

RIVEREAST

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A snowstorm hit all of *Rivereast*-land hard on Tuesday – and Colchester was no exception. Two feet of snow blanketed the town. This shot of the Town Hall parking lot shows what clean-up crews had to deal with.

Storm Packs a Punch For Area Towns

by Geeta Schrayter

As the old saying goes, March is supposed to come in like a lion. But this year, January seems to be leaving like one, too.

Monday's blizzard brought cold temperatures, wind and snow totals ranging from less than a foot to almost three feet across the state; two of the *Rivereast* towns were listed in the selected snowfall totals posted by the National Weather Service Wednesday: Colchester, which was listed as receiving 25 inches; and Marlborough, which was listed as earning 22 inches (However, the Weather Channel listed Marlborough substantially higher, with snowfall totals closer to 30 inches).

Speaking on the storm this week, Colchester First Selectman Stan Soby said the town fared pretty well, with crews working constantly to keep up with the two feet of snow that fell in town.

"I think we were fortunate in that it was less snow than we were supposed to get," Soby said. "No one lost power. We were monitoring the [Connecticut Light & Power website] while in touch with our community liaison. That was just a huge benefit."

Soby said crews and contractors began at the beginning of the snow and worked all through the night, taking breaks as needed.

"They stayed ahead of [the snow] with multiple passes" with the plows, Soby said. "We had some EMS calls that we sent a truck with the responder to, to plow even a driveway if

they needed to."

And now that the storm had ended, Soby explained crews were continuing to work on cleaning up the roads, explaining the streets are mainly maintained during the storm for emergency vehicles.

"The typical process is we keep the roads open" so emergency vehicles can still get through, "but we don't clear to the curbs," Soby said. On Tuesday, "loaders were out to really clear better and go closer to the curbs and cul-de-sacs."

Soby also said the town has been responding as it hears from residents who are unhappy with where the plowed snow has been left.

"Crews were out early [Wednesday] to clean up and try to approve sightlines," Soby said. Sightlines are the lines of sight along intersections where snow can get piled high, making it impossible for drivers to see.

"We have four contractor payloaders and the town payloaders along with other equipment," Soby said. "The school contractor had the schools pretty well set, but with the additional snow forecasted over [Tuesday] night, the superintendent made the call to not have school [Wednesday]."

Superintendent of Schools Jeff Mathieu said the school district was also well-prepared for the storm.

"We had a town-wide planning meeting at

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With Teacher Cuts, Hebron Schools Budget Passed

by Geeta Schrayter

After making a reduction of two teaching positions – a move that prompted an at-times emotional discussion – the Hebron Board of Education last Thursday approved its proposed 2015-16 school budget of \$12,175,093.

The spending plan is a 1.54 percent, or \$184,693, increase over the current year's budget. The budget passed 4-1, with board member Amy Lynch-Gracias voting against.

While she ultimately voted in favor of the spending plan, board member Carole Connolly said at the meeting she would reject the budget at first, because of the request to cut the two positions.

Despite decreasing enrollment in the district, Connolly said she'd like the teachers to stay in order to keep class sizes low and prevent parents from putting their kids in magnet schools – thereby increasing that line item.

"The draw of magnet schools is the small class sizes," she said, adding "smaller class sizes equal a higher-quality education."

In addition, Connolly said cutting high-performing teachers would hurt morale.

"We have to understand the human element

when we cut," she said, and then presented an alternative possibility to add one of the teachers back into the budget – reducing the schools superintendent's salary by around \$20,000 [current superintendent Jeff Newton has announced he will leave the district in April], along with cutting the salary for the director of finance and the amount allocated for legal fees.

"I'm trying to save two teachers," Connolly said. "This is the way you're forcing me to do it. If no one is going to agree to add the teachers back in, let's cut at the top – everyone's saying that. That's transparency."

But school board chair Maryanne Leichter mentioned the proposed cuts would make the superintendent's salary less than some of the school administrators – and a superintendent would never accept such a position.

Along the same lines, Newton stated, "No one will apply at that level. There's no way anyone would take the job for less than what the principals are making."

In the end, Connolly made a motion to amend the budget with her cuts and to add one teacher back into the proposal, but the motion failed

when it didn't receive a second.

Afterwards, board member Abe Krisst asked Newton and Director of Finance Richard Huot for their thoughts on the idea of reducing the salaries for those positions.

As for the superintendent's salary, Newton said, "If I knew what the salary was I'd never apply for it. You just can't pay superintendents less than principals."

Furthermore, he added a reduction in the salary would limit the pool of candidates. He said while there may still be candidates who are "excellent," the reduced salary wouldn't bring those the district was looking for.

"You pay the market rate," he explained.

In addition, Newton spoke to the possibility that had also been discussed of moving from a fulltime to a part-time superintendent.

Which route the board goes with would depend upon "how much attention to detail you want in the district, how much attention to detail you want in the workings of the town," he explained.

Krisst replied, "At this point you feel it's not even a debatable issue: you're of the opinion

that a full-time, fair-market superintendent is what we need in Hebron."

"That's my opinion, absolutely, if you want the level of detail, the level of work that I would expect from my district – and as a parent," Newton said.

Similarly, Huot said if he were to leave the position and a new director of finance were hired with a lower salary, that would likely translate into less experience – "certainly not 35 years of experience" as he had, which he felt enabled him to handle various challenges in the district.

To Connolly's point about class size, Huot also said Hebron had "wonderful numbers" compared to some of the other towns in the state, but Connolly said she "fundamentally and wholeheartedly" disagreed.

Huot also said he would "not like it to be lost the fact that behind the scenes in developing the budget, we were very cognizant of those two people and their abilities" who would lose their jobs.

"We came up with a couple strategies that

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8:45 a.m. on Monday, then a district-wide meeting at 11 a.m.," Mathieu said. "We had our plan in place and talked things through and were ready to go when the storm hit."

"Our guys did a tremendous job," Mathieu continued. "We had two custodians at each school during the duration of the storm" to respond to anticipated power outages – and they also were able to keep the door passages clean. Mathieu added along with those custodians, the district had staff ready to man Bacon Academy as a Red Cross shelter if needed.

"If the Red Cross ever deemed it necessary, if we had an abundance of power outages, Bacon Academy was ready to be opened as a shelter," he said.

Students in Colchester had an early dismissal Monday and were off Tuesday and Wednesday, but returned to school Thursday.

With the days off, Colchester students can now expect their last day to be June 16.

Soby said that by not having school Wednesday, the town had the opportunity to do a final clean-up job and residents had more time to take care of any sidewalks so children could walk on them.

"People need a little bit of time to catch up with two feet of snow," Soby said. "I think we're in pretty good shape. All in all, I think we did well."

Soby said that by Wednesday, town offices and services were open however they were not driving seniors around; the library and senior center buildings were open as well.

During the storm, Fire Chief Walter Cox said the two fire stations were manned overnight; however, there were no major emergencies to respond to.

"People heeded the warnings to stay inside and stay off the road," Cox said. "Right now we're cleaning up and recovering and making sure all the fire hydrants are accessible."

Cox added the fire department would appreciate it if residents with hydrants on their property could clean them off.

* * *

In Marlborough, First Selectwoman Cathi Gaudinski reported things also went well.

"The biggest concern I had was power outages," she said. "I'm happy we didn't lose electricity with how cold and windy it was. There was no property damage and people were comfortable in their homes."

Gaudinski said police reported no incidents. "What was a big help was people listening to the governor and staying off the roads which made it easier for the town crew to take care of it," Gaudinski said.

Fire Chief Kevin Asklar shared similar thoughts.

"Everybody was smart and got off the roads early and obeyed the governor's request," Asklar said, referring to the travel ban Gov. Dannel Malloy had put in effect from Monday night until mid-afternoon Tuesday. "We did have two ambulance calls during the day on Tuesday, but we had no problems getting crews out to those calls and everything worked out pretty well."

Gaudinski said the town crew, which consists of ten men including dump trucks, a payloader and Bobcat, worked throughout the storm and stayed on top of the snow. Gaudinski said there were no equipment breakdowns, and everything was ready to go.

"The crew did an outstanding job in taking care of the roads and facilities," Gaudinski said. "On Monday, my office spent time going through all the storm preparation areas and making sure there were sufficient supplies for snow removal."

Gaudinski said the town was fortunate the crew worked during the night and straight through the two days of the storm. The town was also in contact with its emergency management director in case they lost power.

On Wednesday, Gaudinski said most of the cleanup work had been done, including clearing town sidewalks, the library and the senior center.

"We're still working on the transfer station and the town cemetery," she stated. "All facilities are open and ready to go."

Town Hall was open by 10 a.m. Wednesday and, with more snow in the forecast, Gaudinski said the town was expecting more snow-removal supplies to arrive this week.

As was the case in Colchester, Marlborough Elementary School students had snow days Tuesday and Wednesday, but returned to their classes on Thursday.

* * *

Over in Hebron, Town Manager Andrew Tierney said the town had received "roughly two feet" but had technically been prepared for the storm all winter.

"We've been ready all winter, with not having too many storms, so everything was pretty much geared up and ready to go," Tierney stated, explaining larger plows were put on the trucks to handle the amount of snow, and some contractors had been lined up with blowers to assist with the cleanup.

And cleaning up is what the town was all about on Wednesday.

"We're in cleanup mode today," Tierney said Wednesday, "but we had plenty of salt and sand and material and added contractors, like I said, on standby and everything seemed to hold up during the storm."

Tierney added the public works employees had worked all day and night Monday, then all day Tuesday.

"We had to knock 'em off last night to get some rest, then they came back this morning," he explained, adding "the guys did well and other than some mailbox casualties we've had no complaints."

And now, with more snow in the forecast, Tierney said "we're getting ready to do it all over again."

As for the schools in town, both Hebron Public Schools and the RHAM schools remained closed Wednesday – bringing their snow day total this year to three.

Regarding preparations for the storm, Hebron Superintendent of Schools Jeff Newton explained there was "a lot of discussion with the facilities director and the town, just about emergency management preparations."

Newton furthered, "We just tried and kind of made sure we were set with notifying parents with what we were doing and we were able to do that the night before, letting parents know we were going to dismiss early on Monday, and then [Tuesday] we were obviously closed."

When it came to making the call Wednesday, Newton said after talking with other superintendents and the facilities director the consensus was "it was just too much to get cleaned up in the amount of time we had and for the safety of all students and staff and with discussions with the town, we decided that we would not open."

Newton added, "It's only been three days [school has been closed] so far. We hope for no more snow but the weather is unpredictable for sure and it was a tough call [to close Wednesday] but we always just have to factor in safety."

RHAM Superintendent of Schools Bob Siminski shared similar thoughts.

He said a "big thing" done in preparation of the storm was having a half-day Monday, to ensure everyone got home safely.

"I think the other big thing that we had done is we contracted out our plowing and the contractor brought in one of those big loaders like those used in shopping centers, so that was used to clear the parking lots," he added.

Siminski said cleanup was still taking place Wednesday, which "continues to be a challenge because of the wind blowing the snow" and like Newton, he said school was kept closed to allow more time for that process.

"We were closed Wednesday after discussions with the public works folks," Siminski explained. "Just looking at the strains put on [the town's] crews and the fact that there was a lot of work that needed to be done – the crews had been out for extended periods of time and needed some rest for safety and human concerns of life. So they required more time and with the roads – with how much snow there was – I think they did a great job given the circumstances faced with."

Siminski concluded, "The weather has truly been an adventure" and with three of the school system's five scheduled snow days used up and more snow in the forecast, "that quite frankly concerns me."

* * *

Over in Andover, the elementary school was closed as well Wednesday for the same reasons.

"We weren't sure on Monday whether we were going to have school or not on Wednesday, but we knew based on the weather forecast that the cleanup would be a problem," explained Superintendent of Schools Andrew Maneggia.

The parking lots at the school had yet to be plowed Wednesday, and Maneggia acknowledged "the first priority for the town is to get the town roads passable and so forth, and then after they get that done they work on the school. So there was not sufficient time to do everything. That's really what it boiled down to."

He added, "Our custodians have been out all morning clearing the snow away from the doorways which would be emergency exits and things like that so there's more to it than just 'oh the sidewalks look alright.' It all boils down

to safety."

Regarding the number of snow days used this school year – like Hebron and Marlborough, Andover's had three of them – Maneggia said "I'm not panicking or anything like that – but we still have several weeks of winter left and it's not going to be storm-free, let me put it that way. What we hope is that it will not result in any more than a delayed opening or an early dismissal."

As for the town in general, First Selectman Bob Burbank said the town's public works employees got to work early, "prepped all the trucks and made all the arrangements to get extra help in to keep ahead of the storm."

And Burbank said that, for the most part, that's what the town was able to do.

"We had very little traffic on the roads," Burbank said. "We were able to keep ahead of the storm for the most part. The snow was fairly light which made it fairly easy to move."

Burbank added there was an instance where a plow truck driver hit a ditch and rolled a truck on its side – but there were no injuries, the truck wasn't significantly damaged and has already been repaired.

"That's the only mishap that we had, but we're still doing some cleanup work but overall it wasn't a bad storm," Burbank said. "We've had much worse and this was pretty easy to handle, even though we got probably over 20 inches in most areas."

And looking toward the future, Burbank said the town was still in good shape should any more winter weather come along.

"So far we've had a pretty mild winter and we had enough [sand and salt] for this storm and we have more salt on route right now," Burbank said, "so we will prep the sand and salt, get it together, and we also try to keep our trucks loaded prior to any storm notification – so we'll be ready to go."

* * *

Portland was able to ride out the blizzard fairly easily as well, Portland First Selectwoman Susan Bransfield said.

"I want to thank residents for staying off the roads, for helping one another, for weathering the storm very well," she said. "Overall, things went very well."

Bransfield also said she wanted to thank all of the employees involved in helping the town through the storm.

"Public works, police, fire, emergency management, public safety, grounds crews – they all did a fantastic job in keeping us safe and clearing the roads in a timely fashion," she stated.

Along those same lines, she said aside from a few medical calls, the police did not receive any major calls, there were no fire calls, and there were no reported power outages in town.

"I feel that we were prepared for this storm," she said.

Bransfield also pointed to this blizzard as the debut of the town's winter weather webpage, courtesy of Portland's technology department.

The Winter Storm Information Center webpage is linked directly from the town's page,

portlandct.org, and features weather updates, power outage updates, information on emergency shelters in town, updates on roads and information from the state on severe weather preparedness.

"We're going to continue with that; it was very useful this first time," she said.

Bransfield also said people are welcome to email her for information during severe weather.

"I try to respond to them as quickly as I can during storms," she said.

For those residents without internet access, Bransfield said the town would use the reverse 911 system to inform residents by phone. That system was not used this week.

Also, Bransfield said she wanted to thank the taxpayers for their cooperation in helping the town be prepared for the storm.

"The town over the last few years has purchased some new dump trucks, new plows, new equipment," she said. "And, as you can see, it really is all necessary in this weather."

Though the snow has stopped falling – for now – Bransfield said people should still exercise caution while on the roads this week.

"As the snow is pushed to the side of the road, visibility is a challenge at the intersections," she said. "As a driver you have to be very cautious, especially with youngsters walking to school."

She also encouraged everyone to keep their sidewalks clear of snow and ice. However, she said from what she's seen, it hasn't been a problem.

"I noticed, coming into work, all of the sidewalks had been done in my neighborhood already," she said. "We get through these severe weather events by everyone helping one another."

Bransfield also talked about the town's Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) program, a local component of a state program designed to aid in disaster preparedness.

"We have a very active CERT program; they drill all the time and they know what they're doing," she said.

And while its services wound up not being needed this week, Bransfield said the town's CERT program is crucial in helping the town prepare for a wide range of disasters. She added those interested in joining the CERT program could contact her directly.

"They welcome new members, and they provide all the necessary training," she said.

In addition, Bransfield said she welcomes residents' feedback on the town's response to the storm, to help public services improve moving forward. She explained this is just one way the town debriefs after each storm, along with having each department report on how they handled the storm and share information, which allows the town to be better prepared for the next one.

Bransfield also said she wanted to acknowledge the state's role in preparing for the storm.

"Governor Malloy's office did a great job with handling the storm, and giving the town access to resources to help prepare," she said.

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Here, a town crew member works to clear the sidewalks outside Colchester Town Hall Wednesday.

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Specifically, she mentioned the constant communication and assistance from the state's emergency management Region 3, headquartered in Hartford.

"When I need them, they get right back to me," Bransfield said. "They're such an important partner."

Portland Public Schools dismissed early on Monday before the bulk of the snow arrived, and had two days off before resuming Thursday.

"We announced to parents Sunday night that we were dismissing students early on Monday," Superintendent of Schools Phillip B. O'Reilly said. "Upon reflection, I'm glad we did that; those first couple inches can get very slippery."

He said the decision to close school Tuesday was "obvious," given the governor's ban on highway use, and the large amount of snow – around 20 inches – which had fallen on the town.

O'Reilly said school was not in session Wednesday, primarily to allow for cleanup of school buses, school grounds and concerns over the narrowness of roads due to piled snow.

"Making this decision is not easy," he said, referring to making the call to cancel school Wednesday. "We have to look at forecasts and road conditions, and student safety is always a top concern."

He added, "I also consider the inconvenience to parents but I always have to err on the side of kids' safety."

Lastly, in East Hampton, Town Manager Michael Maniscalco said that though the storm was "sizeable," with the town receiving around two feet of snow, it went by largely without incident.

"People were excellent about staying off the roads; that was really key to our success," he said. "In total, we only had to help one stranded motorist throughout the entire storm."

Maniscalco also said the roads were all open and passable by Wednesday, and the Department of Public Works' next job was to push snow further back from the roads.

"It's very time consuming but they're doing

a good job," he said. "I can't sing enough praises, especially for the DPW, working non-stop."

He also praised the police department, the fire department, EMS personnel and the town's CERT members for their storm response.

"Everyone was staffed and ready to go, and everyone did very well," he said. "I can't express enough appreciation to all of them."

Maniscalco specifically mentioned the volunteer firehouses were fully staffed in case of a major fire call, which did not materialize.

Previously, in the February 2013 blizzard, East Hampton firefighters responded to a house fire during the heaviest part of the storm. Though the volunteers were able to extinguish the fire in about an hour, two firefighters were injured due to the blizzard conditions.

Also, Maniscalco mentioned the town's CERT "did a great job" prepping the town's new emergency shelter: the middle school.

"Because of all the renovations at the high school, we had to change spots," he said. "They had to get used to a totally new location, and there was a lot to move, but they did a great job."

In addition, this year marks the first test of a new town-wide system to provide electricity to the emergency shelter in the event of a power outage.

"The high school has an in-place generator, but none of the other schools have them," Maniscalco said. "A few years ago we bought a mobile generator and had all the schools wired for it, so we could turn any of them into shelters."

He added, "This is a really great highlight of how forethought and planning can benefit the community."

At the same time, Maniscalco said the town managed to avoid any power outages, as well as any other major incidents.

"A lot of people heeded the warning and stayed home, and that helped immensely," he said.

In terms of communication, the town maintained several links on its website,



Colchester Town Hall was open for business on Wednesday – despite a thick coating of snow.

easthamptonct.org, to storm preparedness information and weather information.

During the storm, Maniscalco also sent out informational tweets through his Twitter account, @EH_Townmanager, and also sent out three reverse 911 calls to reach residents on the topics of staying off the roads, and using generators and alternative heating sources safely.

East Hampton Public Schools opted for an early dismissal Monday, and canceled classes on both Tuesday, due to the storm, and Wednesday, for snow removal.

However, classes were back in session Thursday, as usual.

All in all, while the blizzard turned *Riverestland* into quite the marshmallow world this week, each of the towns seemed well-prepared and capable of handling the snow. But with spring still seven weeks away, and despite the mild start, there's no saying what else Old Man Winter has in store.

Reporters Kaitlyn Schroyer and John Tyczkowski contributed to this story.

Hebron Budget cont. from Front Page

we felt might hurt us if we brought them forth to save those jobs," he added.

"But in all your experience" Connolly continued, addressing both Huot and Newton, "you can't find \$65,500 in the budget" to keep one of the teachers?

Newton replied, saying, "We could if insurance went down."

At this point, insurance is expected to rise 10 percent next year, which translates to around \$200,000. When Newton first presented the budget, he said if the insurance rate stayed flat, the proposed budget for 2015-16 would actually be below zero: the change from the current year would be a \$6,785 decrease, or .57 percent.

But Connolly wasn't convinced insurance reductions would be the only way to find the savings for the teachers. "I don't buy it," she said.

Apart from Connolly, other members had concerns with the budget. For Lynch-Gracias, the number remained too high.

"I really do not believe that budget will pass with that much of an increase," she stated. "That's my position."

In addition to cutting the two teaching positions, Lynch-Gracias felt the board should consider hiring a part-time superintendent after Newton's departure.

"I do believe by reducing to part-time, we would have some savings to lower the bottom line of the budget and help us moving forward because of a smaller benefits package," she stated.

Board member Erica Bromley also shared her thoughts, and, like Lynch-Gracias, she was concerned as to whether or not the budget would pass as it currently stands.

Like Connolly, Bromley said she felt the director of finance's salary was something to be examined. Regarding the superintendent's position, she added she wasn't sure how she felt about a part time versus a full-time superintendent, saying, "I have feelings on both sides." Bromley also mentioned the possibility of moving to a part-time assistant principal's position.

"It's a guessing game at this point," she said, adding "if I'm going to support the fact that there's a reduction of teaching staff because of declining enrollment, I want to look at the administrative levels and numbers because of declining enrollment."

But in the end, despite the different discussions, the board decided to send the proposed budget forward with no changes.

The board voted 4-1 to approve the proposed 2015-16 school budget of \$12,175,093, with Lynch-Gracias against.

Speaking on her decision to vote for the proposal after all, Connolly said she didn't want to vote "no" and then have more detrimental cuts made – but the decision was emotional for her, and when Leichter made a motion to adjourn the meeting, Connolly said, "I'll give a second so I can go get a tissue."

The next Hebron Board of Education meeting is scheduled for Thursday, Feb. 12, at 7 p.m., in the Gilead Hill School music room.

Sklarz Proposes \$7.46 Million Budget for Marlborough

by Kaitlyn Schroyer

Superintendent of Schools David Sklarz last week presented a proposed budget of \$7.46 million for the 2015-16 fiscal year. The package is an increase of \$192,213, or 2.64 percent, over the current year's \$7.27 million spending plan.

"We've come a long way in funding education in Marlborough," Sklarz said. "We can maintain the status of a school of excellence."

The budget funds the town's lone school, Elmer Thienes-Mary Hall Elementary School, which services kids in kindergarten through sixth grade.

With a decline in enrollment expected at the school, from 599 students in 2014-15 to 560 students in 2015-16, Sklarz said he's been looking forward to the full-day kindergarten program, which has already brought more than 50 students in to be registered. Sklarz had projected around 60 kindergarteners for the coming year.

Sklarz said there were "tough decisions" involved in crafting the budget. While he is asking for a budget increase, the proposal calls for a loss of two sections of classes at the school, along with one full-time teacher. School administration will not hire anyone new next year, Sklarz said.

Sklarz outlined the factors driving the overall budget increase. Needs for special education students, he said, are still high.

"There were six new students enrolled in 2014 already with Individualized Education Plans (IEP)," Sklarz said.

There is also more money included in the

spending proposal for magnet schools. In the 2014-15 school year, there are eight fifth- and sixth-graders that attended magnet schools – a marked increase from the three the Board of Education had budgeted for. In response, Sklarz is seeking funding for five magnet school students in the 2015-16 budget.

There will also "continue to be unfunded mandates," Sklarz said – and added there would also be no additional federal funds to support the local budget.

The budget also features health insurance rates rising 4.98 percent, Sklarz said.

Sklarz said the full-day kindergarten program added one full-time teacher and two paraprofessionals, along with classroom materials and furniture. Sklarz said administration had to add one paraprofessional, along with equipment, testing and support services, for special education students; had to increase the expected number of magnet school students from three to five; are implementing Common Core with professional development, curriculum writing, new books, materials and supplies; and are paying for an out-of-district placement.

Sklarz also proposed increasing teachers' budgets for their classrooms from \$300 to \$400, so teachers do not have to ask parents to bring in things for activities. Sklarz also said he hopes to gradually replace aging SMART boards in the school and add iPads and Chromebooks, while improving the infrastructure to handle the technology.

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Broken down line by line, the budget pro-

posal features a mix of increases and decreases.

Even with the loss of one teacher, certified staff salaries – including administrators and teachers – easily make up the biggest chunk of the budget. Due to the teacher cutting, this account is due to drop \$56,342, bringing it to \$3,998,533 in the proposed budget.

In the 112 Personnel-Non-Certified Staff line, the budget increased by \$89,226 to bring it to \$1,018,671. Non-certified staff includes salaries for office and technology support, paraprofessionals, nurse and custodians. This line increased with the addition of the paraprofessionals for special education and kindergarten.

The 200 line, which includes group health insurances, Social Security, pensions, workers' compensation and unemployment, decreased by \$48,587 to \$1,072,161.

A hefty increase is coming in the 300 line, the money for AHM Youth and Family Services, legal and audit fees, consultants, and occupational and physical therapy. This is slated to rise by \$97,068, to \$237,248 – with two main factors driving the increase. Funds allotted for a social worker are climbing from \$16,472 to \$64,842, due to the school deciding to use AHM Youth and Family Services' social workers as opposed to one of its own. (The school's previous social worker passed away last June, and the position has gone unfilled since then; the school has been using AHM for social work services this year, and Sklarz's budget calls for the school to start using the AHM social workers full time.)

Also in the 300 line is an increase in legal

fees from \$5,000 to \$40,000 – an eight-fold rise that's driven by negotiations coming up for new three-year contracts for teachers, administrators and paraprofessionals.

The 400 line, which includes electricity, sewer fees and contracts for facility maintenance, increased by \$26,538, to bring it to \$280,302.

The 500 line, including bus contracts, liability insurance, magnet school tuition, outplacement, phones and email and postage, increased by \$34,717, to \$450,006.

The 600 Supplies and Materials line, which includes curriculum/custodial/office supplies, textbooks, heating oil, diesel and gasoline, increased by \$650 to \$296,250.

The 700 Capital Outlay line, which includes new or replacement furniture and equipment, is slated to nearly double, increasing by \$44,298 to a total of \$89,714. This is due to the new furniture for the kindergarten classroom.

The budget also includes an 800 "other objects" line, which includes money for meetings and conferences for Future Problem Solvers, as well as school system membership dues and fees in such groups as the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education and the Connecticut Association of Schools. That line is slated to rise by \$4,645, bringing it to \$20,913.

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The Board of Education will break down these line items at its next meeting, to be held Tuesday, Feb. 10, at 6 p.m., at the elementary school.

Revolutionary Families Focus of Hebron Resident's Book

by Geeta Schrayter

Last May, Hebron resident Mark Baker was excited about the release of his book *Spies of Revolutionary Connecticut*. Now, less than a year later, he's excited about the release of another book – this time about Revolutionary families from the Nutmeg State.

The book, called *Connecticut Families of the Revolution, American Forebears from Burr to Wolcott*, is Baker's 18th. He shared this week he was in the process of finishing up his book about spies when he began contemplating a book about families.

"What happened was, as I was doing the spies book it became very clear as I was going to historical sites that there were some voids," he stated.

At the Nathan Hale Homestead in Coventry for example, Baker explained visitors can learn about Hale, but as they go through the homestead other questions inevitably arise about the rest of Hale's family.

Volunteers "were wonderful at answering these questions at the homestead and I said 'there should be something you can get your hands on that fill in these gaps.'"

And so, Baker decided to write the book that would do just that – one with information about revolutionary families "beyond the scope of what some sites had."

"I wanted a book that tied all these families together; a lot of these families married into each other, so I wanted to do a book to kind of put these pieces together," he stated.

"The challenging thing was to put the pieces together to make it work as an entire entity, and to try to include all the family members as much as you can," Baker added. "The biggest challenge was painting the correct picture of the

foundation of the state through these families."

The 225-page book includes information on 16 families who Baker said "built the foundation of our state and influenced the foundation of our government."

Among those written about are the Hales, the Ellsworth family of Windsor, the Trumbull family of Lebanon, the Webster family of West Hartford and New Haven – even the Peters family of Hebron.

"Some of the most prominent families of the American Revolution proudly hailed from Connecticut," reads the book's synopsis. "Committed to the pursuit of freedom, men like Major General David Wooster led troops into battle, while Samuel Huntington and others risked it all by signing the Declaration of Independence."

The synopsis furthers, "Women may have stayed at home, but they played a vital part by producing goods for soldiers all while taking care of their property and children. In the wake of war, Sarah Pierce started the Litchfield Female Academy and taught protégés like Harriet Beecher Stowe."

And writing about the women was one of the aspects Baker said he enjoyed the most.

"There were so many great, strong women from Connecticut – just incredible people," he said, adding, "There's a whole chapter dedicated to women and children but they're also touched on in each chapter."

To research for this book, Baker said he searched online, took information garnered from his frequent attendance at historical events and visited the historical sites relevant to the families.

"I really utilized everything I had available

to me and this included photographs, and that's the hardest thing usually," he stated.

Included in the book are more than 60 black and white pictures.

Among the stories Baker discovered through his research, he said one of his favorites had to do with Oliver Wolcott, who was in New York City when then-General George Washington read the Declaration of Independence to his troops.

Baker writes, "The words were so moving that the citizens who had heard the proclamation raced down Broadway toward a large four-thousand-pound equestrian statue of King George III and pulled it down. The crowd cheered as the statue, made of lead coated with a fine layer of gold leaf, was shattered into pieces. When the mass cut off the statue's head, severed the nose and mounted what remained of the crown on a spike outside a tavern, the clamor was deafening."

But it was Wolcott, Baker said, who organized "a more befitting crucifixion."

Wolcott had the pieces of metal shipped to his house in Litchfield where, in a community event, he and his wife and some other patriotic women gathered in the orchard behind their home to melt the lead and shape it into bullets; according to a memorandum from Wolcott in possession of the Connecticut Historical Society, the pieces of the statue made 42,088 bullets.

Also through his research, Baker said one of the things he discovered was that many of these families married into each other.

"So I tried to put all these people together and I found it really fascinating," he said, ex-

plaining, for example, that two of the daughters of Oliver and Abigail Ellsworth married sons of Ezekiel Williams. Then, one of Ellsworth's twin boys William married the daughter of Noah Webster Jr. and became governor of Connecticut from 1838-42.

Other Ellsworth children also married into the Wolcott and Trumbull families.

"There were all these pieces I tried to weave together to tell a tale about just what we're dealing with here in Connecticut," Baker furthered, explaining his task was "to bring the reader back to the 18th century."

And while Baker didn't set out with this in mind, he added the book, with its information on 12 of 19 Connecticut governors who served from 1759-1850, would work well as a tool in history classes.

Baker explained, "I fell in love with this period and teaching it from a period perspective is interesting. Had I had this approach when I was a kid I would have been a lot more interested in history I think."

He added books such as his were "a way to teach Connecticut history without jamming a textbook down kids' throats to so speak."

Writing the book, he continued, "was a lot of fun. The reviews have been very, very good and the book's done extremely well."

"I'm pleased with it and I hope I get an opportunity to continue with the Revolutionary vein, because there are so many good stories" to be told, Baker concluded.

Connecticut Families of the Revolution, American Forebears from Burr to Wolcott is available online and in bookstores such as Barnes and Noble.

Committee Aims to Bring State Park Trail to Portland

by John Tyczkowski

The Air Line Trail Steering Committee wants you as part of its effort to bring a state park trail to town.

Lou Pear, co-chair of the Air Line Trail Steering Committee, said the committee is always looking for more people.

"It's great to see the community getting involved," he said. "And we want to encourage that involvement."

Currently, the committee comprises more than 40 volunteer members in addition to the seven core members appointed by the Board of Selectmen.

According to an agenda it presented before the Board of Selectmen earlier this month, the Air Line Trail Steering Committee seeks to extend the current trail from East Hampton into Portland, to ultimately end at the Arrigoni Bridge and connect Portland and Middletown.

First, the committee plans to create a section in Portland on the north border of the Camp Ingersoll property. From there, the trail would extend east to East Hampton, through Breezy Corners Road and parallel to Middle Haddam Road, to Depot Hill Road and the town line.

It would run west to the bridge running roughly parallel to Route 66 until Pickering Street, where it would branch off to the bridge. The committee will look into whether that particular section could run beside the active, but unused, Providence and Worcester Railroad tracks in town, Pear said.

Many of the specifics will be nailed down in a site plan, set to be ready for discussion among the committee in February.

The trail itself follows the path of the Air Line Railroad, active from 1873 until about the turn of the century as a passenger line, and then as a mixed-use rail until the 1970s. The line stretched, in sections, from New York to Boston.

Today, the Air Line Trail extends from East Hampton all the way to Putnam, with a small section heading from Thompson to the Massachusetts state line which is largely not maintained. There is also a small stretch of the trail in Colchester that branches off from the railway's path.

Also, the section of the trail which runs from East Hampton to Willimantic has been designated a state park.

The Board of Selectmen created the Air Line Trail Steering Committee last March, which has a complement of seven residents appointed by the selectmen, representing both Democrat and Republican views.

According to the original resolution, the committee's official mission is "to organize, guide and support a large group of citizen volunteers in activities to build public support for the trail, develop specific plans for trail access, identify funding sources and cooperate with regional entities."

The short-term plan, delivered at a Board of

Selectmen meeting two weeks ago, is to connect Portland to Cobalt, beginning at Camp Ingersoll.

To that end, the committee has talked with the camp leadership and the Middlesex YMCA Board of Directors, with the goal of allowing trail-goers to use the camp's parking.

Member John Shafer presented a set of 10 information points to outgoing camp director Tony Sharillo, discussing the trail's development history, its funding sources and estimated average use, among other factors.

Shafer said things are "looking good" for the camp allowing use of their parking facilities for trail-goers.

"They are basically receptive to this plan. They have some minor concerns, but I think everyone is enthusiastic that we can work those out," he said. "It's a real possibility at this point."

Allowing parking at Camp Ingersoll would create an easy point of access for the first section of the Portland Air Line Trail, which runs along Camp Ingersoll property on its northern edge.

Along those lines, two weeks ago, the committee held a walk along that portion of the proposed trail. More than 25 representatives from state and local government, as well as other interested parties, showed up for the hike.

These included First Selectwoman Susan Bransfield, Town Planner Deanna Rhodes,

Town Engineer Jeff Jacobs, State Reps. Christie Carpino and Melissa Ziobron, and representatives from Butler Construction Co., Spectra and Connecticut Light & Power, as well as from the Middlesex YMCA.

Spectra, a subsidiary of Algonquin Gas, has easement rights over the property where the Air Line Trail would be situated. CL&P in turn owns the property.

Butler Construction Co. has a permit from CL&P to excavate on a portion of the property that overlaps with the old Air Line Railroad, which the trail planned to follow.

"I think it's very promising and optimistic that we had every stakeholder that could possibly be there with us on that hike," Pear said. "We were able to show to everybody that we don't want to do anything crazy, we just want to have a nice trail, and give everyone an opportunity to use that trail."

"It really showed the wide range of interest from politicians, committee members, people in town, the companies that own the land and the Y," he said.

The Air Line Trail Steering Committee meets every fourth Wednesday at the Portland Public Library at 6:30 p.m.

Look in the coming weeks in the *Rivereast* for more features on citizens' groups in Portland.

WJJMS Committee Chooses Mix of Renovate/New

by Kaitlyn Schroyer

After months of deliberations, the William J. Johnston Middle School Building Committee last week decided on an option for the new-look middle school.

At its Jan. 22 meeting, the committee unanimously decided to back option two, which is a mix of renovation and new construction for the building. The option carries a price tag of \$44,554,213 price tag, though due to state reimbursement the impact to the town would be \$17,384,560.

Tom Tyler, chairman of the committee, said the option will now go to the boards of selectmen, education and finance at a joint meeting Thursday, Feb. 5, at 6 p.m. At the meeting, the boards will discuss a timetable and possible referendum date, and how to begin educating citizens about the chosen option.

During last week's meeting, committee members went around the table and explained why they favored option two over option three, which would have been all-new construction.

(Committee members had previously eliminated option one, which would have been largely renovation with little new construction.) Member Tony Tarnowski said he didn't think the committee could justify the additional cost to build all new with no real big energy savings or operating cost savings. Tarnowski also said option two was better for academic programming, and was more flexible for expansion is ever needed.

Members of the committee generally agreed that the additional cost for new was not justified.

After the last building committee meeting with NESDEC (New England School Development Council), the options had been reduced by 6,000 square feet to reflect a four-teacher team structure instead of five teachers per team, due to enrollment that is projected to decrease at the school.

With the square foot reduction, option three still clocked in at \$46,755,139, with the cost to

the town being \$22,708,971. (There would have been less reimbursement from the state with option three, as it would have been all-new construction.)

Both options included keeping the second gym and renovating the pupil services area. The options also included the two fields, increased parking and separated areas for bus drop-off and parent drop-off.

Tecton Architects, which are working on the project, estimated construction would take between 18 and 19 months.

Board of Education Chairman Ron Goldstein said he felt it was great the committee chose option two.

"We have responded to the declining enrollment with a smaller building that's a practical building that uses the existing structure as well and renovates as opposed to being an entirely new building," Goldstein said.

Goldstein stressed the committee was able

to look at the most up-to-date information regarding enrollment projections and state reimbursement rates, and that helped it make a decision on the options and solidify a cost for the project.

"Because of the conversation with the state about the level of reimbursement and because of the scaled-down building, it resulted in the net cost to be substantially less than what had been discussed, which had been the worst-case scenario," Goldstein said.

Throughout its deliberations on the options, Goldstein said, the building committee had been told by the architects that the costs had been subject to the discussion with the state.

After next week's joint meeting of the selectmen, school and finance boards, Goldstein said some public information sessions will need to be held, and the Board of Finance will need to review the project. It would then go to a town meeting before heading to referendum.

East Hampton Man Dies Clearing Snow

An East Hampton man died while clearing snow last weekend, East Hampton Police said.

At about 7:20 p.m. Saturday, Jan. 24, police responded to a medical complaint at 43 Colchester Avenue. East Hampton Volunteer Ambulance and East Hampton Fire Department personnel also responded, as did a Middlesex Hospital medic.

Police said Cornelius (Neil) Jay, 70, was found unresponsive in the driveway of his

home where he had been clearing snow.

Police, fire department and ambulance volunteers attempted to revive Jay, police said, until it was discovered at the scene that he had legally requested not to be resuscitated.

Jay was presumed dead by a Middlesex Hospital paramedic. A police investigation found no criminal aspect in the death.

Jay's final arrangements were seen to by the Biega Funeral Home in Middletown.

Hebron Police News

1/23: State Police said two juveniles were referred to the AHM Juvenile Review Board after they were found in two cars at the RHAM parking lot on Wall Street in possession of narcotics.

1/23: State Police said Colleen Leary, 25, of 264 Millstream Rd., Amston, was arrested and charged with failure to pay or plead.

1/24: State Police said William Larsen, 58, of 781 East St., was transported to the Marlborough Clinic for minor injuries after he lost control of his vehicle on East Road and collided with the guard rail.

Marlborough Police News

1/20: State Police said Lisa Mogren, 51, of 71 South Buckboard Lane, was arrested and charged with DUI, interfering with an officer, engaging police in pursuit, failure to submit to fingerprinting and simple trespass.

Colchester Police News

1/19: State Police said Susan Sych, 45, of 1360 Enfield St., Enfield, was arrested and charged with DUI and failure to drive in the proper lane.

1/20: Colchester Police said they are investigating after a vehicle was struck, causing severe damage, while parked on Broadway sometime in the afternoon on Jan. 19. Anyone with information can call Colchester Police Officer Robert Labonte at 860-537-7270.

1/21: Colchester Police said Tesche Gray, 30, of 136 Stanavage Rd., and Alana Riley, 6 months old, also of 136 Stanavage Rd., were transported to Marlborough Clinic for precautionary reasons after the car Gray was driving made an improper turn off Route 16 near Ashley Lane and rolled into a ditch.

1/22: Colchester Police said they are investigating after an ex-employee at a Middletown Road dentist office allegedly forged fake prescriptions.

1/22: Colchester Police said Kenneth Sanders II, 25, of 146 Naomi Dr., East Hartford, was arrested and charged with first-degree stalking, home invasion, breach of peace, violation of a

protective order and third-degree assault.

1/23: State Police said Nicholas Viccaro, 36, of 87 Bulkeley Hill Rd., was arrested and charged with risk of injury to a child and illegal possession of narcotics.

1/23: State Police said Keith Petersen, 47, of 105 Witter Rd., Salem, was arrested and charged with DUI and making an improper turn.

1/24: Colchester Police said they are investigating after a person on Birch Circle reported an unknown person assaulted him and stole his vehicle. Police said the victim sustained minor injuries and that the case is under investigation.

1/24: State Police said Justin Pedro, 31, of 106 Westchester Rd., was arrested and charged with disorderly conduct and violation of a restraining order.

1/26: State Police said Kristoffer Sypher, 33, of 43 Antioch Rd., was arrested and charged with second-degree harassment and second-degree criminal mischief.

1/28: State Police said Julie Desiata, 31, of 35 Saybrook Rd., Middletown, was arrested and charged with third-degree assault and breach of peace.

Obituaries

Portland

Gary H. Clark

Gary Clark, formerly from Portland, the son of the late Ruth Clark, died suddenly Monday, Dec. 15, 2014, in Colorado. He was born Nov. 18, 1957.

Gary leaves his sisters and brothers, George Clark, Joan Rice, Claire Ciochini, Ruth Norton, Carol Bowerman, Linda Brown, Paula Oakliff, Richard Clark, Allan Clark and leaves numerous nieces and nephews.

He was predeceased by one sister, Jane Clark, and brother, Robert Clark, plus his mother, Ruth Clark.

There will be no memorial service or calling hours.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the Guiding Edges for the Blind or Fidelco Guide Dog Foundation. He loved his dog.

He will be buried in Trinity Church Cemetery with his mother, sister and brother.



Portland

Jason M. Strycharz

Jason "Uncle Jay" M. Strycharz, 40, of Portland, passed away Friday, Jan. 23, at Middlesex Hospital. He was the son of Peter and Carla (Estabrook) Strycharz of Portland.

Born June 4, 1974, in Middletown, he was a lifelong Portland resident and worked for Primary Steel in Middletown. He enjoyed hiking, camping and was very involved with his family.

Besides his parents, he leaves his fiancé, Sharon Craft of Portland; brother, Nate Strycharz and his wife Emilie of Portland; loving niece and nephew, Maxwell and Teagan; maternal grandmother, Gilma Estabrook of Portland; numerous aunts, uncles, cousins; and his dog, Lilly.

He was predeceased by his paternal grandparents, John and Lottie Strycharz, and his maternal grandfather, Maxwell Estabrook.

Relatives and friends called Thursday, Jan. 29, at Portland Memorial Funeral Home, 231 Main St., Portland. Burial was private.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to Connecticut Children's Medical Center, 282 Washington St., Hartford, CT 06106, or to the Connecticut Humane Society, 701 Russell Rd., Newington, CT 06111.

To send an online expression of sympathy, visit portlandmemorialfh.net.



Colchester

Regina Zawisza

Regina (Casaceli) Zawisza, 85, of Colchester, passed away Saturday, Jan. 24, at Lawrence & Memorial Hospital in New London. She was a survivor of cancer which she struggled with for over 40 years.

Born in Queens, N.Y. on Jan. 14, 1930, she was a daughter of the late Francis and Isabel (Latonik) Casaceli. Regina was a graduate of Bellevue School of Nursing in New York.

She married August Chester Zawisza June 30, 1956, at St. Andrew Church in Colchester. The couple raised their family on Prospect Hill Road in Colchester, where they shared 43 years of marriage before he predeceased her on March 18, 2000.

Regina was very proud of her vocation as a registered nurse. She worked in a variety of health care facilities, over her 50-year career. She was a communicant of St. Andrew Roman Catholic Church, where she was also a member of the Ladies' Guild. Regina was an active volunteer, collecting supplies and supporting area battered womens' shelters. She also worked with TRIAD through the Colchester Senior Center.

Regina was an avid reader. She enjoyed knitting, card playing, and crossword puzzles. Most importantly, she will be remembered fondly for her sense of humor and her devotion to family and friends.

She will be sadly missed but always remembered by her children, Elizabeth Anderson of Colorado Springs, Colo., Peter and wife Deb Zawisza of East Hampton, Mary and husband Bob Reed of Norwich, Stephen and wife Sheri Zawisza of Portland, Andrew and wife Yvette Zawisza of Grain Valley, Mo.; four grandchildren, Kate, Matt, Wyatt and Chloe; a sister, Isabella and husband Arthur Corwin of Chamberlain, Maine; and numerous extended family and friends.

She was predeceased by a sister, Delores Fahner.

The funeral liturgy was celebrated Thursday, Jan. 29, directly at St. Andrew Church, 128 Norwich Ave., Colchester. There were no calling hours and burial was private.

Donations in her memory may be made to a Battered Womens' Shelter or St. Andrew Church.

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



Portland

Edward Philip Brahen

Edward Philip Brahen, 82, beloved husband of the late Blanche (Richardson) Brahen, passed away Thursday, Jan. 15, at Middlesex Health Care Center in Middletown. Edward was born July 25, 1932, to the late William and Leona (Smith) Brahen.

Edward was previously a resident of Greystone Retirement Home in Portland. He was a veteran of the U.S. Navy and enjoyed a 40-year career at Pratt & Whitney Aircraft as a tool and die maker.

Edward is survived by four daughters, Leona Brahen and her companion Robert D'Aquilla of Monson, Mass., Wilhelmina Brahen and Karen Cordeau both of Camden, Tenn., and Marjorie Barrett and her husband Tim of Portland. He also leaves seven grandchildren, a great-grandson, and many nieces and nephews.

Edward was predeceased by two brothers, William and Harry, and a sister, Betty.

Edward's family would like to thank the staff at Greystone Retirement Home and Middlesex Health Care Center for their care and compassion. At the family's request, the services will be private and held at a future date.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the Middlebrook Recreation Department at Middlesex Health Care Center, 100 Randolph Rd., Middletown, CT 06457.

Portland

Duane Marie Chowanec

Duane Marie Chowanec, 66, of Portland, passed away Saturday, Jan. 17, at Middlesex Hospital. She was the daughter of the late Joseph J. and Connie (Ferrigno) Chowanec.

Born June 18, 1948, in Middletown, she lived in Portland for most of her life. She worked full time as an office assistant for the State of Connecticut's Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. She also was a licensed hypertrichologist and was self-employed part-time in that role.

She was a member of the Portland Historical Society and the Church of St. Mary. She loved travel and that interest took her to Hawaii, Europe and the Caribbean Islands.

She leaves her aunt, Rose Shefcyk of Portland and her uncles Walter Chowanec of Brandon, Fla., and Raymond Chowanec of Middlefield, as well as many cousins.

Services will be private and at the convenience of the family. In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the Church of St. Mary, 51 Freestone Ave., Portland, CT 06480, or to St. Jude Children's Hospital, 501 St. Jude Place, Memphis, TN 38105.

To send an online expression of sympathy, visit portlandmemorialfh.net.



Marlborough

Joyce M. Dooley

Joyce M. (Porzio) Dooley, 64, of Manchester, beloved wife of Michael W. Dooley, died Friday, Jan. 23, at the Marlborough Health Care Center, surrounded by her family.

Born Jan. 21, 1951, in Hartford, daughter of the late Frank and Anne (Pawlina) Porzio, she was raised in Glastonbury and had lived in Manchester for the past 32 years. Joyce worked in the U.S. Trust Division at Bank of America for over 45 years and she was a member of the CBT Alumni Club.

Besides her husband, she is survived by two sons, Timothy M. Dooley and his girlfriend Melissa Meyer of Vernon, James P. Dooley of Marlborough; a brother, Donald Porzio and his wife Nancy of Glastonbury; a sister, Barbara Planeta of Marlborough; and her aunt, Doris Pawlina of Glastonbury. She is also survived by many nieces and nephews and 11 great nieces and nephews.

Funeral service was Thursday, Jan. 29, in the Mulryan Funeral Home, 725 Hebron Ave., Glastonbury. Burial followed in Marlboro Cemetery. Friends called at the funeral home Wednesday, Jan. 28.

In lieu of flowers, memorial donations may be made to the Connecticut Humane Society, 701 Russell Rd., Newington, CT 06111.

For online condolences, visit mulryanfh.com.



Hebron

Jon Reynolds

Jon Reynolds, 47, passed away in his home in Seattle, Wa., Saturday, Jan. 17. He was born Jan. 8, 1968 in Hartford. Jon was predeceased by his parents, Brian and Gayle Reynolds of Glastonbury.

He is survived by his wife, Oritana Ve'a, and daughters Ahni and Tutuila. He leaves his siblings and their spouses, Brian and Brenda Reynolds of Baltimore, Md., Sharon and William Gusky of Canton, Lynn and David Peterson of Wakefield, Mass., Clifford and Tomoko Reynolds of Tehachapi, Calif., sister-in-law Betina Ve'a and her husband Andrew Flanders; as well as many nieces, nephews and cousins.

Jon had been employed at the UW Medicine Harborview Medical Center as Manager of the Center of Occupational Health and Education. He graduated from RHAM High School in Hebron in 1986 and American University in 1990.

In lieu of flowers, donations to his daughter's college fund can be made to Collegeamerica and mailed to Prudence Financial Inc. Re: Jon Reynolds, 365 Boston Post Rd. #203, Sudbury, MA 01776.

A celebration of life ceremony will be held Saturday, Jan. 31, from 12:30-4 p.m., at the New Haven Museum in the Ball Room (newhavenmuseum.org).

Portland

Ruth J. McGowan

Ruth J. McGowan, 83, of Portland, wife of the late John McGowan, passed away Monday, Jan. 26. Born May 5, 1931, to the late George and Bertha (Turner) Johnson, she lived in Portland most of her life.

A graduate of Portland High School, CCSU, and the University of New Mexico, she became a special education teacher and taught at Riverview Hospital until her retirement. She was a very active member of the Brownstone Quorum and clearing brush for the Riverfront Park, the Portland Historical Society, and CT State Retirees Union 406. Ruth so enjoyed discussing Portland "back then" — the history, the places, the people, and her parent's tobacco farm.

Ruth leaves her sons, Earl Rand (wife Mary) of E. Wallingford, Vt., and Peter Rand (wife Judi) of Portland; and grandchildren, the loves of her life, Nathan, Emily, and Lisa Rand. She is survived by a sister, Doris Salamon; stepdaughters Patricia McGowan and Judy Geato; and many dear nieces, nephews and friends.

A brother, George Johnson, and stepson John, predeceased her.

Her enthusiasm, compassion, laughter, and support at the drop of a hat, will be missed.

Funeral services will be held Saturday, Jan. 31, at 11 a.m., at Portland Memorial Funeral Home, 231 Main St, Portland. Burial is private. Relatives and friends may call today, Jan. 30, from 5-7 p.m., at the funeral home.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the Brownstone Quorum Inc., P.O. Box 402, Portland CT 06480.

To send an online expression of sympathy, visit portlandmemorialfh.net.



Observations & Ruminations

by Mike Thompson

Like most people did, I imagine, I spent a lot of time in the past week watching the weather – first to try to get a handle on last Saturday's snowstorm (which turned out not to be as big as imagined), and then to learn more about the blizzard that hit us Tuesday. And in my time watching the different local meteorologists, I heard a lot about a phrase I first became familiar with a few years ago: the European model.

No, I'm not talking about British supermodels. Rather, it's a computer system used to forecast weather. Its official name is the European Centre for Medium-range Weather Forecasting, and the supercomputer is used not just in Europe, but around the world. Around here, weathermen seem to be using it more and more – perhaps because, unlike the Global Forecast System (GFS) model the U.S. uses, the European model seems to be right more often than not.

A notable example of this came in 2012, when Hurricane Sandy hit. The GFS model showed it harmlessly going out to sea, while the European model called for a direct hit on the east coast. And as we all know, that's what happened.

Particularly since the Sandy incident, I've noticed weathermen talking more and more about what the European model calls for – and I guess the folks at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) got tired of all the reliance on the supercomputer from the people across the pond.

NOAA announced this month a whopping \$45 million upgrade that, according to *USA Today*, will increase tenfold the forecasting power of U.S. weather supercomputers.

How exactly do these weather models work? According to *USA Today*, the weather models take data from satellites, weather balloons and other observations, and plug them into atmospheric physics equations in supercomputers that help make weather forecasts.

This fall, after the upgrade, U.S. computers will go from now being able to handle 426 trillion operations a second to 5,000 trillion calculations. I'd say that's a pretty big jump in power.

"By increasing our overall capacity, we'll be able to process quadrillions of calculations per second that all feed into our forecasts and predictions," Louis Uccellini, director of the National Weather Service, said in a press release. "This boost in processing power is essential as we work to improve our numerical prediction models for more accurate and consistent forecasts."

Meteorologists are routinely derided for botching their forecasts; while I think that, for the most part, they're more often than not, there are some definite screw-ups sometimes. After all, a week ago at this time, Tuesday's blizzard was supposed to be little more than "light snow" – and it was supposed to arrive Monday.

So maybe this really will lead to more accurate forecasts, as Uccellini said. It'll be interesting to see – and if the development sends the European model into the background.

* * *

Speaking of weather, as I've written here in the past, I'm a firm believer in climate change. It just feels obvious to me that it's real, and it's happening. I frequently read

about people dismissing it as a myth, though, and it irks me a little. Because it's not a myth – and earlier this month brought some more, sobering evidence to back me up.

Both the aforementioned NOAA and NASA announced Jan. 16 that 2014 was the planet's hottest year in 135 years of record-keeping. Earlier, the Japanese weather agency and an independent group out of University of California Berkeley had also calculated 2014 was the hottest on record.

As the audience on Johnny Carson's *Tonight Show* might say, "how hot was it?" Well, NOAA said 2014 averaged 58.24 degrees Fahrenheit – which is 1.24 degrees above the 20th-century record. NASA calculated things a little differently, but came up with 58.42 – 1.22 degrees above the average of the years 1951-80.

So either way, that's warm – and as NOAA elaborated on its findings, it became clear it's no fluke. Nine of the 10 hottest years in NOAA global records have occurred since 2000.

Do you personally don't recall being that hot in 2014? Well, it may not be your imagination. According to the Associated Press, the warmth last year was widespread, with records falling across far eastern Russia, interior South America, much of Europe, the western part of the United States, northern Africa and parts of Australia. However, there were a few cooler spots – and those included, you guessed it, the eastern U.S.

"Every continent had some aspect of record high temperature" last year, Tom Karl, director of NOAA's National Climate Data Center, said.

And while the record-keeping only goes back 135 years, but climate scientist Jennifer Francis of Rutgers University wasn't convinced that if the records only went back just a little bit further, everything would be okay.

"The globe is warmer now than it has been in the last 100 years and more likely in at least 5,000 years," she said. "Any wisps of doubt that human activities are at fault are now gone with the wind."

Despite this, I'm sure there will be doubters. Indeed, the AP article on NOAA's and NASA's findings states that some non-scientists who deny man-made global warming point to satellite temperature records – which only go back to 1979 – which show that the world is indeed warming, but not at a record rate in 2014, and that there was less of a recent increase than the longer-term ground thermometers.

But scientists like Francis have criticized this approach, saying there has been some quality and trustworthy issues with some satellite measurements – and furthermore, that those measurements only show what's happening far above the ground. Ground measurements are more important, Francis and others have maintained, because it is where we live.

The '90s TV show *The X-Files* used to tell us "the truth is out there." Of course, the show was talking about UFOs, but that expression is still relevant. The truth really is out there. Whether you call it climate change or global warming (I personally prefer the former), it really does exist. These startling new findings from NOAA and NASA prove it.

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See you next week.