



RIVEREAST

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Blessing Box... Kristy Thompson, left, and Evelyn Taggart, both of Westchester Congregational Church in Colchester, stand by the church's new blessing box – a type of donation exchange that allows anyone in the community to give and take items of need at no cost, including everything from food to personal care items. See story on page 14.

Flu Claims Life of Colchester Child

by Julianna Roche

A 6-year-old from Colchester died last Wednesday, Feb. 21 of complications from the flu – making him the third Connecticut child in the last two months whose death has been linked to influenza.

A kindergarten student at Colchester Elementary School (CES), DeMarcus White was described in his obituary as having “captured the hearts of so many.”

“We thank all who were blessed to be a part of his life,” DeMarcus’ obituary reads. “He made such a huge impact on everyone. His beautiful smile and charming charisma will be dearly missed and NEVER forgotten.”

On the day after his death, interim Superintendent of Schools Dr. Mary Conway and CES Principal Judy O’Meara each sent out letters addressed to the Colchester Public Schools community and CES families.

“It is so very difficult for us to comprehend the loss of someone so young,” Conway wrote, adding that a team of school social workers and psychologists would be made available to provide support to staff, students and families “for as long as needed.”



O’Meara’s letter also offered parents ideas and guidance on how to have a conversation about the loss of a fellow student, including a link to the website grievingstudents.org.

“Your child may only need reassurance that they are safe,” she wrote. “We want them to know that they attend school in a caring community.”

DeMarcus is the third child whose death has been linked to the flu in Connecticut. Emma Splan, 6, of Norwalk died earlier this month and Nico Mallozzi, 10, of New

Canaan, died in January.

According to the state Department of Public Health (DPH), 97 people have died from flu-related illness this season as of Feb. 17 – making it the highest number of influenza-associated deaths reported to the department in the last five years. The state also reported 6,267 people have tested positive for the illness and 1,951 people have been hospitalized for it since Aug. 27.

In a press release issued Feb. 22, DPH Commissioner Dr. Raul Pino said the number

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B-Ball Coach Punished for ‘Unprofessional’ Texts

by Elizabeth Regan

East Hampton High School boys’ basketball coach Parker Strong was suspended for one game last week after an investigation by school officials revealed he sent “highly unprofessional” text messages to two members of East Haddam’s Nathan Hale-Ray High School team to warn them about one of their teammates.

The texts were sent after a play during a Jan. 9 basketball game against Hale-Ray resulted in a broken wrist for East Hampton senior Colin Baker, according to East Hampton school officials.

The East Hampton team is undefeated this season.

Video of the play posted on courant.com showed Hale-Ray athlete Connor Egan trying to block Baker, who was going for a basket. Baker could be seen falling to the ground.

East Hampton Superintendent of Schools Paul K. Smith said Strong subsequently sent a text message, which the administration later learned included a video clip of the play, to two Hale-Ray players Strong had coached in AAU basketball. The message indicated Strong thought it was an unfair play, according to Smith.

East Hampton High School athletic director Shaun Russell said Strong would not be available for comment. But the district provided a copy of the apology note Strong sent to Hale-Ray coach Nathan Moses, Hale-Ray Athletic Director Martin Ryczek and Principal Eric Spencer on Jan. 12.

“The other day I sent a text message to two members of your basketball team out of frustration and that was wrong,” Strong wrote. “I apologize for my actions and this is not what I want to represent within my school and program. I apologize for any problems that this caused and if I could go back and undo it I would.”

According to the *Courant*, Egan and his father said the texts and video spurred a backlash against the Hale-Ray player that included name-calling and threats.

The Egan family could not be reached for comment.

The issue came to a head on Feb. 19, when Hale-Ray administration forfeited its final regular season game against East Hampton.

East Hampton officials said the forfeiture, as well as the discovery by the administration that Strong’s text messages to the two students had included a video clip of the play, spurred the administration to discipline Strong.

“Regardless of the fact that an East Hampton player sustained an injury, your sending of a text and video to two Hale-Ray students after the game represented highly unprofessional behavior,” Smith wrote in the Feb. 21 disciplinary letter.

Smith noted any further incidents “will continue to result in immediate discipline of a progressive nature, up to and including termination as a coach in the East Hampton Public Schools.”

The one-game sanction was carried out during that evening’s away game against Portland.

Russell said the disciplinary action is “an opportunity to learn about a mistake made” while at the same time attempting “to keep the student athletes out of it.”

“In no way, shape or form do we condone the initial actions of Coach Strong,” Russell said.

Russell said the situation was handled internally in the immediate aftermath of the Jan. 9 game, when he first heard from the Hale-Ray athletic director that there had been some kind of communication between Strong and two Hale-Ray players.

But the issue did not go away and, over the next four weeks, Russell said he and East Hampton High School Principal Frank Rizzuto investigated allegations of “some social media stuff” involving name-calling or threatening talk stemming from the inciting game.

One report came from the Hale-Ray administration, to alert Russell the state police were investigating an allegation that a student from Colchester had posted a threatening message directed at Egan, he said.

According to state police, the social media message said Egan should be “snuffed.” State police determined “snuffed” in that context meant “beat up.”

The Colchester student was issued a juvenile summons for threatening and disorderly conduct, state police said.

Russell and Rizzuto could not find any indication that players from the East Hampton athletic program were involved, according to Russell.

“Any of that is unfortunate, unwarranted and we wouldn’t condone any of it,” Russell said. “But it did not include any of us.”

Russell applauded the athletes from both teams for staying away from the hostility that was showing up online.

“This was not an issue of two basketball teams yelling at each other through social media,” he said. “I give them all credit for that.”

Both Smith and Russell said they were disappointed by the Hale-Ray administration’s decision to forfeit the game. They said appropriate measures had been put in place to make sure the game would go smoothly, including having the coaches and team captains meet beforehand to discuss unresolved issues.

Russell said playing the game would have given the players from both teams the chance to get closure on the issue.

“From that perspective, I think it was an opportunity lost for everybody,” Russell said.

The game was also supposed to serve as East Hampton’s Senior Night, which honors the group of five seniors Russell said have been steadily improving over high school careers that culminated in this year’s undefeated season.

“Our seniors were deprived that opportunity of being able to play in that game,” Russell said,

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Flu Claims Life cont. from Front Page

of flu-related deaths “continues to highlight the gravity and intensity of this flu season.”
 “With 97 total deaths so far this season, I cannot stress enough that if you have not received a flu shot yet, for your own health and to protect the health of those around you, please get a flu shot,” he said. “It is still not too late.”
 Pino added that while the flu season is showing signs of peaking in Connecticut, it’s still widespread and he foresees another few weeks remaining.
 According to the press release, statewide emergency department visits attributed to the flu have remained at or above 14 percent, which are the highest weekly levels observed in Connecticut since the 2009 H1N1 pandemic.

“Unfortunately, we anticipate seeing more hospitalizations and deaths in the coming weeks,” Pino stated. “I continue to encourage everyone to take all precautions to prevent contracting or spreading the flu – cover your cough and sneeze, wash your hands frequently, stay home if you are sick, and avoid close contact with people who are sick.”
 * * *

On Feb. 23, a Go Fund Me page was created by family friends to raise money for DeMarcus’ funeral expenses and, as of Thursday morning, had raised \$21,256 of a \$25,000 goal. To donate, visit www.gofundme.com/56sxhgg.

Coach Punished cont. from Front Page

adding that he did not believe it was Hale-Ray’s intention “to rob us of that.”
 Senior Night instead was held as part of a subsequent game against Coghinchaug.
 Hale-Ray Athletic Director Martin Ryczek and Principal Eric Spencer referred questions from the *Rivereast* to East Haddam Superintendent of Schools Brian Reas, who did not return multiple calls for comment.
 Strong’s one-game suspension came at the end of what the East Hampton athletic director

described as a remarkably good season. The team has advanced to the Shoreline conference finals against Cromwell High School.
 The team is scheduled to compete in the second round of the state tournament on March 7 against the winner of the Putnam High School and Hartford Magnet Trinity College Academy game.
 Baker returned to play last week after recuperating from his wrist injury.

RHAM Student Charged with Threatening School

by Sloan Brewster

A student at RHAM Middle School was arrested this week and charged with making threats against the school, according to officials.
 Additional police have been at the school since officials learned about the threat early Wednesday, said schools superintendent Patricia Law.
 “We had the State Police come Wednesday during the day,” Law said. “Just to kind of bring a feeling of security.”
 That day, officials decided to maintain the additional police presence for the remainder of the week, Law said, “to help with that feeling of security and safety.”
 State Police Public Information Officer Sgt. Eric Haglund said the resident state trooper has been in RHAM schools, as had the School Resource Officer (SRO).

“The SRO has been in the schools every day and the resident trooper had a little more of a presence this week,” Haglund said.
 According to a letter Law sent to parents, a student at the school reported that another student made the threat.
 Police learned about the verbal threat against the school late Tuesday, according to the police report from Troop K. Through their investigation, police determined the threat had taken place during lunch on Monday and was overheard by three students.
 A juvenile male student was located and issued a juvenile misdemeanor summons. He was charged with breach of peace and second-degree threatening, police said, assigned a court date at Willimantic Juvenile Court and released into the custody of his guardian.
 He is currently suspended, Law said.

Victim in Marlborough Crash Suffers Gunshot Wound

by Julianna Roche

State Police are still investigating a car crash from last week in which three occupants were ejected from a vehicle, one of whom had sustained a gunshot wound.
 According to police, at approximately 3:30 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 22, they received a report of a motor vehicle collision on Route 2 east-bound near exit 15 in Marlborough.
 Police said first responders located a single vehicle at the scene with all three occupants suffering from life-threatening injuries after having been ejected from the car.
 The three victims were then transported to Hartford Hospital by Marlborough Volunteer Fire Department (MVFD), where doctors discovered one of them had been shot with a gun – which was later found on scene inside the vehicle by the State Police Collision Analysis Reconstruction Squad (CARS) who was brought in to assist with crime scene analysis.
 According to MVFD Fire Chief Kevin Asklar, Route 2 was closed for “a short period of time” while CARS investigated and took photos before one lane of traffic was

opened.
 Asklar explained that Lifestar was initially called to transport the victims; however, due to “pending weather conditions” of expected light snow, “they were prevented from flying.”
 Mutual aid was also provided by both Hebron and East Hampton, he said, adding that he “appreciated the response” from both towns as “they were quick to get out there to assist us.”
 According to police, detectives with Eastern District Major Crime were also notified of the car crash and are currently assisting with the investigation.
 On Wednesday, State Police spokesperson Sgt. Eric Haglund said no information on the identities of the three individuals has been released yet and the case remains under investigation.
 Anyone with information is asked to contact Det. William Utermarck at 860-896-3248, Eastern District Major Crime at 860-896-3230 or text TIP711 and the information to 274637. All calls and texts will remain confidential.

Observations & Ruminations

by Mike Thompson

Given that a large chunk of my family is from, or lives in, Alabama, I always bristle a little whenever I hear of embarrassing news coming from that state. I’ve spent a lot of time over the years trying to convince my northern friends it’s not that bad.....only to have someone like Roy Moore come along and ruin the whole thing.
 So I somewhat breathed a sigh of relief when a southern state recently landed in the headlines for a couple of embarrassing reasons, and for once it wasn’t Alabama.
 Instead, it was Georgia’s turn to shine in the shameful spotlight.
 Late last week, the Georgia State Senate passed a bill that would make it legal for adoption agencies that receive taxpayer funding to refuse to work with same-sex couples.
 While the legislation still needs to pass the state House, the fact it has already gone that far is revolting enough. Denying gay couples the right to adopt is terrible. To quote Lin-Manuel Miranda, love is love is love is love. Would it be better for a kid to go into an unhappy home just because the parents are straight? I don’t think so. How does that benefit anybody – especially the child?
 The news cycle being what it is, no one really started talking about the anti-gay adoption bill until Monday morning. And, just when folks seemed to stop reeling from that, there came a horrible abuse-of-power threat by Georgia’s lieutenant governor.
 Since the Parkland, Fla., shootings, there has been a push for companies that offer discounts to members of the National Rifle Association to sever their ties with the organization. Several companies, from insurance companies to hotel chains, have dropped the discounts – and over the weekend, Delta followed suit, announcing it would be ending its deal with the NRA to offer discounted rates for its group travel program.
 Gun enthusiasts flipped out, calling such moves an attack on the Second Amendment, as if the Second Amendment provided not just the right to bear arms but the right for a 20 percent discount at Enterprise Rent-a-Car. Yeah, I’m sure the discount was nice, but these are all private businesses that have the right to do what they want. I’m a member of AAA, and I love, say, the discounted movie tickets or the breaks at certain hotels. But if the hotel, or the movie theater, decided to end its connection with AAA, yeah, that would stink but I’d move on. After all, that’s not the reason I joined AAA, just as I assume people didn’t join the NRA to discounts on computer software.
 But, alas, I’m not Georgia’s lieutenant governor.
 Republican Casey Cagle, who also leads the Georgia State Senate, angrily tweeted Monday that he would “kill any tax legislation that benefits @Delta unless the company changes its position and fully reinstates its relationship with @NRA. Corporations cannot attack conservatives and expect us not to fight back.”
 Though he didn’t mention it by name, Cagle likely meant the \$50 million sales tax exemption on jet fuel, which primarily benefits Atlanta-based Delta.
 Should Cagle get his fellow Republicans to strike down the tax exemption, it’d be abuse of power, pure and simple. There’s no evidence at all this would be a good move for

the state; he’d be doing it purely out of spite.
 In fact, there is evidence it would be bad for the state. Delta touts itself as Georgia’s largest private employer, providing more than 33,000 jobs to the state. But do you think Delta would stick around Georgia if a \$50 million tax break up and vanished? Indeed, already officials from such states as New York, Virginia and Washington have invited Delta to relocate.
 The threat also doesn’t make sense when you take into consideration that, as University of Georgia political science professor Chuck Bullock told *The Washington Post*, “the justification [for the tax exemption] was that it would bring more jobs to the state.” Why would politicians want to get rid of those jobs?
 It’s something Republicans in Georgia may want to keep in mind – especially in light of a Hollywood filmmaker calling on Monday for studios to pull their TV and movie productions from the state if that aforementioned anti-same sex adoption bill comes to pass. (Pulling out would actually have more of an impact on Georgia than you might think; due to tax breaks, an increasing number of TV shows and movies – including several of the Disney/Marvel blockbusters – have been filmed there.)
 If Hollywood and Delta both took flight from Georgia.....well, that would be pretty bad news for the economy down there. And it would all be because of short-sighted, cruel political decisions that simply didn’t have to be made.
 Yes, not a great week for Georgia. Thanks again, guys, for taking some of the heat off of Alabama.
 * * *
 Lastly, I’ve got some personnel news to pass along. Effective this week, Elizabeth Regan is now the assistant editor of the *Rivereast*, in addition to continuing to cover Portland and East Hampton. In her two and a half years with the paper, Elizabeth has proven not just to be a terrific reporter but also very adept at helping me, from filling in for me when I’m on vacation or am sick to editing a story or two for me if I’m particularly swamped on a Thursday morning. She’s also been great to bounce ideas off of. Elizabeth has solid journalistic instincts and has often aided me in my decision-making. She’s made herself a real asset to the paper, and I’m very happy to name her assistant editor.
 On a sadder note, after two years with the paper, Colchester/Marlborough reporter Julianna Roche is moving on. This is her last week with the *Rivereast*. Julianna is a very good reporter and a skilled writer, with a strong work ethic and enthusiastically tackles any assignment I give her. In fact, “enthusiasm” is key to describing Julianna. She’s often a ray of sunshine in the office, with a positive attitude that’s infectious. More than once she’s come into the office after an interview, just beaming about how much she enjoyed it. Simply put, she’s been a joy to have around the office – and I’m sure she will continue to be that in her next professional endeavor.
 So, good luck, Julianna; you’ll be missed. And congratulations, Elizabeth; you deserve it.
 * * *
 See you next week.

Portland Native Produces New Haven Play

by Elizabeth Regan

Portland native Kevin Paley recently launched the Jasmine Ensemble Theatre Company to merge Connecticut roots with metropolitan connections as he raises awareness and funds for important social causes.

The company's inaugural production of *Andrew Lippa's Wild Party* will be performed this weekend at BAR New Haven, with proceeds going to the New Haven-based Umbrella Center for Domestic Violence Services.

Paley, who graduated Portland High School second in his class in 2012, went on to earn a theater degree at the University of Southern California. Crossing back to the East Coast, he joined the cast of the off-Broadway musical *Lili Marlene* at New York City's St. Luke Theatre.

That's where he met several like-minded artists who agreed to form a theater company committed to putting on "meaningful" musicals that benefit organizations dealing with the real-world repercussions of the shows' themes.

Paley told the *Rivercast* he selected *Andrew Lippa's Wild Party* because of its strong female lead character and focus on issues including domestic violence, gender equality and interracial relationships.

The show, licensed through Music Theatre International, bills itself as a steamy prohibition tale about a woman named Queenie and her Vaudeville clown boyfriend, Burrs.

The story unfolds over the course of a "party-to-end-all-parties" at the couple's Manhattan apartment.

"Over the course of the two hours of the show, Queenie has to figure out what is most important to her and what she has to do to make a better life for herself," Paley said.

He said the decision to launch his own *Wild Party* production came to him last year after seeing a performance in Brooklyn that left him feeling like the focus on "sexiness and entertainment" strayed from the show's domestic violence theme.

"I went home and was basically aggravated because I thought the show had so much potential," he said. "In that moment, I decided to do it myself."

Paley serves as the theater company's producing artistic director. Other local connections in the company include assistant director Molly Chiffer of Glastonbury and ensemble actor Brynn Owen, of East Hampton.

Owen graduated this December from Rider University in New Jersey. She is understudy for the lead role of Queenie.

The Jasmine Ensemble Theatre Company has been supported to date by crowdsourcing efforts that have yielded more than \$5,000 of its \$20,000 goal, according to gofundme.com/wildparty.

Donations cover production costs like the rights to perform the musical, costumes, props, musicians, and rehearsal and performance venues, according to the site.

Paley said ticket sales will help provide food, clothing, and living arrangements for women and children seeking shelter in communities

covered by the Umbrella Center for Domestic Violence Services.

Paley's focus on community service was fostered by family members including his grandfather, Ralph Paley, in whose name the annual *Spirit of Portland* awards are given.

The program was started by senior center administrator Mary Flood to honor residents who do much for the community "with very little, if any, recognition." It's currently sponsored by Ralph Paley's daughters.

Ralph Paley died in 2011 at the age of 81.

"I grew up realizing money is only as good as the people you're able to spend it on," Kevin Paley said.

He said supporting a cause - instead of simply "making money" - helps keep the cast grounded and focused.

"It lends a sense of gravity for what we're trying to achieve as an ensemble," he said.

Andrew Lippa's *Wild Party* will be performed at BAR New Haven, 254 Crown Street, on Saturday, March 3, at 7 p.m. and Sunday, March 4 at 5 p.m. Tickets are \$75 for cocktail tables or \$50 for bar seats, and may be purchased at wildparty2018.wixsite.com/jetco or at the door. Students and artists may reserve \$30 tickets by emailing wildparty2018@gmail.com and then paying at the door. Attendees must be 21 or older unless they come with a parent.



Queenie, played by Stephanie Michele Toups, and her boyfriend Burrs, played by Matt Mitchell, will take the issue of domestic violence to the stage in *Andrew Lippa's Wild Party* this weekend as box office proceeds are donated to a New Haven-based social service organization dedicated to addressing the problem in real life.

Pipeline Issues Postpone Portland Town Meeting

by Elizabeth Regan

A town meeting on a proposal to buy 5.28 acres of contaminated property on Brownstone Avenue has been postponed to give officials time to dig deeper into issues related to a pipeline running under the site.

First Selectwoman Susan Bransfield signed a purchase agreement with the property owners on Jan. 25 for \$385,000. The sale is contingent on approval by taxpayers at town meeting.

Town leaders, including those on the Board of Selectmen and Planning and Zoning Commission, have endorsed a plan to buy the three-parcel site as part of the town's continuing riverfront redevelopment efforts.

The town meeting was originally scheduled for Wednesday, Feb. 28.

The purchase is also contingent on a title search, which was submitted to the town the day after the Feb. 21 public hearing. It was at

the public hearing that questions arose over who's supposed to pay for removing and/or remediating the pipeline.

The three-parcel site was a petroleum storage and distribution site operated by Port Oil Company before it was vacated almost a decade ago, leaving five conspicuous oil tanks on the site. Bransfield said the pipeline was used to carry oil from river barges up to the tank farm.

The title search revealed a 1982 easement between Port Oil Company and Chevron USA Inc., which was in the vicinity of what is now Valley Oil. A temporary easement allowed the construction of the pipeline and a perpetual easement allowed the maintenance, repair and removal of the pipeline. The temporary portion of the easement was lifted in 1983 upon completion of the pipeline.

The easement specifies Port Oil is responsible for removing the pipeline and restoring

the land once the easement is no longer necessary.

Bransfield said the newfound information is an issue "for the seller to explain and rectify, if need be."

One lingering question is whether the perpetual easement is still active, according to a letter from the town's legal counsel, Murtha Cullina LLP, to the seller's attorney.

Bransfield noted the conversation is made more difficult by the fact that the property is in estate, with the oil company's owner having passed away years ago.

The town has to take ownership of the property before it can access a \$750,000 grant from the state Department of Economic and Community Development to remediate the brownfields site. According to reports from the environmental engineering firm Tighe and Bond, that's how much it will cost to mitigate

soil and groundwater contamination on the site.

Bransfield said this week the delay also gives officials time to look into the possibility of using the town's Open Space and Recreational Acquisition Fund to help pay for the purchase. The fund was established by a local ordinance in 1999 to allocate approximately \$50,000 each year to pay for properties that will be used for preservation, public space, or active recreation.

The fund currently totals \$168,000, according to Bransfield. It was last used to help pay for the Keegan property that will serve as the trailhead for Portland's section of the Air Line Trail.

The purchase agreement specifies the town has 90 days from the signing to do its due diligence in inspecting the property and reviewing any existing easements, liens or encumbrances.

The town meeting has not yet been rescheduled.

Colchester Welcomes New Superintendent

by Julianna Roche

After narrowing down a pool of 25 candidates, the Board of Education has finally ended its nine-month search for a permanent district leader, appointing Jeffrey Burt as Colchester's new superintendent of schools this week.

Burt, who currently serves as the assistant superintendent in Milford and resides in Madison with his family, is scheduled to begin his new position July 1.

"I am thrilled to be given this opportunity to help lead Colchester Public Schools," he said in a Feb. 26 press release, adding that he's looking forward to "build on Colchester's legacy of innovation and excellence."

When asked what initially drew him to the district, Burt explained Wednesday that the town has a "strong reputation" for excellence, and its personalized learning initiative, Innovation Nation – which was introduced into the



Jeffrey Burt

district in the fall of 2016 – is "definitely something" that meets his "personal and professional philosophy in terms of how to move education forward and to help students."

Prior to working in Milford, Burt held the same position in the Vernon school district from 2013-15. Before that, he served as administrator in Fairfield for nearly six years after teaching history at Darien High School from 1992-2006. He also served as an assistant principal in Montville Public Schools.

Burt holds a bachelor's degree from the College of Wooster in Ohio, a master's in teaching from Columbia University, and a sixth-year degree in administration and supervision from Sacred Heart University in Fairfield.

He explained that once he fills the position, one of his first priorities will be to ensure he understands both "the great things currently happening" in the district as well as "the areas of growth to work on."

"My first goal is really to listen and to learn everything I can from students, staff and the community," he said. "I don't want to come in with too many preconceived notions."

This Tuesday, Burt spent the day touring the schools and facilities, and meeting with school administrators, teachers and students through-

out the day.

"It really says a lot that every person [I met] said how much they love Colchester and how much I will love it," he said. "There couldn't be a better thing for someone to hear coming in."

Burt added that in addition to the staff, students and administrators he's already met – all of whom "were so welcoming and enthusiastic" – he was also very impressed with the new William J. Johnston Middle School (WJJMS) building.

"It's a gorgeous building and it's going to be a really incredible learning space," he said. "Each of the school buildings really is fantastic."

As with any new position however, Burt said he also expects to face some challenges – predominantly with ongoing budget issues resulting from state cuts to municipal aid.

"Transitioning into any new position, there's challenges, but I look forward to those challenges," Burt said, adding that school districts all over the state are facing the same budget issues.

Board of Education Chairman Brad Bernier said this week that while there were some "great, great candidates" who applied for the

superintendent position, Burt stood out from the crowd because of his "connection with individualized learning" and his "support for innovative learning."

"To have someone come into the district and embrace and foster that is great," Bernier said. "That is so important to us."

The board's search for a new superintendent began last May with the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE) as its consultant. Former schools superintendent Jeffrey Mathieu – who served as the district's leader for five years – retired last June.

The school board had then appointed former Colchester superintendent Karen Loiselle Goodwin to serve as interim superintendent from July 1 through Dec. 31, before appointing interim superintendent Dr. Mary Conway, who began Jan. 1. She will continue in the role until Burt starts.

"Jeff [Burt] comes to us with a commitment to educational excellence and an excitement towards supporting innovative learning," Bernier stated in a press release. "We believe these traits make him a great match for our staff, students and community."

Burt agreed. "I'm thrilled to be in the district," he said.

'Blessing Box' Comes to Colchester

by Julianna Roche

A nationwide, small-scale charity movement made its way to Colchester this week, landing itself right outside of Westchester Congregational Church (WCC) in the form of a wooden pantry painted in a crisp white.

According to Kristy Thompson, a congregation member and the Rev. Ron Thompson's wife – the "blessing box" is modeled after the Little Free Library, a nonprofit which installs and fills wooden boxes in communities across the country with books for people to give and take.

The blessing box works similarly, but with a twist – the small pantry is stocked with everything from nonperishable foods and canned goods to personal care items and office supplies.

Blessing boxes have "started popping up in neighborhoods and at churches, and we thought

this would be a new, nice thing [to bring to Colchester]," Thompson said, adding that in other communities, the boxes are placed in housing developments or in front of buildings that may be widely used by residents.

Sitting at the end of the church's driveway, WCC's blessing box rests atop a table with a blue paper sign hanging below it reading: take a blessing, bring a blessing, be a blessing.

"We're still working on making an actual sign," Thompson said, explaining that this past Wednesday was the first day the pantry was fully stocked and open to the community.

And while there's a door on the front of the pantry, there's no lock – so anyone can take anything they need at any time, for free.

The blessing box program also centers on the idea that small acts of generosity or kindness

can make a huge difference, especially if done anonymously.

"We chose this location so if someone just pulls into the driveway, they don't need to see anyone or say anything" whether they're donating items or taking some, Thompson explained.

Ron Thompson added that some donors also may not like going to social or public charity events, so this program "might appeal to them" instead.

"There's no commitment. If someone needs something, they're welcome to come and help themselves," he said. "This [idea] is completely organic... it came from the congregation. It was the people's vision to do this."

Thompson explained that in addition to nonperishable items and personal care items, the

blessing box will feature seasonal items such as stocking stuffers during the holiday season, fresh fruits and vegetables in the summer, and school supplies in the fall.

"So many families live paycheck to paycheck," she said. "And if you have children, you've got extra-curricular expenses, school supplies, birthday parties. ... If this helps take the bite off that, then that's great."

Longtime congregation member Evelyn Taggart explained the box is the church's "gift" to the community and she hopes to "spread the word" about the program.

Thompson agreed.

"If this encourages other organizations to want to build more blessing boxes in town, that would be great," she said.

Former Cop Turns Tree Into Table in Hebron

by Sloan Brewster

A resident and former police officer is transforming a historic maple tree into a conference table for town hall.

Sgt. Marc Rubera, a retired Hartford cop, has been in law enforcement for 37 years. He started woodworking 30 years ago as a way to decompress.

“As a kind of solitary therapy from the demands of work and it was a place to go to find peace and relaxation and I found that I really loved working with my hands and making things,” Rubera said, standing outside his workshop Wednesday.

When he was in the Hartford Police Department, Rubera started a program called Hoods in the Woods, a woodworking program for inner-city kids, he said. He taught them to build furniture and box in the boxing gym and woodworking shop he had in Hartford at the time.

“I got them out of gangs, some became police officers,” he said. “One is the [school resource officer] at RHAM and is retired from Hartford.”

When the Public Works Department had to remove a historic tree that was estimated to be about 100 years old, from the grounds at the library, town officials were loath to simply let the old tree go, said Town Manager Andrew Tierney.

“They felt that it was in the center of town, that it had some significance,” he said. “It felt that it would be a shame to just discard it.”

Director of Administrative Services Donna Lanza came up with the idea to have Rubera make a table to put in the Celio Room, a room on the first floor of Town Hall dedicated to Marion Celio, who was town clerk from 1974 until she passed away in 1998.

“She lived right over there on the town green,” Lanza said, pointing out the window from her desk in Town Hall. “Something Simple Café was the general store and Marion ran it with her husband Frank and she was very involved in the library.”

In April 2015, the Public Works Department used a crane to take down the tree, which was

not only rotted but was hanging over the roof, causing some concern, said department director Kevin Kelly.

Rubera was there, instructing staff on what length cuts to make, he said. Then they delivered the heavy trunk to Forest to Furniture, a saw mill and furniture-making operation he co-owns with a friend in Lebanon.

Rubera then cut the trunk into two pieces, finding some unexpected items within the old wood.

“There was metal that was 80 or 90 years old in there,” he said.

He said he could tell the age of the metal, which consisted of bullets and barbed wire, by its shape and texture.

“The metal from the early turn of the century is softer,” he said.

After he cut the trunk into pieces up to nine feet long and two inches thick, Rubera brought it to Harwick Kilns, in Hardwick, Mass., where it dried inside a kiln for about one year.

“It takes a year to dry something two inches thick,” he said, “One inch can take four to six months. It depends on the species; oak takes longer than maple.”

Once the wood was properly dry, he brought it to his workshop.

“And that’s when the artistry takes place,” Rubera said.

Rubera designed the table, first coming up with an idea in his head and then drawing it. It wasn’t that difficult for him to come up with a design, he said, as he has made about 50 tables. He did have certain specifications he wanted the design to follow, however.

For starters, he wanted to use butterfly joints.

“I wanted to use the butterflies because the wood was not perfect,” he said. “It had a lot of character to it and I had to work with cracks and defects in it. It came out beautiful. It’s all about how you put it together.”

The top of the table is already finished and leaning against a wall in the conference room across from the clerk’s office in Town Hall.

“It’s beautiful isn’t it?” Lanza said. “Can’t wait to see it be used, especially in [the Celio]



Sgt. Marc Rubera has been making a table from a historic maple tree that was in front of the library. Here he is putting the table together.

room.”

The table was delivered to Town Hall via a gurney, said Assistant Town Clerk Ann Hughes.

“They didn’t want it to get scratched so they brought it up on a gurney,” she said.

The tabletop is so heavy that he and volunteers from the town’s EMS delivered it in an ambulance.

Rubera is planning to donate the \$500 the town is giving him to make the table to the EMS department. He said he has great admiration for firefighters and EMS workers, many who work fulltime jobs in the same profession and still volunteer.

“I wanted to show my appreciation to them for the service they provide to the town,” he said. “In the past week I’ve gone to two OD calls with Hebron EMS where two individuals

close to death were brought back to life.”

Rubera said he is particularly impressed by the hard work and dedication of the younger generation of EMS workers, who work with modesty and humility.

“These young people, they inspire me,” he said. “It’s refreshing, it gives you faith.”

The EMS workers, along with cops, are there for anyone and everyone in need, according to Rubera.

“It’s been our creed that law enforcement and EMS,” he said, “that no matter who you voted for, what party you belong to, how much money you make or don’t make, your ethnicity or how important you are, we’re coming to help you.”

The table is almost completed and Rubera was putting some finishing touches on the legs on Tuesday.

Marlborough School Board Cuts \$52K from Budget

by Julianna Roche

At its meeting last Thursday, the Board of Education voted to cut an additional \$52,333 from its budget – bringing the school’s proposed spending package for the 2018-19 fiscal year to \$7,308,497, or a 0.3 percent increase over current year spending.

In late December, Superintendent of Schools Dr. David Sklarz presented board members with a first draft of his budget, which saw a 1.01 percent, or \$73,892, increase over current year spending.

The superintendent explained at the time that the spending package presented was a “needs-based budget” that was “very responsible, but not without sacrifice.”

Included in the cuts made by the school board last Thursday, however, were: reducing the number of kindergarten paraprofessionals from three full-time equivalents (FTE) to 1.5 FTE with a cost savings of \$27,000; \$11,500 in instructional equipment; \$10,098 in instructional technology; \$2,500 in teachers’ supplies; and \$1,235 in AHM social worker services.

Board of Education Chairwoman Ruth Kelly said this week that the meeting was the board’s “last chance to have a stab” at the budget before it presents the spending package to the Board of Finance on March 8.

“I think as a board we have really done our due diligence,” she continued. “We tried to bring in a budget as reasonable as possible without hurting the education of the kids and keeping the school in repair.”

Kelly furthered that the board has worked

very hard to craft a budget “that will give the school what it needs to continue having a good educational system.”

“Now it’s up to the Board of Finance,” she added.

Of the proposed \$7.31 million budget, salaries and benefits account for 84 percent, totaling \$6.17 million, with an average general wage increase of 1.8 percent for teacher salaries over the current year.

The proposed budget also includes \$164,747 for purchased professional services which cover items such as AHM Youth Services and legal and audit fees, and \$325,478 for purchased property services – a 24.9 percent increase over current year spending which covers electricity, sewer fees and contracts for facility maintenance.

The 2018-19 spending package also consists of \$14,660 for capital outlay, which was decreased from \$23,740 in the adopted 2017-18 budget.

In December, Sklarz noted that the district will continue to rely on various grants, Marlborough Elementary Child Care Association (MECCA) rental fees, and Medicaid and excess cost reimbursements as alternative funding sources and cost-savings measures.

He further explained that since the 2011-12 school year, the district has reduced classroom teachers from 31.5 to 26 in 2016-17, saving \$440,000. Other staff reductions have also included a 0.5 full-time equivalent (FTE) Span-

ish teacher, 0.5 FTE superintendent, 0.5 FTE special education coordinator, 2.2 FTE paraeducators, 1.0 FTE office receptionist, 0.5 FTE custodian, 0.4 FTE special education teacher, 0.5 FTE social worker, 0.2 FTE preschool teacher, the replacement of a custodian supervisor position with a custodian, and reducing the number of buses from 10 to 9.

Board members also spent time during the Feb. 22 meeting talking about school security and safety precautions in the wake of the Feb. 14 school shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Fla., which left 17 dead and became the nation’s deadliest school shooting since the 2012 elementary school shooting at Sandy Hook in Newtown.

“Nothing is more important to me than the safety of our children,” Sklarz said, adding that he considers every child who walks through the school doors as one of his own.

“With the horrific situation that has occurred too many times in this country, we have to look back at what we are doing in terms of security,” the superintendent added.

Sklarz explained that the school follows a strict security plan, which has received “high marks” from the state in the past.

“I would expect nothing less than that,” he furthered, explaining, however, that the state reviews security plans on an ongoing basis and is constantly making changes to what practices should be employed in schools.

During public comments, some residents had

their own suggestions of what the school could do to strengthen its security measures, including a proposal by Ken Hjulstrom to relocate the resident trooper’s and constable’s base from its current location at Firehouse 2 on West Road to inside the school building as there is enough space available.

He furthered that while the trooper and constables are not always in their offices, they do spend time there and the “increased [police] presence” could “be a great thing for the kids to see.”

Resident Stephanie Billiel also questioned whether there could be updates made to the entry system – which currently requires that anyone visiting the building must buzz in before being allowed into the school.

“I know that office staff is excellent about screening who’s coming in and out, but it’s very easy for someone to come in as someone is exiting,” she said, suggesting maybe adding an additional lock on the door from the foyer area to the office or a window where visitors could check in before they enter the building.

Sklarz agreed that while holding the door for someone behind you is considered polite, everyone, himself included, needs to practice not doing that.

The superintendent emphasized, however, that the school takes every precaution necessary to ensure the safety of all its students.

“You shouldn’t have to worry about [your kids],” Sklarz said, “but if you do, just know that we’re going to take care of them.”

Working Toward New Seamster Park in East Hampton

by Elizabeth Regan

The Parks and Recreation Department continues to work toward its \$100,000 fundraising goal for a new Seamster Park.

Almost two years after the existing playground near Memorial School was deemed a safety risk by the town insurance company, Parks and Recreation Director Jeremy Hall said he's hopeful a couple of large-scale events – such as a live auction and a golf tournament – will bring in enough money to reach the fundraising goal.

The auction will be held Saturday, March 10, from 5-9 p.m. at Angelico's Lake House. The golf tournament will tee off at 10 a.m. Thursday, May 24, at Blackledge Country Club.

The project cost, which has gone from original estimates of \$250,000 to a pared-down \$150,000, will be made possible by a combination of donations, department program fees and capital funding from the town.

Hall said the plan is to phase in a few elements over the coming years if donations allow, such as a zip line, ropes course and twisty slide. A splash pad has also been discussed as a future possibility but is not in the current plan.

The department has brought in approximately \$40,000 in donations so far, according to a fundraising spreadsheet.

Designs for the 14,000-square-foot proposed playspace were created with help from East Hampton elementary school students through interactive workshops facilitated by architects from the Ithaca, N.Y.-based Play By Design

firm. The kids pitched in their ideas for amenities including adaptive swings, a rock wall, monkey bars, bridges, slides and tunnels.

If all goes according to plan, the rest of the community will get the chance to pitch in during the volunteer "community build."

The project will take about a week to complete and requires 70 volunteers per shift for three shifts per day.

While previous estimates for a tentative build date have come and gone without the necessary funds, Hall said last week that he hopes construction can begin in April 2019.

It's not yet clear what will happen to the existing playground in the meantime.

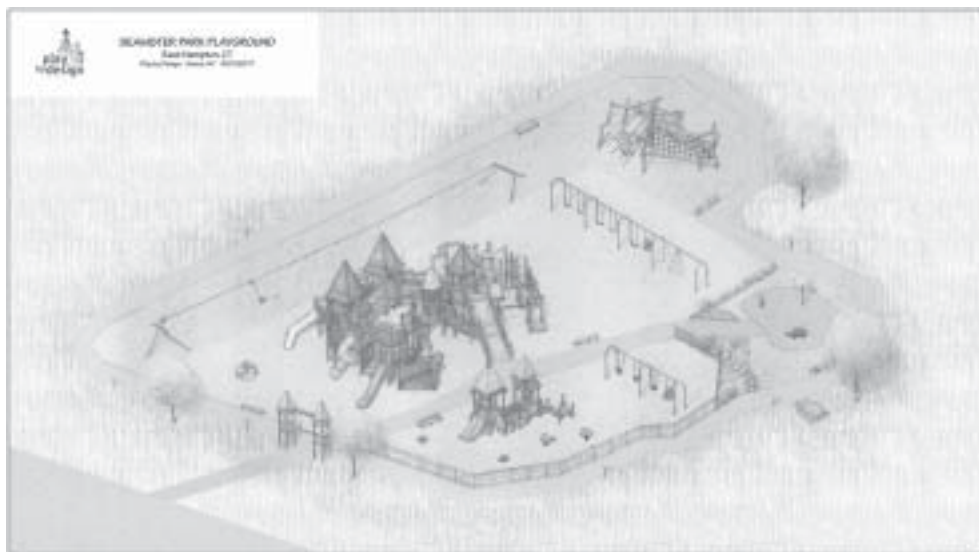
Hall said the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board at its March 6 meeting will recommend bringing the issue to the Town Council for further discussion.

Potentially unsafe components have been removed or barricaded, according to Hall.

A 2016 report by Trident Insurance Company said the structure did not meet existing safety standards even when it was built over 20 years ago. It also indicated improper maintenance of the wood has contributed to the playground's decline.

The new playground design includes school-age and "Tot-Lot" sections. Roughly 40 different play elements make up the space, ranging from swings and slides to a pirate ship and bell tower.

An itemized list of playground components and pricing is available in the Parks and Recre-



The East Hampton Parks and Recreation Department is working to raise \$100,000 to replace the deteriorating and unsafe playscape at Seamster Park.

ation department and online at easthamptonrec.com. Those interested in donating can pick a specific item - or they can suggest their own idea for a customized component.

The current plan includes a play-camper donated by Nelson's Family Campground.

Hall said that's an example of the creative approach members of the community can take in supporting the project.

The March 10 auction event will offer the

chance to buy tickets for roughly 30 raffle items. The live auction will begin at 7 p.m. About 40 big-ticket items will be auctioned off by Red McKinney, according to Hall – ranging from a happy hour boat ride for six on Lake Pocotopaug to a week-long vacation in Florida.

The event is being held in conjunction with the Rotary Club of East Hampton.

East Hampton School Board Passes \$31.17M Budget

by Elizabeth Regan

The Board of Education Monday approved a 3.73 percent increase over the current school budget.

The \$31.17 million education budget proposal for 2018-19 will go to the Board of Finance for review and deliberation over the next month.

The school board vote came after a month of interactive budget workshops. The format incorporated public feedback into the school board's deliberations.

The education proposal is an increase of \$115,090 over the recommended budget presented by Superintendent of Schools Paul K. Smith in January.

School board members rejected Smith's move to cut a high school math and science teacher. They also nixed his suggestion to add an elementary world language teacher.

The school board added \$30,000 in Next Generation Science Standards classroom supplies. Director of Curriculum and Instruction Mary Clark said the materials are necessary as the district moves toward "really doing science" as opposed to just talking about it.

The rest of the budget is in line with Smith's recommendation, including roughly \$107,000 to be spent district-wide toward new programming, textbooks and curriculum revision in the subjects of reading, writing and math.

Staffing changes in the proposed spending plan include an existing guidance position that would be reassigned to the high school to focus on job coaching and college placement. The proposal would also add a middle school assistant cheerleading coach.

The 3.73 percent increase over the current budget is largely due to contractual and special education cost increases, according to school officials.

Smith said about 1.5 percent of the 3.73 percent proposed education budget increase comes from rising special education costs. It's the result of an unexpected increase in the number of students who require services outside the district this year.

"Keeping the increase low this year has been a challenge due to rising special education outplacements and special education transportation needs," Smith wrote in the packet out-

lining the school board budget.

School business manager Karen Asetta said this week that outplacement costs are expected to rise by \$200,000 in the current fiscal year compared to what the district spent last year.

The district is working to mitigate the increases in special education expenses with the expansion of a program designed to meet special education students' needs in the district so they can remain in – or return to – school with their East Hampton peers, while reducing expensive outplacement costs.

The program was initiated in Center and Memorial schools as part of the current budget. The proposed spending plan would expand the initiative to the middle school by moving around teachers already assigned to the district.

Smith said fixed costs and contractual increases comprise 1.85 percent of the proposed budget. Electricity increases of about \$90,000 resulting from the completion of the high school contribute to the rising costs, he said.

In a dramatic shift from the superintendent's proposal at this time last year, which included significant increases in health insurance costs,

the spending plan now estimates a 3 percent decrease in those expenses compared to the current budget. The change is the result of a switch to a plan allowing municipal employees to become part of the same pool as state employees.

On the revenue side, the education budget assumes a slight decrease in education aid amid a trend of deepening reductions in funding from the state.

The proposed education budget estimates the town will receive \$6.39 million in education aid, a 2.5 percent decrease compared to the current year.

Gov. Dannel P. Malloy's proposed 2018-19 budget, announced last month, would reduce the amount of education aid from the state by \$134,726 compared to the current year.

It's up to lawmakers to approve the final budget revision before it goes back to the governor for his signature.

Asetta said the district does not expect to see a repeat of the kind of drastic cuts made by Malloy late last year, when education aid to the town was reduced by \$991,000.

RHAM Schools Chief Tweaks Budget Recommendation

by Sloan Brewster

Schools Superintendent Patricia Law this week presented the Board of Education with \$48,528 in possible tweaks to her 2018-2019 budget recommendation.

Law announced the revised numbers, along with possible staffing changes, to school board members on Feb. 26. The presentation was a response to questions from board members earlier that month.

When worked into the budget request, the numbers bring the RHAM budget total to \$30.17 million, an increase of \$48,528 over Law's original proposal.

Law began her presentation with a look at School Resource Officer (SRO) positions in surrounding towns.

The district currently employs one full-time SRO. There is no specific proposal on the table regarding the SRO.

"(Board members) just wanted more information around that position," Law said in a phone call Wednesday.

Scotland, Lebanon, Region 19, Mansfield, Region 11, Eastford and Thompson do not have SROs, Law said. In Plainfield, there are three part-time security officers with no guns. Tolland has two SROs. Windham High School has one SRO. Woodstock Academy has 12 security guards, some of whom are armed with guns.

Board members asked how traffic issues would be addressed if the SRO were to be cut.

According to Law, there are a couple of possibilities, including hiring a police officer for an hour in the morning and an hour in the afternoon, hiring a crossing guard, and reviewing parking availability to avoid across-the-street parking.

The district currently pays paraprofessionals an additional \$360 a year to assist the SRO with traffic, Law said.

"How do you get that number?" Board member Joseph O'Connor asked.

"It's in their contract," Law said. "They get a little stipend above and beyond their full-time para pay."

Law also offered possible administrative tweaks.

Cutting the middle school assistant principal's schedule from 260 to 196 days would save roughly \$30,000 to \$32,000, Law said. Hiring a pupil personnel director would run \$130,753. Eliminating the director of curriculum and assigning that position's duties to herself, fellow administrators and some teachers, who would receive stipends to do the curriculum work, would calculate to a savings of \$65,306.

Law's initial proposal was to eliminate the middle school assistant principal and create a new pupil services supervisor and middle school assistant principal. One person would have filled both roles.

The revised recommendation would also eliminate two special education coordinators and make the director of curriculum, professional development, assessment and instructional technology a part-time position.

The changes would help address the needs of rising numbers of special education students, she said.

Law also made some tweaks to her proposal to reconfigure the technology department.

Initially, she proposed eliminating all positions in the department and redesigning three

more for \$34,947 in savings. The plan included hiring a media center technology specialist for the high school and middle schools for an approximate \$80,083 cost.

The new plan is to hire the specialist and an instructional technology coach for about \$70,407, for a total cost of \$150,490.

"That would be a teaching position," she said about the coach.

The department currently has a director of technology, two technology services technicians and someone in charge of PowerSchool, an education technology platform, Law said in a phone call Wednesday.

"They work independently in each area," she said. "What I'm looking to do is just streamline and connect all of the parts and develop a larger range of duties they would oversee."

Additionally, she wants to create a director to oversee the entire department.

Board member David Gostanian said he was worried that one technician would not be enough. As an example, he said a single virus would be a challenge for just one person to surmount.

"There's 122 devices, not counting phones," he said.

Law also offered ideas for budgeting for the state's special education Excess Cost grant. She said it was important for the board to consider how it and the three towns in the district would address the fluctuations in the grant.

For the past few years, the district has not received as much in Excess Cost revenue as it expected, Law said. In the 2014-2015 school year, it received \$90,689 less than it planned on getting. The following year, it got \$99,669 less and last year, the grant was \$65,885 less

than anticipated.

"We all know they are going to go up and down next year, where they land I do not know," she said.

She offered three possible scenarios.

The board could run with her initial projection of \$646,459, she said. It could also anticipate receiving 73 percent of that, or \$471,915, or it could go with a projection of \$0.

Law said she was also working on ways to bring special education students back to the district to reduce expensive outplacement costs.

"We're trying to be very proactive as a district," she said.

If the board goes with a \$0 revenue projection for Excess Cost, the budget would be 3.91 percent above the current budget, Law said. Using the \$471,915 projection, the budget shows a 2.26 percent increase.

Law also said the district has \$600,000 in requests for capital improvements, with \$300,700 of that top priority items for next year.

The items she would like funded next year include \$55,000 for a new dump truck body, \$75,000 to replace sidewalks steps in a couple areas at the high school, \$45,000 to repair a sidewalk in the middle school courtyard, \$12,500 to replace caulking on the loading dock, \$19,800 for vents in the high school main entrance, \$20,000 to replace a fire panel, \$35,000 for sidewalk repairs, \$8,400 to restore a chimney and \$30,000 to make the softball field ADA compliant.

"We really haven't had any conversation around capital," Law said.

The board will discuss capital needs Monday, March 5 at 6:30 p.m. in the high school chorus room.

East Hampton Police News

2/6: After an investigation into a car-vs.-telephone pole crash at the intersection of Walnut Avenue and Main Street, Harvey Leonard, 30, of 41 Midwood Farm Rd., was arrested and charged with evading, failure to obey a stop sign, failure to carry operator's license and operating under the influence, East Hampton Police said. According to police, Leonard was the sole occupant of the vehicle and walked away from the scene of the crash.

2/8: Katie Boudreau, 27, of 5 Edgerton St., was issued a summons for operating a motor vehicle while using a cell phone and operating a motor vehicle while under suspension, police said.

2/9: Thomas Charles Trumbull, 57, of 18 Bellwood Ct., was arrested and charged with patronizing a prostitute, police said.

2/9: After an investigation into reports of an erratically-operating vehicle that had crashed and rolled into a ditch on West High Street (Route 66), Joseph Pistilli, 60, of 565 Clark Ave., Bristol, was arrested for driving under the influence, reckless driving, failure to drive right and distracted driving, police said.

2/11: John Forbes, 31, of 205 W. High St., was arrested and charged with operating under the influence, resisting arrest, operating a motor vehicle with a suspended license and failure to drive right, police said.

2/13: Sean Pedevillano, 20, of 59 Clark Hill Rd., was issued a summons for reckless driving and possession of less than half an ounce of marijuana, police said, police said.

2/13: After an investigation into a four-car crash that occurred in area of Middletown Av-

enue (Route 16), and West High Street (Route 66), Andrew E. McGuire, 51, of 162 Old Middle St., Middletown was issued a summons for operating while license suspended and operating an unregistered motor vehicle, police said.

2/16: Neil Singhal, 37, of 4 Keighley Pond Rd., was taken into custody pursuant to an active warrant for his arrest and charged with possession of drug paraphernalia, possession of a controlled substance and violation of a protective order, police said.

2/17: Robert Francis Moran, 48, of 77 Chestnut St., Middletown, was arrested and charged with speeding, operating a motor vehicle while suspended and possession of drug paraphernalia. Moran was also taken into custody pursuant to two outstanding warrants for his arrest and charged with two separate counts of second-degree failure, police said.

2/18: Alan R. McKenna, 28, of 31-2 Grist Mill Rd., Moodus was issued a summons for operating an unregistered motor vehicle and misuse of plates, police said.

2/20: DaShawn Kaheem Dwyer, 23, of 385 Woodland St., Hartford, was taken into custody pursuant to an active warrant for his arrest for violation of probation, police said.

2/20: Justin Kyle Kneeland, 32, of 532 Clubhouse Rd., Lebanon, was arrested and charged with conspiracy to commit second-degree robbery, criminal attempt to commit second-degree robbery, second-degree assault and third-degree stalking, police said.

Also, from Feb. 5-18, officers responded to 32 medical calls, 13 motor vehicle crashes and 13 alarms, and made 49 traffic stops, police said.

Marlborough Police News

2/21: State Police said Ryan McCutchen, 32, of 31 Keirstead Circle, was arrested and charged with breach of peace and third-degree assault.

Hebron Police News

2/21: State Police said Wesley J. Brooker, 31, of 33 Hunt Rd., was arrested and charged with operating a motor vehicle under the influence of drugs/alcohol.

Colchester Police News

2/20: Colchester Police said Krista N. Hartling, 47, of 12 Highwood Circle, was arrested and charged with operation of a motor vehicle with a suspended license/registration.

2/21: State Police said David H. Forrester, 44, of 120 Enfield St., Hartford, was arrested and charged with second-degree failure to appear.

2/25: State Police said Rochelle Lambert, 41, of 71 Midland Dr., was arrested and charged with third-degree criminal mischief.

Obituaries

Colchester

Aurora Trotta Krupke

Aurora Trotta (Wrang) Krupke died suddenly after a brief illness Wednesday, Feb. 21. She leaves her beloved husband and best friend of 30 years, John, and her two loving children, Kaila Aurora Krupke and Gregory John Krupke.



She was born in Middletown April 17, 1962, to Josephine (Trotta) Poliner of Wallingford and the late J. Peter Wrang. She leaves her sister, Jo-Anne W. Foley and her husband, Thomas and their children, Meghan Kwiatkowski, Dr. Gillian Foley, Conor Foley and Declan Foley; her sister, Jane W. Lewis and her husband, Donald; and their daughter, Sarah; her brother, James P. Wrang and his wife, Victoria, and their daughter, Caitlyn. She also leaves several aunts and many cousins.

Aurora was a longtime employee of Northeast Utilities and until recently, secretary in the law firm of Myron J. Poliner. Aurora and John enjoyed camping, canoeing and water rafting. Aurora loved collecting rock specimens and has accumulated a large collection. She and John vacationed last summer at the Herkimer Diamonds outcrop in New York, where she dug up some beautiful quartz crystals close to 500 million years old. As a child she spent each summer at her grandmother's cottage in Milford.

Aurora was also an avid New York Giants fan and enjoyed going to games. Aurora and her family vacationed regularly in Newport, one of her all-time favorite places. Aurora is a graduate of Mercy High School, Class of 1980, and attended Eastern Connecticut State University.

The Krupke family would like to thank the nurses, the doctors and the staff for the wonderful care she received at Danbury Hospital in the last months. Aurora's cheerful nature and wonderful smile will be missed by her family, friends and all her knew her. Aurora was a loving wife, mother, daughter and sister who will be greatly missed by all. May she rest in peace.

The family received friends Tuesday, Feb. 27, at the Aurora-McCarthy Funeral Home, 167 Old Hartford Rd., Colchester. A chapel service celebrating her life was observed during the visitation.

As Aurora was an avid animal lover, the family suggests that those who wish make a donation in her memory to either the Connecticut Humane Society, 701 Russell Rd., Newington, CT 06111 or to the Ledyard Animal Control, 889 Col. Ledyard Hwy., Ledyard, CT 06339.

For online condolences, visit auroramccarthyfuneralhome.com.

Colchester

Debra Closson Yarrow

Debra Closson Yarrow, 59, of Colchester, formerly of Middletown, entered Eternal Rest peacefully Thursday, Feb. 22, at the Westside Health Care Center in Manchester.



In her passing, she was reunited with her two best friends - her sister, Kimberlee (Yarrow) Sanborn and mother, Roxanna (Starbuck) Yarrow.

Born May 20, 1958, in Middletown, she spent most of her life there and had worked for various restaurants in the area.

She leaves to mourn her passing but cherish her memory two siblings, Robert Yarrow Jr. and his wife, Jeanne of Lambertville, NJ and Heather Parlee and her husband, Robert of Colchester; two nieces, Katherine Yarrow and Rachael Parlee; a nephew, Joshua Parlee; and numerous extended family members.

In addition to her sister and mother, she was predeceased by her father, Robert Yarrow Sr. and her husband, Daniel Remsen.

In lieu of flowers, donations in her memory may be made to the charity of one's choice.

Care of private arrangements has been entrusted to the Aurora-McCarthy Funeral Home of Colchester.

Andover

Inez Stella McKinney

Inez Stella (Smith) McKinney, 77, of Andover, entered into eternal rest Wednesday, Feb. 21. She was born Feb. 26, 1940, in Brattleboro, Vt., daughter of the late Floyd E. and Emma L. (Dryden) Smith.



Inez grew up in East Hampton, where she resided with her late brothers Eugene, Irving, Milton and Duane. She married at 19 on Aug. 15, 1959 to the late Charles H. McKinney. Her greatest love and accomplishments were her three daughters, whom she raised in Colchester.

Inez loved dancing, roller skating, ice skating, oil painting, nature, flowers, birds, especially hummingbirds and butterflies. She always had a cat by her side as well as chocolate to comfort her. She did her best to put a smile on everyone's face who were in her presence. She was a strong-willed, determined woman who persevered through all of life's struggles.

Inez is survived by her daughters Cynthia L. Litz of Columbia, Pamela I. Buffinton and Robert J. Buffinton (husband) of West Haven, and Deborah J. Patten and John D. Patten (husband) of Columbia, and Timothy S. Litz Jr. (grandson) of East Hartford.

Funeral services will be held at 11 a.m. Saturday, March 3, at Spencer Funeral Home, 112 Main St., East Hampton. Burial will take place in a private ceremony at Meeting House Hill Cemetery, Brattleboro, Vt., at a later date.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to Masonicare Partners Home Health and Hospice, 111 Founders Plaza, Suite 200, East Hartford, CT 06108 or Hebrew Home and Hospital, 1 Abrahms Rd., West Hartford, CT 06117. These two organizations treated Inez with kindness, dignity and respect.

Online condolences may be made at spencerfuneralhomeinc.com.

East Hampton

Jo-Ann Jackson

Jo-Ann Jackson, 76, of East Hampton, made her journey to heaven peacefully Friday, Feb. 23, after a courageous battle with cancer. She had her family by her side.



She was born and raised in Newington. She had a college degree and went to work for Southern New England Telephone Company where she retired from after a long successful career in management. She was small in stature but big in personality. She was a very strong woman who could do anything she set her mind to.

She leaves behind her two sons, Stephen and Christopher Guerin; her loving sister, Barbara Wade; her grandchildren, Michael, Lia, Christopher, Austin Guerin; and her new great-grandson Jameson, whom she'd met a week prior to her death; her nieces, Julie, Amanda and Ann; along with many dear friends.

Services will be held at St. Patrick Church in East Hampton Monday, March 5, at 10:30 a.m. All are welcome.

Portland

Jeffrey Carlos Barry

Jeffrey Carlos Barry, 59, formerly of Meredith, N.H., and Portland, died Monday, Jan. 29, at his residence in Yakima, Wash. Born in 1959, Mr. Barry was the son of Carlos Barry IV and Aline (Roman) Barry of Portland. He lived a full and rewarding life, and his memory will be treasured by his family and friends as long as they draw breath.



Mr. Barry was predeceased by his parents and his nephew, Christopher H. Barry. Survivors include his brother, Peter A. Barry, and niece, Corinda Barry Gibbs, and many close friends, including those in Connecticut - Larry Unikewicz, Tom Thiffault and Bill Scully; in New Hampshire - Stu Morrill and Ken Hood; and in the Pacific Northwest - his former wife Monika Kohl, Don Johnson, and Joe and Cathy Buchanan.

Mr. Barry was educated in Portland and learned the trade of carpentry working in the Lake Winnepesaukee region of New Hampshire. In his early years, he worked many projects, from public housing to million-dollar vacation retreats and everything in between. Later, he found success in purchasing and rehabilitating homes in New Hampshire and Massachusetts. There are several families who will be sleeping under the roofs he built tonight.

While carpentry was his work, and he gave it his all, aviation became his passion. In his adult years, Mr. Barry discovered the joy of flying, earned his private pilot's license, and owned/operated four aircraft-one FAA-certified and three experimental, two of which he built with his own hands (and one which landed and took off on water!) Mr. Barry came to the Yakima Valley of Washington State in 2013 because of good flying weather. Home remodel work kept him in the chips while he flew a hand-built experimental aircraft around the western United States. In these years, he became a dear friend to those who relied on his skills and knowledge and enjoyed his charming manner. (Well, "charming" may not quite catch it...)

At the time of his passing, Jeff was getting ready to move back to New England, heading on to the next phase of his life. His Yakima friend would like to apologize to his New England family and friends for not shepherding him home safely. Those of us who knew him loved him. He will be missed.

Memorial services will be held at Farrell's Restaurant from 11 a.m.-1 p.m. Saturday, March 3, with graveside services to follow at Trinity Church cemetery, Main Street, Portland. A gathering for Jeff's Yakima friends will be organized in the spring.

The Portland Memorial Funeral Home, 231 Main St., Portland, is in charge of arrangements.

East Hampton

Joan Marie Lawson

Joan Marie Lawson, 90, of East Hampton, died Monday, Jan. 29, at Middlesex Hospital. Born March 11, 1927, in Bronx, N.Y., she was the daughter of the late Paul and Metta (Hansen) Monroe.

Joan was the widow of the late Frank B. Lawson Jr. She was a communicant of St. Patrick Church in East Hampton and a member of the American Legion Women's Auxiliary. Joan was a volunteer at the State Veterans Hospital in Rocky Hill, and had been a den mother in the Cub Scouts for many years.

She is survived by her sons Bruce Lawson and wife Kathleen of East Hampton, Roger Lawson of East Hampton, two sisters-in-law, Dottie Lawson of Florida, and Doris Lawson of East Hampton.

She was predeceased by her four brothers, Jerry, Robert, Paul and Vincent Monroe.

A funeral liturgy will be celebrated Saturday March 3, at 11 a.m. in St. Patrick Church in East Hampton. Burial will follow in St. Patrick Cemetery.

To leave online condolences, visit spencerfuneralhomeinc.com.

Colchester

DeMarcus Stanley White

DeMarcus Stanley White, cherished son of Michelle Lee Henderson and Stanley B. White II; brother of Jade Clarke; grandson of Patricia and Steven Dankiw, William and Madeline Henderson and Stanley and Minnie White; and nephew, cousin, classmate to many, left us all to soon at the tender age of 6 on Wednesday, Feb. 21, from consequences of Influenza.



DeMarcus captured the hearts of so many and we thank all who were blessed to be a part of his life. He fought hard to come to this earth and in his short time here made a huge impact on everyone. His beautiful smile and charming charisma will be dearly missed and NEVER forgotten.

His family received guests Monday, Feb. 26, at the Aurora-McCarthy Funeral Home, 167 Old Hartford Rd., Colchester. Services and burial were private.

A memorial fund has been established to help the family through this sudden and tragic loss and may be accessed online at gofundme.com/56sxhgg.