

RIVEREAST

News Bulletin

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

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Flag for the School... On June 21, Emily Lukowski, Cadet 2nd Lieutenant with the Civil Air Patrol, presented on behalf of the men and women of the 386th Expeditionary Maintenance Squadron a flag to be flown over Marlborough Elementary School. The flag was presented with “deepest appreciation for all the support during our deployment in Southwest Asia” to a group of MES sixth-graders (Riley Panico, Sarah West and Grace Baran) for their work and the assistance of the rest of the school in supporting the troops throughout the school year.

St. Clements Fire Sparks Permit Questions

by Elizabeth Regan

A fire at the marina club next to St. Clements Castle has sparked questions about whether the popular wedding venue has the necessary permits.

East Hampton Building Official Glen LeConche said Thursday the building is not in compliance with a certificate of occupancy issued in 2014.

“My department continues to actively research the history of this property,” he said.

Chatham Health District Director Don Mitchell said the marina facility does not have a food service license.

The Port-Hampton Marina Club is located on the eastern portion of the St. Clements Castle and Marina property. The castle and its grounds, which comprise the bulk of the 90-acre property, is in Portland; the marina is in East Hampton.

The 4.96-acre site is approved by town zoning and building officials for use as a marina, but a paper trail going back six years shows planning and zoning department staff members have repeatedly told owner Edward Doherty he is not allowed to operate a banquet facility on the property.

Doherty is chairman of the Roncalli Institute, a nonprofit organization he has said was created to address the health and welfare of elderly people. Numerous nonprofit entities and trusts, as well as the for-profit St. Clements banquet facility, exist under the umbrella of the Roncalli Institute.

Doherty has said he was trained at Holy Apostles College and Seminary in Cromwell.

The 7,788-square-foot building damaged in the fire is identified on its tax card as commercial “office/warehouse” space. It is described in planning and zoning documents as a “storage” area.

The fire occurred during a midday wedding reception, forcing guests from the building – where they had just been served cake – onto the riverside lawn as firefighters from at least eight departments moved in to help fight the blaze.

Portland Fire Chief Robert Shea said his department was dispatched to the fire even though the marina club falls under East Hampton’s jurisdiction. The call came in as an outdoor fire, but was upgraded once a volunteer firefighter arrived to find it was actually a “well-involved

See St. Clements Fire page 2

Early Deadline Next Week

Due to the Independence Day holiday, the *RiverEast* offices will be closed next Tuesday, July 4. Therefore, the news deadline for next week’s issue is a day early.

All news copy – such as letters to the editor, weekly listings and press releases – **must** be received by noon Monday, July 3. No exceptions will be made.

RHAM Superintendent Looks Back at 12 Years

by Lauren Yandow

For the past 12 years, Dr. Robert Siminski has been the superintendent for the RHAM school system – a role he said is “part of his fabric.”

Now at the end of his tenure, Siminski is looking back at his career in education and looking forward to the next chapter in his life. “One of the things I’m looking forward to is having supper at home every night with my wife,” he said.

Siminski is retiring as superintendent of the regional high and middle schools, which serve residents of Andover, Hebron and Marlborough. His last day is today, June 30.

Over the years, two statements have “really governed” his thinking, Siminski said: the first, how “a teacher affects eternity,” and the second, that “students are messengers to a time that we will not see.”

Prior to RHAM, Siminski had a journey of educational experiences that helped shape who he is today.

Born in Rhode Island – where he currently resides with his wife – he grew up an only child. Today, he has four children and six grandchildren, whom he gushes about with a smile. “They’re all happy with what they’re doing, they have a good self-image and the grandchild-

dren I just spoil – it’s my job,” he said.

While education is a constant throughout Siminski’s career, it’s an honor he said he’s “fortunate to have earned.” He holds two degrees from Providence College and a doctorate degree from Johnson and Wales University. He’s since revisited both institutions as an adjunct professor.

“When you think about retiring you do have a chance to reflect. I was given the opportunity to get an education and I feel that I’ve used it to help people and that makes me happy,” he said.

Siminski’s career resume includes being a schoolteacher – in both social studies and government – teaching literacy to adults, and holding the title of superintendent in Thompson.

His interest in becoming an administrator and desire to help people led him to “one of the more interesting pieces” of his career, as a director of education at state prisons in Rhode Island and New Jersey.

While working in those prisons, Siminski engaged in conversation with inmates about their own high school experiences. “I had been a teacher and I’d say ‘Okay, where did the train come off the track to get you into this joint?’”

Those conversations, he said, helped him develop his personal philosophy of what a school district should be.

Hence, RHAM’s evening adult program – a program that helps kids get their high school diploma and significantly impacts the dropout rate, Siminski said.

One story that sticks with him – a woman in the adult education program who wanted to be a Marine, but in order to join, first had to earn a high school diploma. Siminski said, “That’s the difference in our program: kids don’t get GEDs; they get high school diplomas.”

Siminski said the woman worked hard, earned her diploma and went on to be a Marine. “When you look at kids who have made a decision to go into the military, it’s inspirational because they care about our country.”

Siminski took his role as a molder of young minds very seriously.

“You know, you just look at the biology of the situation – here I am at the end of my career and you take a senior graduating who’s got probably 50 or 60 years ahead of him and he’s gonna take the message that he learned here to the next generation,” Siminski said. “The message I want him to take is one of care and concern and helping.”

While referencing the next generation – Siminski brings up RHAM High School’s Class of 2017 salutatorian, Paul Tamburro. “To listen

See Superintendent page 2



Dr. Robert Siminski retires today, June 30, after 12 years with the RHAM high and middle schools. Reflecting back on his experience this week, he said, “I just want to thank the community for the courtesies they’ve extended me during my tenure as superintendent.”

St. Clements Fire cont. from Front Page

structure fire,” according to Shea. East Hampton Fire Chief Greg Voelker said from the scene on Sunday that one person, whom he believed to be a staff member, was taken to Middlesex Hospital for evaluation.

There were no reported injuries, according to Voelker.

Voelker said he was told the fire appears to have started on a wooden deck between the building and a cement retaining wall.

The most extensive damage was in the kitchen area, according to Voelker; There was only smoke and water damage in the area where guests had been eating and drinking when the fire started.

Shea said Portland firefighters turned over the scene to East Hampton fire marshals after the flames were extinguished and any lingering pockets of fire were put out.

The fire investigation is being conducted by East Hampton Fire Marshal Richard Klotzbier and Deputy Fire Marshal Joe Guest. Klotzbier also called in the Office of the State Fire Marshal to assist with the investigation.

Klotzbier said from the scene Sunday that he called in the state because of the size of the fire and the value of the property.

Early Wednesday, Guest said the investigation was winding down. However, he revised his statement later in the day when he said the investigation was back at full speed after the discovery of new information.

The fire marshals would not comment on the source of the fire while the investigation is ongoing.

Voelker said Sunday he heard the fire was related to cooking equipment. The same possible cause was cited by Mitchell and LeConche, who walked through the site on Monday with Klotzbier.

Klotzbier told the *Rivereast* Wednesday he had inspected the building “within the past year.” When asked if there was a kitchen, his response was “I don’t recall.”

The *Rivereast* filed a Freedom of Information request Wednesday with the fire marshal’s office for any documents pertaining to the property.

St. Clements Castle and Marina Marketing and Communications Vice President Amanda Delzio said Tuesday the most important thing is there were no injuries.

“Everyone is safe and the castle – the estate itself – is in full operation and was not affected by [the] fire,” she said.

She said there are “a lot of unknowns at the moment” about when they will be up and running again.

“There are plans, once we get the go ahead, to restore the marina as soon as we can,” she said.

She did not return a subsequent call for comment on its permit status with the town of East Hampton or the Chatham Health District.

Mitchell on Tuesday said nobody from St. Clements has approached him about getting a food license.

When the health district approved the septic system for the marina club in 2010, Mitchell said the permit was based on 29 boat slips, an outdoor reception area for 150 people and two 10x10-foot bathrooms inside a pavilion.

He said representatives from St. Clements told the health district at the time that the outdoor events would be catered from the castle.

But Mitchell said what he saw on his Monday visit to the damaged building didn’t look like a “simple reheat facility” one would expect if all the food was coming from the main hall.

“There would be no reason there would be all kinds of kitchen equipment set up there,” he said, citing a three-bay sink, stainless steel tables, pots and pans, dishes, silverware and coffee pots.

Documents in the planning and zoning department included a May 3 application for a mechanical permit to run gas piping for an outdoor cooking setup made up of two pot heaters, a grill and a fryolator.

A month later, the contractor told the planning and zoning department “the customer decided not to do the job.”

In July 2011, the then-acting zoning enforcement officer Daphne Schaub issued Doherty a cease-and-desist order stating “it was represented that this facility was to be used solely for storage” during the permitting process.

She told Doherty that using the building for anything other than storage requires approval by the town “due to increased parking, notice and other regulatory requirements.” She said no such approvals were requested or granted.

The letter asked Doherty to stop using it and advertising it for uses other than storage.

According a letter from Planning, Zoning and Building Department Administrator James Carey, the cease-and-desist order was lifted over two weeks later on the understanding that all advertising had been withdrawn and that any use of the property “will be consistent with the marina use” established prior to his ownership.

In August 2013, Carey wrote to Doherty in response to a call from a contractor to discuss installing geothermal heating in the building. Carey said it was unclear to him why a storage area and pavilion would need heating.

A back-and-forth ensued during which Doherty suggested “contractors sometimes run off on their tangent without having all the facts” and then reminded Carey about a 2010 agreement between East Hampton and St. Clements. That’s when the town paid Doherty, doing busi-



A fire on the marina side of St. Clements Castle and Marina drew a response from at least nine towns on the afternoon of June 25. When firefighters cleared out after several hours, fire marshals from East Hampton and the Office of the State Fire Marshal began their investigation, which was still ongoing at press time.

ness as Saint Clements Marina LLC, \$673,000 for an easement to use two wells on his property. The town also paid for the remediation of contaminated soil and building removal with the goal of using the wells as part of a public water system that has not yet come to fruition.

The agreement states Doherty reserves the right – “provided it has obtained all necessary permits and approvals” – to maintain, improve or beautify the area for guests of the marina and St. Clements Castle.

The geothermal system was ultimately permitted that year, according to LeConche.

Portland Fire Chief Robert Shea said the call for Sunday’s fire came in at 1:18 p.m. Portland Fire Department took command under the direction of Deputy Chief Andrew Goff; they received command assistance from Middletown Fire Department until the full Portland contingent was on site. Efforts were bolstered by fire apparatus and firefighters from East Hampton, Glastonbury, Cromwell, Marlborough, Haddam Neck and East Haddam.

Shea said firefighters were forced out of the building when the roof began to fail, at which point they “went defensive” to get the fire to

stop traveling. Using the ladder truck, they were able to extinguish the main body of the fire in about twenty minutes – though they spent about two more hours checking for and extinguishing small pockets of fire.

Water came from the river through a drafting operation set up by the East Hampton firefighters, Shea said, as well as from tankers.

The brother of the bride, Ryan Adams of Lake Tahoe, Calif., said wedding guests were eating cake when staff members rushed out from the kitchen area screaming “fire!” at the same time the alarm began to go off.

The roughly 40 guests, who were there to celebrate the wedding of Jessica Wilson and David Knapp, of Middletown, spilled out of the building.

Adams said he figured something had ignited in the kitchen.

“It sounded like a jet engine was taking off,” Adams recounted from in front of the fire-damaged building later that afternoon. “We turned around and there was an insane amount of smoke and flames that looked like it was shooting out the roof, but it was actually behind the building.”

Superintendent cont. from Front Page

to him and the fact that he’s going to Harvard – and I played a part in that – that’s gotta be inspirational.”

Siminski said he continues to be impressed with the overall increase in student achievement. “I think when you look at the climate – and by climate I mean how people get along with each other and also the climate of learning – kids value learning and want to learn.”

One thing he’s learned about education: “it’s not static.”

The environment, state mandates and constantly-emerging trends will continue to impact how students learn, he said. “That’s what we’re all about, we’re all about kids. We want to maximize the opportunities that they have, we want to provide them with a wide range of experiences.”

He added, “I just want to see kids do good and succeed. I honestly feel that every kid has a right to fulfill their dreams. Whatever those dreams are, those career aspirations, I think that kids need that – they need to be happy.”

Siminski said some of his best memories as superintendent are watching students receive awards, give speeches at commencement, perform at concerts and play on the athletic field. “To me, watching that product and seeing the kids have such pride in what they do – that ranges from athletic events to the special education athletics program [Best Buddies],” has been memorable.

It wouldn’t be possible without a “good administrative team,” he said, praising the subject area coordinators who’ve facilitated the schools’ progress in curriculum.

Siminski also praised the various chairs the RHAM board has had during his dozen years in the school system – folks like Al Covino, Susan Griffiths, Mike Turner and Danny Holtsclaw. “Those are the people who encouraged us, supported our efforts, and ... it allowed the district to go forward,” he said.

Siminski added, “I’ve made some friendships here that I will continue – and I know they’re gonna be lifelong.”

This summer will be Siminski’s first summer off work since his sophomore year in high school. On his to-do list: traveling, being a “beach bum,” and reading for pleasure rather than solely for work – with plans to delve into some books about a favorite topic: history, and more specifically, World War II in the Pacific.

Siminski also said he has plans to remain current in teaching. He said there’s a possibility of revisiting one of his alma maters once again as an adjunct professor.

On a final note about RHAM, he simply said, “I love this place.”

“Leaving is going to be difficult but I realize that as of Monday it’s Dr. [Patricia] Law’s district,” he said. He added, “I’ll support her in any way I can but it’s her district – and I’ll go off and do retirement things.”

Voters Say ‘Yes’ to RHAM Budget

by Lauren Yandow

Following a third budget referendum, the proposed 2017-18 RHAM schools budget was approved by a vote of 768 to 717.

Andover voters rejected the spending plan, but that wasn't enough to prevent the budget from passing.

Residents from each town took to the polls on Thursday, June 22 to vote on the \$28,524,232 budget. Some town residents sent their 'yea' or 'nay' with an absentee ballot.

The 2017-18 spending package is a 1.75 percent increase or \$490,873 more than the current year, which includes the approved capital improvement spending package of \$289,960. The total 2017-18 RHAM budget increased by \$780,833 or 2.78 percent. Under the budget, Andover will dole out \$4.13 million or 14.51 percent of the cost. Hebron stands at \$15.4 million or 54 percent, and Marlborough residents at \$8.89 million or 31.16 percent.

On voting day in Andover, Registrar of Voters Wally Barton said as of 5 p.m. the turnout was relatively low with only 127 residents showing up to vote, out of a total 2,238 registered voters. It was a turnout he said that's "typical for referendums."

Barton said although the budget vote is advertised, he attributes the slow day to the referendum being held on a Thursday, since people generally associate elections with Tuesdays. When asked his opinion on the budget and whether or not he voted 'yes,' or 'no' he said, "my feelings inside the voting booth are mine" – a reaction many residents responded with.

With a final number of 188 votes in Andover, more residents were against the budget than for it; 83 voted 'yes,' while 105 voted 'no.'

Agreeing with the majority, Jeff Murray said he voted "no." Murray is on the Board of Finance, but stressed he wanted speak as a town resident and not as a member of the board. When asked why he voted against the budget, he said, "I went to the Board of Education meeting and I know what troubles we're gonna be in over the next few years and we need to tighten

our belts." He added, "I hope enough people showed up and voiced their opinion because it's not gonna get any easier the next couple of years."

Board of Finance member, Eric Shevchenko, also came out to vote at the Andover Town Office Building. He said, "I voted 'yes.' The RHAM Board of Education took about \$350,000 out of their originally proposed budget and I believe that represents a good faith effort on their part."

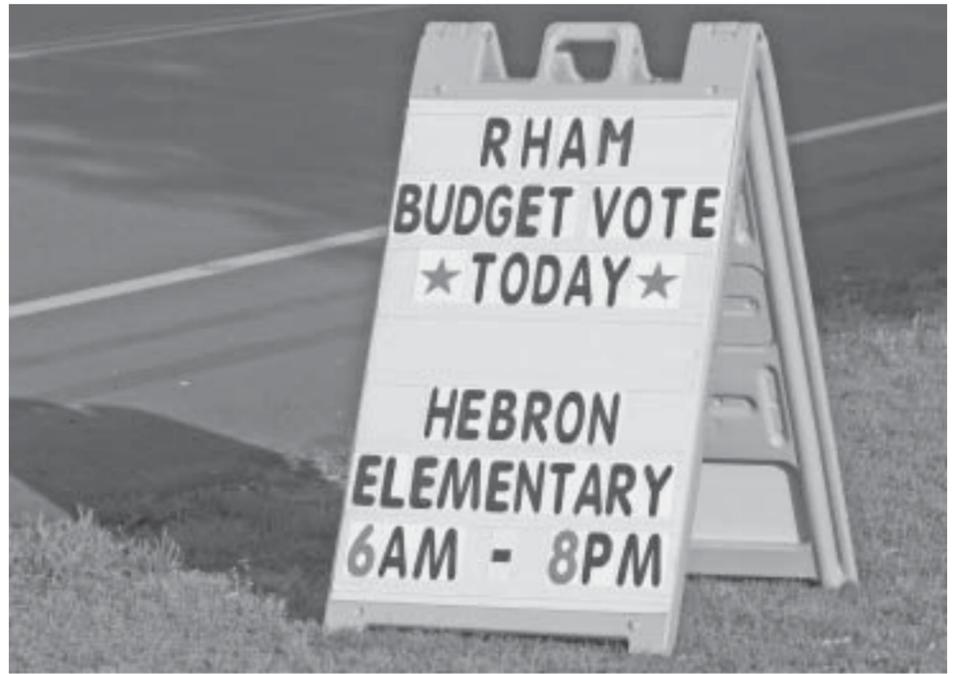
Also voicing his opinion was David Gostanian – incidentally, a member of the RHAM Board of Education. Gostanian said, "I voted 'yes' because it's a good budget and we worked very, very hard to get it down. We heard the will of the people by the votes and we worked hard. I think it's a good job, since there's a lot of costs that are well beyond our control."

Gostanian added, "The superintendent [of schools] did come up with some great decision packages for us that helped us reduce the budget but without cutting any services to the students." That's the important thing, he said, no educational services were cut so the high level of instruction would remain. Stating his overall impression, he said "I think it's a fair budget."

But when it comes to the state budget, Schools Superintendent Bob Siminiski said earlier this month that, based on the information he's received, the state will likely not pass its own budget until September. Siminiski added at the time that if the cuts are as steep as Gov. Dannel Malloy has proposed, "the district would be very drastically changed."

In Marlborough, 257 residents voted 'yes' to pass the budget while 206 residents voted 'no' – out of a total of 4,231 registered voters.

Marlborough's First Selectwoman Amy Traversa said she's relieved the budget passed but is still concerned about the legislature's failure to adopt a state budget. "Right now, the only proposal on the table is the governor's revised budget, which will cut \$2.2 million from Marlborough," she said. Although the mill rate will be set and tax bills will go out, "we are not



On Thursday, June 22 town residents of Hebron, Marlborough and Andover took to the polls to vote in a third budget referendum – and this time, the voters had ‘yes’ on their minds.

out of the woods." Budgets may need to be re-considered or supplemental taxes may be required, she added – depending on the decisions made by the State.

Out of 7,016 registered voters in Hebron, 836 residents voted on the budget; a final tally of 429-406 in favor of the budget.

While exiting the polls at Hebron Elementary School, resident Tiffany Thiele said, "I voted 'no' reluctantly. I really wanted to vote 'yes' but I just feel with the enrollment numbers going down the way they are, I think the school board could have been a little bit more judicious with some cuts."

Hebron resident Chris Mader, meanwhile, agreed with the majority. "I voted yes. I'm a

teacher at RHAM so obviously I support our program and I don't want to see anything get cut," he said.

Prior to the budget passing, the proposed amount was reduced by \$355,410 after the second failed referendum on May 31. Reductions included such items as: \$44,524 in updated health insurance enrollment; \$52,008 in adjustments to retiring staff and unemployment adjustments; \$35,098 in diesel fuel; and \$10,000 in electricity costs. Additionally, a new special education program was put in place to offset \$25,000 in revenue, and the school resource officer position was reduced from 12 months to 10.5 months to save on costs.

Andover Appoints New Town Treasurer

by Lauren Yandow

Earlier this month, Andover appointed Andrea M. Caldwell of Marlborough as the town's new treasurer.

As treasurer, Caldwell will receive \$30 per hour, while working an average of 30 hours a week.

First Selectman Robert Burbank said, "I think we're fantastically fortunate to find an individual with so many great qualifications."

Caldwell has over 15 years' experience in municipal financial management. Her skills include cash management and budgeting, as well as working with financial statements, debts schedules and grant schedules. For her most recent role, Caldwell was a temporary accountant and auditor for the Town of Ledyard, where she was responsible for working on the audit and annual budgets.

When asked why she decided to make a career move to Andover, she said, "I had a long commute and I was very excited that the Town of Andover was looking for a treasurer." She added, "It's a beautiful town."

In 2013, Caldwell graduated from Manchester Community College with an associate's de-

gree in business management. She's also certified as a payroll professional by the American Payroll Association.

As the new town treasurer, Caldwell will work closely with the Board of Selectmen and Board of Finance, a part of the job she said she's "looking forward to." She added, "The town staff and Board of Selectmen are very friendly."

In her application to the town, Caldwell described herself as a self-starter who enjoys challenges and responsibility. She included the drive to continue to grow educationally in her career field, by writing, "I always keep myself educated by going to accounting classes offered by the Governmental Finance Officers Association."

"I feel I am uniquely qualified for this position," she added.

According to the official Connecticut General Assembly website, by law, a town treasurer must receive, account for and invest town funds.

Caldwell starts her position as new town treasurer next week. She said, "I look forward to serving the residents of Andover."

Possible Human Exposure to Rabid Bat in Marlborough

The state Department of Public Health (DPH) is advising the person who brought a bat to a veterinary clinic in Marlborough on Friday morning, June 23, to contact the Chatham Health District office at 860-365-0884.

The bat tested positive for rabies on June 27. The person should be evaluated for possible rabies virus exposure.

Rabies is a viral disease primarily of ani-

mals caused by infection of the brain and spinal cord. People get rabies from the bite of an infected animal. While rabies is a fatal disease once clinical signs appear, it can be prevented by thorough wound cleaning and timely medical treatment that includes administration of one dose of immune globulin (antibodies) and four doses of vaccine over two weeks.

Colchester Car Tax Bills to be Delayed

The Town of Colchester will delay issuing motor vehicle tax bills due to the uncertainty concerning possible legislation that could result in a change to the uniform state-side motor vehicle mill rate.

As soon as information about the motor vehicle tax bills is available it will be noticed in the *Rivereast*, posted at colchesterct.gov and will also be available by calling the tax office at 860-537-7210. State statutes mandate that taxpayers will have a one-month grace period from the established due date to pay the bill without penalty.

Bills for real estate and personal property will go out on time, according to Wyatt.

"The 2016 Grand List bills for real estate and personal property will be due July 1, 2017 and delinquent after Aug. 1, 2017. Those bills will be mailed by June 30, 2017," Wyatt said. "Once the state budget has been finalized, the town will proceed with setting a due date for the motor vehicle bills and then they will be mailed."

Questions concerning tax payments should be directed to the tax office at 860-537-7210.

Marlborough Budget Passes on Fourth Try

by Julianna Roche

It took four attempts – but this week, the \$24.11 million spending package proposed by the Board of Finance for the 2017-18 year was finally passed by a 176-93 vote.

The last time voter turnout was that high was in 2009, when 522 residents voted on the budget, according to the town clerk's office.

Residents packed into Marlborough Elementary School's community room Monday night to cast their ballots after electing Board of Finance Chairman Doug Knowlton as the moderator, who presented the proposal to the crowd.

The \$24.11 million budget – which marks a 1.57 percent increase over current year spending – was decided on by finance board members after the previous proposed spending package of \$24.27 million was defeated in a tight 108-102 tally at the third town meeting earlier this month.

Included in the spending package is \$7,286,938 for the total education budget and \$4,900,050 for town operations, with non-recurring capital expenditure funds totaling \$12,265 for the local Board of Education and

\$727,200 for town operations.

With the approval of RHAM's budget on June 22, Marlborough will also pay its portion of the \$28,524,232, which totals \$8.89 million – or a 3.95 percent increase over current year spending.

Knowlton explained to residents that the budget process this year has been “very, very frustrating” for all members of all the boards involved and he hoped they would “appreciate some of the things we've [the board] been through.”

The budget also makes for a 3.85 percent tax increase, as it features a proposed mill rate of 35.51 mills, up 1.36 mills from 34.15. This means that the average homeowner with property valued at \$250,000 would pay \$8,878 in taxes on it – up from the current \$8,537.

The mill rate will be officially set by the Board of Finance at a special meeting tonight, June 30. Knowlton quipped that he wanted to wait as long as possible to give the state a chance to approve its budget before the new fiscal year starts tomorrow, July 1.

Finance board members also voted unanimously earlier this month for the motor vehicle mill rate to be capped at 32 mills – which is in accordance with state law.

Despite the increase, Knowlton noted that if the town were to receive the same amount of money from the state as last year, the mill rate would have actually gone down – “not by much, but by a little bit.” (Under Gov. Dannel Malloy's current proposed budget, Marlborough faces a \$2.2 million cut to state funding.)

First Selectwoman Amy Traversa added that it may be months before the state settles on a budget, however, and that the boards of selectmen and finance could only use “the best possible assumptions” in crafting the town's spending package.

“When we started this process, we didn't have the RHAM number and we didn't have the state's. We still don't have the state's,” she continued, adding “it could be sometime in July. It could be sometime in November. It could be next April [when we find out].”

The first selectwoman also explained that groups such as the Connecticut Council of Small Towns are currently lobbying for towns to have the option to revisit budgets should the governor's proposed budget “be significantly different” than what they expect.

If that were the case, Traversa explained, budgets could be “reopened” and adjusted, though towns would not be obligated to do so.

Knowlton explained that in addition to revisiting the budget should the town get “hit harder than we thought by the state,” they could also either raise the mill rate or dip into the undesignated fund balance – though the chairman noted he wouldn't feel comfortable doing so.

“Once we get clarity from the state, I'm sure we'll all be putting our heads together and [seeing] what adjustments need to be made. Until that happens, there isn't too much we can do,” he continued. “The overall thing is it [the budget] is not a dead issue just because we voted it in.”

Plans for Norton Park Still Moving Forward in Colchester

by Julianna Roche

The town's plans to rehabilitate the Norton Paper Mill site on 139 Westchester Rd. into a public park are still in the works, according to Public Works Director Jim Paggioli, who explained to the *Rivereast* this week that “like with anything else, just because you don't see someone out there working every day doesn't mean there isn't anything going on.”

According to Paggioli, the town submitted its remediation plan to the state Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) in May and is awaiting approval before taking the next steps.

“We are progressing, it's just a step-by-step process,” he explained.

The Norton Paper Mill – which sits along Jeremy River on Route 149 – had originally been abandoned for more than 25 years before it was vandalized and ultimately destroyed by a fire in July 2012.

In December 2013, however, the mill's former owner – Nan Norton Wasniewski – saw a new role for her family's property in Colchester, deciding to have the 17-foot high

concrete dam adjacent to the mill removed and to sell the property to the town for \$1 to develop it into Norton Park.

Since then, the town and the Nature Conservancy – a nonprofit who works to preserve land and water for future generations – have worked in conjunction to find ways to improve the property and turn it into a gateway of recreational opportunities, such as paddling and fishing, as well as improving Jeremy River's upstream habitat.

The town received a state Small Town Economic Assistance Program (STEAP) grant worth \$350,000 to help develop the property, while the Conservancy received \$1.5 million in federal funds to remove the dam, which according to Sally Harold, director of River Restoration and Fish Passage for the Conservancy, will help aid migratory fish.

Harold furthered that the dam removal “restored fish passage to 17 miles of stream habitat” on the Jeremy River – which she explained, will help protect fish habitat and benefit spe-

cies such as the Eastern Brook trout, Atlantic salmon, sea-run brown trout, sea lamprey, American eel and river herring.

Before it had been removed, the Jeremy River was cut off from fish and other wildlife, while the dam itself had damaging effects to the water, including increased pollution and decreased oxygen levels, making it difficult for some fish species to thrive.

“They need flowing, cold water,” Harold said, adding, “Places where we have these ponds behind dams are not good habitats for [most fish], so when you take these dams out, you're restoring conditions that are really going to save native fish.”

Harold furthered that most dams in the state are privately owned, meaning they often sit behind somebody's house or are “out of sight” to the public.

“This is a really neat example that people can see what happens when a dam is removed and can appreciate what a restored river really looks like,” she said, adding that “reclaiming a

former industrial site” such as the Norton Paper Mill can “turn into something beautiful.”

In April, the Conservancy, along with DEEP and other volunteers, planted an array of trees along the banks of the Jeremy River and according to Harold, there are just a few more “wrap-up” projects the Conservancy plans on undertaking.

However, the Conservancy must wait for DEEP's approval of the town's remediation plan before moving forward.

“We were hoping the town would be a little further along by now, but they're being delayed by the state,” Harold said, adding however, that good things “take time.”

“The property was no longer viable or being used, so to be able to convert it into a place that can be used and enjoyed by the public – who will have access to the river and be able to enjoy it, is really important,” she said. “This was a place with an incredible history and a place that pulled people [in the Colchester community] together.”

Bikers Celebrate 200 Years of Deaf Education

by Julianna Roche

Last week, 42 bikers traveled 200 miles and visited 25 historical sites across the state in four days – all to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the American School for the Deaf (ASD) – the first permanent school in the western hemisphere for deaf and hard of hearing students.

On a breezy afternoon Monday, June 19, small groups of the wide-smiled and sweaty bikers dressed in orange and black ASD jerseys trickled into the Harry's Place parking lot in Colchester, pulling their bikes off to the side in the grass while they anxiously awaited their mid-day lunches – all of which were paid for in advance by Harry's.

Described by his colleagues as an “Energizer Bunny” and someone who's “always smiling,” ASD executive director Jeff Bravin was easy to spot standing among the group in the shade with a grin plastered across his face.

Speaking through an American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter, Bravin explained that he fell in love with cycling in college, before eventually biking trans-America for the Ronald McDonald house in 1988.

When ASD celebrated its 190th anniversary in 2007, the school's executive director helped organize a 190-mile bike tour across various towns and cities across the state, where 14 bikers visited sites of importance related to deaf education history.

This year, that number tripled, with 42 bikers from across the country – including California, Delaware and Florida – meeting in West Hartford on June 18 to begin a four-day historical bike tour across Connecticut, with the tour ending at Camp Isola Bella in Salisbury.

Sitting on a picturesque island high in the Berkshire Mountains in the middle of Twin Lakes, the camp is the oldest and longest-running camp for the deaf and hard of hearing and was established by ASD.

Throughout the tour, bikers visited places such as Old City Hotel (currently Bushnell Towers) in Hartford, which was the site of the first

ASD building, founded in 1817 by Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, Laurent Clerc and Mason Fitch Cogswell.

The founding of ASD, now located in West Hartford, stemmed from Cogswell wanting to find a place for his daughter Alice – who became deaf in childhood through a fever – to be properly educated.

When it was originally founded, according to Bravin, the school had just seven students enrolled, including Alice and John Brewster Jr., who was a 51-year-old traveling portrait painter and later became the oldest regularly matriculated student at ASD.

For Alyssa Pecorino, who serves as director at Camp Isola Bella and was also one of the riders, this was one of the “most interesting” parts of the tour.

“We're celebrating 200 years of deaf education and it's mind-blowing some of the stories [we've heard],” she said. “I'm learning things I didn't even know before. ... The first group of students came in and you're thinking they'd be 3 or 5 years old, but it's just amazing that there were 20-year-olds going into school for the first time.”

An ASD nurse for the last 18 years, Denise Graziani, added that “women were learning carpentry skills and men were taught how to sew.”

“It was very general, but the students were taught schools that they could use in life,” she explained.

From 1988-93, Pecorino, who is hearing-impaired herself, originally attended Camp Isola Bella as a camper, before working her way up to camp counselor and eventually director.

“I discovered at camp I really am deaf and that it's not something negative; it's cultural,” she explained. “Yes, I'm deaf and I'm proud of it.”

According to Bravin, other riders on the tour included “some alumni, some staff, and some people who just wanted to join and celebrate with us.”



On June 18 through June 21, 42 bikers – which included alumni, staff and supporters of the American School for the Deaf – partook in a 200 mile bike tour, visiting historical sites across the state related to deaf education to celebrate the school's 200th anniversary. One of those stops was Harry's Place.

“It's nice to see people come together who share common interests,” he continued. “It's a really good group of people who feel like biking is something we all like to do... at night, we go out to dinner [and] we tell stories.”

The story Bravin tells meanwhile, is a rare one – as he became the fourth generation in his family to be diagnosed with a severe genetic hearing impairment with both his parents and two siblings also being deaf.

Such a long family history of deafness is unusual, with more than 90 percent of deaf children being born to hearing parents and only 2 to 3 out of every 1,000 children being born in the United States with a detectable level of hearing loss in one or both ears, according to the National Institute on Deafness and Other Com-

munication Disorders (NIDCD).

While many of the riders were deaf or hard of hearing, others included riders such as Bill Halscheid, who works as a health and physical education teacher at ASD and also chairs the committee which organized the 200th anniversary bike tour.

Halscheid explained that it was having a deaf aunt and uncle growing up that sparked his interest in learning ASL and led him to pursue a career in deaf education.

“I was fascinated by it,” he said, adding that the bike tour has been a “great way of getting everybody together supporting each other.”

“ASD is a part of all our lives. We want to give back,” Pecorino agreed. “And this is a great way to do that.”

East Hampton's Restraining Order Request Rejected

by Elizabeth Regan

A judge has denied the town's motion for a restraining order to prevent the newest member of the Board of Education from fulfilling her duties.

The decision is the latest in a year-and-a-half-long legal battle that began when the school board filed a lawsuit against the town in December 2015 in order to determine who has the authority to make appointments to the school board.

Middlesex Superior Court Judge Julia L. Aurigemma on Monday rejected the town's request for a restraining order, according to Board of Education Chairman Chris Goff.

A legal filing by town attorneys Morris R. Borea and Richard E. Fennelly III, of McGivney, Kluger and Cook, said the council was seeking to restrain "Mr. Lois Villa (sic) from performing any of his duties, exercising any of his powers, and otherwise serving as a member of the board" while the case is ongoing.

Lois Villa, whom school board members appointed late last month to the seat vacated by Kenneth Barber, is a woman.

The town attorneys also asked the judge to restrain the school board from filling any more vacancies in the absence of a final verdict.

Goff said the school board's attorney, Zachary D. Schurin of Pullman and Comley, told him the judge did not buy the argument that the town would suffer irreparable harm if a restraining order wasn't issued. He said he was also told the judge put a lot of weight on the fact that the school board has been making its own appointments for 27 years.

The school board and council agreed last year to put the case on hold until a charter revision referendum that would bring the issue to voters. In November, those residents and taxpayers rejected proposed charter language that would have given council the authority to fill vacancies on boards and commissions and to require them to appoint a member of the same party as the one who left the seat.

The referendum question on the November general election ballot failed by a margin of 559 votes. The other four proposed charter revisions

passed.

"The town voted. Period," Goff said.

He said the argument often cited by Council Chairwoman Patience Anderson, which is that the Board of Education started the lawsuit so they should be the ones to drop it, doesn't hold water with him.

"It's true, we can withdraw it. But we're standing our ground on the past 27 years of practice and the fact that the town voted," he said. "We're not going to withdraw because you're the defendant."

Wednesday, Anderson said the situation has changed so that it's unlikely the school board would find itself in the kind of situation that played out in November 2015.

Anderson said the issue arose because the outgoing school board, under the leadership of the school board's then-chairman Kenneth Barber, filled a post-election vacancy instead of waiting for its newly-elected members to be sworn in.

Now that the charter revision has changed to provide that all elected officials will be sworn in the day after the election, Anderson said that won't be an issue.

"The charter did make some changes to when the board gets sworn in, so the chances of a board of education making the same choices that Mr. Barber made would be unlikely," she said. "Also, the Board of Education now has a policy they didn't have last November, so the chances of there being an issue with the Board of Education appointing anybody is slim to none."

When asked what would prevent a newly-elected council from meeting to appoint a Board of Education member before the school board makes a move to do so, she said it's up to voters.

"It depends who you elect and whether or not they have a vendetta," she said. "You had two people who had a vendetta. And now the townspeople are suffering."

Anderson confirmed she was referring to Barber and councilman Ted Hintz Jr.

The issue stems from the general election on Nov. 3, 2015, during which a vacancy arose on

the school board after one of its members, Josh Piteo, was elected to the Town Council.

The Board of Education met in a special session on Nov. 10 to direct interim Superintendent Mark Winzler to post the vacancy publicly so that interviews may be held and a new member appointed by the school board. No vote was taken; Barber said it was an administrative action that did not require one.

"Let the new board figure out who they want to work with," Barber said at the time.

About two hours later, the Town Council appointed Republican Michael Rose to the vacant Board of Education seat. They cited authority granted in the town charter.

The move would have resulted in a Republican majority.

Rose ultimately declined the seat.

When reached for comment Wednesday, Hintz said they didn't know anything about vendettas.

"If [Anderson] thought that, why did she support the lawsuit?" he asked.

He declined to comment further because the appointment issue is an ongoing legal matter.

According to an email obtained by the *Riverast*, Hintz promptly sent a message to Republican Town Committee members about Anderson's communications with the newspaper. The message lambasted Anderson for commenting on an ongoing legal matter and attempting to tarnish his reputation.

Immediately after the backlash, Anderson was even more candid about the issue when she said Hintz knew about the school board meeting and its outcome but did not inform the rest of the council.

If council members had known the school board had decided to hold off on filling the vacancy, she said, she's confident councilors would not have taken the action they took to appoint Rose.

Hintz did not respond to a subsequent request for comment as of press time.

Barber, who stepped down as chairman last year and resigned from the board this May, said neither he nor Hintz had any desire for revenge

against anyone.

"It would strike me that [Anderson] is trying to deflect any sort of blame under her chairmanship that this is continuing to go on," Barber said.

Anderson called it a "power grab" on both sides.

She said Barber "saw an opportunity to keep this majority" and did so.

After Rose declined his appointment to the school board back in 2015, the outgoing school board met in a rare Saturday morning meeting on Nov. 14. They appointed Democrat Jeffrey Carlson to the seat, tipping the majority to the Democrats.

The vote to appoint Carlson was 6-1. The 'nay' vote belonged to Republican Debra Devin. Carlson left the room for the discussion and vote.

Devin said she preferred to continue with the plan established by the school board days earlier – before the Town Council exercised what it believes to be its appointment authority – when they decided to publicly post the vacancy and let the incoming school board conduct the interviews.

Anderson said she is trying to convene a special meeting of the town council to discuss the lawsuit but is having difficulty establishing a quorum.

"I need feedback from council members about what they want to do," she said.

Anderson expressed willingness to discuss the issue further with the Board of Education chairman.

"If Mr. Goff wants to revisit it, I am always appreciative of any opportunity to negotiate something other than having the court make the decision," she said.

School business manager Karen Asetta said this week that the Board of Education spent \$31,384 on litigation related to the appointment controversy as of May 31.

Town Manager Michael Maniscalco had no update to the \$12,711.85 figure he provided earlier this month. That's how much the town spent on the vacancy issue through March 30.

Old Home Days Has Unique Feel This Year

by Elizabeth Regan

This year's Old Home Days is a three-day opportunity to celebrate the town's rich history and bright future during East Hampton's 250th anniversary.

The Glorious Celebration, which runs July 6-8, includes a wide array of free musical entertainment with an emphasis on homegrown talent. Carnival rides, food vendors, prizes and activities will fill the three-day extravaganza.

The Old Home Day Parade on Saturday, July 8, at 11 a.m. will carry on the 250th anniversary theme with a contingent of marchers dressed in historical garb as well as floats devoted to Belltown traditions and well-known sites.

Parade organizer Catherine Egan said the parade, already touted as the largest parade in Middlesex County, is going to be even bigger than usual. She counted more than 62 entries on the roster.

Two parade marshals were chosen to represent the "Rich History, Bright Future" theme.

The town's rich history is personified by parade co-marshal Red McKinney, a local icon who helped resurrect the Old Home Days tradition in 1978. The lifelong resident is an active member of the Democratic Town Committee, the East Hampton Rotary and the Old Home Day Association. He has served as a selectman and a member of the parks and recreation advisory board.

Last year, McKinney described Old Home Days as a gathering rooted in the town's rural history, when farmers would get together for a period of respite after the hay was cut and the crops were in. It was a time "to have some cider, cook a pig and dance around," he said.

East Hampton's bright future will be represented by recent high school graduate and fellow parade co-marshal Molly Bentley. She will be majoring in sports, entertainment and event

management at Johnson and Wales University in Providence, RI. She's been involved with numerous high school clubs, including the service-based Interact Club.

In a biography provided by the Old Home Day Association, Bentley said volunteering at Old Home Days and the Relay for Life has helped shape her goals for the future.

She thanked the East Hampton community for helping her become the person she is today: "a fearless, compassionate and fun loving girl ready to take on the world."

Old Home Day Association President Jim Vick said there will also be a new focus on local crafters this year. He said association member Maureen Luddy has brought together 18 crafters to sell their handmade goods.

Vick also touted the three-day musical lineup that leans heavily on local bands.

The local band Scatterhead will start things off when it takes to the stage Thursday from 7:30 to 10 p.m.

On Friday, the Connecticut-based jam band The Neybas, named Hall of Famers in the *Hartford Advocate's* Grand Band Slam, plays a five-hour "marathon set" until 11 p.m., and will be joined by special guests throughout.

Saturday's lineup starts off with Eminent Domain at 1:30 p.m. Four Barrel Billy will bring American roots rock and roll at 2:50 p.m. East Hampton-based bands round out the weekend with Amity at 4:30 p.m., the Mercks at 6:30 p.m. and the JohnnyFive LiveBand at 8:30 p.m.

For kids of all ages, a one-man magic show by The Amazing Andy will perform Thursday at 6 p.m.

After a successful rollout last year, All-You-Can-Ride carnival wristbands return Saturday. The wristbands cost \$15 on Thursday night and \$20 on Friday night and all day Saturday.

The 39th annual Old Home Days Glorious



Old Home Days is back for another year next week. One of the highlights of the three-day Glorious Celebration will be the Old Home Day Parade, stepping off Saturday, July 8, at 11 a.m. The parade, said to be the largest in Middlesex County, will be led by co-grand marshals Molly Bentley and Red McKinney.

Celebration will be held on Thursday from 6-10 p.m.; Friday from 6-11 p.m.; and Saturday from 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. The fairgrounds are located at Center School, 7 Summit St.

Vick said shuttles from East Hampton High School, 15 North Maple St., to the Village Center run throughout the three-day event. The service is donated by DATTCO, Inc. People can

park at the high school and take the shuttles. Return shuttles will be provided throughout the festival from Center School, and on Saturday at the end of the parade on Main Street in the Village Center.

For more information, visit ehohd.org, or search "East Hampton Old Home Days" on Facebook.

Obituaries

Hebron

W. David Holland Jr.

W. David "Red" Holland Jr., 84, of Hebron, formerly of Glastonbury, beloved husband of the late Shirley (Baker) Holland, died peacefully Wednesday, June 21, at his home. He was born March 17, 1933, in Hartford, son of the late William D. Holland Sr. and Dorothy (Rose) Holland. Dave had been a resident of Hebron since 1961.



He was a member of the Manchester Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses. He loved to paint since he was 15 years old and retired as a painter from Pratt & Whitney Aircraft. Dave was a devoted and an adoring husband to Shirley for 57 years. He was a caring father and grandfather, always willing to help. He loved animals, country music and vacationing in Florida. He also enjoyed being outdoors, woodworking and small repair projects, and was never shy about voicing his opinion and thoughts.

He is survived by two daughters, Sally Allard and her husband Joseph Allard Sr. of Andover, Jill Kurys of Hebron; his son, David Holland and his wife Anna Marie of Sebring, Fla.; nine grandchildren, Joseph Allard Jr. and Leah, Angela Secondino and Tom, Jennifer Clymer and Dan, Nicholas Allard and Kelly, Priscilla Martinez and David, April Kurys, Jason Kurys, Cristina Schatz and Stuart, and Carrie Garcia and Rich. He also leaves 15 great-grandchildren and several nieces and nephews.

In addition to his parents, Dave was predeceased by his son-in-law, Thomas J. Kurys; his brother, Bernard "Butch" Holland; and sister, Davina Cofiell.

Dave's family would like to thank Hartford Health Home Hospice Care with a special thank you to Holly, Cathy and Suzanne from the Mansfield Group.

Calling hours were held Monday, June 26, at Holmes Funeral Home, 400 Main St. in Manchester, from 4-7 p.m., with a service of remembrance at 7 p.m. Burial will be private in the Jordan Cemetery in Waterford.

Memorial donations may be made to the Manchester Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses, 214 New Bolton Rd., Manchester, CT 06040.

To sign the online register book, go to holmes-watkinsfuneralhomes.com.

Colchester

Elizabeth Clark Hill

Elizabeth (Betty) Clark Hill, 89, passed away peacefully Saturday, June 10, at Apple Rehabilitation in Colchester. Born in Hartford Oct. 25, 1927, she was the daughter of the late Ralph and May (Nugent) Clark.



Betty was married to her beloved Edwin B. Hill for 43 years before he predeceased her in 1993.

Betty grew up in Wethersfield and moved to Middletown in 1967. She went to St Francis School of Nursing in Hartford graduating in 1948. She worked as a nurse for 42 years at Portland Convalescent, then at the VA Medical Center in White River Junction, Vt. She and Ed also volunteered at the information booth for several years in Quechee, Vt.

When she moved to Colchester 20 years ago she started volunteering at Harrington Court in Colchester. She also belonged to the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults, volunteered for First Fridays, delivered the Eucharist to Harrington Court and homebound people, adoration and went to daily Mass at St. Andrew Church in Colchester.

Betty is survived by her five children and their spouses, Sue Koerber and her husband Ed of Baltimore, Md., Dave Hill of Baltimore, Md., Janet Ellsworth and her husband Bob of Portland, Betsey Moon and her husband Jim of Colchester and Tom Hill and his wife Pat of East Hampton. She is also survived by 10 grandchildren, Kim, Bryan, Jen, Jacqlyn, Sarah, Abby, Katie, Steve, Jessica and Joshua; along with 12 great-grandchildren.

Calling hours will begin at 10 a.m. Saturday, July 15, followed by a Mass at St. Andrew Church in Colchester. Burial will be private at a later date.

In lieu of flowers, donations can be made in Betty's name to St. Andrew Church in Colchester.

Stafford Springs

Charles P. Knotek

Charles P. Knotek, 89, of Stafford Springs, husband of the late Eleanor G. (Anderson) Knotek, passed away in the comfort of his home, surrounded by his family, Saturday, June 24. He was born in New York, N.Y., son of the late Charles and Anna (Krejce) Knotek.



Charlie served in the United States Marine Corps during World War II, and retired as a corrections officer from the State of Connecticut. He was a huge NASCAR fan.

Charlie is survived by his three daughters, Barbara Jellen and her fiancé Brant Buhler, Judy Ackett and her husband Leonard, and Jane Knotek; grandchildren, Scott Jellen and his fiancée Julie, Kristina Agarwal and her husband Darren, Jonathon Ackett, Michelle VanNostrand and her husband Ryan, and Mark Syphers; great-grandchildren, Bryanna and Hunter; nephews, Howard Chaffee and Steven King; and niece, Sandra Young.

He was predeceased by his granddaughter, Heather Slattery.

Calling hours were held Tuesday, June 27, with a funeral service that morning, at Introigne Funeral Home, Inc., 51 East Main St., Stafford Springs. Burial with military honors followed in Stafford Springs Cemetery, Stafford Springs.

Memorial donations may be made to the Heather Slattery Scholarship Fund, c/o Concord High School, 481 Burrage Rd. NE, Concord, NC 28025.

For online condolences or directions, visit introignefuneralhome.com.

Hebron

Deborah Jean Rinaldi

Deborah Jean Rinaldi, 63, of Hebron, passed away early Tuesday morning, June 27, at Hartford Hospital, after a long and courageous battle with cancer. Born in Hartford July 6, 1953, she was the daughter of the late Alfred and Evelyn (Donna) Bourassa.



Deborah grew up in Windsor Locks and went on to become a registered nurse. She married her beloved husband, Salvatore Rinaldi, on Oct. 11, 1974. The couple raised their family in Hebron and retired to their lake home in Amston. She and her family loved to visit their camp at Pachaug Pond where they enjoyed boating and fishing as well as their annual vacations to Water's Edge. She had a special love and talent for scrapbooking, especially when she did the mother-daughter scrapbook retreats.

Deborah was a truly dedicated nurse, who loved to take care of others in need. She was universally loved by all who knew her or were touched by her caring nature.

She leaves to mourn her passing her devoted husband of 42 years, Sal; her son, Bryan and his wife, Nina Rinaldi of Hebron; her daughter, Elyse Plude and her companion, Anthony Torneo of Andover; a brother, James Bourassa and his companion, Judy Works of Windsor Locks; three grandchildren, Cameron Plude, Ellora and Suamira Lopes; her dog, Kasper; and numerous extended family and friends.

A Celebration of her Life will be held Sunday, July 9, from 1-2 p.m., at the Aurora-McCarthy Funeral Home, 167 Old Hartford Rd., Colchester. A memorial service will follow immediately at 2 p.m. at the funeral home. Burial will be at the convenience of the family.

Donations in her memory may be made to the American Cancer Society (donate3.cancer.org).

For online condolences, visit auroramccarthyfuneralhome.com.

Marlborough

Gayle Theresa Daigle

Gayle Theresa Daigle, 53, of Marlborough, died unexpectedly Friday, June 23, at Middlesex Hospital, surrounded by her family. She was born Jan. 1, 1964, in Hartford, the daughter of Albert W. Daigle and the late Fernande (Daigle) Daigle.



Gayle lived in Marlborough most of her life and was a graduate of RHAM High School with the Class of 1982. She worked for the Aetna Insurance Company. Gayle was a vivacious, social woman who loved animals and the outdoors. She devoted her life to raising her three daughters, whom she adored. She coached cheerleading for the past five years, an activity she treasured.

Along with her father, Albert of Marlborough, she leaves her loving daughters, Alyssa, Kaitlyn and Krista Tracey, all of Marlborough; her brother, Michael Daigle of Thompson; her adopted sister, Stephanie; and her beloved dog, Tasha.

Family and friends may gather Saturday, July 1, at 9 a.m., at the Samsel & Carmon Funeral Home, 419 Buckland Rd., South Windsor, followed by a Mass of Christian Burial, 10 a.m., at St. Francis of Assisi Church in South Windsor. Burial will follow at Holy Cross Cemetery in Glastonbury. Her family will receive friends today, June 30, from 5-8 p.m., at the funeral home.

Visit carmonfuneralhome.com for online condolences and guestbook.

From the Editor's Desk

Observations & Ruminations

by Mike Thompson

I try from time to time to grow my list of unusual meats I've eaten – stuff that's not just, say, beef or pork or chicken. One thing I haven't gotten to yet is frog's legs, and while the delicacy isn't exactly high on my "unusual meats wish list," but I admit to being curious.

However, if and when I finally do try frog's legs, I want to do so under my own free will. I want to know that's what I'm getting.

Seems like an odd qualification to make? One California woman probably doesn't think so, after a horrendous experience while dining out earlier this month.

According to the *New York Daily News*, Shawna Cepeda was dining at BJ's Restaurant and Brewhouse in West Covina when she noticed her salad tasted unusually bitter. The paper quoted Cepeda's review on the popular website Yelp.

So, about four bites into her meal, Cepeda started poking around to see what could be producing such a bitter taste. Cepeda said she "thought maybe the ranch dressing was a little bitter."

If only it were that simple.

Cepeda said that, after mixing the salad around some more, she found a dead baby frog.

Utterly – and understandably – grossed out, Cepeda immediately brought it to the attention of the restaurant's manager, who, she said, offered to comp her family's meal, minus the drinks.

The manager also gave her a \$50 gift certificate for the future, although Cepeda – again, understandably – has vowed to never eat there again.

Personally, I tend to like to give restaurants more than one shot. After all, anyone can have bad day – and that includes cooks and/or wait staff too. Provided the food didn't make me physically ill, I'm usually up to try a restaurant again to see if maybe things were better the second time around.

However, if I found a dead frog in my salad, there would likely be no second chance.

* * *

Speaking of pretty disgusting things (and no, I don't mean the Senate health care bill – that's a *very* disgusting thing), the other night I got home from work and was having dinner while I watched some TV. An advertisement came on that got me thinking: is this the best commercial that could be shown at a time when people could be reasonably expected to be eating dinner? (It was a little after 7 p.m.)

The answer was a definite no.

The commercial in question was for a product called "V.I.Poo." It's a little bottle of liquid that you spray into your toilet bowl, directly on top of the toilet water, right before you sit down to....well, you can probably guess. Any odors your, er, waste produces are then covered up by the more pleasant smells of your choice of lavender, lemon, roses or fruit.

Sound kinda disgusting? Well, imagine watching a video description of it: in the commercial, while you see three little brown rings form at the bottom of a cartoon toilet, an attractive blonde spokeswoman mentions how the spray forms a protective layer that "traps the icky smell of your devil's doughnuts." (Personally, I don't know why something as delicious as doughnuts needed to be brought into this sickening spot.)

And did I mention this was all while I was

eating dinner?

Not a whole lot makes me lose my appetite (well, a frog in my salad probably would), but this commercial just grossed me out. If it needs to be shown at all, how about, say, after midnight? Of course, I think advertising in general needs to cut down on the toilet humor. (Call me a prude, but I think even those Charmin commercials with the jolly cartoon bears that get pieces of toilet paper stuck to their butts is a little much.) I enjoy a funny commercial, but does it have to seem like it was written by a 12-year-old?

* * *

Some people just really shouldn't be parents. Unfortunately, in those types of situations the ones who suffer the most are invariably children.

I recently came across a terrible story out of Texas. At about 12:30 p.m. May 26, Cynthia Randolph, 24, found her 2-year-old daughter and 16-month-old son playing in the car, according to the Parker County (Texas) Sheriff's Office. Randolph told her daughter to get out of the car, and the child refused. So, to teach her daughter "a lesson," police said, Randolph closed the door to the car and shut them in. According to police, Randolph thought the girl could get herself and her brother out of the car when she was ready.

Randolph then went into the house, smoked some marijuana and took a nap for about two to three hours. Meanwhile, temperatures outside climbed to 96 degrees – which meant the temperature in the car was beyond deadly. According to San Jose State University, after an hour of 95-degree heat, the temperature inside a car is 138 degrees. And those two poor little children were in the car for between two and three hours.

When Randolph woke up, she apparently realized what had happened – and then went about staging an accident. She even smashed the window of the car, police said, in an attempt to make it look like she was trying to save the girl and boy. Officers responded to the scene at around 4 p.m., but it was too late. The two children – Juliet and Cavanaugh Ramirez – were pronounced dead half an hour later.

Police said Randolph told them the children were playing on an enclosed back porch when she realized they were "gone." She told officers that after 30-40 minutes she found them locked inside the car. Randolph told police the children "entered the vehicle on their own and had locked themselves inside."

But even at the time, officers seemed suspicious of Randolph's story. "The question is, can a 2-year-old open a car door and a 2-year-old and a 1-year-old climb inside and lock it?" Parker County Sheriff's Captain Mark Arnett told CNN last month, when the deaths were first reported.

It also didn't help that Randolph kept changing her story. Police said that "throughout multiple interviews, Randolph created several variations of the events which led to the death of her children."

Ultimately, police arrested Randolph last Friday, June 23, on two felony charges of injury to a child causing serious bodily injury.

It's just a terrible, sickening story. Little Juliet and Cavanaugh deserved better. Much better.

* * *

See you next week.