

RIVEREAST

# News Bulletin

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East Hampton sisters Riley (left) and Ella (center) Briggs, and West Hartford resident Ben Stone-Zelman, comprise the youth contingent of the cast of *A Wonderful Life* at the Goodspeed Opera House. The show runs through Dec. 6. Photo by Diane Sobolewski.

## Belltown Siblings Have 'Wonderful Life'

by Elizabeth Regan

East Hampton sisters Riley and Ella Briggs had one main concern about auditioning for their first professional production at the Goodspeed Opera House.

"We were worried one of us would get it and one of us wouldn't," Riley, 10, said.

It turns out they had nothing to fear. Both girls were chosen from among 30 area actors for roles in *A Wonderful Life*, a musical adaptation of *It's a Wonderful Life*, the Frank Capra holiday classic about divine intervention.

Ella, 7, plays Zuzu Bailey in the role made famous back in 1946 with the line "Every time a bell rings, an angel gets its wings." Riley plays her sister, Beth Bailey.

No strangers to the stage, the Briggs sisters have appeared in numerous productions put on by their parents, Chris Briggs and Kendra Dickinson. Briggs is the head of drama at Middletown High School while Dickinson, a language arts teacher at MHS, serves as a choreographer. The couple works locally at East Hampton's Young People's Center for Creative Arts, or YPCCA.

Riley recounted her younger sister's first impromptu performance in the YPCCA production of the musical *Aladdin* when she was only 2 years old.

"She put on a little costume and she crawled onstage with her best friend," Riley said. "I'm not joking. During a real performance she waddled on. She was like 'Hi,' waddling with her little self."

Now both girls perform eight times per week in the predominantly adult cast. Ben Stone-Zelman, of West Hartford, rounds out the triad

of child actors, in the role of Tommy Bailey. East Hampton resident Brendan Oakley, 11, is his understudy.

Following three to four weeks of rehearsal, previews of *A Wonderful Life* took place in September, with regular performances commencing in October. The girls and their parents describe the cast and crew as extended family.

"I never could have imagined the immersive family culture that the Goodspeed would create and foster," Dickinson said. "Truly from the first rehearsal, the adults in the cast overwhelmingly enveloped the children and made them feel like they were a part of it."

She cited the cast's efforts to bring Halloween to the girls when the performance schedule meant they were unable to go house-to-house in their own neighborhood. The Briggs family was invited to the Artists Village in East Haddam, where some actors reside during the show's run, for tricks and treats.

"At one of the houses we had to dance to 'Thriller' to get our candy," Ella said.

Briggs and Dickinson also credited East Hampton Public Schools with much of the girls' success in *A Wonderful Life*. They said teachers and principals at Center Elementary School and Memorial Elementary School, as well as interim schools superintendent Mark Winzler, have worked together to pull off an abbreviated schedule.

The girls attend school Mondays and Tuesdays, with a shortened day on Wednesdays.

"It's somewhat uncommon to only send your child to a public school half-time, so we all had

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## 'Stars Align' to Make Nature Trail a Reality

by Geeta Schrayter

A partnership between AHM Youth and Family Services and St. Peter's Episcopal Church in Hebron is leading to the creation of a nature trail that will allow for outdoor recreation and learning by the kids AHM serves.

The youth services bureau and the church are working together to jointly share the use of 16 acres of land owned by the church. The land, which is located behind AHM on Pendleton Drive, was described in an AHM news release about the trail as "diverse habitat" with "tremendous geography and history around" that includes two old fields, a mixed hardwood forest, a wetlands area, milkweed to attract Monarch butterflies, a stream, old stone walls and an old road.

For the past several months, AHM officials have been working with the church to coordinate the program, and previous executive director Joel Rosenberg – who now works with fund development at AHM – said this week "all the stars aligned to make this happen."

AHM Board of Directors member Steve Fish

shared this week he had approached Rosenberg earlier this year about joining the board and volunteering at AHM since he was now retired from working at the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection. As he was talking with Rosenberg about the possibility of volunteering with the teen center at AHM, mentioning how he started his career working at area nature centers, "Joel said, 'You know what? We've been thinking about doing a nature trail out back – do you want to help us with that?' And that's how I got involved."

From there, Hebron resident and church member Jack Gasper was contacted, who explained this week, "I asked them to develop a plan of intent and how it was going to be supervised and administered and I would be the spokesperson to go to our vestry" which is the church's governing body.

And so, Gasper did just that. The vestry was presented with the plan, and voted on – and approved – it a couple of months ago, setting up an annual agreement for shared use of the land.

Following the approval, work began to clear a trail throughout the property with the help of volunteers and a number of trail days. At present, Fish said the trail is about three quarters of the way done. Once finished, it will consist of two loops he said would likely take between 45 minutes and an hour to complete at a leisurely pace.

"It's just tremendous," Fish stated. "It's a wonderful partnership."

The trail, and sharing use of the property, "fits in with some of our objectives as a church," Gasper added. "We want to do community outreach and increase that level of involvement, and this became a wonderful opportunity for us to connect with the town, teenagers, and our own parishioner base to utilize God's given resources and do some good things with it."

He furthered, "Our main thing is to get kids away from social media. It's really important for them to be aware of the natural things in life. ... When they're quiet, they can think. That's a good thing."

Fish added, "The intent initially – and still is

– to really get kids out there, to get families and children out there. And I say 'families' because it's been proven again and again if their family is with them, kids are more likely to learn and retain."

The combination of the new trail and Fish's involvement with AHM has meant outdoor activities relating to nature are now "an offshoot of the teen center," which got back underway in March after an 18-month hiatus.

AHM Executive Director Michelle Hamilton explained this week Fish comes to the teen center about once a week and usually takes the kids outside.

"They look forward to that," she said. "He gets them outside and doing things they would never have done otherwise. We're excited to have him on board."

Fish shared he had some "crazy ideas" for the property and the trail as things evolve. The trail will allow for different hands-on learning projects such as identifying native plants and animal habitats. It will also allow for nature

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## Holiday Shopping Guide Inside



**Volunteers are working to put together a new nature trail that will allow for outdoor recreation and learning for kids at AHM Youth and Family Services. From left, RHAM Students Erian McKenna and Brody Barnes work on the trail with volunteers Bill Sudol and John Korl.**

**Nature Trail cont. from Front Page**

walks, bird watching, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, and learning about Native American lore.

Fish also mentioned taking the kids out to track animals, and said some of the teen center participants brought up the idea to go outside to create art. He added he's already worked with them to build wildlife brush piles, and planned to build birdhouses, and, in view of the upcoming holiday, bird ornaments made with seed.

The creation of trail guides was also mentioned, as well as the possibility of creating information stations along the trail on topics such as identifying trees and wildlife, preventing invasive species at home, and composting.

"And it's all possible because of the generosity of the church allowing us to use the land," Fish said, and Rosenberg echoed those thoughts.

"I want to pay gratitude and also give credit

to where it's due: if it wasn't for the church, this wouldn't be possible. The faith community in the area has always been very generous to AHM. We wouldn't even be sitting here if it weren't for them – the church is one of our oldest community partners."

In the release about the trail, Hamilton shared, "Our friends at the St. Peter's Episcopal Church have created a friendly agreement with AHM's Board of Directors to create this unique walking trail that will be integrated into activities through the AHM Teen Center."

She furthered this week, "Kids aren't getting that outdoor experience anymore. Now we're able to go out. ... It's nice to see kids running around outside."

"It's a really neat thing we've got going on," Fish added.

"And what's unique is that it's right in back of the town center," concluded Gasper.



**Ella Briggs of East Hampton plays Zuzu Bailey in the Goodspeed Opera House production of *A Wonderful Life* through Dec. 6. She's shown here in the arms of Duke Lafoon of New York, who plays George Bailey. Photo by Diane Sobolewski.**

**Wonderful Life cont. from Front Page**

to learn what the steps are," Dickinson said.

Based on guidelines from the state Department of Education, absences may be excused on a case-by-case basis when "extraordinary educational opportunities" are presented.

Dickinson said the family found a staunch ally in Center School principal Mary Clark, who also happens to be a graduate of YPCCA. The principal affirmed that there's a lot of learning to be done outside the four walls of the classroom, according to Dickinson.

For Ella, the experience has enhanced her bond with second-grade teacher Emily Scalise, with whom she did one-on-one work to make sure she didn't fall behind. "While the other kids are reading Monday and Tuesday, we work on math," Ella said. "Once we had lunch together, which was the best day ever."

Briggs, who studied at the University of Hartford's Hartt School and performed in summer stock productions in Maine, said there was an element of risk in allowing the girls to take the hectic, months-long gig.

"You're really kind of putting yourself and your family out there," he said.

But the risk paid off because of all the support from the theater and the schools, he said: "I just know the girls are going to look back on this for the rest of their lives and smile. They're just going to smile and that makes me happy."

Both girls have expressed an interest in making the jump to Broadway – Riley sooner than Ella.

"It would be amazing to go to Broadway, but not right now," Ella said. The self-described "feisty" girl is focused on her two big dogs – Newfoundland-St. Bernard mixes – and her burgeoning social network.

But the older Briggs sister has her sights set on New York City in the near term.

"Somebody told me once, she said, 'You need a life goal, lady,'" Riley said with a conspiratorial glance toward her mother. "I'm looking at you, Mom. Life goals."

According to Riley, the sooner she accomplishes this life goal, the sooner she can move on to another one.

Dickinson said she's open-minded when it comes to the girls' acting future.

So, too, is her husband. "They have said they wanted to continue auditioning," Briggs said. "I think that as long as they're happy doing it, we're happy having them do it."

Riley, already exhibiting a full and ebullient sense of self, said she relishes the chance to take on other personas in front of an audience.

"This production has been very fun, just exciting every single time," she said. "When the show starts, it's like 'Yes! I get to go on stage again. I get to have this opportunity all over again.' It keeps on happening. And I like that."

*A Wonderful Life* runs through Dec. 6 at the Goodspeed Opera House in East Haddam. For showtimes and more information, visit [goodspeed.org/productions/2015/a-wonderful-life](http://goodspeed.org/productions/2015/a-wonderful-life).

# RHAM Field Conditions Continue to Pose Problems

by Geeta Schrayter

At this month's RHAM Board of Education meeting, upset was expressed surrounding a decision that sent the varsity girls soccer team to Southbury to play their tournament game when they'd the option of playing it at home.

The team was scheduled to play the Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference tournament game at home on Wednesday Nov. 11 at RHAM – a right they had earned by finishing the regular season undefeated. However, due to the state of the field because of rain the day before, the decision was made to move play to their opponent's field in Southbury. The team wound up losing the game, 3-1.

During public comment at the Monday, Nov. 16, meeting, Hebron resident John Jepson spoke regarding the decision, calling it "unfortunate."

Jepson shared he was frustrated no alternate plan had been made even though the possibility for rain was known days in advance. He added fields that are much closer – including at Burnt Hill Park in Hebron or Eastern Connecticut State University – were available but since no work was done ahead of time to line things up in case a location change was needed, the game had to go to Southbury.

And that, Jepson stated, meant the team "lost home field advantage and the chance to play in front of friends."

Resident Randy Skoly also spoke regarding the fields, saying, "The field has major problems. And we're going to be faced with more issues like last Wednesday... or last spring when the entire lacrosse season for boys and girls – both junior varsity and varsity – was moved to non-home sites."

He added, "If in fact that field was available

[in Hebron] and we carted the kids halfway across the state, shame on us."

Speaking to the issue this week, board member Joe O'Connor said, "This problem happens every November and has been here since day one of the school opening, due to the field being built incorrectly."

Typically, he explained, a field is constructed with topsoil on the top, a layer of sand in the middle and then a subbase layer on the bottom. But the RHAM competition field was built topsoil, subbase and then sand instead, which impacts the field's drainage ability.

O'Connor added moving the game to Southbury was the result of a "lack of planning and the poor drainage – once again – at the RHAM competition field."

High School Principal Scott Leslie spoke to the decision Tuesday, and said there were a couple of options considered, but holding the game at Southbury was deemed best.

One of those other options, Leslie explained, was postponing the game to the following day, "but the coach didn't want to because, if they had won, he didn't want to do two back-to-back games."

He added the coach also expressed a preference for the team to play on a turf field which would prepare them for the next set of games, also scheduled to be held on all-weather fields.

"So the decision was made to request to play at Pomperaug [High School in Southbury] because they had the turf field," he said.

Leslie added although ECSU has an available turf field "there's a fee involved and right now we don't have a budget item to allow us to cover the cost of alternate sites."

In addition Leslie said it was his understanding that, normally, the RHAM field could have been made playable, "but because it was a holiday [Veterans Day] the personnel weren't available to make sure it was ready. Had it been a normal school day they may have been able to play" at home.

Moving forward, though, Leslie said work continues to be done on the field "to help alleviate future drainage issues."

There's also the potential a synthetic turf field may be brought to the school: included in a \$10 million package expected to be sent to state Sen. Cathy Osten and state Rep. Gayle Mulligan for submission to the State Bonding Commission is \$2,735,000 in track and field improvements which includes the installation of a new all-weather synthetic turf field.

But whether that will come to pass is still a ways off; Osten shared previously the package won't be discussed until the General Assembly is back in regular session in February, and whether or not bonding is approved may not be learned until the end of May.

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Also at the meeting, the board learned about new science standards coming to the school as well as a new science assessment that will be implemented in the next 3-4 years.

Lauren Fierman, the director of curriculum, instruction and assessment shared the emphasis in these new standards – called Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) – "goes to inquiry, goes to developing ideas; to the application of your knowledge and understanding to real world problems and novel situations."

The standards "move away from the idea of

knowledge recall being where you stop. Knowledge recall is important – it's not that we don't want it – but you can't set the bar there," Fierman stated. "You have to use the knowledge recall to apply it to a new situation. That's what happens in a real science job; you don't hire people to solve problems you already know the answer to, you hire people to solve problems you don't know the answer to."

Reasons for the change in standards shared at the meeting include to align them with college and career readiness standards in other disciplines; because many of today's (and future) jobs require stem knowledge; and because Connecticut has lots of jobs in the science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) field that could be filled by Connecticut students.

RHAM Middle School Principal Mike Seroussi said "almost all of [those who've learned about the new standards] agree this is going to be a good change for the state."

The new standards have already gotten underway in grades seven and eight at RHAM. Grade 10 is expected to switch over in 2016-17, while grade nine is expected to switch in 2017-18, and grades 11 and 12 will follow in 2018-19.

Following the change in standards will be a new assessment. Fierman explained, "We won't really know what it looks like until it happens but our big next step is changing the curriculum to reflect the new standards."

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The next RHAM Board of Education meeting is scheduled for Monday, Dec. 21, at 6:30 p.m. in the RHAM High School music room, 85 Wall St.

## New AHM Director Settling into Role

by Geeta Schrayter

Becoming only the second executive director in the history of AHM Youth and Services may be daunting, but for Michelle Hamilton – who began in the role last month – it's also exciting.

"It's daunting, but I'm excited about it," Hamilton shared this week. "Joel [Rosenberg] was here for 37 years. He built AHM to what is it today, but I feel I have the drive, the experience, and the support from the [AHM Board of Directors] and from Joel and from the director of finance and operations to continue what they've accomplished."

She added, "I'm really excited about continuing what they've accomplished and to inject some new ideas."

Prior to becoming executive director, Hamilton worked as the program director at AHM, joining the bureau in December 2014. Switching positions, she said, has been "a seamless transition."

"I enjoy the fact that Joel is still here as a special advisor," she said. "Things are running. We have strong staff that has been here for a number of years. They know their roles, so it's been going pretty well. I'm learning a lot working with the board now and getting to know the board members and getting to know the communities."

Prior to joining AHM, Hamilton worked as the senior program health educator for the regional health district Ledge Light in New Lon-

don for 12 years. There, she explained, she worked to coordinate the district's substance abuse prevention coalition, which she shared was similar to the AHM Coalition for a Healthy Empowered Community (CHEC). She also had experience with QPR (Question, Persuade, Refer) suicide prevention training and so, was able to implement that in the community.

In addition, Hamilton worked closely with the five communities Ledge Light serviced, "so I was very well used to going to different communities and working with different town agencies," which is part of her role as she works with Andover, Hebron, Marlborough and Columbia.

Following her time at Ledge Light, Hamilton took some time off before searching for another job.

"There just wasn't a lot of work out there for what I wanted to do – work with youth and families," she recalled. "I wanted to continue what I did at Ledge Light. I thought that was an important piece. So when I saw the ad for the program director position at AHM, I just thought that was where I wanted to be."

And she continues to settle into her role, Hamilton said one of the challenges would be the state budget.

"I think you're always going to have those years where it's like, are we going to get cut? How much are we going to get cut? And I think with the way [AHM has] transitioned and the way we've restructured AHM with Joel taking

on the responsibility of fund development, I think we'll look at that and say, 'Okay, we can look to other resources,'" Hamilton said. "So Joel will still be a big part of keeping AHM afloat so we're able to provide the services that we're providing."

Moving forward, Hamilton said she planned to look at the programs that are currently being offered to see if there were any gaps.

"I want to make sure that we're filling the needs of the community... and increasing programming to a level where we can handle it. We're not going to overextend ourselves, but we want to make sure we're meeting the needs of the community."

Speaking about the services AHM already offers, Hamilton said, "We have over 40 programs that we offer the community in mental health, criminal justice, development, intervention, prevention, with the family resource center. ... We offer, birth to 18, an array of services to the communities."

She furthered, "Whether or not your child needs some developmental screening, which we do, or your teenager has made a mistake and now they need to go to the juvenile review board, our agency offers these different opportunities and access to mental health counseling to be able to change the course of their lives to make them, when they grow up, a positive, successful citizen in their community that they live in. That's what we do every day."

Hamilton concluded it was important for the



**Michelle Hamilton is the new executive director at AHM – and only the second head of the youth service bureau in nearly 40 years.**

members of the communities AHM services to realize the value of the work AHM does.

"We're really changing the trajectory of children," she said. "That's big. That's huge. And I want the community to know that we will continue to do that."

# Colchester Rotary Aids 205 Families with Thanksgiving Meal

by Kaitlyn Schroyer

Boxes filled with all of the fixings for a Thanksgiving meal were stacked high in the conference rooms of Town Hall Monday, as the Colchester Rotary distributed 205 meals to area families in need.

It has been almost 30 years that the service group has helped families during this time of year. Rotarian Gretchen Marvin recalled that, when she first participated 25 years ago, the group gave out 50 boxes – and personally delivered the meals. Each year, though, the number of families helped has grown and this year set another record by five boxes. The Rotarians switched from delivering door-to-door to the pick-up at Town Hall three years ago, after the amount of meals got too large.

Those that received the boxes were appreciative, with one gentleman dropping off a thank you note before the end of distribution.

“It’s just such a good thing to do,” Marvin said, while volunteers around her checked in people picking up boxes and helped them put the boxes in their cars. “What isn’t distributed goes to [Colchester Food Bank].”

The names of the families are given to the Rotary from Colchester Youth and Social Services. CYSS also determines how many boxes a family gets, depending on how large of a family it is.

Inside each box put together by either Noel’s Market or Westchester Marketplace was a 10-12 pound turkey, five pounds of potatoes, stuffing, gravy, cranberry sauce, four cans of vegetables, apple juice, dinner rolls, margarine and an apple pie. A new addition this year was two small packaged meals, one with macaroni and a powdered cheese sauce and one with pasta and a powdered tomato and basil sauce. Those

meals were packaged by Rotarians and other volunteers the previous week in a partnership with End Hunger NE.

The Rotarians also had new helpers this year with the Interact Club at Bacon Academy attending the event. Interact is a Rotary-like high school service club.

The money to purchase the food came from a variety of sources, including local families sponsoring a family for \$40, and a program by Liberty Bank.

The sponsorships, Marvin said were a huge help this year, with 25-30 families being sponsored. The amount of sponsors was up this year, thanks to Rotary advertising earlier than in previous years, she said.

“We thank them tremendously,” Marvin said of the sponsors. “Without their help, we wouldn’t be able to [provide all the meals.]”

The Rotary also set a new record with Liberty Bank this year. From the paper turkey legs sold at the Colchester Liberty branch, the Rotary raised \$11,484 – with the bank matching \$2,871 of that amount, for a total of \$14,355.

Of the 35 Liberty branches across the state holding paper turkey leg drives, in partnership with 35 different Rotary clubs, the Colchester fundraiser generated the sixth-highest amount of money.

It was also a substantial increase from last year, when the Colchester Rotary/Liberty Bank drive raised \$10,700.

Any of the money not used by the Colchester Rotary to purchase the meals goes toward filling the pantries of the Ponemah and Dublin villages for the elderly. And there’s a need for the food at those villages, since, due to being on a fixed income, the seniors often “buy medicine before food,” Marvin said.



Colchester Rotarians, from left, Mike Emerling, Gretchen Marvin, Nicole Reardon, Wayne Potvin and John Bedford were just some of the volunteers behind Monday’s Thanksgiving basket distribution.

The Rotary contributes to the village pantries throughout the year, contributing \$300 a month to stock the shelves at both villages.

Overall, this year was also a record breaker for Liberty Bank with \$267,457 raised at the bank’s 35 branches. Last year’s drive raised just under \$209,500.

Sue Murphy of Liberty Bank said that, since the drive began in 2004, the bank has helped provide over \$1.4 million toward Thanksgiving meals.

“We’ve expanded the drive to new towns whenever we’ve added branches, and are committed to continuing to grow this project as Liberty grows,” Murphy said. “One of our strengths as a community bank is the ability to bring partners around the table to address community needs.”

Murphy expects the Rotary and Liberty to continue their partnership for Thanksgiving 2016 – and beyond. Since the need for food is not going away anytime soon, neither will the drive.

# Two Ordinance Changes Considered by Colchester Selectmen

by Kaitlyn Schroyer

Taxes were the talk of the night at last Thursday’s Board of Selectmen meeting, as selectmen discussed a change to the fire department’s life member tax exemption, as well as preventing residents and contractors from obtaining a building permit when they owe taxes on the property.

Colchester Hayward Volunteer Fire Department President David Martin explained how the system of life member tax exemptions works currently, and what it would become if the ordinance is changed.

If any firefighter responds to 125 calls, they receive a \$500 property tax exemption; if they respond to more than 125, they receive a \$1,000 tax exemption.

Once a member has been active for 25 years, they attain life member status. They continue to train and respond to calls if they want, but they can also become inactive and retain their member status.

Martin explained the proposed change is to expand the tax exemption to inactive life members. That exemption would be based on an average of calls responded to the last five years they qualified for exemptions. For example, if the average is more than 125 calls per year, the volunteers would continue to receive a \$1,000 exemption. The tax exemption would end when the person passes away or ceases to own property in Colchester, Martin said.

Currently, 13 people would qualify for the exemption. These are current active life members who would qualify when they become inactive. Martin explained the change would not be retroactive; current inactive life members would not be eligible for the exemption.

If all 13 members went inactive at the same time and hypothetically all averaged to the \$1,000 exemption, it would be \$13,000 less in revenue for the town.

But, Martin said, “The feeling is the amount of years each members gives, it’s really a small token on behalf of the town to express some gratitude for that.”

Town Assessor John Chaponis told the selectmen he was unsure if state statute would allow such a change. He said the current statute states the exemption applies to a person who volunteers their service – there’s nothing in the statute about people who used to volunteer their service.

Chaponis urged the selectmen to pass the proposed change to legal counsel to get their opinion.

First Selectmen Art Shilosky agreed it would be good to send the proposed change to counsel.

“It’s a good idea, but we want to do it the right way,” Shilosky said.

Martin supported that decision, saying he was sure the selectmen understand the fire

department’s endeavors and thanked the board.

“If counsel says ‘no, we can’t,’ we are prepared to go to Hartford to get that language changed as well,” Martin said.

For the town to make the proposed change, the ordinance change would have to go in front of a town meeting for approval.

The topic is expected to be in front of the board again once legal counsel has responded.

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Another proposal in front of the selectmen is changing the ordinance regarding obtaining a building permit. Building permits are required for such things as decks, sheds and additions.

The change would require residents or contractors to get a “stamp” from the tax collector’s office to show taxes on the property are all paid before being granted a building permit. If there are outstanding taxes on the property, the permit would not be granted. Currently, more than 100 towns in the state have similar ordinances.

But Chaponis said he didn’t think Colchester should join those ranks.

“It is hard enough to get people to take out building permits and some property owners do work without ever obtaining a permit already,” Chaponis said. “We should not encourage such action.”

When residents don’t take out permits, he said, the town is losing money and the work is

not inspected.

“The town is losing the revenue on the building permit and the revenue on the additional taxes because if the assessor’s office does not receive a copy of a building permit, it may be years before we become privy to the fact that the home was improved,” Chaponis said. “Furthermore, if the work is done with no permits, the work will not have been inspected by the town’s building official and may not meet state building requirements, making a property less safe.”

Chaponis explained the tax collector’s office has numerous tax collection tools, including filing a lien, having a tax sale, or foreclosing and taking possession of the property.

“We always get paid on real estate and collect an additional 18 percent interest on our money when the property owner is late,” Chaponis said.

He explained if the town files a lien, that lien is the first to be satisfied and supersedes a bank mortgage.

The proposed change is currently with legal counsel to go over the language of the ordinance. The change would need to go in front of a town meeting for approval.

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The next Board of Selectmen meeting is Thursday, Dec. 3, at 7 p.m., at Town Hall.

# Chaconis Looks Back at Life on the Portland Courts

by Elizabeth Regan

Nick Chaconis was 22 when he took his first teaching job at Portland High School, in the midst of a revolution that would change the sports landscape forever.

It started with Title IX, a federal law prohibiting discrimination against women in federally-funded education. The move spurred the creation of new girls sports programs across the country so both male and female athletes would have equal access to scholastic sports.

Coach Chaconis took the ball from there – and has kept it in play for 41 years. Until now, he's been the high school's only girls basketball head coach. He announced his retirement from the basketball program last month.

Chaconis said Jim McKinnon, a teacher from Rocky Hill, has been selected as his replacement. Former PHS athlete Karen Miano will serve as assistant coach.

Chaconis will continue as the track and field coach for at least this season, he said, and will take a leadership role with the school's new unified sports program joining athletes with and without intellectual disabilities. The decision on when he will retire as a special education teacher is still up in the air.

The Connecticut Women's Basketball Hall of Famer is leaving behind a record that includes a 2011 state tournament championship. His teams qualified for the tournament in 35 of his 41 years. One season, his team was undefeated. There were eight league championships. He coached nine 1,000-point scorers and 11 All State players.

But he's quick to point out there was also a season during which his team only won a single game.

"That 1-and-19 team played every bit as hard as the team that was 20-and-0," Chaconis said. "It's the nature of the sport and the nature of high school."

Diane Coleman, a PHS player during the early years of Chaconis' coaching tenure and an assistant coach in the latter years, said he taught athletes to play hard no matter what. "It wasn't the end of the world if we lost a game; you learn lessons whether you win or lose," she said.

Chaconis said he's gotten a lot of lessons himself as a high school coach. "I've learned if you make mistakes, you have to go back and try to correct them," he said. "I was never one who's always right. A lot of times the drive home was a long drive home and I'd say 'I wish I did this,' or 'I should've done that.' But in the moment as a coach when you make a decision, it's the best decision. Obviously, if it didn't work out I'd love to push the rewind button. But that's life."

Chaconis' coaching style focuses on the sport first but acknowledges the social and emotional aspects of being a young woman in high school. He learned early the job requires flexibility, especially when it comes to managing practice

sessions.

He said there were times when players would come in upset and distracted by off-the-court concerns like relationship problems. Sometimes an assistant coach would talk it out with the player while doing drills off to the side; other times the whole team would get involved.

"Somebody's in the corner upset, then everybody's upset, then everybody's laughing. It's like, 'Okay, now can we practice?'" he recounted with his characteristic sense of humor.

Coleman said Chaconis made basketball fun – from replacing their pop music CDs with Frank Sinatra tunes at practices to calling a time out for "equipment failure" when a player's bra strap broke during a game.

"The kids know when it's time to work hard. And that's most of the time. But there won't be a practice when there won't be a moment that everyone's cracking up laughing," Coleman said.

Chaconis recognizes some coaches might call his lighthearted attitude ridiculous. He said a more hardline approach works for some people – but not him.

"Believe me, when we got to work we were all on the same page and all working hard together," he said. "We were focused and intense."

Chaconis is part of a legacy forged in the PHS gym alongside former boys basketball coach Gene Reilly, who passed away last year. Reilly accrued 547 wins as the boys coach; Chaconis amassed 548.

Portland's new athletic director, Chris Serra, said the duo's reputation is longstanding and widespread. "I remember being a little kid in Middletown and hearing about Coach Reilly and Coach Chaconis and what they were doing in Portland," Serra said. "They were very good friends."

Coleman got choked up recalling the special bond between the coaches she described as a court-side Abbott and Costello.

"We were fortunate to see Coach Reilly and Coach Chaconis in the gym together. It was a special time," she said.

Chaconis attributes his success not only to Reilly – from whom he picked up many pointers over the years on the floorboards of the shared gym – but also to his assistant coaches and the school administration. His longest association has been with his first full-time assistant, Arnie Liscombe, who stayed on for almost twenty years and still works alongside him on the track and field team.

"Life goes by fast," Chaconis said. "I was fortunate to have good health over the years. I've never missed a game. That's a credit to the people around me, starting with family. It's a big commitment; it's a lot of time. And I wouldn't give a minute of it back. I was happy to do what I could to help the team."

The 63-year-old special education teacher said he is stepping back to spend more time with his family – including a wife, daughter and



Nicholas Chaconis has retired as the coach of the Portland High School girls basketball program he started 41 years ago.

two grandchildren – and to pass the ball to a coach who can infuse the team with new energy.

For Serra, it's about saying goodbye to a legend: "He started the girls basketball program. The whole town looks up to him."

Chaconis' list of accolades shows the whole state looks up to him, too. In 1985, he was named the Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference (CIAC) Girls Basketball Coach of the Year. In both 2001 and 2005, Chaconis was a finalist for the National Girls Basketball Coach of the Year. In 2004, he received the CIAC Basketball Merit Award. He was inducted into the Portland High School Hall of Fame in 2005. In 2012, Chaconis received the Central Connecticut District Board's Sportsmanship Award.

He was then inducted into the Connecticut Women's Basketball Hall of Fame in 2013, the same year University of Connecticut girls basketball coach Geno Auremma received the honor.

Through it all, a source of pride has been his stint as a member and past president of the CIAC Girls Basketball Committee, through which he helped shape the program and its tournament structure.

Chaconis brought his own teams to the state tournament finals twice – once in a failed 2010 bid and then with a championship title the following year.

"We got a second chance," he said. "A lot of times you don't get a second chance."

The 2010 finals game qualifies as one of those hard lessons he talked about earlier. That's when a go-ahead bucket by St. Paul Catholic High School with 15 seconds to go sunk Portland 39-37. The game ended with one time out remaining for the Highlanders.

"To this day I can't watch the last minute of the game," Chaconis said.

The next year, with most of the team returning, Portland capped a 24-3 season with a championship victory against archrival Cromwell in a 45-41 game.

That biggest win stays with Chaconis, but so does the biggest loss – and the time-out that could have been. "I was saving it," he said. Then, with a laugh: "I'm still saving it."

But what happened on the court is only part of Chaconis' legacy.

"He was a teacher at Portland High School for as many years as he coached," Coleman said, describing an educator whose outwardly comedic nature and innate sensitivity has helped build relationships with students that last long after graduation.

One student Chaconis taught three decades ago has been coming to girls basketball games ever since, according to Coleman. The fan would cheer on the teams and help where needed, even on the road. Recently, when the former student's mother died, Chaconis attended the wake with Coleman.

"He's more than a coach," Coleman said. "He's got your back. I think that sums up the kind of person he is."

## East Hampton Council Balks at Recognizing BOE Authority

by Elizabeth Regan

The threat of legal action persists after the Town Council Tuesday refused to cede to the Board of Education's demand for formal acknowledgement of the board's authority to fill its own vacancies.

The council said the issue should be resolved through the charter revision process currently in its formative stages.

According to state statute, a charter revision committee may take no less than 90 days and no more than 18 months to complete their report.

The Town Council tabled a vote on a resolution to start the charter revision process at its meeting Tuesday based on scheduling concerns with the upcoming holidays. Statute dictates councilors must appoint members to a charter revision committee and identify the group's charge within 30 days of the approval of the resolution.

Board of Education Chairman Kenneth Barber said Wednesday that legal action is still a distinct possibility now that the council has failed to adopt a resolution clarifying the school board's authority to appoint its own members.

"[The Town Council's] response was anticipated," Barber said. "The Board of Education

has already authorized that, if necessary, legal action would be implemented."

He said the issue could arise again before the charter review process is complete.

"We may have vacancies within the two years it's going to take to revise the charter," he said. "Do we want to do this again?"

Tensions between the council and the school board have been high since the Nov. 3 elections. A vacancy arose on the school board after one of its members, Republican Josh Piteo, was elected to the Town Council. Town Council, citing authority granted in the town charter, appointed Republican Michael Rose to the vacant Board of Education seat. After Rose declined, the school board appointed Democrat Jeffrey Carlson based on its own reading of the town charter, state statute and board bylaws.

Last week, the school board sent a letter to the Town Council insisting that councilors take up a resolution affirming the school board's authority to make such appointments. The letter threatened legal action if the council failed to adopt the resolution.

A separate letter dated the next day alerted the council that Carlson had been sworn in by

a non-local justice of the peace as a school board member.

Town Council Chairwoman Patience Anderson responded by reading a statement at Tuesday's council meeting.

"The Town Council is in receipt of the two Board of Education letters," Anderson read. "In response, we respectfully disagree with their position and decline to adopt their resolution. Additionally, we are not willing to spend large sums of taxpayer dollars to litigate this matter. We believe the Town Council is the appropriate appointing authority under [section] 6.4 of the town charter. We believe it is more productive to address this issue through the charter revision process."

Barber said reading a response at a council meeting, instead of issuing written correspondence, was another sign of the council's unwillingness to communicate directly with the school board.

On Monday, Barber acknowledged the costs associated with legal action. "I'm very afraid this is going to cost an awful lot of money that we're going to have to take out of the hands of kids or, on the town side, it'll come out of who

knows where – police overtime?"

"It's just a damn shame after all this time it's got to come down to this," he said, citing a 30-year history of appointments made by the school board without objection from the Town Council.

Differing legal opinions given to the Town Council and the school board about the appropriate appointment authority hinge on separate provisions in the town charter and state statute.

State law governing school boards specifies that vacancies shall be filled by the remaining members of the board "unless otherwise provided by charter or special act."

The town charter empowers the town council to fill any vacancy unless "another appointing authority has been designated by law."

School board members, under the guidance of legal counsel, maintain that state statute clearly makes them the other "appointing authority" referenced in the town charter.

Town attorneys for the council have said "the specific reference to the Town Council as the appointing authority would prevail over an ambiguous allusion to the possible authority of the Board of Education to fill a vacancy."

# Marlborough Discusses Transportation Grants

by **Kaitlyn Schroyer**

The town was awarded a grant to reconstruct South Main Street to South Street; however, where the town's portion of the money for the project is coming from has not been determined.

Director of Planning and Development Peter Hughes told the Board of Selectmen Tuesday the town has been awarded a Local Transportation Capital Improvement Program (LOTICIP) grant totaling \$916,000. Of that amount, the town would need to cover \$183,000.

LOTICIP previously was a federal grant program and very difficult to obtain, Hughes said. Three years ago, the program became state-run with the states receiving the funds from federal money and then bonding the grants out to the towns. Only a small portion to the total grant money goes to small towns.

The road project includes the reconstruction of a portion of South Main Street to not only rebuild and repave the road, but to resize the lanes to allow for wider shoulders for runners or bicycles. Hughes explained the road is an old state highway and is not in good shape. The town has three years to complete the project, or else it would forfeit the grant.

Hughes explained that when the town applies for a LOTICIP grant, the selectmen are saying they are committed to seeking the funds. This does not mean that the town is locked into doing the project.

Hughes also presented two projects that could be submitted for next year's LOTICIP grant. One is the continuation of the South Main

Street project and the other is the development of the Blackledge River Greenway.

Hughes said the South Main Street extension would be an additional three quarters of a mile down the road, past South Street, and again include the reconstruction of the road and changing the lanes. Also like the current approved project, the cost to the town would be approximately \$180,000.

"We would save money on what we would need to do on our own," Hughes said.

The road reconstruction is in one category of the LOTICIP grant applications. Since each town is allowed to submit two projects per year, Hughes also presented the trail project.

Part of the Blackledge River Greenway is a gravel walkway that residents can walk and take strollers on. However the portion before that section and a proposed section after that are not gravel. One section is a "spur trail" that is a typical footpath and the other portion is undeveloped.

The proposed project would include developing both of those sections into a more established gravel trail.

The trail project would have a total cost of approximately \$350,000, of which the town would be responsible for approximately \$100,000. However, Hughes said, the town currently has \$30,000 in open space acquisition funds and another \$50,000 in the same account that the selectmen previously borrowed and did not use. Therefore, a total of \$80,000 could potentially go toward the town portion for the

trail project.

"It was an old woods trail along the Blackledge River," Sherry Newman, a member of the Nature Trails and Sidewalk Commission, said. "It's still a beautiful area. It's been part of the community."

Newman explained how residents are often parked in the trail's lot on West Road to walk the trail and enjoy the river, pines and stone walls in the area.

The applications for the LOTICIP grants are due Jan. 4 therefore Hughes told the selectmen he would need to know if the town is going forward with submitting the projects by the selectmen's next meeting. The grant awards would be announced around May or June.

\* \* \*

Issues regarding technology and communication were also discussed by the selectmen Tuesday.

Selectwoman Evelyn Godbout suggested the board look into establishing town email addresses for each commission or board.

"It leaves town businesses with the town rather than on personal emails," Godbout said. "It would make for more open town government."

Godbout also said she would like every selectman to have a town email address as well.

"I can't see any negatives unless it costs a fortune," selectman Dick Shea said.

First Selectwoman Amy Traversa admitted it would be a good idea; however, there are "bigger issues" with technology and communica-

tion in town.

"Right now you cannot email town employees from the town website," Traversa said. "We need to take a more comprehensive look at technology."

Traversa said she has some "serious concerns" about communication in Town Hall, and suggested an all boards and commissions meeting to discuss the issue.

Traversa also said she is in contact with representatives from the Nutmeg Network to find out when the town will be connected. The Nutmeg Network is Connecticut's public broadband fiber network.

"It will open up a whole new world," Traversa said of the network.

Traversa is also working on adding links to the local Board of Education and RHAM Board of Education's meeting minutes to the town website so residents can easily access them.

Godbout also suggested the town work on the calendar on the town website to include more activities such as Parks and Recreation, the library and the senior center; she noted that Colchester has calendars on their site for more town activities than just meetings. Traversa also mentioned Colchester's first selectman has a weekly "email blast" that is sent to anyone that signs up, listing various events activities around town.

\* \* \*

The next Board of Selectmen meeting is Tuesday, Dec. 1, at 7 p.m. at Town Hall.

## Portland Police News

11/13: Benjamin Leitch, 36, of 12 Lakewood Rd., East Hampton, was charged with evading responsibility and following too closely, Portland Police said.

11/14: Robert Howard, 52, of 165 Summit St., Plantsville, was charged with DUI, evading responsibility and failure to drive in proper lane, police said.

## Colchester Police News

11/16: Colchester Police said they are investigating after a residential burglary on Old Hartford Road between 8:15 a.m. and 3:30 p.m. Police reported \$575 in cash and miscellaneous costume jewelry was stolen. Anyone with information can call Officer Cyril Green at 860-536-7270.

11/19: State Police said Christopher Millette, 28, of 35 Grist Mill Rd., Moodus, was arrested and charged with failure to appear.

11/21: State Police said Gerald Hoffstot, 73, of 60 Linwood Ave., was arrested and charged with failure to appear.

## Andover Police News

11/17: State Police said Vincent Wells, 29, of 48 Prospect St., Vernon, was arrested and charged with operating under suspension, failure to wear a seat belt, improper plates, failure to display plates, and failure to meet insurance requirements.

## Marlborough Police News

11/20: State Police said Dylan Ratti, 21, of 966 Silas Deane Highway, Wethersfield, was arrested and charged with possession of narcotics, possession of a hallucinogen, and possession of drug paraphernalia.

## One Injured on Route 6 in Andover

A Windsor man went to the hospital after his car was sideswiped on Route 6 last week, State Police said.

Police said Roger Griffin, 43, of 393 Dudley Town Rd., Windsor, was transported to Windham Hospital for possible injuries following the crash, which occurred last Monday, Nov. 16.

Police said Sean McNamara, 52, of 255 Singleton Rd., Chaplin, fell asleep behind the wheel, crossing the center line and struck Griffin's car at 4:34 p.m. on Route 6. McNamara was issued an infraction for failure to drive right, police said.

## Three Injured after Rollover in Hebron

State Police said three 17-year-olds were transported to the Marlborough Clinic last week after the car they were in rolled over.

Police said the crash occurred at 4 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 19. Police said the driver of the car was driving recklessly in a grass parking lot on Gilead Street and rolled the car over. The three teens were not wearing seat belts and sustained minor injuries, police said.

The driver was issued a summons for reckless driving and violation of passenger restrictions.

## East Hampton Police News

11/12: Robert Filippone Jr., 68, of 54 Waterview Circle, was arrested for driving while under the influence of intoxicating liquor, illegal operation of a motor vehicle without minimum insurance and misuse of marker plates, East Hampton Police said.

11/14: Susan Magri, 47, of 12 Stage Coach Run; Andrew Magri, 51, of the same address; and Danielle Holmes, 26, of 49 Old Marlborough Rd., were all arrested and charged with sixth-degree larceny, police said.

11/15: Robert Glidden, 28, of 66 Freestone Ave., Portland, was issued a summons for trav-

eling unreasonably fast, operating under suspension, failure to comply with periodic emissions testing requirements, and operating an unregistered and uninsured motor vehicle, police said.

11/19: Paul Kus, 45, who is currently incarcerated, was brought to Middletown Superior Court where an arrest warrant was served stemming from a March incident. Kus was charged with third-degree burglary, fourth-degree larceny, credit card theft, illegal use of a credit card, receipt of goods by illegal use of credit card, and third-degree identity theft, police said.

## Obituaries

### Colchester

#### Arthur John Staples

Arthur John Staples, 82, of Colchester, passed away peacefully Wednesday, Nov. 18. Born Sept. 12, 1933, in Port Jefferson, Long Island, N.Y., he was a son of the late John Wm. Staples and Anna (Jogus) Staples Avery.

Mr. Staples proudly served his country in the U.S. Army during the Korean War conflict, achieving the rank of corporal. He was a 30-year employee with the Connecticut Department of Transportation before his retirement in October of 1989. He was an avid baseball fan of the St. Louis Cardinals and bluegrass music, having attended many bluegrass festivals.

He leaves his wife, Linda Staples; her daughter, Debbie French and her granddaughter Aleia, both of East Hampton; three sons, Arthur of Manchester, Thomas of Germany and Barry of East Hampton; seven grandchildren, Michael, Joshua, Owen, Julia, Nico, Alannah and Keanan; six siblings, Richard Staples of Middletown, Fred Staples of Coventry, R.I., Bruce Avery of Colchester, Joan Measimer of Portland, Sharon Ramer of New Hampshire and Betty Ann Woltman of Michigan.

The family received guests Monday, Nov. 23, at the Aurora-McCarthy Funeral Home, 167 Old Hartford Rd., Colchester. A chapel service was observed that morning, and burial with full military honors followed in the State Veterans Cemetery, Bow Lane, Middletown.

In lieu of flowers, donations in his memory may be made to VFW Post 5095, 20 N. Maple St., East Hampton, CT 06424.

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

### Portland

#### Jane A. Tozer

Jane A. Tozer, 76, of Portland, born March 1, 1939, in Long Branch, N.J., wife of the late William Tozer, passed away Friday, Nov. 20. She was the daughter of the late Jack and Betty (Kinsel) Erlacher.

Jane was a longstanding member of Trinity Church in Portland and a member of its choir. Jane also was a proud participant of the Middlesex Hospital Vocal Chords. Jane worked for over 30 years at Wesleyan University as an executive secretary. Yet the love of Jane's life was her family.

Jane is survived by her two daughters, Kim McCaffrey and her husband, Michael and their children, Ryan, Jake and Erin, and Laura Deane and her husband, Edward and their children, Mackenzie, Gavin, Harrison and Brittany and a nephew, Scott Zoldak.

She was predeceased by her sister, Lois.

Funeral services were held Tuesday, Nov. 24, at Trinity Episcopal Church, 345 Main St., Portland. Burial was private.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the Trinity Church Book of Remembrance 345 Main St., Portland, CT 06480 or to the Middlesex Hospital Vocal Chords, 132 Pepperidge Rd., Portland, CT 06480.

To send an online expression of sympathy, visit [portlandmemorialfh.net](http://portlandmemorialfh.net).



### Portland

#### Ryan James McAllister

It is with great sorrow that we report the passing of Ryan James McAllister, 33, on Friday, July 3, in Hobe Sound, Fla.

Ryan was born in Mineola, N.Y., on Dec. 11, 1981. He was the son of Carole E. Gregory and the late James M. McAllister.

Ryan moved to Portland when he was one year old and spent most of his life there. Ryan was a joy to raise and was the best big brother to his little sister, Brienne. He was very involved in sports throughout middle and high school, had a great sense of humor and a deep love of animals. He also loved boating on the Connecticut River.

Ryan had many friends, and many best friends, as was so eloquently described in a memorial gathering that was held in Portland on Aug. 9. Ryan was well-loved and his life was celebrated by many of his family and friends in attendance. We are comforted knowing we will again be reunited one day in heaven.

Ryan is survived by his son Conner, his mother and stepfather, Carole and John Gregory, his sister and brother in law, Brienne and Angelo Papahristou, and a loving extended family.

In support of Ryan's love of animals, anyone wishing to make a donation should do so to the Warm Hearts Society, at [warmhearts.org](http://warmhearts.org).



### Colchester

#### Emilie Grundy

Emilie (Brewer) Grundy, 95, of Colchester, widow of the late Neal Grundy, passed away Monday, Nov. 23, at the Wm. W. Backus Hospital in Norwich, after a brief illness. Born Jan. 3, 1920, in Passaic, N.J., she was the daughter of the late Leonard and Emilie (Anderson) Brewer.

On April 11, 1942, she and Neal were married and shortly after Neal enlisted in the U.S. Army, proudly serving in the Rhineland and Central Europe during World War II. Together, they shared nearly 68 years of marriage before he predeceased her on April 5, 2010.

Mrs. Grundy worked for the Colchester Public Schools system for 30 years, starting her career at the former Central School and retiring from the former Halls Hill Elementary.

A woman of great faith, she was a member of the Leffingwell Baptist Church in Bozrah. She was a former member of the Norwich Alliance Church, as well as the First Baptist Church of Lebanon, where she sang in the choir and taught Sunday School.

The only thing more important to her than her faith was her family. She was a devoted wife, mother, grandmother, great-grandmother and sister, who enjoyed crocheting, sewing and baking for them.

She is survived by two children and their spouses, William and Sharon Grundy of Groton and Phyllis and Kevin Boyes of Norwich; four grandchildren, Larry, Eric, Seth and Emilie; nine great-grandchildren; and numerous extended family members and friends.

She was recently predeceased by her sister, Elizabeth Hageman, on Oct. 23.

The family will receive guests from 4-6 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 28, at the Leffingwell Baptist Church, 388 Salem Tpke. (Route 82), Bozrah. A memorial service will follow at 6 p.m. Burial will be private in the State Veterans Cemetery, Middletown.

Donations in her memory may be made to Gideon's International, New London Camp, P.O. Box 55, Old Mystic, CT 06372. Care of arrangements has been entrusted to the Aurora-McCarthy Funeral Home of Colchester. For online condolences, visit [auroramccarthyfuneralhome.com](http://auroramccarthyfuneralhome.com).

### Waterford

#### Lorraine Jean Burruano

Lorraine Burruano of 82 Longview St., Unit 63, died Saturday, Nov. 21, at Lawrence + Memorial Hospital. She was born in Kulpmont, Pa., on June 18, 1932, the daughter of Frank and Mary Savitski.

She retired from Lawrence + Memorial Hospital and also from federal civil service, working in the Seawolf office of Supervisor of Shipbuilding (Supships) in Groton, and the Naval Underwater Warfare Center (NUWC) in Newport, R.I. She was also employed by the American Cancer Society and General Motors Acceptance Corp. (GMAC).

Her very active life included volunteering at the Garde Arts Theatre, Summer Music, Friends of Harkness, Lawrence + Memorial Auxiliary, and Sound Music, and August Nights at Harkness. She was also a founder of the East Lyme High School Marching Band Parents Association, serving for several years as president, treasurer, and secretary. She also served as president of the board of directors of Longview Village Condominiums for several years.

She is survived by her daughter, Joanne Burruano of Niantic; her son, Michael and wife, Barbara Burruano, of Amston; a sister, Rita Jaso of Wakefield, R.I.; four grandchildren, Matt Burruano and his wife, Chealsea, Allesandra, Timothy and Douglas; also many beloved nieces and nephews; and two great-nephews and a great-niece.

She was predeceased by her former husband, Vincent Burruano, and her brother-in-law Hector Jaso.

A Mass of Christian Burial will be celebrated at 1 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 28, in St. Agnes Church in Niantic. Interment will be at a later date in Union Cemetery, Niantic. Calling hours are from 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Saturday at the Thomas L. Neilan & Sons East Lyme Funeral Home, 48 Grand St., Niantic.

Donations may be made to the L+M Hospital Palliative Care Unit.

Please visit [neilanfuneralhome.com](http://neilanfuneralhome.com) to leave a condolence message for the Burruano family.



### Amston

#### Maria Darczyn

Maria (Szymga) Darczyn, 69, of Amston, widow of the late Wasyl Darczyn, passed away peacefully Thursday, Nov. 19, surrounded by her loving family. Born June 22, 1946, in Ulm, Germany, she was a daughter of the late Theodore and Ewdokia (Stefurak) Szymga.

Maria had worked as a medical office manager for many years before her retirement. Mrs. Darczyn was a communicant of St. Mary Ukrainian Catholic Church in Colchester and a former member of CYM. Most importantly, she was ever devoted to her family, especially as "Babi" to her granddaughters.

She leaves two children, Eugene and wife, Christine M. Darczyn and Christine Darczyn, all of Amston; her two loving granddaughters, Olyvia and Emma; her sister and brother-in-law, Orysia and Nicholas Jakowiw of Jewett, NY; nieces and nephews, as well as other extended family members and friends.

In addition to her loving husband of 44 years, who passed away April 12, 2012, she was predeceased by her brother, Wasyl Szymga.

The family received guests Friday, Nov. 20, at the Aurora-McCarthy Funeral Home, 167 Old Hartford Rd., Colchester. A Panahyda service was observed that evening. The funeral gathered Saturday, Nov. 21, at the funeral home, followed by celebration of The Divine Liturgy at St. Mary Church, 178 Linwood Ave. (Route 16), Colchester. Interment followed in the New St. Mary Cemetery.

Donations in her memory may be made to the church. For online condolences, visit [auroramccarthyfuneralhome.com](http://auroramccarthyfuneralhome.com).

### Colchester

#### Michelle Edwina Hurovitz

Michelle Edwina "Mimi" (Yush) Hurovitz, 79, of Boynton Beach, Fla., formerly of Colchester and Glastonbury, passed away peacefully Thursday, Nov. 19, surrounded by her family at her home.

Born in Hartford Aug. 31, 1936, to the late Benjamin and Lillian (Gere) Yush, Michelle was a graduate of Weaver High School, Class of 1954, and continued her education at Mohegan Community College graduating in 1981, and Eastern Connecticut State University graduating in 1983.

She was married to her beloved David Hurovitz in Hartford on June 17, 1956, and for most of their marriage they resided in Hartford, Colchester and then Glastonbury, where they lived for almost 30 years.

Michelle was an active member of Congregation Kol Haverim in Glastonbury. Under the auspices of Kol Haverim, she had chaired a successful annual clothing drive for the needy since 1991. She also co-organized and chaired a monthly book club discussion for many years and an adult Chanukah party.

Throughout her adult and married life, Michelle was an active member of many organizations and synagogue committees. Notably, she served a two-year term as sisterhood president of Congregation Ahavath Achim in Colchester and one year as president of the Zionist Organization of Pioneer Women, the Kinnert Chapter in Hartford, and one year as vice president of the Colchester chapter of Hadassah.

For some 15 years, she served in many areas of Literacy Volunteers of America, East of the River Chapter, and in her last year she served on the Literacy Board of Directors in Colchester. She volunteered for Friends in Service to Humanity (FISH) and was on call some five years to drive patients out of town to doctors and hospital appointments. Professionally she worked during and after college as an equity mortgage title abstractor.

Surviving Michelle is her beloved husband of 59 years, David Hurovitz; her dearest son, Dr. Craig Shawn Hurovitz and her dearest daughter-in-law, Mitze (Lee) Hurovitz; her cherished grandson, Benjamin Lee Hurovitz; a brother, David Yush and his wife Peggy of Enfield; and numerous cousins.

She was predeceased by a daughter, Dana Holly Hurovitz; and two dear sisters, Ellen Roisman and Joanne Krantz.

A funeral service was held Monday, Nov. 23, at Congregation Kol Haverim, 1079 Hebron Ave., Glastonbury. Burial followed in Hartford Mutual Cemetery, East Granby.

Donations in Michelle's memory may be made to any soup kitchens or homeless shelters that feed or house the poor, or to any non-killing animal shelters, or to Congregation Kol Haverim, 1079 Hebron Ave., Glastonbury, CT 06033.

Carmon Windsor Funeral Home has care of the arrangements. For online condolences, visit [carmonfuneralhome.com](http://carmonfuneralhome.com).

### Portland

#### Pauline Bucionis

Pauline "Pat" Bucionis, 83, of Cromwell, died Thursday, Nov. 12, at Middlesex Hospital, Middletown. Pat was born in Portland, and was the daughter of the late Wesley E. and Helen M. (Johnson) Bosworth. She worked as a personnel manager for Bob's Stores for 25 years.

Pat is survived by her son, Kim Bucionis of Cromwell, and her good friend, Kathy, of Florida.

A graveside service for Mrs. Bucionis was held Tuesday, Nov. 24, at the Swedish Cemetery, 184 Williams St., Portland. There were no calling hours.

The Paul A. Shaker Funeral Home, 764 Farmington Ave, New Britain, CT, has charge of arrangements. To extend condolences to the Bucionis family or to share a memory of Pat, visit [shakerfuneralhome.com](http://shakerfuneralhome.com).

*From the Editor's Desk*

# Observations & Ruminations

by Mike Thompson

Perhaps my mom being from the south has something to do with it, but I've always had a soft spot for country music. Which isn't a universally-shared opinion up here in Connecticut, but I wear it proud. And one of the country acts I like the most has been The Dixie Chicks.

Which is why I was pretty enthused last week when I read they were set to launch their first big tour in years – and even more enthused to see one of their tour stops will be in Hartford.

The Dixie Chicks are the band behind some terrific late-90s, early-2000s songs, like “Wide Open Spaces,” “Long Time Gone,” “Goodbye Earl” and more. And, as a lot of you may recall, came under a ton of fire back in 2003 when lead singer Natalie Maines shared a less-than-favorable comment about President George W. Bush. The band was playing a concert over in England, on the eve of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, when Maines told the crowd the following, as the band was getting ready to play the beautiful “Travelin’ Soldier”:

“Just so you know, we’re on the good side with y’all. We do not want this war, this violence, and we’re ashamed that the president of the United States is from Texas.”

These were the days before Twitter, before Facebook, before everyone recording everything on their phones, so Maines’ comment may have gone for the most part unnoticed – were it not for a British journalist reviewing the concert, who opted to include the remark in his review.

I’ve often wondered over the years what the Dixie Chicks’ career would’ve been like if Maines’ comment hadn’t made that music critic’s review, for whatever reason. Maybe the band would’ve had several more years of wild success – they were the bestselling female group of all time.

We’ll never know, though. Because once that quote got out, and hit the wires, it made its way back to the U.S. – and country fans were *livid*. Country songs have a reputation of being pretty patriotic. And in the days after 9/11, and the build-up to the Iraq War, patriotism seemed to sometimes morph into a sense of “support the president and everything he does, no matter what” (which doesn’t exactly meet my definition of patriotism, but that’s beside the point). So when word got back to Nashville that Maines was doing the polar opposite of supporting the president – well, people *flipped out*.

Now, you’ll see sometimes when a high-profile person says something dumb and then there’s fallout from it, the high-profile person’s advocates will jump to his or her defense, and say, “What about free speech?!”

But freedom of speech doesn’t prevent you from being *criticized* for what you said; all it means is you can’t get thrown in jail for it. So – hypothetically-speaking, of course – if some important businessman just happens to share publically that Mexicans are drug lords and rapists and then the TV network doing business with him decides to sever its ties, then it’s totally that network’s right to do that. There’s a risk involved in shooting your mouth off.

So, in that regard, I’m not saying Maines should’ve been exempt from criticism. She knew what The Dixie Chicks’ fan base was. And she knew they wouldn’t take kindly to such a remark about the president of the United States.

But fallout was swift, and, in my opinion, way too extreme. DJs on many country stations were prohibited from playing the band’s music – and two that did play the band anyway got suspended. Ex-fans gleefully held a gathering where they crushed Dixie Chicks CDs with a bulldozer. In short, The Dixie Chicks were blackballed – and with them went some of the best, most enjoyable songs ever heard on country radio.

But, most startling and worrisome of all, there was a legitimate death threat lodged against Maines. A death threat?! Seriously?!

Three years later, the group put out a pop-rock album, *Taking the Long Way*, which featured several songs dealing with the fallout from the Bush remark. The album won a Grammy, even if its sales were a fraction of what The Dixie Chicks had previously enjoyed in their country days.

After 2006, though, the group, while never officially breaking up, was scarcely heard from. The other two members of the group, Emily Robison and Martie Maguire, formed their own duo called Court Yard Hounds, and put out two albums. Maines, meanwhile, moved from Texas to California and proceeded to keep a pretty low profile, finally emerging last year to put out a CD of covers.

Since 2006, the group has played together on a handful of special occasions, mostly up in Canada. But they’ve yet to put together a real tour – until now. The tour kicks off next April in Belgium and plays about a dozen dates overseas before coming back to the U.S. for a bunch of stops. I was somewhat surprised to see the band is playing in a bunch of southern cities – including three stops in Texas. I hope the shows do well for them.

And, like I said earlier, one of the stops is in Hartford. They’ll play the Xfinity Theatre on Friday, June 17. Hopefully I’ll see you all there.

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See you next week.