

RIVEREAST

# News Bulletin

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**State Rep. Stops By...** State Rep. Gayle Mulligan (R-55th District) recently visited Hebron Elementary School to read to kids, to celebrate Read Across America Day as well as Women's History Month. She read her favorite Dr. Seuss book to mark the former, and *Grace for President* to mark the latter. See related story on page 23.

## Changes Coming to Elmcrest Proposal?

by Elizabeth Regan

The Portland Board of Selectmen, Planning and Zoning Commission, and Economic Development Commission will convene next week for a rare joint meeting to discuss potential zoning changes that could affect the revitalization of the historic Elmcrest Hospital campus.

Dan Bertram, principal of BRT Corporation of Danbury, who emerged as a potential developer about a year ago, wants the freedom to build many more than the 82 housing units approved by the commission in 2009 before the project stalled due to the economic downturn.

The property at the corner of routes 17A and 66 was originally pitched as the site of a mixed-use development focused on commercial and residential uses with an emphasis on retail.

Now Bertram, in partnership with the Rochester, N.Y.-based DiMarco Group, is asking the Planning and Zoning Commission to raise the ratio of mixed use from a maximum of three residential units for each 5,000 square feet of commercial space to a maximum of 20 units per 5,000 square feet.

Schematics available on the website of real estate consulting firm Ferrara Jerum International identify Bertram's proposed development as Brainerd Place, a 74,825 square foot "neighborhood shopping center" with 238 residential units.

The redevelopment effort is named for the one historic home out of three that would remain on the property as proposed: the Brainerd House, an Italianate building designed by New Haven architect Henry Austin and finished in

1852.

If Bertram's suggested ratio of housing units to commercial space is implemented, he will be able to seek zoning approval for as many as 300 units alongside the proposed shopping center.

The developer is also asking the commission to strike a clause in the mixed-use regulations which would require 50 percent of the commercial construction to be move-in ready before a certificate of occupancy can be issued for the residential portion – and vice-versa.

Town Planner Deanna Rhodes told commission members last month that the town attorney shares her reservations about Bertram's suggestion to eliminate the mixed-use zoning provision requiring 50 percent completion of the commercial part of the project before anyone can move into the housing portion, according to meeting minutes. She said the change would remove "the teeth" of the regulation that ensures a true mixed-use development.

Elwin Guild, a leader with the volunteer Elmcrest Campus Advisory Committee, described the suggestion as a "non-starter."

"That just exposes the town to an unfinished product. It would be too easy to do housing and just walk away from it," Guild said.

Planning and Zoning Commission Chairman Bruce Tyler said Wednesday he can't speak for the commission, but his own preference would be to reject Bertram's proposal to remove those teeth from the mixed-use regulation.

As for the number of housing units, Tyler See Changes Coming Page 2

## Talent Abounds in Hebron Show

by Geeta S. Sandberg

Last Friday, Feb. 26, I spent the evening at the third annual Hebron's Got Talent show. And as I sat there watching one act, then another, one thing became abundantly clear: Hebron (and technically the surrounding towns) really does have talent.

Presented by Gilead Congregational Church, proceeds from the event benefit the children's scholarship programs of AHM Youth and Family Services and Hebron Parks and Recreation.

Stephanie Haines, minister of mission and faith formation at Gilead Congregational, said this week the purpose of the event "is to celebrate that we all have been blessed with gifts and talents."

She furthered, "Countless individuals made our mission a reality by offering their gifts and talents either through volunteering, sponsorship, participating in the show or attending. The proceeds from the show will directly benefit local children in need, who may not have a chance to develop and explore their own talents and gifts, through the children's scholarship programs."

Haines added, "I personally believe every child should have the opportunity to grow socially and emotionally as well as pursue their

personal strengths and explore what ignites a 'spark' inside them. Who knows if in our own backyard there may be a child, or many children, who could change our future in positive and unimaginable ways? And shouldn't all children have that opportunity? Hopefully they will through our efforts."

This year those efforts brought in \$6,795 for the scholarship programs through an event that was entertaining from start to finish, thanks in part to the emcee skills of Marlborough resident Mark Dursin (who, it just so happens, was also my freshman English teacher at Glastonbury High School).

Dursin – returning for his third go-around as emcee – kept the audience laughing in between each act; at one point, he joked about making some requests this year for what he'd like waiting for him backstage.

"I'm not a diva or anything, but I like things just so. Little things, like a case of asparagus water. They're only \$6 a bottle at Whole Foods – a bargain! I wanted a candy buffet in the back, of course, with all the orange M&Ms removed – I'm not a barbarian!" he said to laughter.

And all joking aside, Dursin had it right when he called the talent show a "win-win" because

See Talent Abounds Page 2



At Hebron's Got Talent last Friday, 10 local acts showcased their talent, and the audience chose the RHAM Youth Cheerleaders as the 2016 winner. From left are emcee, Mark Dursin; the RHAM Youth Cheerleading team, Lexie Marques, Kaleena Walz, Emily Deskus, Caitlynn Lessard and Alyssa Tracey; and the three judges, Baron Ambrosia, last year's winner, Emma Dokmanovich, and Chris Ambrose.





**Elite Tap Team mesmerized the audience during last week's talent show with their high-energy, attitude-filled tap dancing routine that had celebrity judge Baron Ambrosia telling the group "you've single handedly redefined what tap dancing means in my eyes." But my favorite act was RHAM senior Mary Allain, who proved she definitely has talent when she played the piano and sang an original song. All three judges showered her with praise, and encouraged her to continue performing.**



**Talent Abounds cont. from Front Page**

entertainment.  
He added this week, "I thought it was a wonderful night. The acts were amazing, the audience was energetic, and most of all, I didn't make any major blunders! The third time really was a charm!"

Dursin furthered, "I always support any opportunities for people of all ages to share their talents. You know that expression: 'Don't hide your light under a bushel.' If you have a talent, you need to share it with the world. And I am so proud that I get to have a part – a small part – in a tradition that allows people to do just that."

Following each act, input was received from a team of three judges – and, rightfully, it was always positive. This year's judges were: Chris Ambrose, a retired educator with "more than half a century of viewing and listening to live theater and musical acts," according to the event program; and last year's winner Emma Dokmanovich, a RHAM senior and award winning dancer.

This year's celebrity judge, meanwhile, was Baron Ambrosia, a New York Emmy Award winner "who channels his mischievous spirit" to showcase mom and pop ethnic eateries in an

online series.

Talents showcased during this year's event included a variety of singing and dancing – all by performers with no shortage of skill. There was a group of jazz dancers with an upbeat, entertaining performance, and a hip-hop routine by 15 girls aged 10-13.

Meanwhile, RHAM eighth-grader Danielle Golden channeled Madame Morrible and Elphaba for a performance of "The Wizard and I" from the musical *Wicked*, and Norwich resident Sally Masse, who has acted in about 15 shows, sang "Don't Rain on my Parade" from *Funny Girl*. Ambrose said it best when he told Masse, "You brought the Great White Way to Hebron!"

The winner of the show received a trophy and \$250 and was determined by audience applause. This year, the winning performance happened to be the first: the RHAM Youth Cheerleading Squad. While the "applause-o-meter" is a fun creation, in my opinion using it means the winner is really chosen based on popularity rather than solely talent.

I don't mean to take away from the winning act – made up of five sixth and seventh-graders, the group mixed their cheerleading, danc-

ing and gymnastic talents for a routine the judges called amazing, fun and energetic – but I'd be remiss if I didn't share what I considered the top three performances talent-wise.

If I had my way, third place would go to the barbershop quartet Gaslight, made up of members from Chester, Farmington and Tolland along with Hebron resident Kevin Williams. Last year, the four were just random guys looking for a quartet at the 2015 New England Harmony Brigade; they've been performing together ever since.

The group performed Cole Porter's "Let's Do It" and they were really, really great. Ambrose called them "outstanding," Dokmanovich said they did a "great job," and Ambrosia remarked they were keeping a timeless tradition alive; I agree with all three of them.

In second place, I'd choose Elite Tap Team, made up of five girls aged 14-18. Their performance was mesmerizing and their skill was abundantly apparent. They made tap dancing their own with their style, attitudes and choreography.

"That was fire," said Ambrosia. "You've single-handedly redefined what tap dancing

means in my eyes."

"You guys killed it," added Dokmanovich. "That was super energetic and super stylized."

And finally, the performer I feel deserved the top spot was RHAM senior Mary Allain. The curtains parted and she was sitting on stage at a piano; she then proceeded to not only play, but sing – and an original song at that! She excelled in all three areas. She's a talented pianist with a beautiful voice and skills as a songwriter; her original song was stuck in my head long after the show came to a close.

Like me, the judges were similarly impressed.

"Hats off to your talent," said Ambrose. "Keep doing what you love because you're really good at it."

Ambrosia added, "I don't know a single person who doesn't wish they could do what you do. ... Please, please, keep doing it and take it as far as you can because it was really incredible."

And all in all, while the above three are tops in my book, every performer was talented and the event as a whole was a worthwhile way to spend an evening – one I hope continues.

**Changes Coming cont. from Front Page**

would like to see that figure lowered as well.

In a phone interview, Bertram said he came to the proposed housing ratio based on the 2015 Vibrant Communities Initiative study – compiled with input from the municipal, business and volunteer community as well as through multiple focus groups of residents – which recommended the town explore zoning changes, including an increase in residential units, as a way to support the community's shared vision for the property.

The study described the vision for the 12-acre former hospital site and about three acres of surrounding property as one that "has a mix of uses, is compatible with the historic buildings and provides village center character and shared amenity like the town green."

Each of three possible development scenarios outlined in the report – which Bertram said represents an analysis of what the market can support – exceed current zoning regulations. The first option shows 36,000 square feet of retail with 240 units of housing; the second shows 66,000 square feet of retail with 180 units of housing; and the final option shows 31,000 square feet of retail and office space with 125 units of housing. The scenarios come in at 33, 14 and 20 housing units per 5,000 square feet of commercial space, respectively.

That means implementing any of the scenarios would require the town to either approve the project based on its special circumstances or modify mixed-use regulations to allow for a bias toward residential development, according to the study.

Bertram said he is developing housing units in Brookfield with similarities to what he envisions for Portland. While he's not ready to release pricing yet, he said the Brookfield numbers are "in the ballpark."

According to the BRT website, apartments at Brookfield's Barnbeck Place range from \$1,060 to \$2,550 per month for a 450-1,240 square foot apartment. The site lists amenities including granite counters, stainless steel appliances, high end cabinetry and private decks in an elevator building.

While some people have expressed concerns in public comment periods at recent planning and zoning meetings about the possibility of a high number of low-rent apartments, Bertram said the cost of construction rules out any possibility for that kind of scenario.

"I would say to the extent that somebody actually wants to come down and look at what we're doing in Brookfield, they'd see the project is very nice and there's no low-income component even possible," he said.

Portland residents have also been adamant about preserving the historic integrity of the site as part of any plan to move forward. There was a public outcry when the Brainerd Place designs were released in September without the 1830 Hart-Jarvis House and 1884 Sage House. But Bertram said trying to mix modern housing and retail options with the historic elements of the site while making sure the project remains marketable and lucrative is a "puzzle."

"You can't do everything for everybody, but you can certainly do as much as you can. And we took that approach to the layout of the site," he said.

He described the project's namesake, the Brainerd House, as a beautiful building that he is particularly excited about restoring. "We'll enjoy bringing it back to – probably beyond – its original condition," he said.

Bertram will attend Wednesday's joint meeting of the Board of Selectmen, Planning and Zoning Commission, and Economic Development Commission. He said that kind of discussion with community stakeholders is key to a successful project.

First Selectwoman Susan Bransfield said the meeting presents an opportunity to inform the wider community about the zoning change request and everything that has led up to it.

"Whenever there is a major change or a major development in the community, it's very important to bring in the people who live in the community and let them know how things are proceeding. I think it's valuable to do that before any formal proposal has been presented and before any zoning change has been put for-

ward," she said.

There will be an opportunity for members of the public to speak at the end of the meeting, according to Bransfield.

She reiterated the importance of the Vibrant Communities Initiative study as a thoughtful, thorough document that represents what the community wants: an appropriate level of housing, preservation of the historic structures, and

a mix of retail options.

It's crucial, she said, to make sure town officials continue to listen to those in the community who come forward to talk about "how they want the town to be developed and how they want it to be conserved."

The special joint meeting will be held Wednesday at 7 p.m. at the Portland Public Library, 20 Freestone Ave.

## East Hampton Man Pleads Guilty to Computer Sex Crime

Keith Haessly, 46, of East Hampton, pled guilty Feb. 18 in federal court to using a computer to persuade minors to engage in unlawful sexual activity, Deirdre M. Daly, United States Attorney for the District of Connecticut, and Patricia M. Ferrick, Special Agent in Charge of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, said in a news release from the U.S. Attorney's Office, District of Connecticut.

The news release said that, according to court documents and statements made in court, from approximately August 2013 to June 2015, Haessly, using video chat programs such as Skype and Omegle, posed as a young female and used previously-recorded videos of females to entice numerous boys to engage in sexual activity over webcams. He then made recordings of the boys engaged in sexual activity, and distributed some of the images he recorded to an individual in Virginia.

To date, investigators have identified 48 in-

dividual victims, the U.S. Attorney's Office said. The effort to identify additional victims is ongoing.

Haessly has been detained since his arrest June 3, 2015. At the time of his arrest, he was a member of the Connecticut Air National Guard, the news release said.

Haessly pled guilty to one count of use of an interstate facility to persuade a minor to engage in unlawful sexual activity, an offense that carries a mandatory minimum term of imprisonment of 10 years, a maximum term of imprisonment of life and a fine of up to \$250,000. A sentencing date is not yet scheduled.

This matter is being investigated by the FBI and the Connecticut Child Exploitation Task Force, with the assistance of the Connecticut Air National Guard Office of Special Investigations. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Ray Miller.



# Portland Parents Concerned About Allergy Safeguards

by Elizabeth Regan

Portland parents April and Bruce Graves are concerned that guidelines to protect children with food allergies in the public school system don't go far enough – and the ones that exist aren't being enforced.

The couple told members of the Board of Education Tuesday that their two children with food allergies – a third-grader at Gildersleeve School and a first-grader at Valley View School – have been exposed to nuts on multiple occasions, despite a district-wide protocol to prevent such situations.

Most recently, their younger son came home from a Valentine's Day party with three peanut butter cups in a gift bag, according to April Graves. She said her younger son's allergy is triggered by eating peanuts or tree nuts; her older son, on the other hand, could experience a reaction simply by breathing in airborne particles from the same allergens.

Her first-grader didn't realize there were peanuts in the treats he brought back from school, she said, "which then brought the allergen into our home."

The American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology describes the most serious allergic reaction to nuts, which is called anaphylaxis, as a whole-body response that could include impaired breathing, swelling in the throat, a sudden drop in blood pressure and fainting or dizziness. It can be fatal if not treated with epinephrine.

The Graves said their sons didn't end up with allergic reactions in any of the situations they are complaining about, but the risk is always there.

"I have a serious issue when my kid leaves my house; there's a chance he may not come

back home," Bruce Graves said.

The Graves are now advocating for "food-free parties" in school, to make sure children aren't exposed to allergens.

April Graves acknowledged the importance of celebrations as part of the school experience, but pointed to food as an unnecessary and potentially dangerous component of the festivities.

"Many other towns, especially towns around us, have switched to food-free parties and with much success," she said.

Kimberly Nagy-Maruschok, who lives in Portland and teaches in Cromwell, said the Cromwell school district has instituted a food-free celebration policy.

According to Cromwell's Plan For Managing Life-Threatening Food Allergies available online, the policy went into effect in 2011.

"There was some hubbub. Parents were upset. Teachers grumbled," Nagy-Maruschok said – but now it's part of the culture.

"I think it is something that needs to be looked at, and something needs to change," she told members of the Portland school board.

In addition to their concerns about the peanut butter treats that came home from school at Valley View, April and Bruce Graves said staff members at Gildersleeve ate allergen-containing foods in their older son's presence on three occasions, despite being in peanut- and tree nut-free zones (which are any area at the school where a person with a known peanut allergy is present).

Principals at both schools have been receptive to their concerns, according to the Graves.

April Graves said a 504 plan – referring to the section of U.S. civil rights law ensuring

people with disabilities can be full participants in any federally-funded program – was instituted for her older son at Gildersleeve in November as a way to make sure reasonable accommodations are made and that all staff and students are aware of the dangers of allergens. Graves pointed to additional signage put up around the school and a professional development workshop held to raise awareness.

But her son has been exposed to foods containing nuts since then, she said. That's why she is asking the school board to examine and strengthen its policies.

Superintendent of Schools Philip O'Reilly said the school is following food allergy guidelines that went into effect district wide in 2012.

The guidelines include a requirement for the school nurse to let all staff members know which children have allergies and what those specific are. Staff members must make any classroom or teaching space allergen-free "for any/all students that may be in their area at any point during the day." It also specifies that any food consumed in a classroom or teaching area that is not provided by food service must first be cleared by the nurse.

State statute requires the district to post the guidelines on the district website or individual school websites. O'Reilly provided the document Wednesday via email but said he was not aware of the state requirement to post it online.

O'Reilly said he is committed to ensuring student safety and the school board shares that mission.

"As superintendent of schools, I'm not going to permit any child, for any reason, to be put in danger," he said. "There's lots of things that we do to protect our kids and we will con-

tinue to do what we need to do to make sure they're safe."

He applauded the board's open and receptive way of dealing with issues that arise. "That's an honorable part of this board: to listen to the people's concerns and then act, if they believe as a board they should," he said.

A subcommittee of the school board is in the process of drafting a policy to address food allergies. While there is a set of allergy guidelines written by school staff, O'Reilly said there is currently no Board of Education policy to direct the district in areas including accommodating students with special dietary needs.

There is, however, a section of health-related policy about when and how to use epinephrine, commonly known as the EpiPen, in cases of anaphylaxis.

The Connecticut Association of Boards of Education describes school board policy as the "road map" for any school district. "They give direction to the administration and staff and become the foundation for accountability," the organization said on its website.

According to Board of Education Chairwoman MaryAnne Rode, members look for guidance from the superintendent as well as legal and medical advisors when looking at policy issues.

"It's never in our best interest to jump to any sort of immediate action without being fully informed," she said. "So we're in the process now of getting fully informed."

Once the board understands the issue completely, the board can make recommendations about reviewing and updating policies – or bringing new policies forward, Rode said.

## Portland Voters Support Property Purchase for Trail Head

by Elizabeth Regan

Portland voters poured into the Mary Flood room of the local library Wednesday in what supporters of the Air Line Trail called an "overwhelming" show of support for the purchase of property slated to serve as the trail head.

By a vote of 64 to 6, taxpayers authorized the town to buy 78 and 82 Middle Haddam Rd. for \$172,000. The sale involves two parcels: 21.7 acres with 25 feet of road frontage and 1.0 acre with 188 feet of road frontage.

The \$172,000 price tag, including fees, will be paid through the capital non-recurring fund and the land preservation fund as well as line items for legal fees and contingencies.

Air Line Trail Steering Committee member Lou Pear said the vote reinforces widespread support for bringing the trail, which cuts a 50-mile swath of recreational opportunity across eastern Connecticut, into Portland.

"This will help economic development, it will help for recreation; families and children will be able to bike and walk safely within the town," Pear said.

First Selectwoman Susan Bransfield said she

was encouraged by the number of people who turned out to support the town purchase.

"I'm just so grateful for everybody's endorsement of this wonderful purchase and I look forward to the opening of our Air Line Trail," she said. "We're keeping our fingers crossed that we're successful in getting the grant that we've applied for to do all of the necessary trail finish work."

A licensing agreement with Eversource Energy signed last month cleared the way for the Air Line Trail Steering Committee to move forward on its rails-to-trails initiative. The 2.2-mile trail will extend from the East Hampton border near Depot Hill Road and will run close to Route 66 before branching off to cross Middle Haddam Road and Breezy Corners Road on its way the termination point near the Middlesex YMCA's Camp Ingersoll.

The town has applied for a Department of Energy and Environmental Protection trail development grant for \$685,932. Awards are expected to be announced later this month.

## New Principal for Portland Valley View

When the new school year starts in the fall, there will be a new head of Valley View School.

The Board of Education Tuesday appointed Jessica Bruenn as the principal of the school for students in preschool through grade two. Bruenn starts July 1, replacing long-time principal Deborah Graner, who will retire in June.

Bruenn, the assistant principal at Hartford Prekindergarten Magnet School since its inception almost three years ago, holds certifications as an elementary educator, special educator and intermediate school administrator. She is currently attending the PK-3 Leadership Program at the University of Connecticut's NEAG School of Education.

Prior to her administrative experience, Bruenn taught numerous elementary grade levels in Southington and special education in Bridgeport. In 2011, she was selected as Southington's Teacher of the Year. Previous

superintendents have described Bruenn as a dynamic leader and "master teacher" and someone of "extraordinary substance" as well as "one of the state's finest emerging leaders," according to a press release put out by Portland Public Schools.

Bruenn and Superintendent of Schools Phillip O'Reilly will craft a transition plan that will include parent outreach activities and multiple opportunities for the incoming principal to meet with Graner and staff members. Bruenn will take an active role in interviewing and selecting teachers for the numerous open positions at Valley View, as well as the summer transition of grade two students to Gildersleeve School. (Starting in the fall, Gildersleeve will house the town's second-graders, in addition to grades three and four; Valley View will serve students in preschool through first grade.)

# East Hampton School Board Adopts \$29.34 Million Budget

by Elizabeth Regan

The Board of Education this week unanimously approved a \$29.34 million proposed budget, at a 1.9 percent increase over the current year's budget, as part of Superintendent of Schools Paul Smith's effort to make sure the spending plan passes in one referendum.

Smith has been vocal that the proposal represents the smallest increase possible without laying off teachers or cutting whole programs.

"This is not a flexible number. It is *the* number needed to maintain," Smith said in a detailed budget narrative he sent out as part of his outreach to the schools and the wider community.

Fixed costs – including contractual salary, benefits and transportation increases – came in at 3.2 percent over the current year's budget, forcing cuts elsewhere in the spending plan.

The proposed budget eliminates 2.4 teaching positions and one non-union staffing position through attrition. It also reduces various

line items for things like supplies, minor equipment and textbooks.

While Smith's proposal falls short of the Town Council dictate to come in at a zero percent increase, he said it's as close as he can get without doing "irreparable damage" to the town's educational system.

Any further cuts could mean laying off five to seven teachers, he said in response to board member questions Monday as they prepared to vote on the proposal.

But cutting teaching positions isn't the only option. He cited programs, like middle school sports and other afterschool opportunities, that could end up on the chopping block: "Things I hate to eliminate in a time when we're trying to keep students connected to school for their own safety and for their own emotional, artistic and academic development."

At an interactive budget workshop held dur-

ing a Board of Education meeting last month, several parents expressed concern about the elimination of the 2.4 teaching positions. The cuts will affect language arts intervention and science at the middle school, according to Smith. That means there will be fewer reading interventionists in the building and science classes may be larger next year.

Some parents and community members also worried that the budget proposal could have disastrous results if voters at referendum think, as has been the case in years past, that there's extra padding built in.

During budget deliberations, Republican school board member Tania Sones said the tightness of the budget is concerning. She said a larger kindergarten class than anticipated, an influx in special education students or a cold, snowy winter could upset the delicate balance.

"For me, I'm uncomfortable not budgeting

for the 'what-ifs,'" Sones said. Still, she joined the rest of the board in rallying around Smith's proposal in a united front to send a clear message to the Town Council, the Board of Finance and, ultimately, all the voters.

Smith said maintaining the status quo when he would prefer to move forward with advances in such areas as digital learning – which he said towns around East Hampton already enjoy – is a response to last year's difficult budget process that dragged on for four referendums.

"It's a year to pass it in one, regain the faith, and then move forward and talk about how we can advance the schools," he said.

Republican Jarod Bushey expressed hope that the proposal will be a foundation on which to build in the coming years.

"When we ask for a need next year, it'll be actually considered a need and not looked at as a want," he said.

# Bieri Resigns from Hebron Board of Education

by Geeta S. Sandberg

Hebron resident Ramon Bieri announced at Tuesday's meeting of the boards of selectmen and finance that he'd resigned from his role on the Board of Education.

Bieri, a Democrat, was elected to serve on the Board of Finance last November; at the time, he was already a member of the Board of Education and the dual role, while not prohibited by state statute or town charter, was a cause for concern for some.

Among those who expressed unease over Bieri's ability to serve unbiased on both boards was Republican Town Committee Chairwoman Catherine Marx, who said in December, "It's going to be very difficult for Mr. Bieri to work in the budget process unless he decides which budget he's going to vote on upfront."

The Board of Finance has the ability to decide the Board of Education's bottom line and how much will – or will not – be cut from the spending package should it fail at referendum.

"It's nothing against Mr. Bieri," Marx said in December. "It's not personal. But what it does is, if we do not address the problem of someone serving on two boards like this, it creates a precedent for boards in the future. So I think that we have to do due diligence in understand-

ing and dealing with it; we can't allow it to go undiscussed and not vetted through the current process."

Marx added Wednesday, "I think everybody understood that it would be in the best interest to choose one of the two boards. That he chose the Board of Finance is his choice and I'm sure that the Hebron Democratic Town Committee can find a candidate to serve on the Hebron Board of Education."

She concluded, "This was a situation that resided with the Hebron Democratic Town Committee and that's where it was taken care of and I respect that."

Democratic Town Committee member and Board of Finance Chairman Malcolm Leichter shared this week he had been concerned "mainly because of the issues that were being raised by people from the community about the ability or inability to be objective and being able to give 100 percent support to one or the other board."

Being on both boards, he said, put Bieri "in a position where there could be question as to the motives."

In the resignation letter Bieri submitted Tuesday, he wrote, "For the past two years, I have

had the privilege and honor to serve as a member of the Hebron Board of Education for our community, our children and for the families of our town. I have been proud to be instrumental in helping our schools foster confidence, creativity, responsibility and academic excellence."

However, he added "I am submitting my resignation from the Hebron Board of Education due to personal reasons" effective March 1.

Bieri elaborated on those "personal reasons" at Tuesday's meeting, explaining he decided to resign not because he was uncertain in his ability to serve unbiased, but due to pressure from others and to save his family from ridicule.

"I'm disappointed in the town leadership," Bieri said. "I'm resigning because of pressure from the Democratic Town Committee and I was informed by the DTC chair that I was to be publically condemned [by the committee]."

Bieri is referring to a letter to the editor members of the DTC had been planning to submit to the *Rivereast* if he didn't resign.

But Democratic Town Committee Chairman Ted Bromley said this week the letter they were planning to submit "wasn't a public condem-

nation at all."

He explained the DTC decided as a result of the length of time people had been discussing whether or not Bieri was going to hold both positions "that at some point the DTC itself had to take a position on it," which was what the letter aimed to do.

"But it wasn't accusing him of doing any wrongdoing," Bromley furthered. "There were several versions written by different [DTC] members and in almost all there was an acknowledgment that Ray was legally entitled to serve on both boards and it was only the appearance of impropriety that was troubling."

Bromley stated, "We totally understand the town attorney's position and that Ray could legally hold both positions, but both boards work so closely together that there could be an appearance of impropriety – there was growing public concern as we enter the budget season."

Town Manager Andrew Tierney reiterated that position this week saying "it was legal" for Bieri to be on both boards but added, "It was apparent there was a conflict."

"I think everyone was trying to look out for the betterment of Hebron," he concluded.

# Hebron Town Manager Proposes 1.63 Budget Increase

by Geeta S. Sandberg

Town Manager Andrew Tierney proposed a budget Tuesday night that amounts to \$36.63 million, for a 1.63 percent, or \$247,624, increase over current year spending.

The 2016-17 budget package includes: \$9,265,664 for general government; \$11,990,454 for the Hebron Board of Education budget, an amount that is flat with current year spending; and \$15,373,307 for the town's portion of the RHAM Board of Education budget – for a \$36,629,425 total.

The general government portion equates to a \$12,017 increase, or .17 percent. Major increases include \$67,169 in salary obligations; \$60,515 for state trooper services; and a \$10,621 contribution for the 27th payroll or "calendar creep," which is due to the bi-weekly pay schedule. Getting paid bi-weekly doesn't add up to the calendar days and as a result, every 11th year there's an extra pay period.

In the current budget \$105,000 was included to cover the 27th payroll and during the budget presentation last year, Jeff Watt, the Board of Selectmen's then-chair, expressed frustration nothing had been put in place ahead of time to prepare for the calendar creep; Tierney had explained it was a problem inherited from past town officials, and said moving forward he was going to put funds aside ahead of time.

Other increases in the town government budget are: \$10,023 for computer support; \$8,406 for the Chatham Health District due to the loss of a member town; \$7,678 for part-time payroll for police; and \$5,500 for an increase in workers compensation.

Decreases, meanwhile, include a \$31,556 reduction in the amount budgeted for AHM Youth and Family Services which was moved

to the Hebron Board of Education budget; a decrease in fulltime payroll due to last year's budget which included the 27th payroll; savings across all budgets for utilities, heating fuel, diesel fuel and gasoline; and a medical insurance reduction.

The budget proposal also includes a number of continued initiatives that are offset by revenues. These are: sharing the building inspector with Marlborough, a turf management agreement with RHAM, and funding for an EMS responder which is reimbursed by ambulance revenue.

Other initiatives included in the budget are: \$15,000 for legal services for a comprehensive zoning regulations review; \$30,000 for second-year funding for a computer replacement plan; and \$5,990 for increased hours for the part-time fire chief.

The budget proposal also includes a \$125,000 contribution to open space/land acquisition which is an increase over last year's contribution but falls short of the selectmen's goal to contribute half a million dollars annually.

In addition, an \$85,000 contribution to debt management is included; Tierney explained, "This is the first time in several years the town has been in a financial position to make such a contribution. It is anticipated the debt management fund will help to level off the tax impact in future years when new debt hits the budget" such as for the construction of a new public works facility.

The proposal also includes an \$828,011 contribution for Capital Improvement Projects (CIP) that cost more than \$25,000, along with a \$78,100 contribution for capital expenditures

between \$5-25,000; a \$50,000 contribution for revaluation; and an \$8,800 contribution for capital non-recurring projects.

Following Tierney's presentation, the CIP committee recommended 14 projects totaling \$1,056,916 to be incorporated in the budget. These include, in order of priority, \$76,370 for the final year of a lease payment for a replacement fire truck purchased in 2014; \$260,946 for road resurfacing and road improvements; \$66,650 for a generator at the Douglas Library; \$117,000 in partial funding for the replacement of breathing apparatus for the fire department; \$95,000 in partial funding for the replacement of an ambulance; and \$75,000 for building ventilation and an air conditioning system at the town office building.

In addition, \$53,450 is included for an air conditioning system for the Gilead Hill School activity room along with \$49,000 for the replacement of a 22-year-old flatbed truck for the public works department; \$80,000 in partial funding for the replacement of a 38-year-old CAT loader; \$50,000 in partial funding for the replacement of an 18-year-old roadside tractor and mower; and \$41,500 in partial funding for the town's contribution to a sidewalk plan dependent upon the town receiving a state Local Transportation Capital Improvement Program (LOTICIP) grant.

Lastly, \$47,000 is included for a tractor replacement along with \$25,000 in partial funding to replace flooring at the Russel Mercier Senior Center; and \$20,000 in partial funding for the replacement/update of the HVAC system at the Douglas Library.

In addition to the town's contribution, funding for the CIP projects is proposed as coming

from: a \$33,574 balance from previous appropriations, \$70,831 in Local Capital Improvement Program (LOCIP) grant monies, and \$124,500 in anticipated state reimbursement from the Hebron Elementary School roof project.

If the budget were approved as it currently stands, it would result in a mill rate of 36.417 for personal property and real estate – up from 36 mills. With the mill rate increase, a resident with a home assessed at \$250,000 would be responsible for \$9,104 in taxes, up from \$9,000.

(The motor vehicle mill rate, however, will be 32 mills as a result of Public Act 15-244 which established new requirements for taxing motor vehicles and prohibits towns from using a mill rate greater than 32.)

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Now that the initial budget has been proposed, the numbers will be reviewed throughout March, with the Board of Selectmen making a recommendation to the Board of Finance by March 31. The selectmen will conduct a public hearing on the spending package Tuesday, March 22, at 7:30 p.m. in the Douglas Library community room, and the Board of Finance is scheduled to hold a budget hearing at RHAM High School Tuesday, April 12, at 7 p.m.

Ultimately, the budget will be sent to referendum Tuesday, May 3, with voting occurring from 6 a.m.-8 p.m. at Hebron Elementary school.

Information on the budget can be found in the town clerk's office, the Douglas Library and the senior center or by going to [hebronct.com](http://hebronct.com); budget-related questions or comments can be sent to [hebronbudget@hebronct.com](mailto:hebronbudget@hebronct.com).

# Tierney Receives Praise and a Raise

by Geeta S. Sandberg

Town Manager Andrew Tierney received praise – along with a 2.5 percent raise and a one-time-only \$2,500 bonus – following the conclusion of his annual performance review by the Board of Selectmen.

The annual town manager review for 2015 came to an end after an executive session at the Feb. 18 Board of Selectmen's meeting. Board chairman Dan Larson spoke to Tierney's performance this week, and said the town was lucky to have him.

"We feel he's done a great job for the Town of Hebron and we're very pleased and consider ourselves lucky to have him," Larson stated.

He added, "Overall he's been very involved with a lot of projects throughout town. He attends lots of meetings; he's been a strong advocate for the Town of Hebron and looking out for the town's best interests and trying to get things rolling on the John Horton Boulevard area, and trying to entice new businesses into town."

"Right now," Larson furthered, "he's work-

ing on the natural gas system – we've had a chance at getting that brought into the center of town which will help not only existing businesses and residents but could be a solid enticement to other new development projects that may want to come into town."

Regarding potential areas for concern, Larson said it really just had to do with ensuring Tierney didn't burn himself out.

"He's so involved with so many things we want to make sure he doesn't burn himself out! You can only burn a candle from so many ends. So we're probably concerned he doesn't let his health suffer from all the different areas that he's taking an active part in, and trying to remedy and come up with solutions," Larson said.

Meanwhile, Board of Selectmen Vice Chairwoman Gail Richmond said, "I think he's serving the Town of Hebron well. We all do."

The selectmen explained in a press release Tierney scored "above average" in the review, and they said they were "very pleased with the overall review and the management of the

town."

Also sharing praise for Tierney this week was selectman Brian O'Connell who said, "I think he has done a good job. He has been given very good reviews by both the Board of Selectmen and his management team and we are very happy with his performance so far."

Speaking to the result of the review Wednesday, Tierney himself was all praise, for his colleagues.

"I want to thank my staff – they also contributed in my review," he said. "I appreciate them having the faith in me for leading the town."

I really appreciate the support I get and I couldn't do it without them."

Tierney started working for the town as the public works director in 1996 and stepped into the role of interim town manager on two occasions. First, he handled the town's duties as part of a three-member team with town planner Mike O'Leary and executive assistant Donna Lanza in 2009. He then served a second time for a stint that started in December 2011 and lasted until he became permanent town manager in October 2012.



# \$54.23 Million Budget Calls for Small Tax Increase in Colchester

by Kaitlyn Schroyer

First Selectman Art Shilosky presented his proposed 2016-17 fiscal year budget Tuesday to the finance board – a \$54.23 million spending plan that features a .8 percent tax increase.

The \$54.23 million spending package includes \$39.80 million in the education budget and \$14.44 million in town operations. Town operations, Shilosky said, increased by \$676,411, or 4.91 percent over the approved 2015-16 budget. Of the increase, \$100,000 is in road improvements and \$222,225 is in insurance, he said.

The budget proposal features a mill rate of 31.01, up from the current year's 30.76. The mill rate is used to determine residents' taxes; a resident can determine their taxes by multiplying the mill rate by their total assessments. One mill is equal to \$1 in tax per \$1,000 of assessed property and under the proposed mill rate of 31.01, a resident with a home assessed at \$250,000 would pay \$7,752 in taxes.

Shilosky stressed 2016-17 will be a tough year, with \$137,986 less expected to come in state aid. But, unlike other towns, at least Colchester won't be impacted by the state's decision to cap motor vehicle taxes, starting with the 2016-17 year. The mill rate for motor vehicle taxes is capped at 32 – but that's above Colchester's proposed mill rate. Shilosky pointed out that starting with the 2017-18 year, the car tax mill rate cap will be set at 29.36, so

the cap will likely impact Colchester then.

During a Board of Finance meeting Wednesday to discuss the town budget, the finance board was quiet, with only a few clarifications sought on the spending proposal. Overall, the board agreed with the budget, stating the three major increases – to health insurance, capital, and road maintenance – were all things the board wanted and expected in the proposed budget.

In the general government line item, the town budget went up \$318,767 to total \$3,695,043. Some highlights, Shilosky said, includes increasing the hours for the fire marshal from 20 hours a week to 25 hours a week, consolidating two part-time information technology positions into a full-time position to save money, and increased cost for worker's compensation. Shilosky stated Wednesday that the fire marshal position was previously full-time and had been cut back to part-time; however, more hours are needed for the necessary inspections and investigations. Regarding the information technology positions, Shilosky said there had been two part-time employees, but one person recently left, so there's only one person there anyway.

The public safety line is decreasing \$119 to \$2,689,100. A major highlight of this line, he said, is adding a third Colchester Police shift for part of the week, so that there will be

Colchester Police coverage 24 hours a day five days a week. Shilosky noted this was done by rescheduling current officers – so the extra shift can be done without adding police officers or increasing overtime funding. Other police items included in the public safety line are the replacement of police uniform and gear including body armor, the replacement of mobile radios and Taser units, and the addition of a laser speed enforcement unit.

For the fire department, there is increased overtime to meet training requirements, and ongoing replacement of personal safety equipment including turnout gear and a fire hose. Shilosky pointed out the town realized some savings with a change in dispatch services from the soon-to-be-defunct Colchester Emergency Communications to Quinebaug Valley Emergency Communications in Killingly. However, he said Middlesex Hospital will be charging for ambulance services.

The public works line increased \$77,290 to total \$3,427,938. Items included were increased funds for road improvements, overseeding for the fields, a reconfiguration of the facilities manager position, and a reduction in heating oil, diesel, and gasoline costs.

Community services increased \$53,882 to total \$1,566,434. Shilosky said that line includes reinstating two hours per Saturday during the school year at Cragin Memorial Library

and six hours per Saturday during the summer, along with increased funding for Collaborative for Colchester's Children, increased expenses for Chatham Health District and continued funding for the substance abuse counselor. The budget also calls for an increase in hours for the social services coordinator at Colchester Youth and Social Services – though Shilosky noted the separate position of part-time seasonal social services coordinator at CYSS would have a decrease in hours from 14 hours a week to seven hours a week.

The debt service line decreased by \$59,200 to \$1,842,266.

Capital and transportation, Shilosky explained, has a lot of items that are in different phases of funding. Many of the items are multi-year budget lines in order to save for the larger purchases, he said. Overall, the line increased \$285,791 to \$1,219,056.

Some of the capital items included vehicle replacement plans, facility repairs on Town Hall, repairs on the highway garage, repairs at the library and youth center, resurfacing the tennis courts, information technology repairs, fire department equipment, and the town matching funds for a grant for the senior services wheelchair accessible van replacement.

The town and school budgets will go to public forum on Monday, March 7, at 7 p.m. at Town Hall.

## Colchester Residents Want More in School Budget

by Kaitlyn Schroyer

Community members filled two of the meeting rooms at Town Hall Tuesday to lodge their displeasure that the proposed Board of Education budget is set to remain flat with current year spending.

Residents spoke for over an hour to the Board of Finance, requesting the board add money back into the spending plan.

In January, Superintendent of Schools Jeff Mathieu presented a proposed \$40.04 million budget to the school board for the 2016-17 fiscal year. The spending package would have been a \$241,822, or 0.61 percent, increase from current year spending.

However, at the end of February the school board adopted a \$39.80 million, zero percent increase budget. The budget proposal, which is exactly \$730 less than the approved 2015-16 budget, calls for cutting teachers and the schools' facilities manager position, as well as several other reductions.

The cuts include four certified teachers – including a new 1.0 full-time-equivalent (FTE) special education position at Jack Jackter Intermediate School, for a \$50,330 savings. Other teachers reduced are already employed by the

school system: a 0.4 FTE science teacher at Bacon Academy, for a \$20,089 savings; a 0.4 FTE world language teacher at Bacon for a \$20,089 savings; and a 0.2 FTE world language at William J. Johnston Middle School for \$10,045.

Mathieu explained these teacher cuts would increase class sizes and also not add needed special education support to JJIS.

Other cuts from Mathieu's January budget proposal were \$44,265 less from the capital reserve fund, and \$40,672 less for technology. Another reduction was cutting the facilities manager position, to save \$44,517. Currently, that position is filled by Tony Gallicchio, who also is the town's facilities manager. The school board pays half Gallicchio's salary, while the town pays the other half. The reduction makes the facilities manager a part-time town employee.

The zero percent increase budget was presented Tuesday to the finance board – and almost immediately, residents began complaining about it, with many saying Mathieu's January proposal was good enough.

"Frankly for Mr. Mathieu to come in at a

0.61 [percent increase], we should be sending him 'thank you' cards and shaking his hand," resident Jeff Newton said. He said there are towns across the state that are seeing budgets coming in at 3 or 4 percent higher than the current year. He noted he works for a school district in another town, and that school's budget proposal is at 4.56 percent higher than current year spending.

Newton said he recommends the finance board give the \$242,000 cut from Mathieu's initial proposal back to the school board.

Michael Egan, a former member of the Board of Education, agreed, and said the finance board should consider that state funds for education have been capped for approximately eight years.

"So when our education budget was significantly less, how much we were getting from the state was a much larger proportion," Egan said. "At one time there was a lawsuit because the state of Connecticut was supposed to be funding education 50 percent. They have never even come close to reaching that."

Egan said "stuff flows downhill" and that funding education is "on us," meaning the town. "We need to support them because Hartford

is not doing it," Egan said. "We need to do it here."

Resident Vince Rose, who unsuccessfully ran for the town Board of Education last year, also spoke about increasing the school budget, saying larger class sizes cost more long-term.

"It's a false savings," Rose said. "Kids learn slower and learn less and we have to make up for it and spend more in the long run."

Cindy Praisner, resident and coordinator for C3 (Collaborative for Colchester's Children), supported Rose's statement and said declining enrollment is not straight division especially at the high school level.

"I have a freshman in high school and there are 32 students in her English class," Praisner said. "That's too many kids in one class."

Praisner stated she was also concerned since special education costs went up 24 percent; however, the finance board still expects the budget to stay at a zero percent increase.

Although the Board of Finance did not have many questions for the school board Tuesday night, the school budget was expected to be discussed by the finance board Thursday night, after press time.

## East Hampton Police Use Narcan to Save Life

An East Hampton police officer last Thursday saved a life using the overdose antidote commonly known as Narcan – less than two weeks after the department was equipped with the drug.

Officer Maciej Bankowski responded to a reported heroin overdose at a Main Street address Feb. 25 at approximately 4:15 p.m., according to Sgt. Timothy D. Dowty.

Dowty said Bankowski checked the airway of an unconscious 37-year-old man, whom

other residents reported had been using heroin, and found that he was breathing. When the victim didn't respond to any stimulus, Bankowski administered Naloxone to reverse the effects of an overdose.

Two East Hampton police officers joined Bankowski at the scene before East Hampton Volunteer Ambulance arrived to transport the victim to the hospital for treatment, Dowty said.

## Police News

2/22: Colchester Police said they are investigating a burglary in a barn on River Road. Police reported the barn was broken into sometime Feb. 22 and numerous tools were stolen including a rare Multiplaz 3500 plasma cutter/welder. Anyone with information can call Officer Adam Regnere at 860-537-7270.

2/22: Colchester Police said Jeffrey Frazer, 44, of 240 Lebanon Ave., was arrested and charged with third-degree criminal mischief, disorderly conduct, interfering with an emergency call and third-degree assault.

2/24: State Police said Nicole Ricketts, 29, of 17 Regan St., Vernon, was arrested and charged with failure to appear.

2/25: Colchester Police said a 17-year-old juvenile was arrested and charged with use of drug paraphernalia, possession of marijuana with intent to sell, and possession of marijuana.

2/25: State Police said Monica Piette, 31, of Norwich Avenue, was arrested and charged with third-degree assault and disorderly conduct.

2/25: State Police said Heidi Wasylyshyn, 32, of 3567 Hebron Ave., Glastonbury, was arrested and charged with DUI and unsafe backing.

2/26: State Police said Michelle Niesyn, 44, of 28 Grimes Rd., Rocky Hill, was arrested and charged with failure to appear.

2/26: State Police said Joanne Vasques, 61, of 219 Martin Rd., Hebron, was arrested and charged with failure to appear.

2/27: Colchester Police said they are investigating after someone forced their way into a barn on Middletown Road and stole a JNC battery starter pack between Feb. 23 and Feb. 27. Anyone with information can call Officer Eric Watrous at 860-537-7270.

2/28: State Police said Anthony Allen, 29, of 9 Newman Ave., Waterbury, was arrested and charged with DUI and failure to drive in the proper lane.

2/29: State Police said Jason Rivera, 33, of 246 6th St., Bridgeport, was arrested and charged with speeding

## Portland Police News

2/21: Ross Taylor, 55, of 208 Main St., Apt. 3, was charged with first-degree criminal mischief, Portland Police said.

2/22: James Granata, 57, of 1503 Portland Cobalt Rd., was charged with possession of drug paraphernalia, possession of less than four ounces of marijuana, possession of narcotics, possession of narcotics with intent to sell and narcotics not kept in original container, police said.

2/22: Michael Dickinson, 51, of 83 Airline Ave., was charged with possession of narcotics and possession of drug paraphernalia, police said.

# Former Colchester Resident Trooper Sues State Police Union

by Kaitlyn Schroyer

Sgt. Joseph Mercer – a former Colchester resident state trooper supervisor – recently filed a federal lawsuit against the state police commissioner and the state police union, claiming he was retaliated against for choosing not to belong to the union.

The complaint was filed Feb. 29, with free legal assistance from the National Right to Work Foundation.

According to court documents, Mercer is claiming the defendants – Commissioner of the Department of Emergency Services Dora Schriro, the Connecticut State Police Union, and Union President Andrew Matthews – violated his first and 14th amendment rights for “exercising his right to be a nonmember of the union, refrain from funding the union’s political and non-bargaining activities, and to advocate on behalf of the rights of nonmembers.”

Mercer’s complaint also claims the “defendants retaliated against Sgt. Mercer by transferring his job from a supervisory, command position to one that is mostly administrative, resulting in the loss of significant potential pensionable overtime and reputation.”

Mark Dumas, attorney for the state police union, said Wednesday generally the union does not comment on pending litigation; however, he is “confident that this lawsuit will ultimately be dismissed.”

The complaint claims the issue began Nov. 14, 2014, when Mercer resigned his union membership and objected to paying for the union’s expenses unrelated to collective bargaining, contract administration and grievance adjustment. After Mercer left the union, the complaint states he informed coworkers of their rights to do so and troopers Carson Konow and Collin Konow also resigned.

The three troopers, along with recently-retired trooper Marc Lamberty – all nonmembers

– filed a federal civil rights lawsuit claiming more money was taken out of their pay in union dues than was required, and that this additional money was used for political purposes. That lawsuit is currently pending.

When Mercer left the union, he was employed full-time by state police as the resident state trooper for Colchester. He also worked part-time in the State Police Tactical Unit (SWAT), part of Emergency Services.

Last April, Mercer was appointed by the commanding officer for Emergency Services to the operations sergeant position, effective May 15. The operations sergeant position, according to the complaint, is a “highly prestigious, desired command position with significant supervisory authority.”

However, the complaint said, upon learning of Mercer’s transfer, Matthews began to investigate the matter. Last June, he filed an institutional grievance over the appointment, stating there was no official selections process, reviewing others for the position.

According to Mercer’s complaint, none of his predecessors in the operations sergeant position – which were all union members – had ever had an institutional grievance filed against them, and there was no selections process for them either.

The complaint stated more issues arose after an Oct. 9, 2015, incident in Old Saybrook, where an armed suspect barricaded himself at a hotel.

Mercer was co-commander of the SWAT team assigned to the incident. After communication with the suspect failed, Mercer and his acting commander devised a plan and, at the time, no one raised any objections.

According to the complaint, during the execution of the plan, the suspect pointed a gun at one of the SWAT members which resulted in

him being shot by two SWAT troopers, Dan McCarthy and Carson Konow.

Standard practice after such an incident is to review the operation. The complaint stated no SWAT leaders or members involved raised concerns.

But at an Oct. 19 invitation-only meeting – meaning a meeting attended only by the union members that Matthews had chosen to be there – Matthews criticized Mercer’s handling of the Old Saybrook shooting, the complaint said. It was the first time the union had ever raised a concern about the handling of a SWAT operation, Mercer said in the complaint.

On Oct. 20, Mercer met with high-ranking state police officials about Old Saybrook – and they were all satisfied with Mercer’s handling of the situation.

But on Oct. 22, the complaint said, Schriro requested Mercer come to a meeting, and indicated to him “the union president threatened her with a press conference over certain issues regarding the Emergency Services division raised by the union.” After Mercer explained the decisions at the Old Saybrook incident, Schriro “expressed her satisfaction.”

The complaint said Mercer informed Schriro of his lawsuit with the three other troopers against the union, his union membership resignation and his advocacy on the behalf of the rights of nonmembers.

Mercer soon got word that Schriro requested, but did not order, his commanders to transfer him. The commanders refused, the complaint said.

On Oct. 26, Matthews held another invitation-only meeting with select union members. And, inside that meeting, he also had a closed-door meeting with Schriro, the complaint said. “About 10 minutes later, Matthews came out and announced to the [union] attendees that ‘it

was a done deal.’”

By Oct. 27, Mercer was transferred to the Office of Counter Terrorism by Schriro, with no reason given – but Mercer, in his complaint, said command staff told him the transfer “was not because he had done anything wrong.”

The transfer stripped Mercer of all supervisory responsibilities and tactical operations. It also diminished Mercer’s opportunities to work overtime and earn additional pay by approximately \$50,000, the complaint said.

Meanwhile, Sgt. Kenneth Albert was transferred to operations sergeant. Albert, a member of the union, did not go through a selections process and the union did not file a grievance against the appointment, the complaint said.

The complaint reads, “The commissioner would not have transferred Sgt. Mercer in the absence of CSPU’s and/or union president Matthews’ influence and Sgt. Mercer exercising his constitutionally protected speech and association to be a nonmember, to object to paying for the union’s non-bargaining expenses, and/or to advocate on behalf of the rights of nonmembers.”

The complaint concludes, the “defendants’ actions and retaliation against Sgt. Mercer for exercising his First Amendment rights were done maliciously and intentionally, in that they were taken with the intent to injure Sgt. Mercer and/or with reckless disregard for Sgt. Mercer’s protected rights.”

Mercer is requesting an order that prohibits the defendants from retaliating against him; requires him to be transferred back into the position of operations sergeant; and awards him compensatory damages including restitution and full payment of any potential overtime pay he would have received if he had remained in the position of operations sergeant.

# Marlborough School Board Adopts Budget with Increase

by Kaitlyn Schroyer

By a tight 5-4 vote, the Board of Education last week decided to add back into the proposed 2016-17 school budget a teaching position that had been slated to be cut.

As a result, the school board wound up adopting a \$7.42 million budget at its March 3 meeting – a \$26,587, or .36 percent, increase over current year spending.

Going into the evening, the proposed school budget was at \$7.35 million – a .70 percent decrease from the current year’s \$7.40 million spending package. The budget proposal contained a reduction in the current number of certified teachers the school system employed – from 28 full-time equivalents (FTEs) to 26 – due to declining enrollment in two of the grade levels.

But at their Feb. 11 meeting, board members learned kindergarten enrollment projections for the next school year had already been proven wrong. The New England School Development Council has projected 39 children in the 2016-17 kindergarten class, and Superintendent of Schools David Sklarz had budgeted accordingly, planning for three kindergarten teachers. But, Sklarz told the board that night, 54 students were already enrolled for next year. If kindergarten enrollment were to exceed 60 students, he said, another teacher would be needed, as per class size guidelines.

With enrollment still at 54 – and with another six months to go before the start of school – school board members last week expressed hesitation at cutting down to 26 teachers. Theresa Brysgel said she is “uncomfortable” with the reduction, and Mimi LaPoint agreed, saying perhaps the school board is “jumping too quickly” in reducing the number of teachers to 26 FTEs.

But school board chair Ruth Kelly disagreed, and said, “We have to go with the recommendation of the administration.” She said residents

have indicated they want the school board to “hold the budget down,” and added, “We can’t hold the budget down by having more staff.”

The other concern of the board, aside from the kindergarten class, is the size of the current first grade – which of course will be moving up to second grade in the fall.

“My impression is the first grade did have trouble,” board member Wes Skorski said of the larger class sizes, which reached 21 students per class. (Skorski has a first-grader at Marlborough Elementary School this year.) The school’s guidelines for class sizes are 16 to 20 students for kindergarten and first grade, 18 to 23 students for second to fourth grade, and 20 to 25 students for fifth and sixth grade.

Marlborough Elementary School Principal Dan White said there have been “occasional concerns” about this year’s first grade. He explained the plan is to shift one of the current four kindergarten teachers to first grade for the 2016-17 school year, continuing with that group of students. (There are 65 students in this year’s kindergarten class.)

With that shift, the incoming kindergarten class would have three teachers, first would have four, and second would have had three teachers.

Kelly said administration had never come to the board with those “occasional concerns,” to which White replied the school is “managing” with the class sizes in first grade.

Going back to the kindergarten teacher issue, Skorski told the board that if the school winds up needing the fourth kindergarten teacher due to increased enrollment, it would have to add the position in anyway, so “Why not put in the money at this point?” Skorski asked.

A motion to increase the number of FTE teachers to 27 passed 5-4, with ‘yea’ votes by Skorski, Brysgel, LaPoint, Judithe Kaplan and

Sue Rapelye outweighing ‘nay’ votes by Kelly, Betty O’Brien, Louise Concedello and Patrick Pabouet.

The decision added \$78,000 to the budget, for salary and benefits. (Ultimately, school administration will decide which grade level that teacher goes to, though, and not the school board.)

After the meeting, though, White didn’t seem too confident that extra teacher will stay in the budget – telling the *Rivereast* “time will tell” if the idea flies with the Board of Finance when it reviews the budget proposal later this month.

Sklarz also proposed to the board a budget neutral solution to adding extra funds to the emergency maintenance contingency line.

He suggested – and the board unanimously approved – combining \$5,000 in facilities contingencies and \$3,000 in cafeteria equipment repairs to equal \$8,000 in the line. He also suggested transferring \$8,660 from health insurance savings and \$12,733 from instructional technology to make the total amount for emergency maintenance contingency \$29,393.

While all board members were on board with this plan, there was a heated discussion about whether the board should return any contingency funds left over at the end of the 2016-17 year to the town’s general fund. The board keeping surplus funds at the end of the fiscal year, rather than returning them to the town, has caused consternation between board members and town officials in recent years.

LaPoint said she did not feel “guilty” spending the surplus funds, and that she feels “the town votes for the bottom line budget and so therefore at the end of year, if we have spent a little less, that money was still voted and approved by the town for educational expenses.”

But other board members weren’t so sure. Brysgel suggested the solution is “not so black

and white” and suggested splitting the surplus funds – with the school board keeping some and returning the rest to the town. Other board members, such as O’Brien, were quite adamant the money needs to be returned to the town.

Ultimately, the board voted 7-2 – with LaPoint and Kaplan opposed – to return to the town whatever 2016-17 contingency funds went unused.

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At the end of the meeting, selectman Dick Shea and finance board member Cliff Denniss – who both stressed they were speaking as individuals – each criticized the board.

Shea told the board he was “disappointed” by its decision to raise the budget, after being encouraged by Sklarz’s initial presentation of a budget that called for a decrease.

“I keep hearing about this magic class size limitation,” Shea said. “Twenty is fine, but 21 is a disaster.”

He added that there is more that makes a difficult class – such as behavioral issues – than just the number of students.

He predicted the Board of Finance will balk at the budget, and it “will be coming back” to school board members to make reductions.

Denniss, meanwhile, spoke to LaPoint’s comments about returning the surplus.

“Some board members feel the taxpayers vote on the bottom line of the Board of Education budget. That’s not true,” Denniss said. “You tell [the taxpayers] you’re going to spend so much on these textbooks or these computers. A surplus develops and you did not spend money on what you said you would.”

Denniss stressed those leftover funds should be returned to the town.

The town and school budgets will be presented to the Board of Finance Wednesday, March 9, at 7 p.m., in the Marlborough Elementary School media center.



# Obituaries

## Colchester

### William Brown Tripp

William Brown Tripp, 62, passed peacefully Friday, Feb. 12. Born Jan. 20, 1954, at The WW Backus Hospital in Norwich, he was the son of Martha M Tripp and Hermon B Tripp of Jewett City.

William was born with Down's syndrome and resided at home until 1960. At that time, he was placed at Mansfield Training School. Not soon after, William was transferred to Seaside Regional Center in Waterford, on Aug. 1, 1961. When the state closed Seaside Center, he moved into a group home operated by The Caring Community Inc. in June of 1986. Up until he turned 21 years, he enjoyed his weekly visits home to Jewett City.

He loved the beach, music, televised wrestling. He also enjoyed his many day trips of shopping, camping at Harkness and trips for ice cream with his housemates of The Caring Community. William also participated in Meals on Wheels and other volunteer activities. Even though he didn't speak, we all knew he was happy throughout his days of laughter and humming to many of his favorite tunes.

William leaves behind his brothers, J. Peter Tripp of Vermont, Henry B. Tripp of North Carolina, and his sister, Janet F. Tripp of Mystic. He also leaves many nieces and nephews and their extended families.

Besides his parents, William was predeceased by his sister, Marion Tripp Gee of Danielson.

The family would like to thank the State of Connecticut Department of Developmental Services (DDS), the federal government and the taxpayers thereof for their financial support and programs they provide for the developmentally disabled citizens of this country and state. They are also very thankful for the Hospice Unit at the Middlesex Hospital of Middletown, for their kindness, support and excellent care in his final days.

Last but not least, William's family would like to extend their thanks to the multiple staff/administrative members and caretakers of the Caring Community Inc. of Colchester, CT. that it took for him to live comfortably and happy well beyond his life expectancy. They are forever grateful for their compassion, excellent care and the love they gave William throughout the last 30 years, right up to his final day.

A graveside service will be held at the Tripp family plot in The Jewett City Cemetery at a later date.

## Colchester

### Nelson Anthony St. Germain

Nelson Anthony St. Germain, 86, of Colchester, beloved husband and best friend of Joanne (Meyer) St. Germain for the past 44½ years, passed away suddenly Sunday, Feb. 28. Born in Worcester, Mass., on Jan. 21, 1930, he was a retired welding instructor for the State of Connecticut technical schools for almost 20 years.

Besides his wife, he leaves his daughter Cynthia Gabrieli and her husband Brian of Holden, Mass.; his daughter, Jennifer Cole of Scottsville, N.Y.; two amazing grandchildren, Jady Lisa Schnarr of Scottsville, N.Y., and Andrew St. Germain of Colchester; his sister-in-law, Marcy Steiner of East Windsor.

He was predeceased by his son, Nelson Jr. He loved reading, traveling and golf and, of course, welding.

He didn't want a service of any kind so we're respecting his wishes.

If you wish to leave online condolences, visit [spencerfuneralhomeinc.com](http://spencerfuneralhomeinc.com).

## Colchester

### Patricia Schmid

Patricia "Skippy" (McLaughlin) Schmid, 84, of Colchester, passed away peacefully with her loving family by her side Sunday, Feb. 21.

Born Oct. 6, 1931, in Fort Fairfield, Maine, she grew up in Wethersfield. The majority of her adult life she lived in Manchester, before moving to Colchester.

She was predeceased by her husband, Leonard Schmid.

She is survived by her sisters, Candy and her husband Andy Kozlak of Amston; and Shileen and her husband Richard Arnold of Deltona, Fla.; her children, Matthew Schmid of Old Town, Maine; Gretchen and her husband Dean Bardenheuer of Baltic; and Amy and her husband Bob Joost of Colfax, Calif. She was the loving grandmother of Jason, Kevin, Amanda, Christian and Madison.

Skippy enjoyed life to the fullest, especially time with her sister and "best friend," Candy, and she also enjoyed the numerous activities and friends she had at Rocky Hill, Wethersfield and Colchester senior centers.

Calling hours and service will be private.

## Colchester

### Kimberly Anne Ballek

Kimberly Anne Ballek, 56, of Colchester, passed away at home unexpectedly Friday, Feb. 26. Kim was born in Hyannis, Mass., April 25, 1959. She was a daughter to the late Lawrence Smith and Kay (Bettis) Anttila.

On May 26, 1977, she married her beloved soulmate, Joseph Thomas Ballek. The couple shared 33 years of marriage before he predeceased her on July 7, 2010.

Kim will be sadly missed but always remembered for her love of reading, playing online games and most importantly, for her love and devotion, especially to her late husband.

In addition to her mother Kay and her husband William Anttila, she is survived by two daughters, Amelia Ballek and fiancé Daniel Gervais, Alicia Michel and fiancé Michael Nagel; her father-in-law, Fred Ballek; a brother, William Steadman and wife Kari; two sisters, Lauren Scovish and Sherry Smith; four grandchildren, Xavier, Elizabeth and Madison Townsend and Phillip Michel; and numerous extended family members and friends.

Funeral services will be held privately, per her wishes.

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

## East Hampton

### Nelson Robert Gustine

Nelson Robert Gustine, 93, of East Hampton, widower of the late Mildred (Kaiser) Gustine, died Friday, Feb. 26, at his home. Born May 4, 1922, in Meriden, he was the son of the late Ralph and Hazel (Nelson) Gustine.

Nelson proudly served his country in the U.S. Navy during World War II. He was a member of Christ Episcopal Church in Middle Haddam, the East Hampton VFW, East Hampton Lions, Chatham Historical Society, Goff House, and Connecticut Campground Owners Association.

Nelson first arrived in East Hampton in the 1930s, while camping at Harts landing on Lake Drive where he had his tent blown away in the 1936 hurricane. He later helped his parents build Gustine's Cottage's nearby and then he went on to purchase land on Mott Hill Road that later became Nelson's Family Campground. Nelson was the owner and founder of Nelson's Family Campground in East Hampton, Connecticut. Opened May 27, 1964, Nelson's has been a thriving campground for over 50 years. Starting with only 40 sites, Nelson, with the help of his loving wife Mildred, two sons, Glenn and Bruce, and numerous other people, grew the campground to become the place it is today with almost 400 sites and many visitors every year.

In recent years, people would seek out "Mr. Nelson" to tell him their fond memories of growing up at the campground and how they now bring their own children to carry on the tradition or to listen to him tell stories from his many years in the camping industry. Nelson cared deeply and that translated into his camping family, and business, creating a second home for many people during the summer months.

Nelson will be remembered as a kind, devoted and determined man who always found a way to listen and get things done.

He is survived by his sons, Glenn Gustine and wife Michele of East Hampton, Bruce Gustine and wife Kelly of East Hampton; his five beloved grandchildren, Joshua, Rebecca, Carter, Clara and Parker.

He was predeceased by a sister, Marion Schultz.

Friends called at Spencer Funeral Home, 112 Main St., East Hampton, Thursday, March 3. Funeral services will be held on today, March 4, at 11 a.m., in Hope Church on Route 66 in East Hampton. Burial will be private at the convenience of the family in Walnut Grove Cemetery in Meriden.

In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions may be made to East Hampton Ambulance Association, P.O. Box 144, East Hampton, CT 06424.

To leave online condolences, visit [spencerfuneralhomeinc.com](http://spencerfuneralhomeinc.com).



## East Hampton

### Glenn Max Wood

Glenn Max Wood, 90, of East Hampton, beloved husband of 64 years to Eleanor (Murray) Wood, died Friday, Feb. 26, at his home. Born Aug. 30, 1925, in Menasha, Mont., he was the son of the late Max and Alma (Lalli) Wood.

Glenn was a member of the V-12 program sponsored by the U.S. government during World War II and proudly served his country in the U.S. Navy during the Korean War. He received his bachelor's degree from Illinois Institute of Technology, a master's degree from MIT and a master's degree from RPI and was a member of Pi Tau Sigma.

Glenn was retired from Pratt & Whitney where he had worked as a mechanical engineer, earning two patents for his work. He was a longtime member of Bethlehem Lutheran Church in East Hampton, where he served on the Church Council for many years. He was a member of ASME and had served as a committee chairman, a member of the Horticulture Society, an eight-year member of the Education Committee in East Hampton, serving as chairman for four years, and a former member of the Finance Committee in East Hampton.

Besides his wife, he is survived by his three sons, Dan Wood of San Diego, Tom Wood of East Hampton, Roger Wood of Cambridge, Mass.; two grandchildren, Caroline and Ryan.

He was predeceased by his brother, Wally Wood.

Friends may call at the Spencer Funeral Home, 112 Main St., East Hampton, today, March 4, from 5-7 p.m. A funeral service will be held Saturday, March 5, at 11 a.m., in Bethlehem Lutheran Church in East Hampton. Burial will be private, at the convenience of the family.

In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions may be made to Bethlehem Lutheran Church, P.O. Box 31, East Hampton, CT 06424.

To leave online condolences, visit [spencerfuneralhomeinc.com](http://spencerfuneralhomeinc.com).

## Portland

### Harriet LeDoux

Harriet (Knutson) LeDoux, a longtime resident of Portland and beloved wife for 61 years of the late Edmond E. LeDoux, passed away peacefully at Pilgrim Manor Care Center in Cromwell Tuesday, March 1.

Born on April 6, 1920 in Canby, Minn., she was the youngest of 13 children of the late Oscar and Mina Knutson. She was a graduate of Granite Falls High School, where she spent most of her younger days and of Minneapolis Business College. In 1946, she moved to Connecticut, where she married her wartime sweetheart, and in 1955 they settled in Portland where they raised four girls. Harriet was employed with the J.C. Penney Co. for 15 years and, upon retiring, she and her husband enjoyed many years of traveling.

Harriet was an active member of The First Congregational Church of Portland, where she served as deacon, clerk, and Bell Choir member and participated in all the activities of the Women's Fellowship. Most recently, she loved participating in the Prayer Shawl Ministry.

She is survived by her daughters, Susan Parsons (John), Nancy Johnson (Keith), Jeannette Chen (Casey), and Mary DeCoursey (Jonathan). She is also survived by seven grandchildren, Timothy Parsons, Becky Bottino, Kevin Johnson, Tracy Ives, Jeffrey Chen, and Carly and Jenna DeCoursey. Great-grandchildren include Julia, Brendan, Tyler, Gregory, Lauren and Lilliana.

She was predeceased by a son, John Edmond LeDoux, and her nine brothers and three sisters.

A memorial service will be held Sunday, March 6, at 2 p.m., at The First Congregational Church of Portland. There are no calling hours.

Donations in her memory may be made to The First Congregational Church of Portland, 554 Main St. Portland, CT 06480.

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



## Hebron

### John Alexander Malecky

John Alexander Malecky, 98, of Hebron, widower of the late Gloria (Barrasso) Malecky, passed away at home on Wednesday morning, Feb. 24. He was born in Glastonbury Oct. 30, 1917, a son of the late Stanley and Balbina (Leach) Malecky.

He spent his childhood there, attended school and after graduating from trade school, began his 40 year career at Pratt & Whitney. John worked in various positions including machinist, training school instructor, and manufacturing engineer. After retiring, he continued volunteering leading tours of the plant.

John was a proud World War II veteran. In 1943, while serving in Army Air Corps, he married the love of his life, Gloria. They were married nearly 60 years before her passing in 2002. She was able to travel with him as he was assigned to several different bases in the U.S. before he was stationed on the island of Tinian.

In 1953, they built their home in Hebron, where they raised their family and were active in the community.

John was a very active communicant of the Church of the Holy Family. He and Gloria were instrumental organizers of the new parish and continued their involvement with the church in a variety of positions over the years. It truly was his church family. He was a longtime member of American Legion Post 95 in Hebron. He loved watching all sports, especially Boston Red Sox, Boston Celtics, men's and women's golf, and of course, his UConn women's basketball team - Go Stewie and Gino!

John will be remembered as a devoted husband and father, and a friend to all. He was always ready to strike up a conversation and touched many lives. He will be greatly missed.

He leaves his loving daughter, Cindy Malecky of Ventura, Calif.; two sisters, Joanna Orzech of Marlborough and Shirley Masterson and her husband, Edward of Somers; four sisters-in-laws, Bernice Barrasso of Hebron, Lois Malecky of Pinellas Park, Fla., Mary Malecky of East Hartford and Yola Ross of Glastonbury; his many nieces, nephews, grandnieces and nephews, great-grandnieces and nephews and other extended family members.

In addition to his loving wife of 59 years, and his parents, he was predeceased by his son, Charles "Chucky" Malecky, and seven siblings, Edmund, Frederick, Stanley, Florence, Irene, Bernie and Elizabeth.

The family received guests Thursday, March 3, at the Aurora-McCarthy Funeral Home, 167 Old Hartford Rd., Colchester. The funeral liturgy will be celebrated at 10 a.m. today, March 4, directly at the Church of the Holy Family, 185 Church St. (Route 85), Hebron, CT 06248. Burial will follow in Rose Hill Memorial Park, Rocky Hill.

In lieu of flowers, donations in his memory may be made to the Church of the Holy Family or to Pets for Vets ([oarridgefield.org](http://oarridgefield.org)).

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





Colchester

Anna Neilson

Anna (Copjak) Neilson, 91, of Colchester, widow of the late Robert Neilson, passed away unexpectedly Monday, Feb. 29. Born Dec. 16, 1924, in Duryea, Pa., she was the daughter of the late Joseph and Katherine (Petrus) Copjak.

She was ever devoted to her family and leaves two children, Robert J. Neilson of Rocky Hill and Patricia Culhane and her husband, Tom of Colchester (with whom she made her home in recent years); five grandchildren, Jennifer Hein and her husband, William of Jacksonville, Fla., Michelle Cooper of Oxford, Maine, Tiffany Neilson of Montville and Thomas and David Culhane, both of Colchester; four great-grandchildren, William, Julia, Wyatt and Ian; a sister, Susan Moses of Duryea, Pa.; and many extended family members and friends.

A woman of great faith, Mrs. Neilson was an active parishioner of St. Mary's Ukrainian Catholic Church in Colchester. She volunteered for many activities there as well as at the Colchester Federated Church with her daughter.

The family will receive guests from 5-7 p.m. today, March 4, at the Aurora-McCarthy Funeral Home, 167 Old Hartford Rd., Colchester. A Panahyda service will be observed at 6:45 p.m. The Divine Liturgy will be celebrated 10:30 a.m. Saturday, March 5, directly at St. Mary's Church, 178 Linwood Ave. (Route 16), Colchester, with Fr. Cyril Manolev, officiating. She will be laid to rest with her husband in the Linwood Cemetery following Mass.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to St. Mary's Church or to the Colchester Federated Church.

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

Colchester

Donald Richard Shuster

Donald Richard Shuster, 67, of East Hampton, entered into rest Sunday, Feb. 21, at Hartford Hospital. He was born in Shelton Nov. 25, 1948, and was the son of the late Walter and Ruth (Hinman) Shuster. He was raised in Shelton and as an adult resided in Wallingford and then East Hampton for the past 12 years.



Donald was a tool and die maker for 35 years at Sikorsky Aircraft before his retirement. He was a great lover of the outdoors, dancing, and singing karaoke. Don loved sports, especially watching baseball and the Super Bowl. You could find him riding his motorcycle on a nice day in Connecticut.

He is the beloved father of Corrine Shuster, loving brother of Daniel Shuster and his wife Cynthia Hummel, Cynthia Strickett and her husband Paul, Vernon Shuster, and Patricia Gaidosz and her husband Steven. He is the loving uncle of Todd Strickett and his wife Melissa, Pamela Strickett, Thomas, Michael, Michele, and Amber Shuster and the late Christopher Strickett. He is also survived by eight grandnieces and grandnephews and several aunts, uncles, cousins and friends.

A memorial service will be held Sunday March 6, at 11:15 a.m., in the Riverview Funeral Home, 390 River Rd., Shelton. Friends may call Sunday from 10:15 a.m. until the time of the service.

Online condolences may be left to Donald's family at [riverviewfh.com](http://riverviewfh.com).

East Hampton

Robert Segda III

Robert Segda III, 26, formerly of Middletown and East Hampton, passed away unexpectedly Sunday, March 3, due to natural causes. He was born March 31, 1989, in Hartford, son of Robert Segda II and stepmother Kathy Segda of Wilmington, N.C., and mother Wendy Tine and husband Duane Tine of East Hampton.



Robert was employed as a master trim carpenter for BTB Builders of Wilmington, N.C. Robert was a former resident of Middletown and attended Middletown schools from sixth - 12th grades until moving to North Carolina to work with his dad.

Besides his parents, he is survived by his 4-year-old son, Conner Corcorhan; sisters, Karla Segda, Brenda Segda and Renee Segda; nephew, Giovanni Mountcastle of Middletown; brother, Bryden Tine of East Hampton; grandparents, Sandy and Jerry Hackett of Largo, Fla.; uncle, William Hackett and fiancée Cara McGowen of West Hartford; and uncle Jerry Hackett of Hollywood, Fla. Robert is also survived by numerous cousins and aunts and uncles.

Bobby would always return to Middletown to visit with his friends and family that he loved and stayed close with for years. Bobby enjoyed life to the fullest, with his friends, and enjoyed singing karaoke.

Family and friends may call at the D'Angelo Funeral Home, 22 South Main St., Middletown, Saturday, March 5, from 2-5 p.m., for a memorial service.

From the Editor's Desk

Observations & Ruminations

by Mike Thompson

As I write this, the polls have closed on "Super Tuesday," and the results are starting to come in. On the Republican side, it looks like a big night for Donald Trump. For the Democrats, Hillary Clinton appears to have the edge over Bernie Sanders.

For the latter race though – will any of Tuesday's outcomes really matter?

History says yes, they will. Still, there's no guarantee.

I say all this because of the phenomenon everybody seems to be talking about in recent weeks but which is actually more than 30 years old: superdelegates.

Since 1982, the Democratic Party has had superdelegates – delegates seated at the Democratic National Convention automatically, who can decide for themselves how they want to vote, regardless of how the primaries or caucuses went in their respective states.

Sound like a bit of an affront to democracy? Yeah, it kind of is. Superdelegates can support anyone they want. The public doesn't control who these superdelegates are; they are, as *The New York Times* said in a recent op-ed piece, "party bigwigs" – Democrat governors, Congressmen and senators, and other Democrat leaders. In short, the head honchos, the folks who are very much the oft-derided "party insiders."

Even the *Washington Post*, in a recent column where it downplayed the importance of the superdelegates, wrote these slots were created to guarantee "the party leadership some voice in a nomination process that had shifted heavily toward public participation in the 1970s."

Because you wouldn't want a democratic process to be too democratic, would you?

Anyway, there are 712 superdelegates, which make up about 30 percent of the total number of delegates that are needed for a candidate to win the party's nomination. That's huge – and could easily swing a close race in favor of one candidate or the other.

Last fall – before a single primary or caucus was held – the Associated Press polled all 712 superdelegates, to see where they were leaning. Clinton had a gigantic 359-8 lead over Sanders, with two of the superdelegates choosing the since-exited Martin O'Malley. The remaining 210 superdelegates were undecided.

Now, to be fair, that was back in the fall. One of the benefits afforded these superdelegates is they can change their mind literally until the Democratic National Convention takes place this summer.

In its recent op-ed piece, the *Times* said a "big chunk" of these superdelegates have said they'll remain uncommitted until a clear primary winner emerges. The *Times* also wrote that, "many party leaders will think twice before pressing for the nomination of a candidate voters have rejected."

And history backs the *Times* up. Since the superdelegates were created in the 1980s, they have gone with whomever winds up winning the primaries. This was the case even in 2008. Many of the superdelegates had pledged their support to Clinton, but when Barack Obama began piling up primary and caucus victories, the superdelegates' support waned, and Obama wound up winning.

So if history is any indication, the superdelegates won't flaunt the will of the people, and whomever wins the primaries and caucuses will wind up with the nomination.

But that's not guaranteed; if it were, there'd be no need for superdelegates. The chairwoman of the DNC recently told CNN superdelegates "exist really to make sure that party leaders and elected officials don't have to be in a position where they are running against grass-roots activists."

While he's a U.S. senator, Bernie Sanders and his campaign seem pretty grass-roots, whereas Clinton is decidedly not. If he winds up winning the popular vote – though, like I said earlier, it's not looking great for Bernie – I hope these superdelegates don't get in the way of what the people really want.

By the way, I'd be remiss if I didn't point out the Republicans don't bother with this superdelegate stuff. That's one thing they're actually doing right. (Yes, dear readers: I just said the Republicans are doing something right. No need to get your eyes examined.)

There's still a long ways to go, and Sanders has said he'll stay in the race until all 50 states have their primaries and caucuses. If, at the end of all the races, Clinton has the edge, then that's fine; she won it fair and square. But if Sanders comes out on top, I hope the superdelegates don't stand in his way.

\* \* \*

See you next week.

East Hampton Police News

2/12: Thomas Smith, 31, of 9 Bevin Blvd., was issued a summons for operating an unregistered and uninsured motor vehicle and failure to comply with required emissions testing, East Hampton Police said.

2/17: Colin Briggs Shirshac, 33, of 81 Clark Hill Rd., was taken into custody pursuant to an active warrant for his arrest and charged with violation of probation.

2/17: Ashley Schonagel, 26, of 29 West High St., was arrested and charged with disorderly conduct, third-degree criminal mischief, operating a motor vehicle under suspension and operating an unregistered and uninsured motor vehicle, police said.

On 2/25, Schonagel was also arrested and charged with second-degree harassment and violation of a protective order, police said.