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Teachers and administrators at Gilead Hill School are all smiles, ready to welcome students back into the building's hallowed hallways. The school year starts Wednesday, Aug. 29.

Hebron Schools Ready for First Day

by Sloan Brewster

While the new school year in Hebron doesn't officially start until Wednesday, Aug. 29, the doors at both Gilead Hill and Hebron Elementary will be open the day before, to let students come and spend a little time getting to know what will be their home away from home for the next 10 months.

During the half-hour events, students will meet teachers and classmates and have a chance to explore the schools, saying hello to the teachers they had last year or meeting other members of the staff, Gilead Hill School Principal Katie Uriano said.

It's all about making the students feel welcome, she said, adding that incoming students also all received letters from teachers over the summer.

"Our staff really goes out of the way to really communicate with kids prior to school," she said.

At Hebron Elementary School, the first day of school brings a time of building classroom communities, said Michael Larkin, who took over as principal on July 1. Students will get to know one another through games and activi-

ties, such as "Just Like Me," an activity in which a teacher will make a statement, such as "I went to the beach this summer" or "I went on a plane."

Students who did similar activities will stand up and say "Just like me" and then talk about what they did, Larkin said.

While the back-to-school activities are not new, they tie into Responsive Classroom, a new initiative the district is rolling out this year, the principals said.

It's about "building positive relationships, building a sense of community where students really feel like they belong and want to come to school," Larkin said.

The priority is about creating a positive school climate and culture with consistency and mutual respect, said Don Briere, director of educational services.

"Everyone's talking the same talk, everyone expects the same positive social behavior out of adults and students," he said. "You should walk into either building and you should expect to be welcomed by an adult, you should

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Back to Business for East Hampton Schools

by Elizabeth Regan

The doors of East Hampton's four public schools will open Tuesday, Sept. 4, with fewer teachers than many in the education community were hoping for when they grudgingly approved this year's \$30.50 million education budget back in May.

Superintendent of Schools Paul K. Smith said this week that the ongoing budget saga is not going to diminish the commitment of administrators and teachers to the district's 1,854 students.

"In spite of the budget situation, our business continues. We're always excited about another year," he said. "We're going to provide as close to a world class education as we can."

The town government budget, which includes the school district's capital spending plan for big-ticket, one-time expenses, remains unapproved after failing at multiple referenda.

The Board of Education budget passed in its first referendum with cuts to several staffing positions. Three teachers were laid off while several other positions were eliminated through attrition or by reassigning teachers within the district.

Some education advocates have since said they voted for the budget because the community was warned by members of the Board of Finance and Town Council that voting it down would result in further cuts.

The finance board rejected subsequent pleas by vocal school supporters to reinstate three teaching positions.

Most recently, Smith reassigned one kindergarten teacher to grade three in order to mitigate the effect of staffing reductions. With third

grade classrooms slated for class sizes of 27 students each, and kindergarten enrollment anticipated to be slightly lower than last year, Smith said he made the difficult decision to move the teacher to the higher grade level.

That will leave about 20-21 students in each kindergarten classroom, according to Smith. He said ideal class sizes are closer to 17 students per room.

"What we're doing is taking away from our youngest learners, which I'm certainly not proud of," Smith said.

According to Smith, last year's second grade class had seven teachers, resulting in 22 to 23 students per class. Those same kids would have been looking at third grade class sizes of 26 students each without moving up a seventh teacher from kindergarten.

Director of Curriculum and Instruction Mary Clark said the alternative – which would be putting 26 students in each third grade classroom – is "outrageous" and "almost unmanageable."

"Third grade is one of the most significant grades for reading instruction," she said. She pointed to research that has connected third grade academic milestones to lifelong academic achievement.

There will now be about 22 students per classroom in third grade, according to Smith.

Clark said she is confident the remaining kindergarten teachers will rise to what she described as a significant challenge.

"A kindergarten teacher can look at a room full of students, several of whom are 4-going-on-5 and some who just turned 6," she said. "And some students have had a full day pre-



Christina Amaral's sixth and seventh grade math classroom is almost ready for the new school year. The middle school boasts some of the largest enrollment numbers in a district that has defied the statewide trend of decreasing student population numbers.

school for two years and some have never been in school before. So [larger class size] really is taking away from the kindergarten environment," she said.

The district is also down a fifth grade teacher compared to last year after the staff member

was shifted to the middle school to fill a retirement vacancy in the math department, according to budget documents.

There will be 24 students in each fifth grade classroom, Smith said. He cited class sizes rang-

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go into a classroom and know the teacher is there to support you academically, and socially and mentally.”

Meanwhile, preschoolers in Megan Ellsworth’s class at Gilead Hill School will spend their first day playing games and singing songs designed around community building. They’ll also learn about themselves and their environment and get to know one another’s names, she said.

Ellsworth said all this is done in order to “establish a climate in the classroom that is safe and caring” and to help the children “learn the expectations and take care of themselves and the school environment.”

The new school year will also bring continued focus on Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Math (STEAM) education, Briere said.

STEAM, according to educators, provides for an integrated approach to learning.

Part of this year’s STEAM program will be working with 3D printers, Briere said. Last year, the district, along with Webco Plastics, Inc. of Middlefield, received a \$10,000 American Mold Manufacturing Advancement Grant from the American Builder Association to expand the district’s STEAM program, Briere said. The funds were used to purchase two 3D printers.

A new Innovation Advisory Council will look into having partnerships between the district and folks in the private sector with hands on experience in manufacturing using 3D printing, Briere said. The hope is that professionals familiar with working with the equipment will help inform lessons in the local schools.

“We’re looking for their perspective on current programming related to STEAM and how to move it further forward,” he said.

The STEAM curriculum will also benefit from a new inquiry based approach to teaching

based on new state standards known as Next Generation School Standards, schools superintendent Timothy Van Tassel said.

“This year, the expectation is the entire curriculum will be rolled out,” Briere said

Instead of talking at students, teachers will present students with a problem to solve, he explained.

“Let students lead learning,” he said. “They can come up with ways to solve problems.”

Second-grade teachers Cindy Govoni and Emily Snayd are planning to roll out new math workshops for more hands-on learning based on individual student levels and abilities, they said. They will mirror writing and reading workshops rolled out in the past few years that allow students to focus on their strengths and weaknesses in a given subject.

Each workshop begins with a 10-minute mini-lesson on the basic concept being studied, the teachers said. Then students break into assigned groups.

During math workshops, they will work on problems, using objects they can manipulate or count or plowing through word problems. Reading and writing workshops include students sharing their writing and working on reading comprehension.

On Tuesday, some folks new to the district, including a special education teacher, an art teacher and a third grade teacher, spent the day at Gilead for new teacher training.

“We are just thrilled to have identified and brought into our Hebron community a great group of educators this year,” Van Tassel said.

Teachers and administrators said they were looking forward to the first day of school.

“This is that point in the summer where we have everything in place and we’re just waiting for them to come back so we can start the year with them,” Uriano said.

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ing from 20-22 as the district’s goal.

The \$30.50 million education budget represents a reduction of \$670,000 to the school board’s original proposal. The finance board ordered the bottom-line cut, but state statute specifies it is up to the school board to decide how the cut will be implemented.

The subsequent and failed proposal to restore three teaching positions came from Finance Director Jeff Jylkka at Smith’s request.

The budget maneuver would have taken \$250,000 slated for student computer tablets and classroom interior door locks out of the town’s proposed 2018-19 capital budget, instead funding through a portion of the current budget surplus, which Jylkka has said is “just north of” \$700,000.

Michael Rose, a Republican and the finance board chairman at the time, resigned immediately after the meeting during which members refused to reinstate the three positions.

Smith originally said he would prioritize a grade three, grade five and high school English teacher for restoration if the funds came through. But he indicated this week something had to be done about grade three right away.

“I couldn’t just stand by and wait and hope,” he said.

He said he would likely bring back a kindergarten teacher if officials eventually release funding for three positions.

Middle School Changes

The middle school will boast some of the largest grades in the district in the coming year, topped by a 165-member sixth grade class. Smith said he shielded the school from staffing cuts in the new budget because levels are already “tight” in the building.

“In a budget year we should have added middle school teachers, the least I could do was not cut any middle school teachers,” he said.

While his budget recommendation back in January included a new middle school world language position, the proposal was an early casualty of the protracted budget battle.

Clark said the upcoming school year will bring changes designed to ease students’ transitions into both the middle school and the high school.

Classrooms have been moved to build on the existing team structure, which allows for enhanced collaboration by grouping students together so they all have the same teachers for core subjects. Clark said each of four teams will be “yoked together” in one section of the building.

The shift is particularly helpful for sixth grade students who will find themselves with five different teachers at the middle school when they were used to two different teachers at Center School, according to Clark.

“Now those five teachers are all together,” Clark said. “That’s very student friendly; it helps them to know this is their home base. I think it’s a very student-centered approach.”

Students will also be eased into their high school experience with new schedules designed to more closely mimic class periods at East Hampton High School.

Sixth and seventh grade math teacher Christina Amaral said she’s been working on setting up her new classroom since July. She described the move as an opportunity to reflect on her teaching practice.

Large new desk configurations enhance collaboration classroom-wide and for small group instruction, she said. Resurfacing the desks with white board paint also gives the students a chance to show their work on the tables.

Amaral, the 2016 East Hampton Teacher of the Year, said the interactive, erasable surface can make math less “scary” for students who are not yet comfortable with numbers.

“They get excited when I pull out white boards, so having that on the table is going to really engage them,” she said.

Smith said the middle school furniture didn’t cost the district anything. The donated items came from the University of Connecticut’s now-defunct West Hartford campus and from area schools that were upgrading their supply.

No Need ‘To Look Elsewhere’

At the high school level, Smith credited the completion of the \$52 million renovation project with driving up enrollment in grade nine. He said that while roughly 22 students have chosen out-of-district schools in each of the past several years – including Vinal Technical High School, Mercy High School, Xavier High School and the Middletown Vocational Agriculture program – that number is down to 10 students this year.

“It’s nice to see that notch-up of students staying in town,” he said. “Part of it is that the high school is finished and they’re not walking through a construction zone every day.”

There are 139 students in the incoming freshman class.

“We want our students to stay in the high school, which we think is a great option,” Smith said. “They shouldn’t need to look elsewhere.”

Marlborough Day Promises Fun on the Lakefront

by Allison Lazur

Residents will flock to Blish Memorial Park Sunday to partake in the town’s 12th Annual Marlborough Day.

The event runs from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Organizers expect approximately 800 to 1,000 individuals to file into the park throughout the day to enjoy food, free parking, music and a variety of activities presented by the Marlborough Business Association (MBA) and the Economic Development Commission.

MBA Marketing and Membership Manager Niki Addington told the *RiverEast* Tuesday the Economic Development Commission joined for the first time this year to help out with the event.

Other new additions to this year’s festival include Big Y, which will have a booth handing out pamphlets about upcoming employment opportunities and how to apply.

The Marlborough Tavern will also make its debut appearance and will be offering samples from their menu in anticipation of the grand opening in mid-to-late October.

Other food options include Top Dog in Portland, Three Fellas Pizza, the Classic Scoop from Colchester, as well as the yearly offering of fried dough from the Republican Town Committee.

Addington explained that the celebration is funded through varying levels of sponsorship. She cited the Roaming Railroad – a trackless train that offers rides to kids around the park – as a popular feature regularly sponsored by Marlborough Health and Rehab.

Approximately twenty other sponsors, including Liberty Bank, Mainsfield Ob/Gyn As-

sociates and Lotus Transitions, sign up to bring residents a variety of activities and entertainment.

This year’s Marlborough Day includes a photo booth, henna tattoos, face painting and a magician.

The Marlborough Art Center which will be holding an art show, showcasing works in two 10 feet by 10 feet booths, Addington said.

Director of Public Safety Services Jay Kehoe will also have a table representing the police department and there will be a fire truck demonstration for the kids, she added.

Addington said she’s also “really working towards sprinkling in crafty vendors,” such as Paparazzi, a jewelry vendor that will make an appearance Sunday.

The Parks and Recreation Department will be hosting a boat parade from 4 p.m. to 5 p.m. While Addington disclosed the parade had only one participant last year, she said it has since gained interest and is expected to have several more attendees this time around.

Entertainment includes tunes from bands such as Modern Riffs and Old Dog New Trick, which Addington called the “closing classic rock band.”

She said even though this is only her second year being involved with the festival, she’s looking into the logistics of bringing in a bounce house and games for future Marlborough Days.

“With Facebook and things like that, the word gets out a little more, so hopefully it can get a little bit bigger each year,” she said.

Break-ins in Hebron and Marlborough

Hebron Resident State Trooper Daniel Greenwood said six cars were targeted in the towns of Hebron and Marlborough in the overnight hours of Aug. 10 into Aug. 11 – and that this time, even some locked cars were broken into.

Greenwood said unlocked vehicles on North Parker Road in Marlborough were rummaged through, but nothing of value was taken. He added that multiple calls were received from residents on Rivendell Road stating that it appeared their vehicles had been gone through, but nothing was stolen.

However, a purse was stolen from an unlocked vehicle on Hills Lane.

Greenwood also said two vehicles had the windows smashed – one on Charles Lane and another on Knollwood Drive. A purse was stolen from the vehicle on Knollwood Drive.

“It seems like the smashing of the windows is becoming a newer thing,” Greenwood said. “We haven’t had that happen in a while,” adding that unlocked cars were the usual target.

Since the break-ins, Greenwood said he has been increasing his patrol time and has reached out to residents to be more vigilant.

He said because the incidents occurred at the same time and all within the same area, the incidents could be connected; however, the investigation is currently ongoing.

Hebron Day Lends Local, Festive Flair

by Sloan Brewster

The fifth annual Hebron Day celebration will take place tomorrow at Burnt Hill Park.

The festivities will kick off with a 5K race at 8:30 a.m. and run through 2:30 p.m.

The annual event is coordinated by the Hebron Parks and Recreation Department.

It all started five years ago when some folks wanted an event that focused on all things Hebron, Town Manager Andrew Tierney said. That's when they went to the Board of Selectmen with their concerns that the Hebron Fair had become commercialized and less local.

Parks and Recreation Department manager Rich Gadoury said the concerned citizens wanted to promote their town.

"They felt like the Hebron Fair was losing the Hebron deal," Gadoury said.

Rich Calarco, Parks and Recreation Department director, said the department was already looking into organizing an event when local folks approached the selectmen.

"The Parks and Recreation Commission wanted to put together a day to let the Hebron residents get together as the summer was coming to a close and the kids were returning to school," he said. "We were looking at doing something as a special [event] and the community was, too ... It was the perfect storm."

It took a couple years before the celebration became a hit, but it was well attended last year, Tierney said.

"There are tents and places to cool off, concessions, ice cream, drinks, wares," he said.

The merriment always takes place the last Saturday of August, Gadoury said.

"This year we're just very excited to offer it

up to everyone again," he said.

Festivities will include a car show with 60 cars and prizes in five categories, including Best in Show and Best Model.

Entry to the car show is \$5 per person with proceeds to benefit the Hebron Parks and Recreation Department scholarship fund, which provides financial aid for town recreation programs.

Other fun will include pony and wagon rides, free face painting and entertainment. There will be performances by local musicians Jim Blair, Steve Wade and RHAM student Abbey Perrin.

"She's partaken in Hebron's Got Talent and has a strong following," Gadoury said of Perrin. "Amazing voice."

There will be local food offerings including a taco truck and Jim's Twisted Barbecue as well as vendors, nonprofits and local crafters.

Judy Podell, founder of the Town Center Project, had a booth with a suggestion box for ideas for her project at last year's Hebron Day.

The Town Center Project is a means to bring more people to the center of town through events and activities, Podell has said. It's something she has been working on for about a year.

She said last year's Hebron Day was well-attended.

"I thought the car show thing was terrific," Podell said.

Gadoury said the event successfully displays what the town offers.

"The atmosphere is very community [oriented]; it's very festive, a very happy feeling," Gadoury said. "It really brings the locals together to showcase their community."



During last summer's Hebron Day, which takes place at Burnt Hill Park every year, folks enjoyed local wares and foods and checked out the car show. This year's event will take place tomorrow and the car show will return, with prizes for the best in five categories. There will also be musical entertainment, pony rides and face painting among other fun.

RHAM Community Looks Forward to New School Year

by Sloan Brewster

A week before the start of school, which is set for next Wednesday, August 29, incoming RHAM seniors took on the tradition of painting a wall with their names and hand prints.

"Seniors painting the wall, that's a tradition that we've had since the beginning of time," said Scott Leslie, RHAM High School principal.

It began in the old building where seniors had a separate cafeteria and would paint their names on the walls. In 2003, the building was expanded and renovated and the senior cafeteria removed, but seniors wanted to carry over the tradition somehow, Leslie explained. A senior study area was created on the second floor and that's where they do their annual painting project.

On Wednesday, seniors mulled around the study area, chatting and laughing while standing on ladders and painting their names in bright colors. Some used brushes to color their hands and then stamp their prints on the white wall.

Students said it was a fun way to begin the year and become closer as a class.

"I feel like it's an accomplishment that we've made it this far," Emmalee Mund said. "It's like a huge start to senior year."

"It's kind of like the first big event we get to do as a class to bond [and] to kick off senior year," Meghan Clifford said.

"To me it means that we're seniors and it's time to get outta here basically and time to live our lives out of school," Kyle Crosskey-Starr said.

Crosskey-Starr already has plans for the future, he said. He plans to become a combat rifleman in the U.S. Marines; it's something he has been planning for his entire life.

"I want to serve my country in the highest possible way," he said.

Kristen Small, who teaches special education, is the class advisor and has been since they were freshmen. She had nothing but compliments for the group and said she considers herself fortunate to be their advisor.

Small said she and her co-advisor Kathleen Gavin help the students organize class trips, activities and fundraisers, such as the prom,

which will be held at the Mashantucket Pequot Museum at Foxwoods Resort Casino, in Ledyard.

"They come up with really super easy fundraising events," Small said. "They're so self-sufficient."

As far as teaching goes, Gavin said her classes, which include School to Career English, history and civics, are geared toward the individual needs of her students.

Some of the things she teaches in the career class include resume writing and how to budget, which she said was a class everyone should take.

Jen Choma, library aide, stopped to chat with Small for a few minutes and spoke briefly to the *Rivereast* about the library.

"The library is the heart of RHAM," she said. "We just try to make it an atmosphere where everybody feels welcome."

If students or teachers are having a bad day, they can stop by the library for some down time, she said.

"We set it up with a bottle of water and tissue," Choma said.

"I've done that," Small chimed.

This year RHAM High School is rolling out a new social emotional support program, Leslie said. Called the Resilience Program, it is designed to support students who struggle with school anxiety.

Students with school anxiety often stay out of school, he explained. A team of professionals will work with the students, providing a range of supports.

"So our goal is to support students and their families so they can attend school," he said.

Another new program rolling out at the high school is an Inquiry Academy to mirror one at RHAM Middle School, Leslie said. The students who were accepted into the program when it began at the middle school are entering high school.

The program focuses on personalizing the student's education, he said.

"It's a program that provides students with different options for how they go about learning math under the guidance of teachers," Leslie said. "It's really a different instructional ap-



Emmalee Mund paints a friend's name on the senior wall at RHAM High School. Painting the wall before the start of school is a longstanding tradition and a time of class bonding, according to incoming seniors.

proach that the teachers will be learning."

Michael Seroussi, principal of RHAM Middle School, said the program was started two years ago with 45 students in seventh grade working with four teachers.

"We personalized their learning," he said. "It was project based learning."

Seventh graders in the program work for one period per day called the Genius Hour, on a project of their choosing, Seroussi said. Eighth graders work for one hour every other day.

Projects done to date have ranged from recreating their own organs to organizing community service projects, such as bike rides for charity, he said.

"It allows us to customize the learning to the student," he said.

A future goal of the program is to incorporate a research project for Advanced Placement credit, the principals said. The plan is to have that in place when the ninth grade students in

the project now are upper classmen.

This year RHAM seniors, who all have their own Chromebooks, will have full access to a digital platform for creating school portfolios, Leslie said.

"Students will use the Chromebooks to create portfolios," Leslie said. "Our goal is for the portfolios to serve as an option for students to reflect on the six years at RHAM."

Over the summer, some building projects have been worked on, Leslie said. The projects include concrete repair, general maintenance and a window replacement project.

More than 160 windows installed during the high school's 2001 to 2003 construction are being replaced as they were found to be failing, according to a press release issued in February. Issues included stains and discoloration from long-term residual condensation and internal signs of moisture and frost during the colder months.

'High Expectations' Await Marlborough Students

by Allison Lazur

As the first day of school approaches, Marlborough Elementary School will continue to challenge its students with teachers who have "high expectations," as well as with an ever-evolving STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art and math) program, explained Superintendent of Schools David Sklarz.

"We are probably doing as much as some of the magnet schools are" in science and technology, he said, adding, "When you get a kindergartener who knows how to program a robot, that's pretty exciting."

Although the STEAM program is not new, the room which houses the supplies for the program has continued to expand this year.

Pointing out snake skin remnants and USB microscopes stored in the STEAM room, Assistant Principal Kim Kelly said, "We are super lucky to have this room because we get to centralize all our supplies."

Kelly explained that the room allows the students to "come here and do really fantastic science and math and art activities," while the school is able to stay "super respectful of funds."

Instead of having to purchase science supplies for each individual student, several students are able to visit the STEAM room and share costly equipment.

The STEAM room – established six years ago – is "accessible to all grades," Kelly said.

The school will also continue to offer a robotics program – which rolled out last year – to students in grades as young as pre-kindergarten. Principal Dan White called the program "highly-engaging" and explained students are challenged to program robots to move through a 4 feet by 8 feet grid.

Pre-kindergarten teacher Kathleen Filosa will begin her year next week with a rearranged classroom.

"I'm trying to add more unique centers," she said. Those areas include writing and an ABC center, where students are taught the alphabet.

"There are little areas they can go to – that they are interested in – while I'm still guiding them towards what I want them to be learning," Filosa said.

Filosa explained her ultimate hope is that her students "start loving school from the moment that they walk in so it carries on through the upper grades."

"It's the most rewarding job in the whole world," she said. "You take these little teeny minds that have never come into a classroom or been in an environment with structure and

you mold them into these little learners who just love to be at school."

Filosa said she will continue her yearly traditions of VIPT (Very Important Person Tea Party) in lieu of Mother's Day and Donuts with Dudes in lieu of a Father's Day celebration. She also said she will host her annual winter solstice party to welcome winter.

Third grade teacher Lynda Quigley said her goal every year is to help her students "become independent learners, take care of themselves and grow up a little bit more."

"I think in third grade the expectations are little higher especially with writing, citing that evidence and really just expressing themselves in written form," she said.

Quigley said her afterschool book-club will continue. She compared the extracurricular program to an "Oprah book club on the third grade level" that families are also invited to attend.

While Sklarz explained the school continues to face the challenge of declining enrollment, he said the decrease has "presented opportunities," such as expanding time spent in the Spanish program for example as oppose to reducing staff.

First grade teacher Molly Reilly said she plans to take full advantage of her smaller class size of 16 students this year.

"It's a gift to have 16 [students]," she said. The smaller class allows for "a lot of learning and extra attention."

Reilly said her tradition for first days of school includes students arriving with a stuffed animal of their choice, which prompts talking and sharing that day.

She also said this year she plans on "really enhancing the writing piece" of her teachings.

"First grade is the biggest level jump in writing and reading," she said, adding, "I love opening that whole world of reading to them."

First grade teacher Sue Rector, who will also be teaching a class of about 16 students this year, said she's using her day without a special scheduled to do STEAM activities.

Rector said her focus will continue to be on teaching her students to work as a team, help each other out and be respectful and kind.

She also said her class mascot, a stuffed animal named Pete the Cat, will make his yearly appearance and go home with a different student each week. In turn, the child writes about their adventures with the cat.

The school's physical education program got a new piece of equipment this year – a trestle tree.



Marlborough Elementary School students will return to school on Aug. 29 and greeted by the ever-popular STEAM room, which will continue to expand this year and serve as a place for students to engage in science, technology, engineering, art and math based activities.

White explained the trestle tree is an indoor playground composed of different ladders and bridges that kids climb, all over mats.

Because the trestle tree utilizes a large portion of the gym, the course will be set up for a designated four-week period in the spring. The trestle tree will also be added to each year with more ropes and ladders, White said.

Students will also be able to partake in The Climber, a climbing dome constructed of rope and installed in the recess area last spring. White said the funding for The Climber came from the PTO.

Band teacher Donna Arseneault said she will continue her yearly tradition of her Instrumental Music Night, scheduled at 6:30 p.m. Wednesday, Sept. 5, where fourth-graders choose an instrument and sign up for the music program.

"I'm most looking forward to my new group of fourth-graders," she said. "You never know what's coming around the corner."

This year, Arseneault's annual combined choral and band winter concert will be "Winter

Wonderland," she said.

While winter is still a few months away, White and Kelly expressed their concerns for any impending snow days – and how that would impact the yearly challenge of not having enough time.

"One of the things we hear from teachers is there's not enough time in the day," White said.

Kelly chimed in adding, "We always look to see how we can budget our time. Is there anything we can tweak to make something longer or shorter? How can we try and make it so we are meeting the needs of our whole population?"

In anticipation of the new year, Sklarz said the school's popular slogan will continue to be upheld: "We want to go from good to great."

* * *

On Tuesday, Aug. 28, the elementary school will host its annual meet and greet from 8:15-9:15 a.m. with the first day of the year following the next day.

East Hampton Town Manager to Keep 'Closer Eye' on Fire Marshal

by Elizabeth Regan

The Town Council last week unanimously approved revisions to town ordinance transferring day-to-day oversight of the fire marshal's office from the volunteer Board of Fire Commissioners to the town manager.

"My hope is we can have a little bit of a closer eye on what's going on in the fire marshal's office," Town Manager Michael Manscalco said.

The responsibility to hire and terminate a fire marshal remains with the fire commission, as dictated by state statute.

Fire commission member Darin Hurne said during a public hearing that the commission is in support of the change "provided we are kept in the loop and we get reports on activities."

Town Manager Michael Manscalco said the change strengthens oversight based on concerns about productivity and time management within the department.

Manscalco said he's heard "a lot of questions" about the fire marshal's office from some members of the Town Council, fire commission and business community.

He said those questions revolve around the prioritization of inspections, the timeliness of plan reviews, and whether or not a fire marshal needs to be present at all fire-related calls.

Part-time Fire Marshal Richard Klotzbier and part-time Deputy Fire Marshal Joe Guest, both budgeted to work 15 hours per week, previously reported to the Board of Fire Commissioners at its monthly meetings.

Manscalco said he will meet with Klotzbier weekly to discuss ongoing projects and responsibilities and that the fire marshal will

give monthly reports to the fire commission.

Klotzbier said this week his office is unable to comment on the new ordinance because he has not yet seen a copy of it and there has not been enough time to determine how it will affect the office.

A draft of the revised ordinance was first proposed by Manscalco in early July. It was approved by councilors last week with no changes.

Klotzbier and Guest have been critical of the council for limiting their allotted hours by cutting the salary line item in the fire marshal's budget from \$39,000 in 2015-16 to \$30,162 in 2016-17. It is currently \$30,765, according to Finance Director Jeff Jylkka, and is proposed to be \$33,765 in the 2018-19 town budget – a budget that hasn't yet been approved by voters.

Klotzbier said last summer that the fire marshal's office was only able to complete 29 percent of its inspections during the 2016 calendar year. He said at the time he expected the percentage to be even lower in 2017, the first 12-month period during which the department was set to experience the full budgetary cut.

When asked Wednesday for updated inspection totals from 2017, Klotzbier said he was over his allotted hours for the week and would not be able to pull the information together until next week.

Manscalco said the fire marshal's office has a limited set of resources like all the departments he oversees.

"We have to make sure they're using their resources in the most efficient manner," he said.

East Hampton Police News

8/5: Mark Recor, 75, of 130 Wopowog Rd., was arrested and charged with first-degree criminal trespass, East Hampton Police said.

8/12: Bianca Nadeau, 20, of 77 Woodland St., West Hartford, was arrested and charged with DUI, failure to drive right, possession of less than a half ounce of marijuana and possession of drug paraphernalia, police said.

8/13: Tracy Molloy, 49, of 12 Candlewood Dr., East Hampton was arrested and charged with DUI and failure to drive right, police said.

Portland Police News

8/19: John Aurigemma, 84, of 14 Perry Ave., was charged with DUI, Portland Police said.

8/19: Wayne Neumann, 46, of 19 Commerce St., was charged with third-degree assault, police said.

Colchester Police News

8/15: Colchester Police said Joseph Forsyth, 38, of 640 Old Hartford Rd., was arrested and charged with DUI.

8/15: State police said Elias Figueroa, 38, of 230 Eastern Ave., Fl. 3, Springfield, Mass., was arrested and charged with operating a motor vehicle under suspension, speeding over 70 mph and DUI.

8/18: State Police said Wayne Mohrlein, 38, of 316 Middletown Rd., was arrested and charged with DUI and failure to drive in proper lane.

H

Police News

8/15: State Police said Tanner M. Parker, 18, of 45 Wildwood Dr., Lebanon, was arrested and charged with violation of a protective order and criminal violation of a restraining order.

8/18: State Police said Meghan L. Chapdelaine, 34, of 5 Blish Rd., Marlborough, was arrested and charged with DUI, police said. Chapdelaine was intoxicated and turned away from Butterballs Café, 47 Main St., police said. Police then found her in her car in the parking lot, in front of the bar. She was subsequently arrested and charged with DUI.

New School Year Brings Focus on Creativity and Science in Andover

by Sloan Brewster

Andover Elementary School's brand new Makerspace is just about ready as the first day of school looms.

Doors will open Wednesday, August 29.

Over the summer, the library media center was transformed to include new furniture, equipment and supplies for the Makerspace – an area where students will make and create things connected to lessons they are learning.

The space is still in progress, Principal John Briody said.

Makerspace students will work on a 3D printer and use a tabletop dry erase board to sketch ideas and thoughts before designing a final product based on lessons, Superintendent of Schools Sally Doyen said. To enhance the creative process, there is also a giant wall-mounted Lego board where kids can manipulate and draw their designs.

On Wednesday, the space was organized with small tables and chairs arranged in the corner of the room previously occupied by the librarian's desk. Items were placed neatly on shelves.

Students won't use the space immediately on the first day of school, Briody said. Rather, the start of school will be time for teachers to familiarize themselves with the space and line up lesson plans.

In June, the Board of Education gave Doyen the go ahead to move some classes around and build a Makerspace using \$25,000 of the \$150,000 budget surplus in last year's budget. The funds were left unspent due to the resignation of the school's assistant principal, who was not replaced, and because an outplaced special education student moved out of town.

The new space is based on Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) adopted by the state in 2015, Doyen said. The broad, hands-on standards empower students to make things and understand how things are made in fields of computer science, engineering, electronics "and all the big areas of the sciences."

The next generation standards tie into Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Math (STEAM) Education, which provides for an integrated approach to learning, she said.

The new standards will be a focal point this school year, Doyen said.

In addition to the Makerspace, the school turned the area around the library into a learning triangle with the art room moved to the room across from the media center, which is already next to the technology room.

Makerspaces are a growing commodity in Connecticut classrooms but are few and far between in small elementary schools, according to Doyen.

Kirstina Frazier, technology teacher at the school, has toured other Makerspaces in the state. The idea is that the space has flexibility and mobility, with smaller tables that can be combined for groups of six to eight children or left individual for smaller groups. They can also be folded up and placed in a corner to make more room or easily moved to another room, depending on projects the students will be developing, she said.

Students will create projects, work through challenges and brainstorm for solutions to problems while learning about specific curriculum, Frazier said.

For example, every year Frazier's class does an interdisciplinary project called the Bow Wow Biscuit Company, in which they make dog biscuits, design logos and sell and package the biscuits, while learning about and overcoming the complications of running a business. A community service aspect of the project involves donating the proceeds to The Fidelco Guide Dog Foundation while at the same time learning about visual impairments.

With the number of its youngest students increasing, the school also made room for an additional pre-kindergarten classroom, Briody said. Last year there were 29 preschool students; this year, as of Wednesday, there are 36 - and registration is still open.

To accommodate them, there are now three pre-kindergarten classrooms.

Over the summer, the school received brand new cubbies for all the classrooms, paid for by a Smart Start Grant from the Connecticut Office of Early Childhood, according to Briody. They were purchased through the Department of Corrections and custom built by inmates to fit in closets in the classrooms.

Preschool teacher Leslie Labenski affixed name tags to each of the cubbies in her classroom.



Furniture, equipment and materials in Andover Elementary School's brand new Makerspace awaits the start of school and the students who will utilize the room to create projects, work through challenges and brainstorm for solutions to problems while learning.

Since the preschool is entering its third year as a full-day program instead of a half-day program, children have more things to store during school, including a rest blanket, Labenski said.

Outdoor learning for the young students is also on the upswing, having increased last year and continuing to do so in the coming year, the teacher said. When learning outside, the children use natural materials to count and calculate, such as differentiating between the number of offshoots on one branch compared to those on another.

"It's self-guided with the kids," Labenski said. "They're taking what they learn inside and applying it to the outside."

Kindergarteners are also going to be experiencing more of the great outdoors, according to Laura Bush, kindergarten teacher. In the spring, the students spent a day working with an outdoor classroom; the plan is to do that more

often in the upcoming year.

Outdoor learning involves such things as water play and digging to learn subjects including art and science. The outdoor classroom last year included a bubble pool using different things to make bubbles, a fossil dig in the sand box, a ribbon to make a spider web and clay and sticks to create artwork on trees.

Over the summer, Bush and other teachers attended a Phonics Foundation Training Program in Massachusetts. They will be incorporating what they learned into lessons in spelling, sounding out words, breaking them down orally and handwriting.

"We're really excited about it because if you don't have a good strong basis in phonics and phonemics, everything else you do you struggle with," Bush said. "It's the basis, so if you have a good strong foundation you will be able to be more successful in the other areas."

Portland Staff Ready for New School Year

by Elizabeth Regan

While the upcoming school year will bring curriculum and programming changes to the Portland school district, Superintendent of Schools Philip O'Reilly said one of the most significant changes is something that's actually staying the same.

"Can I tell you what's not new?" he said in a sit-down with the *Rivereast* this week. "Any member of my administrative team."

Since O'Reilly took the helm of the school district in 2014, he has seen turnover in every administrative position except the middle school principal. He's now looking forward to building on the cohesive relationship forged among members of the team that he has hired and mentored over the course of his four years on the job.

O'Reilly said the current administrators have managed to erase the insular mentality that plagued the district before his arrival.

It was a metaphor he said he heard so often when he was interviewing for the superintendent job: "We're islands here. We're five separate buildings."

Collaboration among administrators means students don't see any dramatic shifts in teaching methods or curriculum as they move from school to school.

Board of Education Chairwoman MaryAnne Rode cited that sense of teamwork as one reason board members asked O'Reilly to stay an extra year instead of retiring next June as he had originally planned.

"An additional year gives us more transition time and the opportunity for the administrative team to grow a little more," she said last week.

One of the newest administrators is Director of Student Services Dawn Davis. She was hired last year after serving in similar capacities in the RHAM school district and in Andover.

Davis this week cited the expansion of the district's Applied Behavioral Analysis program as one of the coming year's big changes. The

special education initiative, implemented last year, uses specific techniques and principles to help students with significant behavioral challenges due to developmental disabilities like autism.

"For example, if a child has problems engaging with you and looking you in the eye, we're going to develop activities to help them engage in that way," Davis said.

Davis said preschool teacher Deb Kekacs was selected to run the program, which will be moving to a larger Valley View School classroom this year.

There will be nine students in the class, according to Davis.

Valley View Principal Jessica Bruenn said the program creates an environment with minimal distractions where students can focus on learning. She credited staff members, from special education professionals to custodial staff, with making the program a success.

"When I say it was a team effort, I mean it. The entire building would help our students acquire skills," she said. "For example teachers, custodians, office staff and others would greet the students and engage the students in dialogue because they knew that was part of what they were learning to do."

Bruenn was equally proud of the growth the program's original six students made in the first year of the program. She cited an increase in positive behaviors, communication skills, attention and interactions with their peers "which has had a positive impact on the entire building."

With the addition of three more students, she said the program will continue to improve as part of the collaborative effort to promote children's success in the classroom and beyond.

On the other end of the special education spectrum, the district is starting a collaboration with the Wheeler Clinic to provide counseling and a supportive educational environment for

students in seventh through 12th grade with mental health and behavioral challenges.

"It's built on a student-centered relational approach," Davis said. "It's small. We're talking 12 students, maximum."

The district is in the process of hiring a special education teacher to work in a classroom with the students, according to Davis. She said there's also the opportunity for students to be mainstreamed – or included in general education classes with their peers – if appropriate.

Davis does not expect to have a teacher in place by the start of the school year, but added that clinicians from Wheeler Clinic will be ready to offer one-on-one and group counseling services right away.

"Several of the students in this program are currently placed outside the district because we didn't have programming for them," she said. "The purpose is to keep the kids in our district as much as possible, versus them having to go somewhere else."

Keeping special education students in the district will help keep down hefty tuition and transportation costs that accrue when students must be sent to programs in other towns because services aren't offered in Portland.

O'Reilly said during this spring's budget planning process that he has not seen "such a rapid increase" in the number of special education students at any other point in his 37-year career.

Math and Reading

Director of Curriculum, Instruction and Technology Charles Britton – another administrator hired in 2017 – said this year will be marked by the full roll-out of a new math program for students in kindergarten through grade five.

Britton said the Bridges in Mathematics program, from the Math Learning Center, is a comprehensive curriculum with a hands-on approach. He described the highly rated program as a vast improvement on the "deeply medio-

cre" Pierson curriculum that had been in place.

A steering committee last year reviewed available options and decided on the Bridges in Mathematics curriculum.

But "it was very expensive," Britton said. "It was about \$82,000 in a year when the budget was very tight."

He credited the Gildersleeve Wheeler Educational Fund with making the purchase possible. It was started by prominent Portland residents in the late 1800s to benefit Portland schools only.

The curriculum was piloted last spring and will be fully available in the upcoming school year.

"Historically in a math classroom, teachers will stand in the front and deliver instruction to students, and the students may do some independent work or project work," Britton said. "This approach is that the teachers spend less time with the direct instruction, and then students spend time rotating through a series of workshops."

It's a labor-intensive process for teachers who must learn a new way of teaching as they shift from direct instruction to facilitation, according to Britton.

He said the program, along with the elementary Readers Workshop curriculum now being expanded to grades six through eight, comes with significant training requirements.

"Neither of these programs is easy to use," he said. "They require an awful lot of planning, training, curriculum work and commitment. I think that's certainly what our K-8 teachers have shown over the last few months."

He described the end result as a fun and engaging curriculum that students will look forward to.

"My goal is to hopefully never again hear the words 'I'm not good at math' or 'I don't like math,'" Britton said.

The first day of school is Thursday, Aug. 30.

Plan Would Restore Middle Haddam School

by Elizabeth Regan

The owners of the deteriorating Middle Haddam School have unveiled a \$2.5 million, four-phase plan to restore the 1931 building that hinges on a long-term lease agreement with the town.

The two-story, 12,000-square-foot brick building closed in 1981 due to dwindling enrollment and has been vacant since.

The nonprofit Middle Haddam Association applied last week for a \$50,000 grant from the State Historic Preservation Office to help fund the first phase of the project, which would stabilize and restore the roof and multiple entryways.

The association would cover the rest of the \$98,500 phase one project through donors and lenders, according to the grant application.

The association purchased the school in 2005 to prevent it from being turned into condominiums by prominent local developer Wayne Rand. It wasn't the first time concerned citizens from Middle Haddam had thwarted such a proposal, either: In the mid-1980s, they blocked a zoning regulation that would have allowed condominiums on the property by suing the Planning and Zoning Commission and outlasting the town in the legal battle.

Members of the nonprofit group's board of directors in recent years have been contributing to mortgage payments, according to Middle Haddam Association Secretary Lois McCutcheon. She said Ted Rossi, the board's treasurer and a Middletown lumber executive, has been responsible for most of the payments.

Rossi did not respond to calls and emails for comment.

A project narrative written by local preservationist Margaret Faber said association members are hopeful the town will sign a long-term lease for municipal use while the association retains ownership.

Faber is McCutcheon's daughter and a member of the state's Historic Preservation Council. She said she will recuse herself from any Historic Preservation Council discussion on the Middle Haddam School grant.

Faber has also nominated the school for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. She said the application will be reviewed by the state in September and, if approved, will be sent to the U.S. Department of the Interior for consideration.

According to Faber's narrative, town officials have expressed interest in a long-term lease. But they cannot enter into an agreement until the new municipal hub is completed, she said.

The town then expects to have \$1 million "to invest in the Middle Haddam School project," she wrote.

Town Council Chairwoman Melissa Engel acknowledged that the sale of the current town hall building, upon the completion of the new

hub, could provide funding for "extra" projects not included in the town budget.

"One of the projects on the list for consideration was the Middle Haddam School," she said in an email last week.

Faber this week was optimistic the first phase of the project could be funded and completed by mid-November. She said she will then write a grant application for the restoration of all windows and three doors. Subsequent phases would assess and restore the interior of the school.

The restoration of the interior would ideally be funded through the state's Small Town Economic Assistance Program (STEAP), according to Faber. The program provides money for capital projects involving new construction, expansion, renovation or replacement of an existing facility.

The grant program is not currently accepting applications, according to Kathleen Taylor of the state's Office of Policy and Management. She told the *Rivereast* this week she doesn't know if or when the state will offer the grants again.

"I don't have the answer to that question," she said. "I don't believe there's been any discussion about it."

Members of the Town Council last week authorized Town Manager Michael Maniscalco to solicit additional project ideas from staff members and the wider community so councilors can decide which to choose should STEAP funding become available again.

According to Faber's project narrative, the Middle Haddam Association will seek another "suitable partner" if a long-term lease agreement with the town cannot be reached within three years.

"If, in the unlikely scenario, a suitable lessee cannot be found for the building, it will be offered for sale utilizing targeted marketing channels such as the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation, and other organizations that match historic real estate with appropriate buyers," the grant said.

The latest plan for the long-vacant facility comes on the heels of a plea early last year from Middle Haddam Association President Barbara Angelico seeking to engage the town in either purchasing the property or leasing it. Angelico and association treasurer Ted Rossi said at the time the building may be razed if the town determines it does not have a use for the building.

Councilors decided the next month they needed more information about the structural integrity of the building and how much it would cost to refurbish it.

An April 2017 letter from Michael Sorano, vice president of the architecture firm Friar Associates, said the building "remains structurally stable."

The uncertain future of the Middle Haddam



The eastern side of the Middle Haddam School blends the original 1931 construction with its 1949 addition. The Middle Haddam Association is hoping to stabilize and restore the long-vacant building, which they describe as an iconic example of the early rural consolidated school.

School was first brought to councilors' attention publicly in late 2016, when Town Manager Michael Maniscalco announced the Middle Haddam Association planned to demolish the building the following spring.

Maniscalco told the *Rivereast* at the time that he heard about the impending demolition from Rossi. Maniscalco said he had not participated in any discussions with Rossi about the building or potential uses for it in the past year, nor had any of his staff.

But Parks and Recreation Director Jeremy Hall said he met with Maniscalco and Rossi in the spring about the idea of turning the former school into a recreation center.

The discussion built on a proposal first made in 2010, when the Middle Haddam Association presented the Town Council with the idea of turning the school into a recreational center.

Schematics by Middletown architect Jeffrey Bianco, of Northeast Collaborative Architects, showed a gym, racquetball and tennis courts, a community room and office space.

In 2008, meeting minutes from the Water Development Task Force state that Rossi came to them with a proposal to use the school as a treatment facility for a centralized water system. Members nixed the plan due to cost.

The year before that, the town authorized an "architectural/engineering analysis of the Middle Haddam School," according to finance department documents. The study was con-

ducted by Friar Associates, the architectural, engineering and design firm that carried out a separate, large-scale assessment of the town's municipal and school buildings during the same timeframe.

According to schematics provided by the Middle Haddam Association, the design included the probate court and health district as well as the town's homeland security office. It also had ample meeting and storage space.

The total cost for the renovation would have been \$4.94 million back in 2007, according to town records. Town council meeting minutes from late that year show the newly elected council, chaired by Melissa Engel, decided not to pursue the project.

"If in the future the space at the Middle Haddam School is viable for town space, that could be researched at that time," the meeting minutes stated.

Engel said last week that she will be meeting with Rossi to find out what he thinks the town can do with the property.

"I don't at this time know what the town would use that building for. Maybe somebody will tell me something I haven't thought of, but I don't right know what that possibility for usage would be," she said.

A bound copy of the National Register for Historic Places nomination and the grant application is available at the Middle Haddam Library, located at 2 Knowles Rd.

Yellow Jackets Attack Colchester Couple, Dogs

by Allison Lazur

Colchester Police said Monday morning a husband and wife, along with their five dogs, were "viciously attacked" by yellow jackets while walking the trails located in the Ruby Cohen Woodlands.

According to police, the couple was stung approximately 40 times and their dogs required a trip to the vet after enduring numerous stings.

Public Works Director Jim Paggioli told the *Rivereast* Wednesday the ground nest was adjacent to the blue trail and has since been remedied by spraying bee and wasp spray into the nest.

During the attack, the dogs' leashes got caught up in the brush adjacent to the nest and they were forced to drop personal belongings and the leashes to run out of the woods, Paggioli explained. The leashes and belongings have since been retrieved and returned.

Although Paggioli said an attack of this degree had not been reported this year in Colchester, it's not unusual.

"I've been land-surveying for years and I've been stung many times," he said. "Between now and the first frost you are going to find bees that are more active."

The Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station recommends taking several precautions to avoid attracting yellow jackets and being stung, such as: keeping garbage cans covered with tight-fitting lids; remaining calm when a wasp lands on you; not swatting the insect; checking food and beverages for yellow jackets; avoiding wearing hairsprays, perfumes, colognes, suntan lotion or brightly-colored clothes outdoors; and taking extra care while working around leaf litter in your yard as nests are sometimes built nearby under the leaves.

East Hampton Victim of Fatal Crash Identified

by Elizabeth Regan

State police have identified the East Hampton man killed in a Cobalt motorcycle crash last week.

Evan J. Basso, 27, of Chestnut Hill Road, was killed Aug. 16 when his 2014 Harley Davidson Street Bob collided with the back of a Ford Interceptor utility vehicle operated by Portland Police Officer James P. Capello, according to a state police accident information report.

The crash occurred around 1 a.m., state police said. Basso was ejected from the motorcycle on Route 66 at the intersection of Route 151 and Depot Hill Road, where he was pronounced dead.

Capello was transported to Middlesex Hospital with minor injuries, state police said.

The accident report stated Capello had come to a stop at the intersection's traffic light

and was making a left onto Depot Hill Road when Basso's Harley Davidson collided with the left side of the cruiser's rear end.

East Hampton Police Chief Dennis Woessner said last week that he turned over the case to the Connecticut State Police Collision Analysis and Reconstruction Squad "due to the severity of the accident and the involvement of a neighboring agency."

State police reported they responded to the crash at 1:24 a.m.

Portland Police Capt. Ron Milardo said he is not releasing any information at this time.

State police are asking anyone who witnessed the collision, or the moments leading up to it, to contact Trooper First Class Mark DiCocco at 203-630-8079 or mark.dicocco@ct.gov.



William J. Johnston Middle School students will be met with a completely renovated and upgraded middle school upon their return on Aug. 29. Pictured at left is the middle school's new main hallway, fittingly titled Main Street. Meanwhile, Bacon Academy students will see new carpets on the school's upper level (pictured right). The building's remaining carpets will be replaced over the next several years.

Colchester: In With the New, Rethinking the Old

by Allison Lazur

A year of new beginnings and renewed assessment will kick off when Colchester schools open their doors next Wednesday, Aug. 29.

The renovated and expanded William J. Johnston Middle School will welcome students for the first time, while, at Bacon Academy, a "year of assessment" will begin, according to Principal Matthew Peel.

Peel said this is the year the staff and administration "will really be taking a look at all our practices – in a reflective way – and try to update them to be what's best for kids."

Peel said teachers and administrators "are really going to be challenging a lot of traditional practices around grading."

With input from students and parents, Peel said a faculty-wide set of principles around grading practices will be established – and later implemented – with the goal being to determine "what's best to support student learning." He said then, teachers and administration will determine if their current practices align with those principles.

Peel said questions such as "Why do we have GPA?" and "Why do we have quarters?" will be asked during discussions.

"I'm not saying we're going to do away with [those aspects]. I don't have any preconceived notion around it, but we're going to question it," he said. "We've been doing it that way forever, but is there a reason we have quarters and is it good or bad?"

Peel said the goal surrounding the year of assessment is to provide students with "feedback about how they could've done better, a chance to retry and a chance to improve their learning."

Peel explained there are several activities scheduled throughout the upcoming school year where the staff will read educational research, as well as debate and discuss what's best for students and the "vision of where we are taking our school."

Although new Superintendent of Schools Jeffrey Burt said he wasn't looking to implement anything new in the district, he echoed Peel's thoughts on the vision for the school system.

"I'm going to continue to look at our emphasis on really good teaching, really strong instruction and personalizing education for students," Burt said. He also explained that the vision for the school surrounds "making sure that each of our students is challenged to their fullest abilities and that we are doing everything we can for each individual student."

Burt noted that traditional multiple choice tests are "limited" and that the district will

be looking into "more authentic ways [of testing] that show whether students know their content, know their skills, but also have a deeper understanding of that content."

Several physical aspects of the building also saw a revamp this summer, beginning with established visitor parking on campus and new carpets on the upper level of the school, Peel said.

"We have [the carpet replacement] designed in phases which will take several years to complete because if you do the whole school at once it's over \$600,000," he said.

The school will also be home to high-quality, directional campus signage designed and built by the technology education students, Peel said.

"When everyone comes back they will be greeted with beautiful, brand new signage so everyone knows where to go."

Upon arrival to the high school, students will also be welcomed by three new water bottle filling stations to replace standard water fountains.

The school will continue its long standing tradition of "First Day Bacon Way," said math teacher Shanna Steele.

"I always look forward to the first day of school," she said, adding, "It's more of a field day for the kids and an ice-breaker."

The day includes food trucks, an assembly and a meet and greet with teachers.

"It's a lot of fun," Steele said.

Peel also said he has a "special surprise in the gym" planned for the students – although he refrained from revealing to the *Rivereast* what the surprise entailed.

"It's something that we've been working on and when they come back on the first day it should be ready to go," he said. "It's going to be something that the kids are going to love."

Peel said the school has also updated technology throughout the building and will continue to do so as the year progresses.

The school will also be "cracking down on student attendance."

"Attendance is the first piece of success," he said. "If you're not there, then you can't be successful."

The curriculum has also expanded to include more workforce-oriented opportunities.

Just three weeks ago, a contract was signed with the state Department of Labor's Office of Apprenticeship, Peel explained.

"We have added two pre-approved apprenticeship programs," Peel said. "Our students who take Manufacturing 1 and Manufacturing 2 will earn 200 pre-apprenticeship hours

through the Department of Labor and then those who take Engineering 1 and Engineering 2 will get another 200 pre-apprenticeship hours which go directly into the world of work."

These hours will contribute to trade professions that often need upwards of 800 apprenticeship hours, he added.

"We're a really, really good high school and we really do achieve a lot, but we're never settled; we're always moving forward," Peel said.

* * *

The long-awaited opening of the new-look William J. Johnston Middle School means a slew of new items for the approximate 550 incoming students, while still upholding the principles of collaboration, inspiration and involvement, explained WJMS Principal Christopher Bennett.

The \$48.66 million renovation project has "been a phenomenal process of collaboration between local officials, state officials, the construction company and the sub-contractors," he said. "You hear nightmare stories about how projects go and this isn't like that; this is really going incredible."

The new school is completely renovated and updated on all fronts, Bennett said.

While the portion of the complex that used to be Colchester Intermediate School won't be completely renovated and finished until December, the middle school area is completed and revamped from floor to ceiling.

Among a list of new features and updated items, students will be met with a black box theatre that sits about 200 people, two gyms – the second will become available in December – and central air conditioning.

"We've had to close school in the past because the school got so hot, especially on the second floor," Bennett said.

While there won't be a single chalkboard to be found in the new building, classrooms will be equipped with TouchIT Boards and students will have their own Chromebooks.

The Chromebooks can be synced to the TouchIT Boards so information can be shared from student to student or student to teacher.

Bennett said "a huge part" of the renovation project was to "eliminate traffic issues and safety concerns."

He explained that "traffic could back up all the way down Norwich Avenue and down to the town green sometimes" for the approximate 200 parents that drop off daily.

"We tried to establish a more efficient system that gets the traffic off of Norwich Avenue"

he said.

The lane allows for increased safety by eliminating the option to pass any vehicles dropping off students. Also, Bennett said, the student will be dropped off on a sidewalk and stay on the sidewalk all the way to the entrance.

A major portion of project planning was also spent on location of classrooms, subjects and students.

"We spent a ton of time talking about adjacencies [of rooms]," Bennett said.

Each grade has a "pod," or a "small school within a school" as Bennett described it, and each pod is broken down into two teams.

This sort of organization means the math, science, social studies and English teachers will all share the same 80 to 120 students, as well as the same schedule. When those students go to their applied academics like art and music, the teachers are free to have "team time" to discuss homework, assessments and collaborate, he said.

The new building also focuses on bringing in more natural light and open space with floor to ceiling windows and high ceilings.

The hallways have also been updated with specific names which give the areas of school a distinct identity.

Bennett said the main hallway is fittingly titled Main Street, while the hallway that leads to the band and chorus rooms is called Broadway.

Even the morning announcements saw an overhaul. While they used to be transmitted over an intercom, they'll now be telecast live in each classroom, and feature students sitting behind an anchor desk, Bennett said.

In addition to the physical changes to the middle school, students will be greeted by a new assistant principal, Stacy Ewings, who was welcomed to the staff just last week.

According to a Colchester Public Schools press release, Ewings spent the past eight years as the lead curriculum and staff developer in the Guilford Public School district where she "developed and coordinated the summer Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) program for middle school students."

Overall, the middle school renovation project "has been inspiring for me," Bennett said. "I have been involved with every aspect of the entire project. Very few principals get to do the whole project from soup to nuts, and I have. We finally have a facility that almost matches how good the staff is. Even though this building is incredible, the staff is better."

Observations & Ruminations

by Mike Thompson

Why the secrecy?

That was my thought last week while editing Elizabeth Regan's story, which appeared on the cover of last week's *Rivereast*, about the Connecticut Freedom of Information Commission dismissing a complaint the paper had filed against the Town of East Hampton, seeking access to the handcounted ballots from last year's municipal election.

In case you didn't read the story last week or need a refresher: Last November, close votes in the races for Town Council and Zoning Board of Appeals prompted a recount. While there were a slew of other items on the Election Day ballot – including the construction of an \$18.98 million municipal hub – election officials, as per state guidelines, only recounted the votes for Town Council and ZBA. I don't quite get why election officials, since they were looking at each of the ballots again anyway, couldn't recount the other items on the ballot as well – but hey, I don't make the laws.

Anyway, upon doing their recount, election officials discovered some of the ballots had been counted twice on Election Day. These were the ballots on which voters had marked the bubble for "write-in votes." The ballots were run through the tabulator machine and then handcounted (even though there were no registered write-in candidates for last year's election).

While the secretary of the state's office specified only the write-in vote on the ballot should be handcounted, this apparently wasn't the case. The mistake only came to light when doing the recount for Town Council and ZBA, but, again, only those two results were recounted. The rest were left alone – including the municipal hub, which ultimately passed by a mere 30 votes.

Terry Latimer, the Democrat deputy registrar of voters, told the *Rivereast* last November she wasn't sure exactly how many ballots were counted twice, but she guessed 22. The reason Latimer couldn't be positive was that the results were already on lockdown, she said.

And therein lay the problem. While the discrepancy didn't affect the outcomes of the Town Council and ZBA races, the total number of votes the candidates in those races changed. So doesn't it stand to reason that the votes for the other races changed as well? Including the municipal hub which, again, only passed by 30 votes? With a price tag pushing \$20 million, it's absolutely imperative the vote total for the project is correct – especially since town taxpayers are still paying off a \$52 million high school renovation project they passed back in 2013.

So, Elizabeth asked the town if she could see the handcounted ballots. No dice. Hence the complaint to the FOIC – a complaint that unfortunately went nowhere.

The commission's decision was based on a provision in state election law that requires election ballots to be sealed for 180 days following an election – with only a judge being allowed to unseal the ballots. The *Rivereast's* hearing with the FOIC took place March 26 – so not quite 180 days since the November election.

It seems like a lousy reason to deny the access – and in the end, the voters are the ones who lose out. I agree wholeheartedly with *Rivereast* publisher Jim Hallas, who said in last week's story the ruling "preserves unnecessary secrecy and deprives the public of transparency in the voting process should questions arise about any given election or referendum."

Shouldn't transparency be what the FOIC wants?

By asking to see the handcounted ballots, Elizabeth was just trying to do what a good reporter does – verify the facts. The town stood in the way. And the question I keep going back to is: why? If there's nothing to hide, then why hide it?

If the end result of the municipal hub vote will remain that the hub was approved, then that's great. But if not – well, don't voters deserve to know? Don't get me wrong; I'm not saying I want the vote overturned. Anybody who's been in the East Hampton Town Hall and especially the police station – heck, anyone who's driven past them – knows the time has come for new ones. For journalists, though, transparency is what we do. You can argue it's the main reason newspapers even exist. I just want the truth – and I don't get why it's being kept from us.

* * *

One of my favorite Hebronians has long been John Tuttle. He's extremely nice – and extremely funny. John has some colorful tales from his past, and if you're lucky enough to sit down with him for a chat and he shares some stories, laughs will surely come your way. He's a delightful man, and it's been a treat to know him these past several years.

So I was pretty tickled when a notice came across my email inbox this week from Douglas Library hyping a visit from John next month. "Travels with Tut" will take place at the library, 22 Main St., Hebron, on Thursday, Sept. 13, at 7 p.m.

John, according to the library, will introduce you to many countries' and counties' characters, through their own accents and dialects. I'm sure it'll be a fun and evening.

Light refreshments will be served – but really, you shouldn't need the bribery of cookies and coffee to get you to the library on that night. A night listening to John Tuttle tell his tales is a night very well spent.

* * *

See you next week.

Two-Car Crash in Colchester Injures Teen

State Police said a two-vehicle collision on Route 16 near the intersection of Waterhole Road last week left a 16-year-old with suspected minor injuries.

On Aug. 13, at approximately 6:08 p.m., Patrick V. Fitzgerald, 59, of 120 Main Street, East Hampton, was driving a Chevrolet Silverado traveling west on Route 16 when he lost control of the vehicle. The Chevrolet

slid across the roadway, police said, and into the path of a Ford Edge driven by a 16-year-old male who was traveling east on Route 16, resulting in a collision.

Police said the 16-year-old was transported by Colchester Fire Department to Marlborough Clinic with suspected minor injuries and Fitzgerald was found at fault for traveling too fast for conditions.

Car Rolls Over in Colchester

State Police said a one-car rollover in the early morning hours Sunday left the driver with possible injuries.

On Aug. 19, at approximately 1:04 a.m. a Volkswagen Jetta driven by Andrew Currier, 25, of 9 Windham Ave., was traveling southbound on Mahoney Road approximately one-tenth of a mile north of the Colchester-Lebanon town line. The vehicle traveled off the left shoulder of the roadway, striking an embankment, police said.

The vehicle then entered back onto Mahoney Road and rolled onto its driver's side, where it came to a final rest.

Currier was traveling with two passengers who were unharmed, but Currier complained of pain and was transported by the Colchester Fire Department to Middlesex Hospital. Currier was also issued an infraction for failure to drive right and traveling too fast for conditions.

Men Arrested in Colchester on Drug Charges

Two men were arrested on drug possession and one with an additional charge of intent to sell after being discovered in a parking lot on Old Hebron Road, State Police said.

Police said they responded to investigate a report of suspicious activity at a parking lot at 188 Old Hebron Road on Aug. 15 at approximately 12:43 a.m. Upon arrival, state police observed three individuals with possession of marijuana.

The first was Jameson P. Violette, 18, of 169 McDonald Rd., who was arrested and charged with drug paraphernalia, possession with intent to sell and possession of less than half an ounce of cannabis. The second was Tyler Donovan, 18, of 44 Cherry Tree Ln., who was arrested and charged with possession of less than half an ounce of cannabis. The third individual was not arrested, according to police.

Obituaries

Colchester

Marie Theresa Day

Marie Theresa Day, 86 of New Port Richey, Fla., formerly of Colchester, passed away peacefully on Monday, July 30. Born in Port Chester, N.Y., Aug. 14, 1931, she was the daughter of the late Angelo and Adelasia (Toni) Giannotti.

Marie worked for many years in the personnel department at the Travelers Insurance Company and then as an assistant accountant for the Connecticut State Department of Education until her retirement. She was a member of the Grange society, an avid fan of UConn women's basketball, and when she could find the time she enjoyed knitting and other small arts and crafts.

Those who loved her will always remember Marie as a loving mother and grandmother. She is survived by her four children, John Day of Las Vegas, Nev., Robert Day of East Haddam, Doreen Prescott of New Port Richey, Fla., and Ann Marie (Steve) Hitchery of Wakefield, R.I. In addition to her children she will also be remembered by her nine grandchildren, Lindsey Day, Christopher Day, Kristy Feragne, Eric Day, Wayne Radway, Michael Prescott, Chelsea Harriman, Jason Lenkiewicz and Allison Lenkiewicz; and her five great grandchildren, Alexa, Taryn, Ciena, Sophia, and Alijah.

The family will receive guests Monday, Aug. 27, from 5-7 p.m., at the Aurora-McCarthy Funeral Home, 167 Old Hartford Rd., Colchester. The memorial liturgy will be celebrated Tuesday, Aug. 28, at 11 a.m., directly at St. Andrew Church, 128 Norwich Ave. Burial will follow in the New St. Andrew Cemetery.

East Hampton

Alfred Paradis

Alfred "Al" Paradis passed away at Middlesex Hospital Wednesday, Aug. 15, surrounded by his loved ones. Al was born May 27, 1956 in Hartford, to his parents Anna and Alfred Paradis. He was employed by Electric Boat for 39 years where he recently retired.

Al was an avid hunter and fisherman, and loved the outdoors. Back in the day, he loved playing pool and waterskiing on the lake, and also snowmobiling. He was a fun and loving guy who touched so many people along the way.

Al is survived by his mother, Anna Paradis of East Hampton; his loving wife, Evelyn Paradis, of East Hampton; his son, Alfred Paradis III, of East Hampton; his three daughters, Tara Couture and husband Justin of East Hampton, Melissa Anderson and husband Allen of Manchester, and Heather Myjak of Portland; and his beloved dog, Little B. He is also survived by five grandchildren, Robert and Anthony Dudchik, Nathan and Emily Couture and Chase Paradis; three siblings, Kevin Paradis of East Hampton, Randy Paradis of Wis., and Benjamin Paradis of Middletown; and many nieces and nephews. Al was predeceased by his maternal and paternal grandparents, his sister Louanne Doherty, his brother Clifford Paradis and his father Alfred Paradis Sr.

Friends may call at Spencer Funeral Home, 112 Main St., East Hampton, Saturday Aug. 25, from 9-11 a.m. Funeral services will be held at 11 a.m. Burial will be private.

In lieu of flowers, memorial donations may be made to Middlesex Hospital Hospice Unit c/o Middlesex Hospital Department of Philanthropy, 55 Crescent St. Middletown, CT 06457.

To leave online condolences, visit spencer-funeralhomeinc.com.



East Hampton

Evan Joseph Basso

Evan Joseph Basso, 27, of East Hampton, husband of Shae (Kogut) Basso, passed away Thursday, Aug. 16, in Cobalt, and is now in God's hands.

Born Feb. 9, 1991, he was the son of John and Elizabeth (Rogers) Basso, of East Hampton. Evan was a 2009 graduate of Vinal Technical High School and had been employed at Pratt & Whitney as a machinist. Evan was a Boy Scout in East Hampton and served as a junior firefighter in the East Hampton Volunteer Fire Department. He was also an avid snowmobiler, and a proud member of Eastcoast Snocross. Evan had a quick smile and sense of humor that could light up a room. He loved making people laugh.

Besides his parents and his wife Shae, he is survived by his two beloved sons, Vince and Mason Basso; his pride, joy and life. He also leaves sisters Rachel Basso of East Haddam and Celia Basso of East Hampton, grandmother Gayle Rogers, and many aunts and uncles, as well as his father and mother in-law Robert and Eileen Kogut of NY. He was predeceased by his grandparents Harry William and Phyllis Basso and B. Peter Rogers.

Friends called at the Spencer Funeral Home, 112 Main St., on Tuesday, Aug. 21. Burial was private at Rock Landing Cemetery in Haddam.

In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions may be made to the Education Fund for Vince and Mason Basso, c/o Liberty Bank, 2 West High St. East Hampton, CT 06424.

To leave online condolences, visit spencer-funeralhomeinc.com.

Portland

Evalyn Santostefano

Evalyn (Pandro) Santostefano, 90, of Portland, died Monday, Aug. 6, at Middlesex Healthcare Center after a short illness. She was born Nov. 25, 1927, in Middletown, daughter of the late Alexander and Rose (Campisi) Pandolfo.

Evalyn had been a resident of Middletown and attended local schools. She was a member of St Mary Church in Portland. She enjoyed cooking, sewing and decorating her home. A great lover of jazz, she spent countless hours listening to her favorite albums. The beach was her favorite place and she cherished her time spent at Hammonasset State Park.

She is survived by her loving family, a son, Alexander Santostefano of Minneapolis, Minn.; two daughters, Cynthia Sharr of Portland and Maria Pacholski of Middletown. She is also survived by a granddaughter Juliet Rodriguez and her husband Jay; three grandsons, Christopher Lord, Jonathan Sharr and his wife Mellisa, and Edward Pacholski; five great-grandchildren, Cayden and Callie Rodriguez, Luke, Nicolo and Mattia Sharr; and many wonderful nieces and nephews.

She was predeceased by a brother, Mario Pandolfo of St Louis, Mo. A memorial Mass was held Monday, Aug. 20, in St Mary Church, Portland. Burial was in St. Sebastian Cemetery, Middlefield.

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

Marlborough

Donald Eugene Julian

Donald Eugene Julian, 87, of Marlborough, beloved husband of Theresa (Martel) Julian, died Saturday, Aug. 18, on vacation in North Hero, Vt. Born May 15, 1931, in Winoski, Vt., he was the son of the late Arthur and Mary (Hamilton) Julian.

Donald proudly served his country in the U.S. Army during the Korean War. Donald had worked as a truck driver before his retirement. He was an active communicant of St. John Fisher Church in Marlborough, and a life member of the American Legion in Marlborough.

Besides his loving wife, he is survived by his children, Jay Julian of Marlborough, Jeff Julian and wife Leigh of Titusville, Fla., Daniel Julian and wife Mary Beth of Colchester, Ronald Julian and his girlfriend Tracy of Marlborough; his grandchildren, Karisti, Amanda, Justin, Eric, Jenna Gail, Ally; brothers and sister, Arthur Julien of Vermont, Ray Julian of Vermont, Dorothy Martin of East Hartford, Richard Julien of East Hartford, and several nieces and nephews.

He was predeceased by his brother Robert Julian.

Don was a good man, with strong values and simple needs. He led by example, instilling in his sons a belief in hard work and love of family. He had a smile and kind word for all; he truly enjoyed life.

Don loved to fish and was on his annual fishing trip when he passed away unexpectedly. He was an avid sports fan, cheering on UConn basketball and the New York Giants. He was a lifelong Yankees fan, and is surely doing what he can to see they get another ring!

Don will be sadly missed by Theresa and his family. It is their hope that, you too, have been blessed with a person like Don in your life.

Friends may call at Spencer Funeral Home, 112 Main St., East Hampton, today, Aug. 24, from 5-7 p.m. A funeral liturgy will be held on Saturday, Aug. 25, at 11 a.m. in St. John Fisher Church in Marlborough. Burial will follow in Jones Hollow Cemetery on West Road in Marlborough.

In lieu of flowers, memorial donations may be made to Marlborough Senior Center, P.O. Box 29, Marlborough, CT 06447.

To leave online condolences, visit spencer-funeralhomeinc.com.

Colchester

Barbara Ann Brainerd

Barbara Ann Brainerd, 85, died Wednesday, Aug. 8, at Wadsworth Glen in Middletown. She was born on June 6, 1933 to the late Felix and Agatha (Lesick) Stankiewicz.

Barbara grew up in Colchester; she graduated from Bacon Academy in 1951. On Oct. 12, 1973, she was united in marriage to Milton Brainerd, who died in 1979. Focusing on her career, Barbara worked at Hartford National Bank & Trust in Colchester and then worked at Travelers Insurance Co. as a paralegal and retiring after almost 38 years as an executive secretary.

Barbara was a devoted parishioner at St. Andrew Church until her illness, and had a love for animals particularly dachshunds.

Barbara is survived by her brother Theodore Stankiewicz and his wife Marie of East Hampton and her nephew Paul Stankiewicz. In addition to her parents and husband Milton, she was predeceased by her sister Irene Harasimowitz with whom she was very close.

Calling hours were held at Belmont Funeral Home Aug. 13; she was laid to rest Aug. 14 at Old St. Andrew Cemetery, following a Mass of Christian Burial at St. Andrew Church.

Visit belmontfh.com to leave condolences for the family.



Colchester

Robert Joseph Neilson

Robert Joseph Neilson, 69, of Colchester, passed away peacefully surrounded by loved ones Saturday, Aug. 11. Born Sept. 28, 1948, in Scranton, Pa., he was the son of the late Robert and Anna (Copjak) Neilson.

Mr. Neilson served proudly with the U.S. Marine Corps during the Vietnam War. While in active duty, he was awarded two Purple Hearts. He was an active individual, who especially loved the outdoors, so his work as a landscaper was a perfect fit.

He leaves three daughters, Jennifer Hein and her husband, William of Jacksonville, Fla., Michelle Cooper and partner Michelle Smith of Otisfield, Maine, and Tiffany Neilson of Montville; three grandchildren, William Hein, Julia and Wyatt Cooper; his sister and brother-in-law, Patricia and Thomas Culhane of Colchester (with whom he most recently made his home), and their two sons, David, Thomas and wife Kristen their children, Ian and Nathan; and numerous extended family and friends.

The family will receive guests today, Aug. 24, beginning at 9:30 a.m., at the Aurora-McCarthy Funeral Home, 167 Old Hartford Rd., Colchester, before a chapel service at 11 a.m. with full military honors. Burial will be at 2 p.m. in the State Veterans Cemetery, Middletown.

For online condolences, visit auroramccarthy-funeralhome.com.

