

RIVEREAST

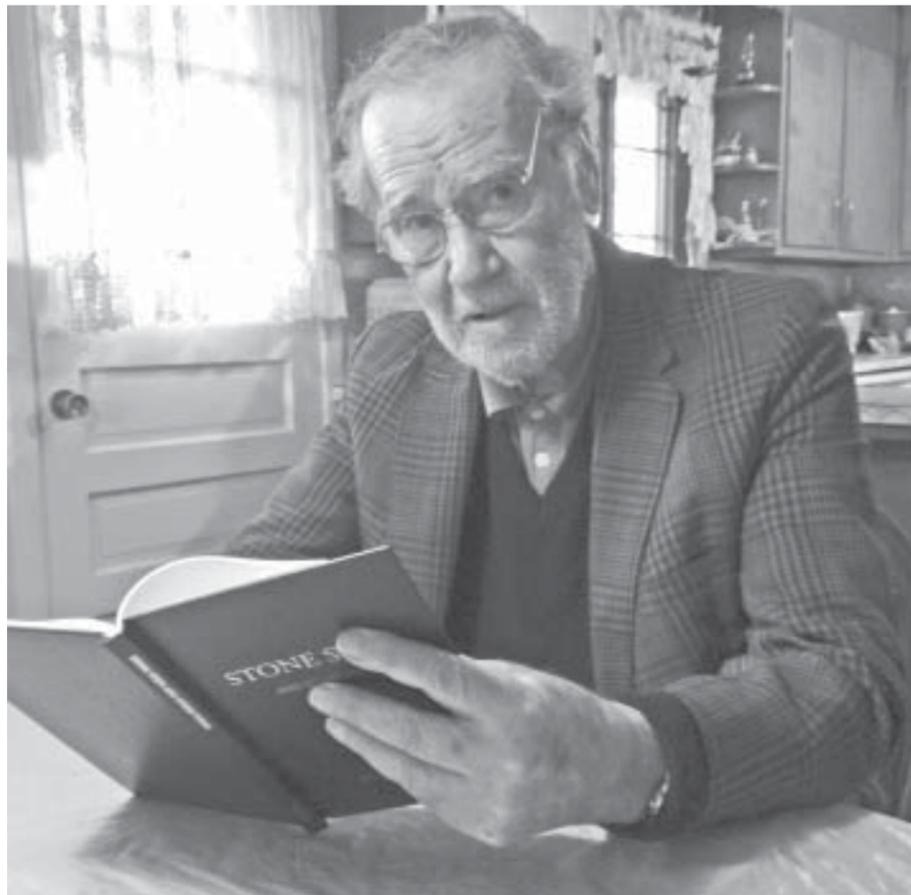
News Bulletin

Serving Amston, Andover, Cobalt, Colchester, East Hampton, Hebron, Marlborough, Middle Haddam and Portland

Volume 40, Number 37

Published by The Glastonbury Citizen

January 15, 2016



New Book of Poetry... East Hampton Poet Laureate Hugo DeSarro reads from his new book, *Stone Steps and Other Poems*, at his home in East Hampton. The book is a compilation of poetry gleaned from 96 years of observation. See related story on page 15.

Chatham Health Is Hanging On

by Elizabeth Regan

Chatham Health District is in survival mode. The regional health department – which serves several *Rivereast* towns – is undergoing a reorganization following the resignation of embattled Director of Health Thad King, the imminent departure of one of its member towns, and widespread concern by residents about customer service.

According to Connecticut Department of Public Health documents, the state reached a settlement agreement with King forcing his resignation from the health district. The agreement also required King to reimburse the state \$100,380 for what DPH has called “the improper and/or fraudulent” use of the state health department laboratory for private business purposes.

The move follows a conflict of interest investigation by DPH into allegations King was working as a private certified water operator at the same time he was serving as the district director of health. State statute specifies district health directors must devote their “entire time” to their job.

King said Wednesday he cannot comment at this time because the agreement is not finalized.

The settlement agreement, signed by King and former DPH Commissioner Jewel Mullen on Dec. 15, acknowledged that King “expressly denies all such charges and does not hereby agree to any liability, wrongdoing or amounts

owed as alleged.”

Mullen left her position as the state’s public health czar on Dec. 18 to take a position with the federal Department of Health and Human Services, according to a press release. Acting commissioner is Dr. Raul Pino, who served as director of the City of Hartford Department of Health and Human Services.

The settlement agreement lays out a plan through which King will pay back the state in quarterly installments over four years starting Jan. 1. A spokesman for the state public health department said King made the first payment on time.

The agreement stipulated that King would work with the state for 30 days following its signing to corroborate the total reimbursement amount.

The agreement also permanently bars King from working as a health director for the district or any other health jurisdiction in Connecticut. He may only serve in a non-director capacity within a health jurisdiction as long as the position is “not funded, in whole or in part, with funding from or flowing through DPH.”

King’s resignation letter characterizes his departure as an “early retirement.” The distinction allows King to remain eligible for a pension through the town of East Hampton. That’s where the health district’s finances are administered and where King had been employed

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KX Dispatchers Disappointed by Dissolution

by Kaitlyn Schroyer

The dispatchers of Colchester Emergency Communications LLC, commonly known as KX, are disappointed efforts have not been made to save the organization.

The KX dispatchers, who work out of a room at the state police Troop K barracks in Colchester, dispatch fire and ambulance services for Colchester, Marlborough, East Hampton, Bozrah, East Haddam and Salem. They also handle calls for East Hampton’s police department and the dispatch services for Middlesex Memorial Hospital paramedics within the northern portion of Middlesex County and its northern service area. The dispatchers also formerly dispatched Hebron, Lebanon and Haddam Neck.

KX dispatches 30,000 incidents a year and receives 12,000 9-1-1 calls a day along with thousands of routine calls.

The KX Board of Directors voted last month to dissolve, after the vast majority of its member towns indicated they wouldn’t renew their contracts when they expire next June.

However, the board didn’t tell the KX dispatchers of this dissolution; rather, the dispatchers learned about it by reading the *Rivereast* on Christmas Eve. The dispatchers were saddened they didn’t hear the news directly from the KX

higher-ups – but they weren’t altogether surprised.

“For a center that’s supposed to be solely a communications center, there is no communication,” said dispatcher Nick Fischer.

Things began going downhill for KX in 2013, when Hebron departed for Tolland County Emergency Communications. When Hebron left, KX lost \$100,000 in annual revenue. To make up for that lost revenue, the company started to take money from its capital reserves.

But Fischer didn’t blame Hebron for KX’s troubles; instead, he pointed to its neighbor to the south. Fischer said former Colchester first selectman Gregg Schuster “pulled the pin, threw the grenade and moved to Pennsylvania.” [Schuster resigned as Colchester first selectman in 2014, for a similar job in Pocono Township, Pa.]

“He was trying to get all these other towns to say, ‘Hey, how do we do this cheaper and combine efforts,’ which is what KX already is,” Fischer said. “It wasn’t a broken system; they were just trying to reinvent the wheel, but cheaper.”

Following Hebron’s departure, the KX Board of Directors sought to consolidate with another company to save money; a planned merger with

Montville fell apart last June.

At the time, some town officials and members of the public blamed the merger failing on the fact dispatchers wanted to unionize. But the dispatchers said they don’t know why the consolidation fell through.

“At the time, no one knew what our intentions were,” dispatcher Sean Hoskins said. “We could have been willing to give up 50 percent of our salaries to save the situation. Nobody asked us [why we wanted to unionize]; they just assumed.”

Fischer said the dispatchers wanted to unionize to keep them together, to prevent problems with management and to compromise on pay.

Last July, Lebanon announced it would leave KX – and in fact paid an early termination fee to depart immediately, and not wait until the end of its contract in June. This proved particularly painful for KX, as the 2015-16 budget had already been approved. The company was forced to, yet again, dip into its capital reserves to balance the budget.

Having fewer towns in its coverage area doesn’t mean KX saves money. KX Board of Directors member Doug Knowlton has explained that, regardless of how many towns KX services, the costs are the same since the orga-

nization needs two dispatchers on each shift. Fewer towns in KX means fewer people to divide the cost by.

When Lebanon left, Fischer said, “you would think some serious discussions would start taking place” to save the company.

And once Lebanon split, other member towns started to tell KX they too would be leaving when their contract expired.

“It’s almost like [the board of directors] lost Lebanon and threw their hands up in the air and gave up,” Cheryl Powers, one of the dispatchers, said.

Fischer agreed with Powers, saying now all of the towns are looking at KX like a vendor, when it’s really a partnership.

“Town officials look as us like they’re shopping for garbage service,” Fischer said. “Obviously, we’re not that.”

Fischer said he feels that, of all of the things towns spend money on, he would think the townspeople would support a little extra funding for their 911 service, instead of shopping for the lowest bidder.

“These are our towns. We grew up in these towns and know the area like the back of our hands,” he said. “Yes, there are competent dis-

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Chatham Health cont. from Front Page

since the early 1990s as a sanitarian and then as the local health department director. He joined the Chatham Health District when it was created in 2002.

The district is governed by a nine-member Board of Health composed of officials from its member towns. Hebron Town Manager Andrew Tierney is set to take over as chairman of the district health board at its meeting later this month. The board's former chair, Melissa Schlag, stepped down after she failed to win re-election as Haddam first selectwoman last November.

The health district serves the *Rivereast* towns of Colchester, East Hampton, Hebron, Marlborough and Portland, as well as East Haddam and Haddam. But Haddam residents voted at town meeting last month to leave the district, effective June 30.

Complaints in Haddam revolved around delayed inspections, a lack of return phone calls and rude employees.

Over the past two months, discussions at selectmen and Town Council meetings in Colchester, East Hampton and Portland about the status of the health district indicate concern among residents and some of their elected officials but have not led any of the towns to join Haddam in making an exit.

The health district provides environmental and community health services. Its environmental role includes water and septic inspections, restaurant inspections, and lead poisoning investigations. Initiatives that fall under the community health umbrella include lead poisoning prevention, emergency management and flu clinics.

Portland resident Kitch Breen Czernicki attended the Portland Board of Selectmen meeting last week to decry what she called a lack of transparency within the health district. She said Board of Health meeting minutes going back nine months weren't available on the health district's website until she asked Portland First Selectwoman Susan Bransfield to intervene.

"Think about what has gone on: A lack of transparency, operating outside of state statute, betrayal of the public trust," Breen Czernicki said. "And all of this was paid for by our local taxes and our state taxes. Our money. Please think strongly and wisely about leaving the Chatham Health District."

She also questioned the oversight of the district's Board of Health.

"It's difficult for me to believe that this situation occurred without the knowledge of some members of the board and that leads me to believe that once known or suspected, it was tacitly condoned," Breen Czernicki said. "I believe a logical question would be, why wasn't an internal investigation instituted immediately?"

In a phone interview, Tierney said the board was aware King had a second job – and so was the state. He characterized the allegations about the use of the DPH laboratory as a personnel issue between King and state public health department. He said the district did not suffer any financial losses because of King's outside employment.

Board of Health meeting minutes from May indicate members knew about the state investigation back then, at which time they authorized the hiring of a labor attorney to "contact DPH requesting more specific delineation of their concerns."

An Oct. 9 letter from Ellen Blaschinski, state health department branch chief for the regulatory services division, said the state was with-

holding funding to the district because of its failure to provide documentation proving the district would require King to comply with the statutory "entire time" requirement.

The Chatham Health District 2015-16 budget included \$133,398 in expected state funding. The funding amounts to \$1.85 for each person in the district.

The state released half of the funding upon King's resignation.

Acting Director of Health Don Mitchell estimated the district spent between \$7,000 and \$9,000 on related legal fees. He said Wednesday he did not yet have access to the district's expenditure report for the year.

Mitchell had been serving as the health district's deputy director before being appointed as interim director. But he indicated the proposed 2016-17 budget eliminates the deputy director position as a cost-saving measure.

Mitchell said he will be applying for the permanent directorship.

Among other orders of business when the board meets on January 26 will be to approve a contract and job description for the position of director of health. DPH has required the district to revise contractual language to explicitly prohibit the director of health from taking on any outside employment.

The state will release the second half of the district's funding when a new director is hired.

Tierney said the board hopes to select a permanent director by May 1.

While Mitchell teaches night classes at Goodwin College as an adjunct public health professor – a commitment he made before he was appointed as acting director – he said DPH has authorized him to continue teaching through the end of the semester. After that, he must comply with the prohibition on outside employment.

In addition to the health director, the district's full-time staff is composed of an office manager, public health nurse and four sanitarians. Part-time staff is made up of an office assistant, a grant-funded emergency preparedness coordinator and one sanitarian.

Mitchell, who was present at the Haddam town meeting and Portland Board of Selectmen meeting during which residents' grievances were aired, said his staff is up for the challenges ahead.

"I feel comfortable with the quality of the work that they do," he told the Portland selectmen. "Do I think sometimes there's poor quality work on occasion? That's possible. Not everybody's 100 percent all the time, but they're very darn good at what they do and they have a lot of experience."

He cited customer service as the main priority going forward. He said he will overhaul the employee evaluation protocol by requiring staff to set goals for themselves that will be reviewed by supervisors and amended as needed. He will also look for public input in the form of randomized email surveys.

"I know we're facing challenges," Mitchell said. "and I know we're going to have some tough times ahead. But I think we've got a group that is up to the challenge and I'd like to give them the opportunity to try."

Tierney said any municipality wishing to leave the district was required to opt out by Dec. 31. Since then, the new customer service push has begun in earnest among the remaining towns.

"The deadline for leaving the district has come and gone, so we're still in it," he said. "We're in it to survive."

Dispatchers cont. from Front Page

patchers throughout the state, but this is a circumstance [where you have to consider] at what cost."

For example, a few of the KX towns, including Colchester, are eyeing joining Quinebaug Valley Communications (QV) out of Killingly. Hoskins theorized QV dispatchers wouldn't know where the Salem Rotary is, just as Hoskins said he doesn't know where the Woodstock Fair is.

Another example, the dispatchers offered, is the process for calling for mutual aid. Right now, KX can press five buttons and dispatch mutual aid to a structure fire because the organization covers the surrounding towns. If a town switches to a dispatch service farther away with no local towns, the dispatchers physically have to make phone calls for mutual aid, making the mutual aid get to the scene slower.

The dispatchers said they would like to see the board of directors pursue other avenues for keeping KX open rather than dissolving.

"If everyone is so invested in the organization, you would think you would look into every option," Fischer said. "Can we combine with someone else or rewrite a financial plan?"

Fischer said the formula for state funding of

regional dispatch centers is in the works to be changed. Under a potential new formula, KX could receive thousands of dollars.

He also criticized the organization for needless spending such as the hiring back of a manager who retired as a consultant with a pay bump, but no benefits.

The dispatchers are still hopeful the organization can be saved.

"We've done a lot of good things and we don't know why they aren't fighting for it," dispatcher Patti Harlow said.

Dispatcher Ryan Flaherty agreed, saying "last time I knew our doors are still open. We're willing to work."

Fischer said he is hoping for a "Hail Mary," even if it's not likely. If three towns stay with KX, the organization could stay open.

"While there would be some legal and contractual issues, if some towns wanted to continue having KX answer 911 calls and dispatch their emergency services, all they need to do so is be willing to fund it," Knowlton confirmed.

As of right now, the KX Board of Directors have approved a Plan of Dissolution and the organization is going forward with closing on June 30.

No More Public Logbooks

by Kaitlyn Schroyer

The separate arrest logbook that has long been available for public viewing at the state police Troop K barracks is public no more. This means all the arrests in the book need to go into a separate book of press releases – but the *Rivereast* has discovered this isn't always happening.

In the lobby of the police barracks on Old Hartford Road, there used to be two books; one handwritten arrest logbook and one printed "press release" binder. While the press release book was always readily available to visitors to the barracks, the logbook needed to be asked for. However, upon request, the logbook would be received.

That, as the *Rivereast* learned this week, is no longer the case.

The difference between the logbook and the press release book for at least the past several years has been that the written book obtained arrests that were not in the press release book, even days after the arrests occurred.

On Dec. 21, the *Rivereast* was first denied access to the arrest logbook. A trooper cited that the logbook needed to be approved by headquarters and that some changes were being made as to how the information was disseminated.

At the time, Trooper Kelly Grant, the state police's public information officer, said the troopers did not have to provide the arrest logbook.

The *Rivereast* tried again on Jan. 4 to obtain both books. The press release book was available and the arrest logbook was given. The handwritten arrest logbook that week contained five arrests in the *Rivereast* coverage zone that were not in the printed book.

On Jan. 11, the request for the handwritten arrest logbook was again denied twice. The troopers who denied the request stated the troop was no longer giving out the logbook, and that all of the information was in the press release book. However, this was not the case the week before when multiple arrests were missing.

Tom Hennick of the state Freedom of Information Commission said if the troopers have created the logbook it is a public record, unless the troopers could cite a specific reason or exemption.

Another *Rivereast* call to Troop K, attempting to speak to the commanding officer, was answered by a dispatcher who said, "If you feel the need to FOI it, go through legal affairs."

With that, the *Rivereast* filed a formal FOIA (Freedom of Information Act) request

to the Public Information Office requesting access to the arrest logbook now and in the future.

Public Act 15-164 is the state law concerning the freedom of information, specifically regarding the release of police arrests.

According to the act, law enforcement agencies must disclose the name, race, and address of the person arrested; the date, time, and place of arrest; and the offense for which the person was arrested.

Also in the record must be the arrest warrant application including the affidavit if the arrest was from a warrant, or in the case of a warrantless arrest, the official arrest or incident report. If the court has sealed the affidavit in whole or in part, police must provide the portion that is not sealed or a summary of the circumstances leading to the arrest that do not violate the court order.

The only redactions permitted, according to the state act, are the identities of witnesses and specific information about the crime which only a perpetrator would know.

Grant did reply to the request, stating the record of arrest – the press release book – is public. In the press release book, the details such as where and when the person was arrested and what for are included.

She did admit there was a separate issue that needed to be corrected on the state police's side – that Troop K was not putting all of the arrests into the printed book.

Lt. Eric Murray, the Troop K commanding officer, then reached out to the *Rivereast* to explain what the troop would be doing to make sure all arrests will be in the printed press release book.

"I've brought this very issue to the attention of all my supervisory staff here so that they are on top of this and to fill in any gaps that might be in [the printed book]," Murray said. "I apologize for any information that has not been put out there."

Murray said if the arrests are not put in the printed book, the troopers and supervisors will be held accountable.

"Putting out a news release is not a priority. [But] typically by the end of the shift the news release should be completed," Murray said. "There shouldn't be any cases where the arrests are not in the news releases."

He explained the only things that should be kept out of the news releases are in the cases of domestic violence arrests where a victim is involved. That victim's name and address should be redacted.

Murray said he appreciated the fact that the *Rivereast* brought the issue to his attention.

Observations & Ruminations

by Mike Thompson

I expressed my disapproval in this space back in 2014 when the New Britain Rock Cats announced they were abandoning the Hardware City for Hartford. Beyond the fact that the move didn't make any sense to me – the Rock Cats were a fantastic success story, selling out their stadium year after year; if it ain't broke, why fix it? – the whole deal just had a dirty feel to it.

It was all apparently done in secret and behind the City of New Britain's back, with city officials – including mayor Erin Stewart – kept in the dark until the eve of the press conference announcing the move to Hartford.

The whole thing left a very sour taste in my mouth.

So I admit I've been rather enjoying the ongoing fiasco with the new Dunkin' Donuts Park, which is where what's now known as the Hartford Yard Goats were to kick off their season in April.

Note I said 'were.'

There have been construction delays and financial woes aplenty with the new stadium, and various people involved have been pointing their fingers at each other. Meanwhile, the commissioner of the Eastern League – the minor league baseball division the Yard Goats play in – is quite understandably, very ticked off by the whole thing. At a meeting in Hartford earlier this month, Joe McEacharn said he's "been lied to and this project has been misrepresented," and added, "I have never been so disappointed for allowing the Eastern League to be put into this position."

Tuesday brought word of the inevitable: The Yard Goats will play its first 17 home games on the road, at the opposing team's ballpark. Seventeen! That's nearly a quarter of the 71 home games that had been planned for Dunkin' Donuts Park.

And it could potentially get even worse; in its press release announcing the relocated games, the Eastern League included this ominous-sounding statement: "The Eastern League will continue to monitor the situation and will make further decisions regarding the Hartford schedule as additional information becomes available regarding the availability of Dunkin' Donuts Park."

Yipes. But fear not, Yard Goat fans (Goat-heads?): The Yard Goats have announced that, if you've got season tickets, you can still attend these home-on-the-road games. Isn't that lovely? Transportation and hotel costs are, of course, on you. But hey, at least you can see the game. The Goats play their "home" opener in Richmond, Va., against the Flying Squirrels. That's only an eight-hour drive!

As the old saying goes, you reap what you sow. I'm guessing Erin Stewart and the rest of New Britain – which, by the way, already has a replacement baseball team in place, one that can actually play its home games in April – is having a good chortle over the beleaguered Yard Goats.

* * *

Speaking of baseball, I'll be honest – I haven't been too pleased with what my Mets have been doing this offseason. I was ecstatic they got as far as they did this past season – all the way to the World Series, something which still seems like it didn't really happen – but it did result in higher expectations for them. That's just natural, really. When you make the World Series one year – particularly when you have as young and dominant a pitching rotation as the Mets does – anything less than at least another postseason appearance will be seen as a huge disappointment.

Which is why I don't quite get their moves

this offseason. They made no attempt to resign either the man who led them to the postseason (Yoenis Cespedes) or the man who, once they were in the playoffs, led them to the World Series (Daniel Murphy).

Murphy's already got a new team. Cespedes is still available, but the Mets, by all accounts, remain almost completely uninterested. (I read earlier this week speculation they might be interested if Cespedes accepts only a one-year contract; sorry, a guy who just turned 30 and hit 35 home runs last year likely isn't going to settle for a one-year deal, nor should he.)

Letting Murphy walk was a move that, while I flatly did not agree with it, at least I understood the Mets' reasoning. Team executives have been pretty clear for a while now they weren't overly fond of him. His defense, while improved, continues to be a little suspect (He made a HUGE error in the World Series, for example). And while he had a record burst of home run magic in the playoffs, he's never been a home run hitter. He hits for a very solid average, and hits doubles like they're going out of style, but he's not a big home run guy.

So the Mets traded for a guy, Neil Walker, who, on paper at least, has offensive numbers similar to Murphy's; his batting average is a little lower, but his home run totals are a little higher – although it remains to be seen if he can put up those offensive numbers in pitcher-friendly Citi Field. Walker's defense – while not Gold Glove-caliber – is also considered to be a little better than Murph's.

While I hate to see Murphy go, the bigger mistake of the offseason has been letting Cespedes walk. I don't think it's a stretch to say that, without him, the Mets don't make the playoffs in 2015. At the very least, it would've been a lot more difficult.

The Mets traded for Cespedes on July 31. Over the ensuing two months – just two months! – the guy hit a whopping 17 home runs and hit .287. He was the quintessential middle-of-the-lineup bat that opposing teams were scared of. As it was when Mike Piazza was here, it seemed as if Cespedes could hit a home run practically on demand. Is it a big spot? Would a home run be nice right now? Boom – you've got it.

The Mets – likely scared off by Cespedes' reported desire for a six-year, \$150 million deal – instead have signed Alejandro de Aza, who hit a grand total of seven home runs last year while playing for three different teams, and will platoon him with Juan Legares, a superb defender who, when healthy, has shown impressive offensive flashes. Neither is close to Cespedes.

So, Murphy and Cespedes are out, and Walker, de Aza and Asdrubal Cabrera (a kind of average shortstop – though at least he's got a little pop – they recently signed) are in. Like I said, I don't quite get it. It looks as if the Mets are back to playing the "if everything goes right" game – if players that were injured last season stay healthy, if other players that had down years bounce back, if nobody has any sophomore slumps, then we'll make the playoffs – and I was hoping that, after winning a pennant, we'd be past all that.

Maybe I'm wrong; I hope I am. Maybe the Mets will surprise me and bring back Cespedes after all (although signing de Aza seemed to effectively close that door), or maybe these new acquisitions will impress me more than I first thought. But, for the moment, I'm just a little perplexed.

* * *

See you next week.

Reserve Funds Combined at District Meeting

by Geeta S. Sandberg

The 11 voters present at a district meeting Monday elected to approve a resolution to combine two RHAM accounts containing non-recurring capital funds. The money will be used to fund the Board of Education's portion of a project to address handicapped-accessibility at the high school athletic fields.

The accounts total \$129,184 and are made up of surplus funds the board approved placing in the non-recurring capital funds at the end of each respective year; \$58,841 is from a surplus in operating funds from the 2012-13 fiscal year and \$70,343 is from a surplus in operating funds from the 2013-14 fiscal year.

Superintendent of Schools Bob Siminski explained this week, "The district meeting then allowed the consolidation of those two non-recurring funds for the specific purpose of addressing handicapped accessibility in the fields based on a civil rights survey done by [the state] Department of Education."

Following that study, Siminski explained the architectural firm The Lawrence Associ-

ates was hired to review the requirements and prepare a report on the accessibility.

The Lawrence report found a number of issues that will be addressed through the project, including that the route from the parking area closest to the softball field to the field is too steep, as is the paved path from the parking area to the track and track bleachers and the sidewalk from the accessible track parking. There are also issues with access to the dugouts.

Some of the proposed changes include extending handrail sections, installing new walkway areas and designating a new drop-off/pick-up area.

Siminski said, "What I'm doing now is I'm getting the submission ready to send to the Department of Education. [Tuesday] night at home, I was working on the specifications to hire a consultant to do the architectural plans so I'm trying to move ahead as fast as I can."

Siminski said the project isn't expected to exceed \$360,000, and the remainder will be paid for with state funds.

Lebanon Teen Arrested in Hebron Assault Case

by Geeta S. Sandberg

A Lebanon teen has been arrested in relation to an alleged sexual assault that took place in Hebron in September.

Andrew Senechal, 19, of 1384 Trumbull Hwy., Lebanon, was arrested Dec. 31 and charged with first-degree sexual assault and risk of injury to a child following an investigation into the alleged sexual assault of a 15-year-old in the trails behind Hebron Veterans Memorial Park Sept. 19.

According to the arrest warrant affidavit, the alleged victim told police she met Senechal on the social media application Instagram, and had arranged to meet him in person through text messages a week after they first made contact.

The teen said she had been at Douglas Library with two friends when she arranged to meet Senechal at the skate park in town. The three met with Senechal and spoke for a few minutes before, according to the affidavit, the friends left and the girl and Senechal started to walk on the trails behind the park.

The girl told police the two talked about "normal" things, including Senechal's girlfriend, before pausing near a water tower the trails come across and sitting to talk more. Then, according to the affidavit, when the girl stood to leave, Senechal grabbed her from behind and assaulted her.

According to the affidavit, while the girl said her mind "went blank" during the assault, she recalls pushing her arms back, saying "stop," and that Senechal's actions were "unwanted." She added she had never talked about nor wanted sex with Senechal, and that she felt "overpowered."

Following the alleged assault, the girl said she told Senechal to get her the Plan B contraceptive pill or she'd tell. He did so, but, according to the affidavit, the girl said he didn't give it to her until she deleted the text messages between the two of them. She said Senechal also took her phone to delete some of their conversations.

After the victim took the pill, the two went their separate ways, and, according to the af-

fidavit, it wasn't until a few days later when the girl said "it hit her" what had happened and she went to a school advocate, and told her parents she'd been raped.

The girl also told police Senechal knew how old she was, and that she'd never lied about her age.

As part of the police investigation, the girl and her father agreed to try a controlled phone call, and the girl had three conversations with Senechal that were recorded, during which time Senechal denied being rough with the girl and repeatedly said she had "nothing to worry about," according to the affidavit. He said the girl never said 'no,' and that he didn't want to talk because the girl was accusing him of some 'f---ed-up s--t.' According to the warrant, Senechal said during the conversations that he didn't do anything, and that he didn't make the girl do anything.

During the investigation, the girl turned over her phone and gave consent for the police to have the cellphone data extracted, but nothing was found that confirmed or denied the assault.

In October, police met with Senechal for a recorded interview. According to the affidavit Senechal was told he was not under arrest and was free to leave, but he agreed to stay and talk.

According to the affidavit, Senechal said during the interview that he knew the girl but only by her first name, and that the two of them did not have sex. He said he didn't know how old she was but thought she was a junior or a sophomore in high school. During the same interview however, according to the affidavit, Senechal changed his story and said the two did in fact have sex on the trails behind the skate park, but that it was consensual.

Following the investigation, according to the affidavit there was "sufficient probable cause to affect an arrest warrant."

Senechal was released on \$30,000 bond. He was due in court Jan. 13.

Contois Lives On Through Dedication in Colchester

by Kaitlyn Schroyer

The spirit of the late Jenny Contois could be felt at Town Hall last Thursday, Jan. 7, as the building's meeting rooms were dedicated in her name, as part of a Board of Selectmen meeting – just as she wanted.

The town's first selectwoman for 15 years, Concetta "Jenny" Contois passed away last October due to illness, at the age of 68. She served on the Board of Finance from 1981-91, and then was elected first selectwoman, using the slogan "No promises, just hard work." She proved perennially popular, winning re-election several times before resigning in January 2007 to work in Congressman Joe Courtney's office. She retired from that role in 2014.

During her time as the town's top official, Contois oversaw the creation of a town charter, the renovation or building of all of the four Colchester schools, the building of the Town Hall, the creation of the police department, modernizing the fire department, and the renovation of the library. Contois was also a founding member of the Colchester Learning Foundation and helped establish the Colchester Land Trust, the fire museum and the Colchester Historical Society.

The idea to name the meeting rooms after Contois began last spring, said Ron Goldstein, chairman of the town Board of Education and a longtime friend of Contois. The idea gained steam in August.

The town's first selectman at the time, Stan Soby, "was insistent [that] 'yes, we're putting it on the Board of Selectmen agenda,'" Goldstein told the crowd of people that filled the meeting rooms for the dedication. "I went over to Jenny's house and told her about it. Jenny was genuinely touched by it."

While chatting about how the town would recognize the dedication, Goldstein said Contois was sure of two things – she wanted it small and she wanted it to be part of a regular selectmen meeting.

"I was thinking today, how many hours did she spend in this room?" John Sandberg, who served as finance board chair while Contois was first selectwoman, said during the dedication. "Five to seven hours every week, 40 weeks of the year, for 15 years, 3,200 hours in this room doing the work for the people of Colchester."

Originally, the hope was to have Contois at the celebration, Goldstein said, but that plan did not work out. Soon after telling her about the idea, Contois went into the hospital. While she was in the hospital, the selectmen voted and passed the naming of the rooms. The group delayed the official dedication, in the hopes that Contois would get well and be able to attend the ceremony. Unfortunately, that time never came.

This may have given last week's dedication ceremony a more somber feel – but, Goldstein said at the ceremony, it does not take away Contois' spirit for doing what was right and her determination to overcome any obstacles in her way.

"Even though Jenny is not here physically, I feel it – Jenny still is here," he said. "She is still here in Colchester, she's here in spirit."

Bill Hettrick, a member of the Board of Education during Contois' time as first selectwoman, shared that, in 1990, the year before Contois was elected, the town was in a "sink or swim" situation after four straight budget referendum defeats that year left major cuts in the town and education budget.

"Jenny was our leader, mentor and she was our head coach," he said. "Jenny had an infectious passion for this town, a passion that transferred to us when we served."

When Contois was in office, Hettrick noted, the town's population grew tremendously, but the first selectwoman had only one prerequisite for working on her team.

"You had to share one vision and it had to be genuine. That was to make Colchester a better place to live each and every day you serve,"



Visitors to Town Hall will now be greeted by large, gold letters announcing the newly-dedicated Jenny Contois Meeting Rooms, honoring the late longtime first selectwoman.

Hettrick said. "The thing that mattered to her was everyone working together."

Contois' husband, Frank, and her daughter, Amy, helped unveil the plaque and letters above the Town Hall meeting rooms. Along with Jenny's picture and accomplishments, large gold letters stretch across the top of the rooms, stating "Jenny Contois Meeting Rooms."

* * *

On Tuesday, a few days after the celebration, residents Art Liverant and Michelle Gilman approached the Board of Education during their meeting to ask the board to consider naming the Colchester Elementary School after Contois.

"We have that school because of Jenny," Liverant said of the building, which opened in 2006.

Gilman also suggested naming the school after Contois would be a teaching lesson for the children when they ask who Jenny Contois was. Gilman also said Contois had a hand in the entire construction of the school, from identifying the location to the funding and design.

Goldstein said the school board is charged with naming the facilities, so the process would be a motion at a board meeting.

"I think it needs to be part of a community discussion," he said. "It's not something the board will just do."

Goldstein said renaming the school definitely is a deserved honor and if the community wants it to happen, a discussion can begin.

"Each of us will remember Jenny in our own way," Goldstein said. "May our memories of Jenny be a blessing to all."

Mill Project Moving Along Despite Contamination

by Kaitlyn Schroyer

Despite finding multiple forms of contamination at the old Norton Paper Mill, the Board of Selectmen stressed last week it is still intent on turning the property into a park.

After several forms of contamination were found at the Norton Paper Mill at 139 Westchester Rd., the fate of the future Norton Park was unknown. However during a Board of Selectmen meeting last Thursday, the selectmen agreed the project must go on.

The history of the Norton Paper Mill, located at 139 Westchester Rd., goes back to the Carriers who came from Salem, Mass., around the time of the witch trials in the late 1600s. The family settled in North Westchester after fleeing Salem.

The former paper mill had been abandoned for more than 25 years before it was destroyed by fire in July 2012. At the time of the blaze, Fire Chief Walter Cox said the building would be watched for structural integrity, as the water continues to flow under the foundation of the building.

Since the 2012 fire, the mill has been boarded up and blocked off by a fence.

Next to the skeleton of the mill is a dam on the Jeremy River. When the mill was operating, the dam was used to divert the water to run the pumps and mechanical machines.

Since the fire, the town and the Nature Conservancy, a non-profit conservation group, have been looking for ways to improve the property. Last spring, the Nature Conservancy received \$1.5 million in federal funds to remove the dam since the river is a Class A river known for fishing and, according to the conservancy, removing the dam would aid the migratory fish especially the Atlantic salmon.

On top of the Nature Conservancy funds, the town received a state Small Town Economic Assistance Program (STEAP) grant for \$350,000 to develop the property into a park called the Norton Park. The town would purchase the property for \$1 from its current owners. However, that sale depended on the result of environmental testing; if contamination was found, the town could stop the purchase.

Colchester's Public Works director, Jim Paggioli, told the selectmen at their meeting last Thursday, Jan. 7, that various forms of con-

tamination were found during the testing in August and October.

The contamination includes: a 20,000 gallon underground tank leaking petrol; lead contamination and polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB) waste; and a small amount of asbestos in the structure. Paggioli stressed the contamination is contained and below the state Department of Energy and Environmental Protection's "automatic action" levels. Therefore, there is no immediate danger to neighbors of the property or to the river, he said.

"If you're judging by other mill sites, it's a minimal amount," Paggioli said of the asbestos and PCBs.

After finding the contamination, Paggioli said a request for proposals (RFP) went out for bidders to do the remediation work. In the RFP, the work was divided into four categories: demolishing the structures, removing the oil tank, removing the PCB-contaminated soil, and bringing soil in to fill the foundation.

"It was an a la carte menu of what we can award," Paggioli said.

For the two biggest categories – the demolition of the building and the removal of the oil tank – the low bidder was Associated Building Records out of Springfield, Mass., for \$226,917. For all four categories, a range of bids came in from \$428,000 (which was Associated Building Records' bid) to \$864,000.

"With the prices we have, portions could be awarded and conducted within the [STEAP] grant," Paggioli said. "At a future point we could do the rest."

Paggioli explained because the levels of PCBs are not high enough for DEEP's automatic action, removing the PCB-contaminated soil and filling the foundation could wait until after the Nature Conservancy removes the dam. At that point, there may be other grants available, such as a state Office of Brownfield Remediation grant.

"At one point, a Brownfield grant for rehabilitation was submitted. It's now remediation and we've gotten positive feedback," selectman Stan Soby said. Soby explained it was harder to get the grant under the rehabilitation category.

If the town goes forward with the demolition of the structures and removal of the tank, the property would be left stable with the foun-



One of the side buildings behind the main Norton Paper Mill structure is one of the areas where contamination was found on the property. Director of Public Works Jim Paggioli said some of the PCB-contamination is contained within and under the building.

dation bare above the floor level. The site would remain fenced in and the Nature Conservancy could then come in and remove the dam.

"I feel comfortable with moving on" with the project, First Selectman Art Shilosky said. He added that, simply by stabilizing the property, it will be safer.

Shilosky said once the first major steps of the project – the demolition, the oil tank removal and the dam removal – are done, it would be easier to develop the park.

The rest of the selectmen agreed with Shilosky, and the group gave a consensus to the board attorney, John Wertham of Shipman and Goodwin, to tell the owners there is interest in proceeding with the purchase.

The next step of the project will be a formal presentation by Paggioli at the February Board of Selectmen meeting. Then the motion to purchase the property will go to a town meeting vote.

Paggioli explained a contract cannot be awarded until the town has the title of the prop-

erty. If all goes well and the project is passed, Paggioli said the town could begin work in April.

The next regular Board of Selectmen meeting will be held Thursday, Jan. 21, at 7 p.m., at Town Hall.

WJMS Read-a-Thon

Students and staff at William J. Johnston Middle School will host a kickoff celebration in their media center on Monday, Feb. 1, to start their "Leap into Reading Read-a-Thon" program.

Students will ask family and friends to sponsor them from Feb. 1-5 as they log their reading for the five days. While celebrating literacy, students will be helping the Colchester Fuel Bank, which helps neighbors stay warm in the cold winter months, and Restavec Freedom Alliance, which is for children in need in Haiti.

Both non-profit organizations will be gifted equally with the funds collected.

Colchester Project Oceanology Returning to Bacon

by Kaitlyn Schroyer

Students at Bacon Academy will once again be able to experience marine science in the field, as the Colchester school district has received a grant to participate in Project Oceanology this year.

School administrators shared the news at Tuesday's Board of Education meeting.

For several years, students at William J. Johnston Middle School and Bacon Academy participated in the Project Oceanology program, which connects students with marine scientists in the classroom and through first-hand experiences. However, that came to an end in 2012, when the \$35,000 to cover Colchester's participation was cut from the 2012-13 budget.

Project Oceanology is a non-profit organization, based in Groton, whose members are public school districts, colleges, universities and educational institutions. Students in the program connect with marine scientists in the classroom and are also afforded the chance for first-hand experiences on the boat and on the shore.

According to the Project Oceanology website, the program is aligned with Connecticut science standards and "provides students with opportunities to explore the disciplinary core ideas and crosscutting concepts as well as employ the scientific and engineering practices of the next generation of science standards."

Bacon Academy Principal Matthew Peel said

he was surprised when Project O approached the school with the grant.

"They were doing grants to school systems with different socio-economic backgrounds," Peel explained. He said that, in the program, two Bacon teachers accompany the students on the days they go down to the shore, so, "except for paying for substitutes for two teachers, there is zero cost to the district."

Called the Coastal Connecticut Connections Program, the program links schools in pairs to study the marine ecosystems of the Long Island Sound. Colchester is paired with the Science and Technology Magnet High School in New London.

In addition to studying and examining marine life in the Sound, students will visit their partner school to "conduct further analysis of data and perform additional inquiry-based lab activities."

The Bacon Academy marine science class will begin later this month at its partner school in New London. The students will then go to the Project Oceanology facility at the University of Connecticut's Avery Point campus in Groton, and to the Connecticut River between Old Saybrook and Old Lyme. Students at the magnet school will also visit Bacon. The group's final meeting will be in May when they head to New Haven to the Quinnipiac River.

At this moment, it's unclear if the program will return for the 2016-17 school year.

"We're not sure how long the grant will go for," Peel said. "We're just riding the wave."

But even if it's just for the remainder of this school year, Board of Education Chairman Ron Goldstein said he was extremely happy to see the program returning to the district.

When the program was cut in 2012, "We were hopeful we could replace it, but could never replace that experience," Goldstein said. "With Project O coming back, it enhances [real life experience learning] in a way we could not do in Colchester. They will literally go out on Project O boats onto the river. You cannot duplicate that."

* * *

Also at the education board meeting, the board heard the Norwich Board of Education has officially approved sending some of the town's students to Bacon Academy.

The Colchester Board of Education agreed to accept Norwich students at a school board meeting last month.

The Norwich school system does not have a high school; therefore, the district pays tuition on each of its students. Norwich students have a list of approved high schools they can attend at no cost – the vast majority attend Norwich Free Academy – and now Colchester is one of

them.

The students would enter the school as freshmen. Colchester can accept 15 freshmen students for the 2016-17 school year. After that year, only 10 new freshmen will be accepted each year. The reason to start off with 15, Superintendent of Schools Jeff Mathieu explained, is to make it worth it for Norwich to send a bus the first year of the arrangement.

Norwich will pay \$14,254 per student, which is Colchester's per pupil rate set by the state. Norwich also pays for transportation.

Applications from Norwich eighth-grade students are due Feb. 1. If more than 15 students apply to come to Colchester, a lottery will be held.

At their December meeting, Colchester board members discussed the idea of barring students that had been expelled from the Norwich school for serious drug or weapon offenses from applying to Bacon. However, Goldstein said that did not end up in the final agreement.

"We will not be judging people on academic, disciplinary or anything of the sort," Goldstein said. "The agreement does provide if a [Norwich] student is expelled from Bacon, they cannot come back."

The next Board of Education meeting will be Tuesday, Jan. 26, at 7 p.m., in Room 120 at Jack Jackter Intermediate School.

Andover Selectmen Closing in on Easement Agreement

by Geeta S. Sandberg

The Board of Selectmen Tuesday took one step closer to approving an easement agreement voters granted to two property owners months ago.

The right-of-way at the end of Riverside Drive was granted to Joshua Clark and Christopher Wierzbicki, owners of a 60-acre piece of property at 64 Long Hill Rd., by a vote of 211-133 at a town meeting last July.

The owners had explained they needed better access to their land, which they hoped to gain through the town easement.

Since that time, however, selectmen have debated various issues with the agreement, such as whether the town was adequately protected from liability and what types of vehicles would be allowed on the property.

At Tuesday's meeting, the selectmen addressed requests and comments the applicants' attorney, Michael Bonanno, had submitted in regards to a draft of the easement agreement. The first request, which the board agreed with, was the addition of language to the end of a paragraph asserting "the restrictions and obligations set forth in this easement shall bind the Grantees and their heirs, successors and assigns in perpetuity and shall run with the Grantees'

Property."

The new language adds, "as long as this easement shall be in effect."

The second change Bonanno requested was the deletion of the line in the agreement stating Clark and Wierzbicki are limited in the number of houses they can build on their property.

Bonanno explained in his comments that Clark and Wierzbicki "feel they should not be restricted with regard to the number of potential houses that can exist on the subject property." He added, "Although my clients have no current intention to subdivide and construct more than two new homes on the subject property, if abutting land were developed and another means of access to their property created, they may consider selling a portion of their land or seek town approval to construct another home."

But First Selectmen Bob Burbank said, "I believe the limit of two houses should be continued." He added, "The reason the easement was even considered was because it would limit the number of houses" on the property.

The majority of the board agreed, and the easement was left as is.

Lastly, the board opted to change the amount

of the bond the applicants will be required to pay the town for maintenance of the easement if the town has deemed "repairs have not been made or insurance has not been provided" by Clark and Wierzbicki. The board agreed to change this bond from \$5,000 to \$25,000 by a vote of 4-1. Selectwoman Julia Haverl voted against the increase, saying she felt the town needn't be so concerned about whether Clark and Wierzbicki would maintain their own property; the \$5,000, she felt, would have been enough.

Following the changes, the board voted to have Burbank bring the easement to the town's acting attorney for a final review.

The selectmen are expected to approve the final agreement at next month's meeting.

* * *

Also Tuesday, the board unanimously approved a Commercial Property Assessed Clean Energy (C-PACE) Agreement authorizing the Connecticut Green Bank to facilitate low-interest loan financing through its C-PACE program for clean energy improvements for businesses in town.

"This is great for economic development,"

Burbank said.

According to cpace.com, the program "is an economic development tool for cities and towns across Connecticut. Energy upgrades create a more competitive environment for attracting and retaining businesses through lower energy costs. Furthermore, energy upgrades create new jobs while reducing greenhouse gases and other pollutants."

A total of 110 Connecticut municipalities have already joined the program, which provides up to 100 percent up-front, long-term financing to commercial, industrial, and multi-family property owners for qualified energy upgrades. Non-profit buildings are also eligible in certain cases.

The upgrades run the gamut from the installation of solar panels to upgraded insulation, energy efficient heating equipment, fuel cells, and the installation of natural gas piping.

To learn more about C-PACE go to cpace.com.

* * *

The next regular Board of Selectmen's meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, Feb. 9, at 7 p.m. in the town office building, 17 School Rd.

Andover School Budget Proposal Flat for Next Year

by Geeta S. Sandberg

A "dramatic" drop in enrollment offset a handful of various increases, and that means the proposed 2016-17 school budget – which Superintendent of Schools Sally Doyen presented to the Board of Education Wednesday – is flat with current year spending, at \$4.32 million.

The proposal contains three increases.

The first comes in the object 200 line which contains insurance, and is proposed at \$845,203 for an increase of \$63,988 or 8.19 percent. The second is in the object 500 line, which contains items such as tuition and the bus contract, and is proposed at \$323,238 for an increase of \$112,738 or 53.56 percent.

Doyen explained the increase in tuition is due to a student outplacement, while insurance is predicted to increase 12 percent next year – although she expects that amount to change.

"I think that will come down but the timing is awful; we don't have even close to final figures [for insurance] but we needed to put something" in the proposal, she explained.

The last increase is in the object 700 line, containing furniture and equipment, which has been budgeted at \$9,600 for the 2016-17 year, up \$5,900. Doyen explained the increase is for new carpeting in the library, computer lab and the office.

Despite the above increases, the budget pro-

posal remained flat due to decreases in other areas – chief among them being a significant drop in the object 100 line, which contains salary, wages and contractual obligations.

Coming in at \$2,619,373, the amount for that line is 5.64 percent, or \$156,624, less than the current year. Doyen attributed this "pretty dramatic decrease" to declining enrollment.

"It's very obvious and pretty dramatic in terms of what's happening" with enrollment, she said.

Enrollment at Andover Elementary School is projected to be 230 for the 2016-17 school year, down from 250 in the current year.

There are currently 50 students in sixth grade who will be moving on to RHAM at the end of this year, and that's the largest grade currently at the elementary school; from there, the grade sizes decrease, down to 21 children currently in kindergarten.

"This is not unique to us; the whole state is seeing a decline in the overall population," Doyen stated. "This budget reflects an elimination of a class."

Next year, there will be two fifth-grade sections instead of three. In addition, one of the school reading specialists submitted their resignation and Doyen said that position was not going to be replaced. The number of paraprofessionals will also decrease by two next year,

due to a number of special education students in the sixth grade that will be moving on to RHAM.

The advancement of the special education students means "we don't have that need next year" for the same amount of paras, Doyen stated.

Meanwhile, the object 300 line, which contains contracted services, is proposed at \$136,125 for a decrease of 5.08 percent or \$7,285. This is also due to several sixth-graders who required extra services moving on to RHAM.

In addition to the above decreases, the object 600 line containing items such as instructional supplies, textbooks, heating oil and fuel dropped 4.93 percent or \$15,227 bringing that amount to \$293,367.

"That's going down a little bit, due to fuel savings," Doyen explained, adding, "So we put extra money in for textbooks and technology but still had a decrease."

The object 400 line, which includes "many preventative maintenance items," is proposed at \$89,000 for a decrease of \$2,500 or 2.73 percent, "even though some additional money was included for roof work and security cameras," Doyen stated.

Lastly, a \$990 decrease – 16.77 percent – is proposed in the object 800 line, bringing that

account to \$4,915. This decrease is due to the elimination of the "undesignated" line.

"We were able to take the savings we had and move it to some other areas we knew we needed some more support," Doyen explained.

She added there were "two big drivers" in the budget proposal: enrollment, and the board's goals, which have a number of focus areas including certain programs and initiatives such as curriculum upgrades in language arts/reading, math and science; technology purchases to provide classroom mini-computer labs for small group work; report card revisions; and facility needs and maintenance.

"The budget reflects those goals in the sense that additional monies were put in those categories," Doyen stated.

In her letter to the Board of Education, Doyen said she was "confident" the budget "meets the obligations we have assumed to educate Andover students in the best possible manner that is both forward-looking and a continuation of Andover's high standards."

Now that next year's budget has been presented, it will come back before the board for approval at next month's meeting scheduled for Wednesday, Feb. 10, at 7 p.m. in the Andover Elementary School Library, 35 School Rd. Following approval by the board, the budget will be forwarded to the Board of Finance.

At 96, East Hampton Resident Publishes First Book of Poems

by Elizabeth Regan

East Hampton Poet Laureate Hugo DeSarro published his first poem when he was 13 years old – and his first book of poetry when he was 96.

The 80 pages of *Stone Steps and Other Poems*, released late last year, contain a lifetime of observation, introspection and recollection, culled with the help of his three daughters. Most of the poems have already appeared in national and international magazines and literary journals.

The book comes on the heels of DeSarro's appointment to the newly-created position of local poet laureate last March. In addition to commemorating special town events in verse, he participates in numerous events that bring together the growing number of poets laureate from other Connecticut towns.

DeSarro's words – crafted for sound and sensibility – come from a place of ingrained decency. He approaches writing the same way he approaches life: carefully and with the intent to do no harm.

"Some things are sensible and some things are very insensible," he said in an interview with the *Rivereast* last week. "Stay away from the insensible things."

DeSarro, who has been writing continuously through the years, is a World War II veteran who went on to work as a human resources profes-

sional for the city of Hartford before his retirement. He has also served as an English instructor with the University of Hartford.

His book is a close scrutiny of nature – the environmental kind and the human kind. It is divided into sections mixing poems about flora and fauna with personal experiences both light and dark.

The second section contains a collection of autobiographical poems about his childhood in Hartford's North End during the Great Depression. The specter of domestic abuse permeates the pages.

One poem, titled "Drama, In Two Parts," is written from the vantage point of a boy who describes his alcoholic father as "squint-eyed, head quaintly cocked" when a pair of bungling cops arrive to find his mother with a face "too swollen for expression."

But there is no arrest, according to the poem; there is no resolution. The police officers walk back out the door and the boy is left to wonder: "Who was there, now, to call?"

The volume of poetry, a simple black hardcover with gold lettering, is self-published. It is up to DeSarro and his family to promote it and make sales.

He said a mainstream publisher expressed interest in producing a small paperback, known as a chapbook, with about 30 of his poems. But

DeSarro held out in search of an outlet willing to print a more comprehensive collection.

According to DeSarro's wife of 69 years, Marietta, that's when their children came up with the idea to make the book a family production. "They're the instigators," she said with a laugh.

The daughters – Doreen DeSarro of Glastonbury, Anita Bellows of East Haddam and Nancy Carbone of Colchester – combined expertise in business and self-publishing to bring the project to fruition. Bellows has written and published numerous soft cover and board books for children from birth to age six.

DeSarro relied on his girls to help decide which of his poems – there are hundreds of them – to include in his first bound compilation.

Doreen DeSarro said he simply couldn't choose one poem over another.

"My father feels about his poetry the way people feel about their children," she said. So she worked with Bellows and Carbone to do the objective work of selecting 65 poems to include in the book. It took them about six weeks.

The result is something that will be handed down in DeSarro family and will, the poet hopes, gain even wider circulation.

"Poems live forever," he said. "If it's good enough, it won't ever end."

DeSarro also has three novel manuscripts, five plays and numerous published essays to his credit. He has been a columnist with the *Rivereast* for more than 30 years. Two of his plays have been staged in town at Epoch Arts.

As the prolific writer looks toward his 97th birthday in April, he said he doesn't know what the future holds when it comes to the publication of his completed novels or the possible staging of more plays. But one thing is certain, according to DeSarro: "I'm not going to stop writing."

Yet his daughters have a more specific plan in mind.

"We're hoping that because he has so many additional poems that we'll publish another book," Doreen DeSarro said. "My sisters and I like working together and we work together well with my dad. That's our goal."

For now, Hugo DeSarro is focused on spreading the word about the first book before he even thinks about another.

"That's insensible, to be working on something else when I'm not even certain about this," he said. "I don't want two uncertainties. One at a time. This is the current uncertainty."

Stone Steps is available for purchase online at hugodesarro.com or by contacting Anita Bellows at anitabellows@comcast.net or 860-873-2408.

East Hampton Council Goes Ahead with Charter Revision

by Elizabeth Regan

A resolution to begin revising the East Hampton town charter was passed Tuesday by the Town Council, opening the door for bipartisan conversations that could affect the way residents vote on budgets and the way elected officials make appointments to town boards and commissions.

The council voted unanimously to establish a seven-member commission to carry out the extensive work of changing the charter. State statute specifies the commission has no more than 18 months and no fewer than 90 days to submit their draft report to the town clerk.

Two councilors – Republican Melissa Engel and Democrat Pete Brown – will serve on the charter revision commission. The remaining five seats must be appointed by the council within 30 days of Tuesday's meeting. No party can have more than a bare majority, according to state statute.

Town Council Chairwoman Patience Anderson said multiple failed budget referendums over the past two years underscore the need for discussion on bifurcation. The issue was a key component of her platform in the November election.

Bifurcation refers to voting on the local municipal budget and the local education budget as separate items at referendum.

"We did hear a call from many residents that they wanted a way in which we could identify which portion of the budget was causing people to vote against it," Anderson said.

Charter revision has also been invoked by councilors of both parties as a permanent solution to an ongoing legal dispute seeking to clarify who has the power to fill vacancies on the Board of Education.

The commission will be responsible for addressing specific charges outlined by the council. It may also consider other updates "as it deems desirable or necessary," according to statute.

A final resolution outlining the Town Council's charges and the expected duration of the commission's work will come with the announcement of the commission membership.

East Hampton resident Michael Bloch spoke during the public comment period at Tuesday's meeting to ask councilors to carefully consider the timetable for the process, which ends with a public vote at referendum.

The most common option is holding the vote in concert with a general election. The charter revision questions would need to be approved by a majority of those casting ballots.

While aiming for this year's presidential election makes sense from a financial and turnout

perspective, Bloch said, it may not give the commission enough time to do a thorough job.

Bloch said the council would have to approve referendum language by Sept. 8 in order to get the charter revision question on the ballot. In the meantime, the commission must research, discuss and reach consensus on each charge. Two public hearings must also be held: one before the commission begins its work and one after the draft report is complete.

Bloch said that may be enough time to address the charges highlighted by the Town Council, but it doesn't leave time for much else.

"The commission is also able to look into anything else in the charter they see fit," he said. "Only giving them time to look at the charges [from the council] doesn't give them any room to look at additional items they might want to take on."

He suggested holding the vote on the charter revisions as part of the 2017 budget referendum instead, "so you don't pay out another expense for a referendum but it gives the commission a little more time."

Holding the vote outside of a general election comes with a slightly different set of guidelines. Statute spells out that the question must be approved by a majority of at least 15 percent of the electorate if held during a special

election such as a budget referendum.

Anderson said she appreciates Bloch's input, which gives the council something to consider as it sets the due date for the commission's draft report.

"I think it's more important to get it right than to rush it," Anderson said. "I just want to focus that they do the job thoroughly. And whatever length of time it takes, it does."

The work of a charter revision commission in 2010 was voted down at referendum in that year's general election. The rejected changes included four-year terms for town councilors, annual reviews for the town manager and a requirement that vacant board positions be filled by the political party of the person who vacated the seat.

Anderson said she thinks the changes to come out of the newly-initiated charter review process are likely to be less extensive than the last go-round.

The town council received 12 applications for this year's charter revision commission. She said she looks forward to selecting five members to join Engel and Brown as they work to update and clarify the charter.

"Hopefully it's something we can bring to the people that this time will pass," Anderson said.

East Hampton Police News

1/3: Lovetta S. Alston, 26, of 243 Sisson Ave., Hartford was taken into custody pursuant to an active warrant for her arrest, and charged with second-degree forgery, issuing a bad check and criminal attempt to commit third-degree larceny, East Hampton Police said.

1/5: Daniel Larson, 22, of 9 Longworth Ave., No. 3, Middletown, was taken into custody pursuant to an active warrant for his arrest, and charged with shoplifting (sixth-degree larceny), police said.

1/6: Jessie Poland, 21, of 40A Palmer Martin Rd., East Haddam, was arrested and charged with possession of heroin, possession of drug paraphernalia and driving under the influence, police said.

1/7: Juliyanti Olson, 42, of 38 Pocotopaug Dr., was arrested and charged with disorderly conduct and third-degree assault, police said.

Portland Police News

1/8: Colin Parker-Williams, 18, of 87 Silver Ln., East Hartford, was charged with second-degree breach of peace, Portland Police said.

1/9: James Jarzabek, Jr., 25, of 11 Freestone Ave., was charged with driving under the influence, police said.

Hebron Police News

1/7: State Police said James Lacroix, 48, of 421 Old Colchester Rd., Amston, was arrested and charged with violation of a protective order.

Colchester Police News

1/5: State Police said Nadean Morin, 27, of 82 Cemetery Rd., Mansfield, was arrested and charged with failure to appear.

1/6: State Police said they are investigating after a burglary at 359 Lebanon Ave. at 4:46 a.m. Police said an undisclosed amount of cash was taken from a file cabinet. Anyone with information can call Trooper Daniel Collin at 860-465-5400 ext. 4023.

1/6: Colchester Police said they are investigating after a larceny at Stop and Shop on Linwood Avenue. Police said a white female took 12 Red Bull energy drinks, paid for three

and left the store at 9:41 a.m. on Jan. 2. Anyone with information can call Officer Jonathan Goss at 860-537-7270.

1/7: State Police said Bobi Bomster, 30, of 76 Doubleday Rd., Columbia, was arrested and charged with failure to appear.

1/9: State Police said Glen Temple, 55, of 61 Summer St., Manchester, was arrested and charged with speeding, DUI, and failure to drive in the proper lane.

1/11: State Police said Jennifer Trombley, 38, of 37 Hodge Rd., Marlborough, was arrested and charged with failure to appear.

Obituaries

Colchester

Charles Howard Thorpe

Charles (Charlie) Howard Thorpe, 75, of Colchester, passed away suddenly at his home Tuesday, Jan. 6. He grew up in Montville and married his high school sweetheart, Nancy Still. They would have celebrated their 55th anniversary this year.



Charlie served in the U.S. Army, both active duty and reserves from 1962-1968. He and his family lived in Norwich, Montville, Pomfret and Windham.

A talented drummer, Charlie played in the Norwich Free Academy band and the Robert Fletcher Drum & Bugle Corps and large dance bands. He also sang, and gleefully passed on his passion for drumming and music to his children, both of whom work and perform in the world of music.

Before retirement, Charlie was a journeyman electrician. In retirement he developed a fledgling antiques business into a full time endeavor and became a respected authority on early American folk art, English ceramics and glass. He and his wife restored historic homes in Pomfret and Windham. Charlie taught courses on antiques, and was a member of the Pomfret Historical Society and the Windham Historical Commission. He contributed to his community through membership in civic organizations including Jaycees, Lions Clubs and various town commissions.

Charlie is predeceased by his sister, Patricia, and brother, Thomas. He is survived by his wife, Nancy and their son Charles Harrison and his wife, Harriet, of Boston and Sprague, CT; son Brian Thomas and his wife, Julie, and their daughter, Aden, of Cranston, R.I.; sister Eleanor Turner of Max Meadow, Va., as well as nieces and nephews.

Funeral services were held Wednesday, Jan. 13, at First Congregational Church of Windham. Committal services will be held at the convenience of the family. There were no calling hours.

To sign the online memorial book, visit potterfuneralhome.com.

East Hampton

Stanley N. Reed

Stanley N. Reed, 74, formerly of East Hampton, beloved husband of Alice Smith Reed, passed away Wednesday, Jan. 6, in Florida. He was born Jan. 13, 1941, to the late Stanley and Lillian Reed of Acushnet, Mass.



He proudly served in the U.S. Navy and was a trumpet player in the military band. He volunteered his time at East Hampton Little League and Boy Scouts. He was a member of the Knights of Columbus and the Rotary Club.

He moved to East Hampton in 1965, where he worked for Pratt & Whitney and as a police constable for the Town of East Haddam. He started his own business and was the sole owner of Stan Reed and Son painting company for more than 20 years. He retired and moved to Zellwood, Fla., with his wife.

Besides his wife Alice, he is survived by his children and their spouses, Kevin and Amanda Reed of East Hampton, Theresa and David Eck of Keene, N.H.; his six grandchildren, Amber Eck, Cayla Eck, Sara Eck, Bryce Reed, Morgan Reed and Jared Reed; and one-great grandchild, Konnor Eck. He was predeceased by his son, Stanley Reed Jr., and his brother, Henry Rock.

He is also survived by his siblings, Alma Reed and Diane Saucy, and his step-children Dominick Sanzone and Donna Brown.

A memorial service will be held at a later date. In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions may be made to the Stanley Reed Jr Scholarship Fund at Ameriprise Financial (Attn: Sherrie), 111 Founders Plaza, Suite 1503, East Hartford, CT 06108-3289. The phone number is 860-290-8880 ext. 15.

East Hampton

Phyllis L. Westcott

Phyllis L. Westcott, 82, of East Hampton, wife of the late Donald A. Westcott Sr., passed away Thursday, Jan. 7, at Middlesex Hospital. She was the daughter of the late George and Bertha (Berry) Lawrence.

Born March 23, 1933 in Cromwell, she was an East Hampton resident for the last 60 years. She worked as a seamstress for Brownell in Moodus for many years.

She leaves her sons, Donald Westcott Jr. of Vernon, David and Daniel Westcott, both of East Hampton; daughters, Darlene Blunt of Methuen, Mass., Diane Almodovar of Port St. Lucie, Fla., and Donna Gilmore of East Hampton; 10 grandchildren; and six great-grandchildren.

She was predeceased by her sisters, Agnes, Louise and Shirley and by her brothers, George, William, Clifford and Kenneth.

Funeral services were held Monday, Jan. 11, at Portland Memorial Funeral Home, 231 Main St., Portland. Burial was in Center Cemetery, Portland. Relatives and friends called Sunday, Jan. 10, at the funeral home.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to a charity of the donor's choice.

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

Colchester

Eric William Lundgren

On Wednesday, Jan. 6, Eric William Lundgren of Colchester passed away unexpectedly at the age of 45. He was born in 1970 in Meriden, the son of Raymond and Linda Lundgren.

He graduated from Sheehan High School in Wallingford in 1988, distinguishing himself as an athlete. He was quarterback of the football team, played small forward, the most versatile of the main five positions on the basketball team, and participated in the long jump and pole vault as a member of the track team. He worked his way through ECSU, attaining Dean's List while employed as a cook/caterer and performing as a musician. He graduated in 1994.

In 2000, Eric married Jill Belli, the daughter of James and Carol Belli from Norwich. He did post-graduate work at CCSU as he began his life's work dedicated to helping some of the most afflicted among us. Eric started his professional career at P.R.I.D.E. in Chaplin as a behavioral counselor working with people with traumatic brain injuries. In 1996, he became a Community Case Manager at the Chrysalis Center in Hartford where he worked with adults with mental illness, AIDS, and drug/alcohol abuse. He spent the past 17 years at Connecticut Valley Hospital working with patients with episodic or persistent psychiatric illness.

Eric was a multi-talented man who was also an accomplished musician and composer. Throughout his adult life, he formed various bands in which he was the lead guitar and vocalist performing at a variety of venues. He also successfully marketed music he had composed. He was an outdoor man who loved skiing in Vermont, boating and fishing at Gardner Lake, and golfing anywhere.

He was famous for his dry sense of humor, but also his generosity and loyalty to his family and friends. He was always willing to help and invariably generated laughter as he lent a hand. He was a born leader and an extraordinarily handsome, amiable, and capable man who had not a whisper of vanity in his body. Those who knew him loved him.

Eric is survived by his wife and daughter, Jill and Sydney Lundgren; his parents, Ray and Linda Lundgren; his sister, Karrie; his grandmother, Ann Paturel; his nieces, Jordan, Alyssa and Taylor Terrenzi and Layla Caramante; along with Lundgren, DeFosses and Paturel aunts, uncles and cousins.

A celebration of life will be held at St. Andrew's Church in Colchester Saturday, Jan. 16, at 10 a.m. Calling hours will also be held at St. Andrew's today, Jan. 15, from 5-8 p.m.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests donations to the Sydney Lundgren Educational Fund, administered by Liberty Bank, 219 South Main St., Colchester, CT 06415, or to a charity of your choice.

Portland

John Henry Gastler

John Henry Gastler, longtime resident of Portland and Sun City Center, Fla., died Saturday, Jan. 9 after a short illness, just five days after his 84th birthday. Born Jan. 4, 1932, he was the son of the late John Burton Gastler and Alice Coe Gastler.

He was a child of the Depression, raised on a family farm in Durham. As such, he learned the importance of family, and of doing much with little, traits that followed him throughout his life. Mr. Gastler graduated from Durham High School in 1949 and from Connecticut State Teachers College (now Central Connecticut State University) in 1953 with a degree in mathematics. He was employed as an aeronautical engineer at Pratt & Whitney Aircraft, and as an air/water/soil quality engineer with the Connecticut State Dept. of Transportation, Northeast Utilities and GZA Environmental Consultants. He retired in 1992.

Mr. Gastler was active in the community. He was a volunteer firefighter in Avon, and was active in Republican Party politics at the local, state and national levels, including a run for Portland Town Selectman. He was a longtime member of Trinity Church in Portland, singing in the choir and serving in various capacities, most recently chairing a project to refurbish the church pipe organ.

He was predeceased by his beloved wife, Nan (Nelson) Gastler, to whom he was married for almost 51 years. He is survived by a daughter, Debra Gastler, and her husband, Andrew Malloy, of Studio City, Calif.; son, Hal and his wife Joanne, of Charlotte, N.C.; son, Jack, and his wife, Debbie, of Chester; and daughter, Laura Kirby, and her husband, Ron, of Statesboro, Ga. Mr. Gastler was also predeceased by his brother, Cliff, and is survived by his sister, Mabel Hamma and her husband, Bill of Durham, and his brother, Harold Gastler and his wife, Alice, of Chesapeake, Va. He also leaves behind 10 grandchildren, 11 great children and many beloved nephews, nieces and cousins.

Most importantly, Mr. Gastler leaves a legacy of quiet strength, kindness, generosity and a propensity for corny jokes. He loved his farm heritage. He loved nature: working in the woods and identifying birds by their call. He loved music, singing in choirs his entire life. He loved flower gardening with his trusty radio tuned to Metropolitan Opera broadcasts on Saturday and ballgames the rest of the time. He loved sports, especially baseball and hockey. He loved travel, having visited each of the lower 48 states, Europe and the Caribbean.

But most of all, he loved what he called his UN family, his children and their spouses, grandchildren and their spouses and his great grandchildren. He and Nan supported them in their every endeavor and he was so proud of the opportunities they pursued throughout the country and world, opportunities he couldn't even have fathomed growing up in rural Durham.

Funeral services were held Thursday, Jan. 14, at Trinity Church in Portland. Burial will be at the convenience of the family. Family and friends called Wednesday evening at the Doolittle Funeral Home, 14 Old Church St., Middletown.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests that donations be made to Trinity Church, 345 Main St., Portland, CT 06480 or Xavier High School, 181 Randolph Rd., Middletown, CT 06457 (to a fund to be set up in the name of John Gastler benefiting the arts), or to a charity of your choice.

To share memories or send condolences to the family, visit doolittlefuneralservice.com.

East Hampton

Marilyn Sohoel

Marilyn Sohoel, beloved wife, mother and grandmother, of Brewster, Mass., age 77, died peacefully, surrounded by her family Sunday, Jan. 10, after a courageous battle with pancreatic cancer. She was born Oct. 17, 1938, in Hartford, the daughter of the late Charles and Arcolina (Preli) Monzeglio.

Marilyn is survived by three children: Deborah Sohoel-Goldberg of West Yarmouth, Mass., Robert Lamson (Alyson) of Medway, Mass., and Kristin Sohoel-Smith (Geoffrey) of Tucson, Ariz. She leaves five grandchildren – Grace Sohoel-Goldberg, Alex Goldberg, Matthew Lamson, Casey and Lindsey Sohoel-Smith – and family abroad.

She was predeceased by her loving husband, Eivind Olav Sohoel, and their granddaughter, Madeline Sohoel-Lamson.

Marilyn was a Who's Who Graduate from Annhurst College, in Woodstock CT, and taught at Glastonbury High School, in Glastonbury. She was also an active Alumni and parent at Mount St. Joseph Academy and Kingswood-Oxford, School, West Hartford, CT. She was Past President of the Glastonbury Women's Club, and a founder of Concerned Citizens of East Hampton, a grassroots environmental group.

Marilyn and her husband Eivind worked hand in hand to grow SPM Instrument into an international company with its inception in Sweden. Marilyn was the comptroller for the company and her husband Eivind served as president and director of research and development of SPM Instrument US (USA) in Marlborough. After Marilyn and Eivind retired to Cape Cod, they launched Milc Corporation, a research and development consulting firm.

On Cape Cod Marilyn found joy in hiking, sailing and spending time with family. She was an active member of her community, belonging to Conservative Women of Cape Cod, volunteering at St. Pius X School, and attending prayer groups. She was also a member of The Vinland Lodge, a club with members of Scandinavian heritage. She supported the Cape's diverse community by teaching English as a Second Language through First Parish Brewster.

Our family would like to express our thanks and gratitude to Mom's surgeons, her oncologist, Dr. Wassif Saif, of Tufts Medical Center Boston, MA, and the entire 8th floor Hematology/Oncology staff, for the wonderful and dignified care and support she received.

Relatives and friends are invited to attend her funeral at St. Pius X Church, Station Avenue, South Yarmouth, Mass., on Saturday, Jan. 16, at noon.

In lieu of flowers, memorial donations may be made to the Maddie Lamson Scholarship Fund c/o Medway High School, 88 Summer St., Medway, MA 02053.

Notes of comfort and sympathy may be made to the family at MorrisOConnorBlute.com.

Portland

Anna Mancarella

Anna Mancarella, 86, of Middletown, passed away at the Portland Rehabilitation Center in Portland Monday, Jan. 11. She was born Jan. 21, 1929, daughter of the late Joseph and Mary (DellaRocco) Mancarella. She was employed as a welder at Pratt and Whitney.

She is survived by several nieces and nephews, great-nieces and nephews and great-great-nieces and nephews, as well as their children.

She is predeceased by two brothers, Carl and Albert Mancarella, as well as two sisters, Grace Spada and Lucille Mancarella.

A Mass of Christian Burial will be held Saturday, Jan. 16, at St. Pius X Church in Middletown, with interment in Pine Grove Cemetery in Middletown.

D'Angelo Funeral Home, 22 South Main St., Middletown, is in charge of arrangements.