for violation of probation, State Police.

1/21: Donald Loree, 28, of 51 South St., Apt. 4, Cromwell, was charged with DUI and failure to maintain proper lane, State Police.

1/22: Cheryl Lee Dexter, 48, of 44 Starwood Trl., was charged with DWI and failure to drive right, State Police.

1/23: Timothy Ferriter, 44, of 263 Abbot St., Springfield, MA, was charged with DUI and failure to drive in proper lane, State Police.

1/24: Gregory Rich, 27, of 85 North Airline Rd., Wallingford was charged with DUI and failure to maintain proper lane, State Police.

1/26: Robin Lay, 21, of 20 Balaban Rd., Apt. 609, turned herself in for sixth-degree larceny, State Police said.

1/27: A 16-year-old was charged with possession of less than four ounces of marijuana, State Police said.

## Portland Police News

1/18 — Thomas Foley, 18, of 311 Cox Rd., was charged with misuse of plates and traveling too fast, Portland Police said.

1/20 — Shane Williams, 18, of 17 Hill Ave., Wallingford, was charged with evading responsibility and failure to drive in an established lane, police said.

## Andover Police News

1/23: Shawn McGirl, 25, of 223 Jackson St., Willimantic, was charged with DUI, State Police said.

1/23: At about 9:30 a.m., a burglary on Lake Road was reported, State Police said. Jewelry "valued in the thousands of dollars," was taken from the bedroom, according to State Police.

## East Hampton Police News

1/6 — Blaine M. Chestnutt, 29, of 9 Sherwood Ln., Marlborough, was issued a ticket for failure to carry an insurance card, East Hampton Police said.

1/14 — Ryan Bousquet, 20, of 137 Young St., was arrested for operating an unregistered motor vehicle, illegal operation without insurance, operating under suspension and misuse of plates, police said.

1/14 — William E. Veronin, 20, of 6 Starr Pl., was issued a ticket for operating an unregistered motor vehicle, police said.

1/15 — Scott A. Palmer, 32, of 16 East High St., was arrested for operating an unregistered motor vehicle and operating without insurance, police said.

1/15 — Andreas Rivers, 44, of 50A Old West High St., was arrested for disorderly conduct and violation of a protective order, police said.

1/17 — Anthony Compocchia, 43, of 9763 Purcell Rd., Richmond, VA, was arrested for failure to obey a traffic signal, operating under the influence of alcohol, possession of marijuana and possession of drug paraphernalia, police said.

1/17 — Heather E. Boucher, 21, of 7 Garden St., Rocky Hill, was arrested pursuant to a warrant for making a false report, police said.

1/18 — James M. Lewis, 39, of 31 Boston Post Rd., Waterford, was issued a ticket for speeding, police said.

1/18 — Daniel Topping, 38, of 325 Main St., Portland, was arrested for speeding and failure to carry a license, police said.

1/18 — Raymond R. Maselek Jr., 46, of 79 Arnott Rd., Manchester, was issued a ticket for traveling too fast for conditions, police said.

1/19 — Heidi Scott, 22, whose address was listed as Eddy Shelter, Middletown, was arrested for sixth-degree larceny, police said.

1/20 — Clarence E. Braun III, 24, of 87 Sillimanville Rd., East Haddam, was arrested on a habeas to three counts of third-degree burglary, two counts of fourth-degree larceny, conspiracy to commit larceny and second-degree larceny, police said.

1/20 — Rebecca R. Burtchell, 19, of 275 Wickham Rd., Glastonbury, and Peter Orofino, 55, of 548 W. Street, Southington, were issued ticket for traveling fast, police said.

*From the Editor's Desk*

# Observations & Ruminations

by **Mike Thompson**

When the calendar turned to 2010 a few weeks ago, I found myself taking the plunge with a piece of technology that's become pretty common: the digital video recorder, or DVR for short.

I held out for quite a while in getting a DVR. I was first introduced to one back in 2002 or 2003, when a friend of mine had a TiVo. A group of us would get together at his place each week to watch *24*. As is often the case when multiple people are involved, not everybody would show up right at 9 p.m. every week. No problem, said my TiVo-owning friend. He'd simply start recording the show at 9, and whenever everyone had finished filing in, be they five minutes late or 20 minutes late, we'd start watching the show, from the beginning. We didn't have to wait until the show ended at 10, and while we watched it, it kept on recording. That was pretty cool, I thought.

But still, I held out. Even as the years went by, and DVRs became fairly ubiquitous, I clinged to my VCR. Why pay a monthly fee (even though it's really a pretty small one) to record shows when I figured out, long ago, how to do it for free? But I thought about it more, talked with friends and family about their DVRs (it was love at first time-shifted viewing, it seemed), and a couple weeks ago, decided to take the plunge.

And I'm glad I did. A DVR, as I quickly found out, is so much more than a glorified VCR.

I already described the cool "you don't have to be home right at 9 to watch your show" aspect. Another neat recording trick: the cable box doesn't have to be tuned into the channel you want to record. More than once I'd set the timer on my VCR to tape something while I was at, say, work or something, only to forget to change the cable box to the right channel before I left. Whereas the VCR would punish me for my clunky memory, the DVR just says, "Ah, don't worry about it; you're only human. I'll take care of it for you."

Also, you can watch one show while you record another. Yes, you can usually do this with a VCR too. But, can you watch a *re-recorded* show while you're recording another? (Why would you want to do that, you ask? Trust me: once you get a DVR, you'll think up a reason.)

One very, very cool feature of the DVR is the one that lets you pause live TV. An inopportune bathroom break becomes a thing of the past. And no longer do you have to say to that long-lost cousin who calls you out of the blue, "Look, can you call me back in two minutes? Jack Bauer's just about to find out who planted the bomb at the mini-mall!"

In the two short weeks I've had my DVR, I've become converted. In fact, I kinda find myself sometimes wishing I could DVR life. Running a little late for work? No problem. Just hit the pause button, and then, whenever you get to work, hit play. Voila, to the world you're at work on time, even though you know you arrived 20 minutes behind.

Perhaps one day that will happen. Okay, probably not. But I can dream, can't I?

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It's now the top-grossing movie of all time, and last weekend I headed to the multiplex, snapped on those fancy 3-D glasses and finally watched *Avatar*. I'm glad I saw it, because the visual effects were simply amazing. But in terms of story, it left something to be desired.

In the movie (and I'll try not to give too much away about the film, but in case you have a weak stomach for spoilers, you might want to skip to something else), the military attempts to wipe out the native people of a planet called Pandora and tear up its vast forests in order to obtain some sort of precious material buried below. The hero of the movie, though, assumes the form of one of the Pandora natives (even though his human body never really leaves this casket-like chamber), bonds with them and attempts to stop the evil military men from destroying their planet.

For a movie that's been deservedly lauded for its breathtaking effects, its plot is pretty simplistic. It's the good guys versus the bad guys, but the good guys are *really* good, and the bad guys are *really* bad. There's no in between, no shades of gray. The movie tells you what to feel and when to feel it; everything's spelled out very clearly.

It's the kind of movie that, if I were 12 years old, I'd probably think it was the best movie ever made. I'd be blown away by the visuals and probably not even notice the lack of any real subtlety or nuance in the script, or the sometimes-dopey dialogue. But, seeing as how I'm not 12, I found myself wanting a story that perhaps engaged my mind a little more.

The movie won Best Picture – Drama at the Golden Globes earlier this month, and is considered a shoo-in to at least get nominated for Best Picture at the Academy Awards. I don't have any problem with it winning every technical type of Oscar it can get; like I said, visually, it's a stunning achievement, and for that reason alone, I'd recommend seeing it. (See it in the theater, though; don't wait for the DVD.) But Best Picture? Surely, the Academy can find a movie that's ... well, a little more grown-up.

\* \* \*

See you next week.

# Obituaries

## Colchester

### James Joseph Conroy

James Joseph Conroy, 92, of Colchester and formerly of Middletown, widower of the late Ruth (Mott) Conroy, passed away peacefully Wednesday morning, Jan. 27, at Cobalt Lodge in Middle Haddam. Born Sept. 1, 1917, in Middletown, he was a son of the late John and Leah (Rosen) Conroy.

He was drafted into the Army in 1941 and proudly served during World War II until his honorable discharge at the rank of sergeant in 1946. On Jan. 26, 1946, he and Ruth were married in Middletown and shared 43 years of marriage before she predeceased him on Sept. 3, 1989.

Mr. Conroy was a Clerk for the US Postal Service for 32 years and was active in the Postal Union. He later worked for the former Farmers & Mechanics Bank for 10 years before his retirement. Mr. Conroy was a member of the Knights of Columbus and was an avid golfer well into his 80's.

He is survived by a daughter and son-in-law, Deborah and Ronald Fournier of Colchester; four grandchildren, Christopher Johnson of Colchester, Brian Johnson of Danielson, Michelle Fournier Tartamosa of Mt. Laurel, NJ and Joy Marie Fournier McMurray of Poplarville, MS; 12 great grandchildren; one great-great grandson; his special friend, Marge Peene of Colchester; and numerous extended family members and friends.

In addition to his parents and wife, he was predeceased by two sisters, Ann Knietek and Margaret Olescowicz; and a brother, Jack Conroy.

Friends may call starting at 9 a.m. Saturday, Jan. 30, at the Aurora-McCarthy Funeral Home, 167 Old Hartford Rd., Colchester, before a 10 a.m. chapel service. Interment with full military honors will follow in the Pine Grove Cemetery, Middletown.

In lieu of flowers, donations in his memory may be made to the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation, 26 Broadway, 14th Floor, New York, NY 10004.

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

## Andover

### Robert L. Meikle Jr.

Robert L. Meikle Jr., "Robb," 56, of Andover, passed away peacefully Thursday, Jan. 21, at Parkway Pavillions, after a two-year battle with cancer. Robb was born Aug. 16, 1953, in Hartford, son of the late Robert L. Meikle and Mary (Coudert) Meikle.

He was a valued employee at Connecticut, where he was well respected for his kind and compassionate way with insureds who just needed a person to talk to. Robb was a kind and gentle person who always had a warm smile for everyone. Though he never had any children of his own, he was a loving uncle, great-uncle and godfather.

Robb is survived by his sister, Pamela La Monica of North Granby; two special cousins, William T. Meikle III, who unselfishly opened his home to Robb in his final months, and Marlee Rubenstein of East Hartford; niece, Lynn Bouteiller of Avon; nephew, Stephen La Monica of Torrington; his great-nieces and nephews, Matt, Ben, Sarah and Rebecca Rubenstein, Kelly Harvy, William T. Meikle IV, Cody and Greyson Meikle; aunts, Florence Murray, Carol, Fran and Patricia Coudert; uncles, Paul Murray, Ernie and Jack Coudert; and many more friends and relatives.

A graveside service will be held today, Friday, Jan. 29, at 1 p.m., at Rose Hill Memorial Park, 580 Elm St., Rocky Hill.

In lieu of flowers, donations can be made to the American Diabetes Association, 306 Industrial Park Rd., Suite 105, Middletown, CT 06457

## Colchester

### Jeffery Brian Lynn

Jeffery Brian Lynn, 50, of Meriden, passed away unexpectedly Thursday, Jan. 21, at the Mid State Medical Center in Meriden. Born Jan. 24, 1959, at Hahn AFB in Frankfurt, Germany, he was a son of Joan (Tillson) Lynn of Colchester and the late Alexander J. Lynn. Mr. Lynn was a machinist for Pratt & Whitney Aircraft in Middletown and later went on to work in carpentry and remodeling work.

In addition to his mother, he is survived by two sons, Joshua and Adam Lynn, both of Richland, WA; his longtime companion, Maria Perez of Meriden; two stepdaughters, Priscilla and Emily Crespo, both of Meriden; two step-grandchildren, Benny Vasquez and Ava Sanchez; three brothers, Craig Lynn of Amston, Randy Lynn of Rocky Hill and David Lynn of Salem; and numerous extended family members and friends.

Friends called Tuesday, Jan. 26, at the Aurora-McCarthy Funeral Home, 167 Old Hartford Road, Colchester. The funeral service followed later that morning at the Colchester Bible Baptist Church, 38 Chestnut Hill Rd., Colchester. Burial private and at the convenience of the family.

In lieu of flowers, donations in his memory may be made to the American Heart Association, 1 Union St., Ste. 301, Robbinsville, NJ 08691-4183.

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

## Hebron

### Barbara R. McAuliffe

Barbara R. (Skewes) McAuliffe of Hebron entered into eternal rest Jan. 24 at home in the presence of her family, after a courageous four-month battle of complications of a newly-diagnosed lung condition.

She was predeceased by her husband of 43 years, Joseph McAuliffe, and also her parents, Helen R. (Lindquist) Zongol and Wilfred Skewes.

She is survived by her loving daughter, nurse and friend, Kathleen R. (McAuliffe) Sinibaldi of Wethersfield; her granddaughter, Carolyn M. Weisbrod and fiance James Coogan of South Glastonbury; her two sons James T. McAuliffe of Hebron and fiancé Teresa Conceicao of Plainville; Kevin J. McAuliffe, his wife Kimberly and their three sons, Joshua, Justin and Daniel of Manchester. She is also survived by her "other daughter" and longtime family friend, Susan Horan of Manchester and three sisters-in-law, Margaret Chapman of Newington, Dorothy Aubin of Canton, Evelyn Burgum of Rocky Hill and many nieces and nephews.

Barbara was born in Hartford and grew up in the Windsor Locks/Suffield area before meeting her husband, Joseph, the love of her life, in Wethersfield while visiting her aunt during the summer. They were soon married at Corpus Christi Church in Wethersfield and lived in Wethersfield and Hartford finally attaining their dream of building a home and moving their family out to the country in Hebron to raise their three children. Prior to their move, Barbara worked for many years for Aetna in Hartford, was very active for many years in the Lady's Guild at St. Justin's Church, of Hartford. After her move to Hebron, she did eventually take a part-time job at Ted's Supermarket in Hebron as the kids got older because she loved to get out and be with people.

Besides being a devoted wife and mother, grandmother, aunt and friend, Barbara had many interests. She was a wonderful cook, she enjoyed knitting, sewing, needlepoint, setback, the antique road show, the shopping network, visits with her family and though an only child, she was a sister to everyone, with her quick wit and wisdom. She made friends wherever she went. She is now at rest and in peace reunited with the Lord. She will be laid to rest with her mother, alongside her husband.

Special thanks to Dr. Rozann Venti of Hebron, Dr. John Foster, and Dr. Fielding Johnson of Hartford Hospital, Dr. Wasserstein of Manchester Hospital Masonicare VNA and Hospice of East Hartford, Right at Home Care of Wethersfield.

A Mass of Christian Burial was held Thursday, Jan. 28, at Corpus Christi Church in Wethersfield. Burial followed in Rose Hill Memorial Park. Calling hours were Wednesday, Jan. 27, at the Rose Hill Funeral Home, 580 Elm St., Rocky Hill.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the American Lung Association, 45 Ash St., East Hartford, CT 06108.

## Portland

### Jo Susan Berner

Jo Susan Berner, 66, died Tuesday, Jan. 5, at the Portland Care and Rehabilitation Center after a five-year battle with cancer. She was the wife of the late Albert F. Schwantor.

Born in Detroit July 16, 1943, daughter of John A. Berner of Surprise, AZ and the late Jane G. Berner, Jo was a longtime resident of both Rocky Hill and Portland. She moved to Connecticut shortly after receiving her degree from Wayne State University in Detroit and was employed as an engineer with United Technologies Corporation until her retirement.

While with UTC, Jo helped pioneer computer-based applications to monitor jet engine emissions which were later adapted by various governmental agencies to test compliance with automobile smog standards. Jo had a keen interest in nature and wildlife, and she and Albert took great pleasure in traveling to all seven continents to observe many endangered species in their natural habitat.

She is survived by her brothers John Berner of Carmichael, CA, and Jeffrey Berner of Brighton, MI.

A private graveside service will be held at the Center Cemetery in Portland in the spring.

Arrangements are under the direction of the Portland Memorial Funeral Home, 231 Main St., Portland. To leave an online expression of sympathy, visit [www.portlandmemorialfh.net](http://www.portlandmemorialfh.net).

## Colchester

### John J. Marinoccio Sr.

John J. Marinoccio, Sr., 75, beloved husband of Laurett, of Colchester, passed away peacefully Sunday, Jan. 24, at Hartford Hospital, with his loving family by his side. Born Aug. 14, 1934, in Hartford, he was the son of the late Joseph and Pauline (Sebinski) Marinoccio.

Mr. Marinoccio was a proud veteran, having served with the U.S. Army during peacetime. On Sept. 5, 1955, he wed Laurett Berthiaume at St. Anne Church in Hartford. Soon after, the couple moved to Colchester, where they raised their family and he had resided until his passing.

In the early years, John worked for CB Gilbert Dairy Farm in Rocky Hill. He later worked as a machinist for Jarvis Airfoil and finally, Pratt & Whitney Aircraft. John was an airplane enthusiast. He built models of the classics and he enjoyed reading historical accounts of the fighter pilots. But his favorite passion was listening to Elvis and Glenn Miller. He will be remembered most by his family as a loving and devoted Father to all of his children which also included those he was a foster father to.

In addition to his loving wife of 54 years, survivors include nine children and their spouses, Beatrice and Richard Dzagan of Scottsville, VA, John Marinoccio, Jr. of Colchester, Diane and Keith Mutch of Montville, Robert Marinoccio and companion, Trish Bogue of Colchester, James and Diana Marinoccio of Windham, Frederick and Jennifer Marinoccio of Waterford, Amy E. Marinoccio of Tuscon, AZ, and Ryan and Christian Marinoccio, both of Colchester; 10 grandchildren, five great-grandchildren; a sister, Jean Letizia of Newington and numerous extended family and friends, which included Christopher Bogue and Shaylynn and Jessica Clark.

Friends and family called Thursday, Jan. 28, at the Aurora-McCarthy Funeral Home, 167 Old Hartford Rd., Colchester, followed by a chapel service. Burial with military honors followed in the Linwood Cemetery.

The family would like to extend their heartfelt gratitude for the loving care given to John by the medical staff at Hartford Hospital Hospice.

In lieu of flowers, donations in his memory may be made to the Hartford Hospital Palliative Care, 80 Seymour St., Hartford, CT 06102-5037 or to the American Cancer Society, 106 Franklin Commons, Rte 32, Franklin, CT 06254-1800.

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

## Andover

### Charles Kukucka

Charles Kukucka, 86, of Andover, passed away early Jan. 27, at home after a long illness surrounded by his loving family. He was born April 24, 1923, in Andover, son of the late Stefan and Zuzanna Kukucka.

Charles was a veteran of World War II having served in the U.S. Army, enlisting voluntarily underage. He was a carpenter by trade, retiring from Pelletier Builders. Charles loved spending time with his animals and family on the family farm. His love for animals was instilled in his children and grandchildren. He so enjoyed walking his pastures with his cows and faithful dogs beside him, before his illness took that from him. He will be greatly missed by all who knew him.

Charles is survived by Lucille, his loving wife of 60 years. In addition, he leaves his children, Charles Henry Kukucka of Andover, Marie Meixell of Vernon, Diane Kukucka of Windham and Carol Kukucka of Andover. He also leaves his five grandchildren that he so loved, Dale Kukucka of Southbury/Andover, Wayne Kukucka and his wife, Suzie, of West Hartford. Gail and Zachary Milliard of Andover and Marlie Meixell of Vernon. He also leaves his brother, Andrew Kukucka and his wife Grace of Andover and his sister, Sue Lebejko and her husband Mike of Norwich; numerous nieces and nephews, extended family members and special friends.

Charles was predeceased by his brothers, Stefan, John and sister, Anna, and numerous brothers and sisters-in-law.

His family will receive relatives and friends Saturday, Jan. 30, between 10 and 11 a.m., with services beginning at 11 a.m. at Potter Funeral Home, 456 Jackson St. (Route 195), Willimantic. Interment will then follow in Townsend Cemetery, Andover.

For online memorial guestbook and directions to the funeral home, visit [www.potterfuneralhome.com](http://www.potterfuneralhome.com).

The family would like to express their heartfelt appreciation to the VNA East Hospice of Mansfield Center for their compassionate care of Charles.

In lieu of flowers, donations in his memory may be made to VNA East Hospice, 34 Ledgebrook Dr., Mansfield Center, CT 06250 or Andover Volunteer Fire Department, School Road, Andover, CT 06232.

## Colchester

### Dorothy K. Turner

Dorothy K. Turner of Colchester passed away Jan. 22 at St. Francis Hospital in Hartford, surrounded by her loving family. She was the beloved wife of Robert A. Turner. They were married June 7, 1947, at St. Gabriel's Church in Washington, DC.

She was born Oct. 6, 1925, in Washington, DC. She was the eldest daughter of Carl and Margaret (Lindsay) Kuldell and was the last surviving member of her family. She received a degree from Strayers Business College in Washington, DC, and during World War II worked at the Navy Department's Bureau of Yards and Docks, Washington, DC, until she and Bob started their family and moved to Norwich, where they raised their children.

She was an active member of the Legion of Mary since 1985, often serving as officer of her parish praesidium, as well as assisting her husband in founding new ones and was a past president of the diocese curia. Her active work included visitation of the sick and shut-ins, especially in nursing homes, and promotion of the family rosary. As a convert to the Catholic Church, she conveyed quickly to others wherever and whenever she could, her thrill of being a Catholic and the mother of a large family and through her enthusiasm, was able to inspire many people to look into the Catholic Church. She was also a professed Carmelite tertiary.

In addition to her husband, Robert, she is lovingly remembered by her four sons: Robert and his wife, Ellen Turner of Columbia, Richard and his wife, Christine Turner of Brooklyn, John and his wife, Carmella Turner of Sprague and Michael Turner of Norwich, and her five daughters: Deborah Turner and a dear friend, Darcy Smith of Coventry, Sr. Margaret Mary, RSM, of Alma, MI, Pauline and her husband Richard Lucci of Lisbon, Mary and her husband, John Harrington of Madison, and Kristine Turner of Uncasville; and 32 grandchildren and 24 great-grandchildren.

She was predeceased by her parents, her brothers, Clarence Kuldell and her twin, Douglas Kuldell and by her sisters, Marjorie Hartley and Mary Ellen Kuldell, and by a grandson, Elias Turner.

In June 2007, the entire family gathered in Colchester for a renewal of their marriage vows on their 60th wedding anniversary.

Calling hours were Tuesday, Jan. 26, at the Guillot Funeral Home, 75 South B St., Taftville. A Mass celebrating her life was held at St Patrick's Cathedral in Norwich on Wednesday, Jan. 27, with burial following at Sacred Heart Cemetery in Norwich. (There was no procession from the funeral home before the Mass.)

In lieu of flowers, donations can be made on their website [www.priestsforlife.org](http://www.priestsforlife.org) to Priests for Life, P.O. Box 141172, Staten Island, NY 10314.

## Salem

### Evelyn Barbara (Kocarnik) Millane

Evelyn Barbara (Kocarnik) Millane, 84, of Oakdale, formerly of Salem, beloved wife of Albert, passed away Monday, Jan. 18, at the Lawrence & Memorial Hospital in New London. Born March 13, 1925, in New Britain, she was a daughter of the late John and Lillian (Klecek) Kocarnik.

She grew up in South Windsor and was a graduate of Ellsworth High School. Mrs. Millane was a secretary for the state highway department in Hartford and New Haven for many years and retired from UConn after having worked in the Schools of Nursing and Allied Health. Over the years, she lived in Southbury, Chaplin, Niantic and Salem before moving to Oakdale in 1995. An avid lover of animals and wildlife, she especially cherished the six canines that came into her life. She also enjoyed dancing to big band music and did so frequently.

In addition to her loving husband of 62 years, she is survived by a sister, Janet Kuehner of Hanover, PA, and several nieces, nephews and cousins.

In addition to her parents, she was predeceased by a sister, Sylvia Wilson, late of South Windsor.

Private services and interment will be observed in the Willington Hill Cemetery, West Willington. There are no calling hours.

In lieu of flowers, donations in her memory may be made to the CT Humane Society, 169 Old Colchester Road, Waterford 06385.

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).