



RIVEREAST

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Linda Orange Remembered

by Karla Santos

Less than two weeks after announcing she had pancreatic cancer and would be retiring from public office in February, state Rep. Linda Orange of Colchester died Wednesday.

State and local officials this week remembered Orange with a variety of terms: pillar of the community, fighter, good friend, selfless, dedicated, someone with a fierce spirit and an immense heart, someone who loved public service – and someone who always had a contagious laugh.

Orange, 69, represented the 48th District, which covers most of Colchester, as well as parts of Lebanon, Windham and Mansfield. She was first elected more than two decades ago, in 1996.

Earlier this month, Orange had tendered her resignation from state office. Her plan was to work from home until February, as she wanted to focus on treatment for pancreatic cancer, which she was diagnosed with this past summer.

Colchester First Selectman Mary Bylone said Orange was like a mentor to her.

“Linda Orange has been a pillar of the Colchester community and state of Connecticut for over two decades,” Bylone said. “She was a model of public service, leadership, and kindness. Anyone who was fortunate enough to know Linda will remember her infectious laugh, sharp wit, and deep dedication to improving the lives of those around her. She did just that.”

“There are too many achievements, lives impacted, debates had, fights won and lost to name when it comes to Linda,” Bylone added. “All I can say is that she led an extraordinary

life of service and made our world a better place. I was lucky to have her as my representative, and as my friend. Bye, bye now, Linda, and thank you.”

Donald Lee, deputy chief of the Colchester Hayward Fire Department, said his department worked with Orange “all the time.”

“She was very much involved with the fire service caucus,” Lee said. “She was one of our greatest supporters and it wasn’t just the fire service, the emergency services across the board, fire police, rescue and EMS. If it fell in any one of those categories, we couldn’t have a greater chair leader, greater supporter at the legislative level.”

Lee said he spoke via text messages with Orange just three days ago.

“Although her body had weakened, her mind was just sharp as a tack,” he said.

The reason for their texts was that the Eastern Connecticut Regional Fire School, which has been in the process of rebuilding, is coming to a completion.

“That was many years of a lot of work on a lot of different levels to get the funding to rebuild that school,” Lee said. “Linda was a big



Linda Orange

advocate and a strong supporter in getting that school properly funded so that it could be rebuilt.”

Since the school is nearly done, Lee sent Orange a lot of pictures of the school. He said his hope was that she would be able to go see it in person. Lee’s initial text to Orange along with the photos was an invite to the open house of the school on Nov. 30.

“The school is the envy of the Connecticut Fire Service and nothing short of an amazing state of the art educational facility for all the emergency services,” he said he wrote to Orange. “Thank you for

all you have done to make this happen.’ She sent me back a text ‘to many years and many squeakers and legislators.’ And I sent back to her, ‘Yeah, but it took a five-star general named Orange to lead the charge to victory,’ and I got a big smiley-face back.”

Lee said Orange was an advocate and strong supporter when it came to emergency personnel.

“She did a lot for all of us,” he added. “She was an honorary member of the Colchester Fire Department for many years. A lot of people here have a lot of very fine memories of Linda.”

Mary Miraglia, president of the Colchester Hayward Volunteer Fire Company, said she has known Orange for over 20 years.

“She was both a mentor and a friend and an advocate,” Miraglia said. “She’s got a fierce spirit and an immense heart. Last Thursday at our monthly meeting, we dedicated part of the meeting to her.”

At the meeting, Miraglia said they brought a sample of the signs that sit on Route 85.

“Right now, there are two sections of 85 where there’s a sign that says Colchester Hayward Volunteer Fire Company Memorial Highway,” she said.

According to Miraglia, Orange made the signs happen.

“What happened at the meeting was a number of people spoke about her impact both professionally and personally on them,” Miraglia said.

Melissa Ziobron, a former state representative whose 34th district included a portion of Colchester, said fighting for small towns will be Orange’s legacy.

“Linda was one of a kind,” Ziobron said. “Often, she would make her way to the Republican side of the chamber – sit down next to me and bring laughter and keen insight to the issue we were debating. But above all she loved her family and Colchester. Fighting for small towns and the volunteer first responders that serve them will be her legislative legacy, but her family was her greatest joy.”

State Sen. Norm Needleman (D-33), whose district includes Colchester, called Orange’s death “a loss for her colleagues, her constituents and the state of Connecticut.”

See Linda Orange page 2

Taking an Icy Dip for a Cause

by Karla Santos

About 110 people took a quick dip in an icy cold Lake Pocotopaug last Saturday, all to help reduce hunger.

The East Hampton Turkey Plunge is a tradition in its 10th year, in support of the East Hampton Volunteer Food Bank.

Tom Crean, who founded the Turkey Plunge along with his wife and daughters, said this year’s event exceeded its goal.

“It went extremely well this year, extremely cold and extremely well,” Crean said. “A lot better than I thought it was going to be this year, giving the weather conditions.”

According to Crean, the Turkey Plunge raises money and puts it through the local Rotary Club, which has a deal with Liberty Bank. All the funds the Turkey Plunge puts through the Rotary Club is matched by Liberty Bank 25 cents on the dollar.

Crean said that once the bank does its match, the total funds raised in this year’s Turkey Plunge will be around \$30,000.

“Our goal is anything we can get,” Crean said. “The original goal 10 years ago was to raise \$1,000.”

The total amount of money collected through the Turkey Plunge in its 10 years, including this year is about \$250,000, Crean said.

He said the event participants are not only from East Hampton but from a wide array of towns.

“We have a big team that comes up every year from the Norwich Court House, Norwich Superior Court,” Crean said. “They jump in every year, they dress up in their costumes every year and they have a very good time. They are very generous.”

One of the biggest fund raisers of the Turkey Plunge is local business owner Anastasios “Tasos” Paggiannopoulos, who is originally from Greece and owns a Mexican restaurant in East Hampton. Tasos has taken part in the Turkey Plunge since its inception 10 years ago.

“He is by far the biggest fundraiser every year,” Crean said. “This year he raised over \$8,500. He’s a guy that just gives and gives to the community and never wants any recognition. He jumped in the water himself. And those were people that sponsored him, \$8,500 worth of sponsors.”

Tasos said he is thankful for all the people who help him contribute to the event. He said he raises funds from the customers and friends of his business, Loco Perro.

“Because I’m an immigrant, I am very blessed to be in this country and be where I am

today so I can help people,” Tasos said. “I hope people continue to help other people when they are in need.”

He said there are people who are in need every day, who should be helped not only during the holidays but throughout the year.

Crean said the idea of the Turkey Plunge is to raise the money right before Thanksgiving because the food bank can be heavily used during the holidays.

“I don’t think anybody should go without Thanksgiving dinner or Christmas dinner,” Crean said.

Beth Wiltsie has been a member of the board of directors of the East Hampton Volunteer Food Bank for about 4 years but has been a volunteer of the food bank for about 11 years.

Wiltsie said the Turkey Plunge is “fantastic” because everything the food bank gives is from donations from the community.

“Then Tom Crean sets the Turkey Plunge up and that just adds several thousand dollars more a year so we could provide that many more services,” she said.

Wiltsie said everything given by the food bank goes to the residents of East Hampton who are in need.

“We are very fortunate to have the Turkey

Plunge and we are very fortunate to have the community of East Hampton itself behind us because they do a fantastic job,” she added.

This Saturday, the East Hampton Volunteer Food Bank will hold its annual turkey give away. Wiltsie said that with donations, the food bank provides residents all the food needed for a turkey dinner.

“This year we are doing it for about 200 families and that includes seniors,” Wiltsie said. “We provide the makings for the Thanksgiving meal for the seniors also.”

In addition, individuals and a variety of organizations buy gifts and clothes for children and donate them to the food bank, which is in charge of distributing them.

Shawn King and his two older sons Gavin and Keegan have taken part in the event for the past three years.

“I just want to give back to the community,” King said. “I’m fortunate enough to be able to feed my family and cloth them and everything, but there are people in our community that aren’t. I wanted to teach my kids about giving back to their own communities so it’s a good way to get them started young.”

King said that in previous years he asked

See Icy Dip page 2

Linda Orange cont. from Front Page

“I’m heartbroken that we’ve lost a friend, mentor and legislator who never stopped fighting for what she believed in,” he said. “I hope every legislator can be inspired by her legacy and her tireless efforts to support her community.”

Needleman said Orange and the late Eileen Daily – a former state senator who died in 2015 – were “inseparable,” and added, “I know they’re reunited, sipping drinks and watching over us.”

On Wednesday, Gov. Ned Lamont announced that he directed the state flags lowered to half-staff in honor of Orange.

“Linda truly loved serving the people of her district,” he said. “She did lasting good work for Connecticut, and she will be missed.”

Nancy Wyman, chairman of the state Democratic Party, issued a statement on Orange’s passing, saying, “Connecticut has lost a great champion, not just for her district, but for the entire state. Linda Orange was dedicated to her

constituents, but held a special place in her heart for men and women in uniform – those who served in the military, firefighters and police. Linda wasn’t afraid to speak her mind or to cross the aisle to work with Republicans. She was a great friend and I will miss her.”

Orange looked back on her service in an interview just last week with the *Rivereast*.

“There has been such an array of things that I have done for the towns that I have represented, all the towns, working in conjunction with the town managers, the mayors, the first selectmen,” Orange said. “I’ve worked with many constituents on individual issues that they’ve had and I’m just delighted that I was able to help them accomplish what they needed on the individual basis.”

Funeral arrangements were unavailable as of press time. In accordance with state law, a special election will take place to determine Orange’s replacement in the House.



The 10th annual East Hampton Turkey Plunge took place last Saturday to raise money for the local food bank. Pictured from left are some of the participants: Brady Bigelow, Keegan King, Ryan Bigelow, Karter Bernier, Maverick Bernier, Gavin King, Adam Bigelow, Shawn King and Doug Bernier. Shawn King said he and his two older sons, Gavin and Keegan, have taken part in the event for the past three years. This year, King used social media to raise funds for the event. Photo courtesy of Shawn King.

Icy Dip cont. from Front Page

people in person to help him sponsor the event. This year he did it through social media and raised over \$1,000 of donations, he said.

But King noticed a little bit of a difference when he plunged on Saturday.

“This year was brutally cold,” King said. “It was absolutely brutal. It was by far the coldest out of the three years that we’ve done it.”

Carl Guild’s team was on board at the event for the first time.

“It was great to see so many people come out for a good cause and I can’t wait to come back next year to do it again,” Guild said.

The Turkey Plunge started after Crean had a conversation about starvation with his daughters. He said he told them there were probably friends of them in their classroom that were

going to bed at night hungry. His daughters were upset when they heard that and decided they should do something, which is how the idea of the Turkey Plunge came about.

Crean said he then approached the director of the food bank to tell her that he was going to get 19 of his friends to jump in the lake. The goal was for each of them to raise \$50. The original goal was \$1,000.

“She looked up at me and told me ‘I think you’re completely insane but go for it’ she said,” Crean said. “The rest is history. It just keeps growing and growing each year. People of this community are very generous and they like to come out and they like to help their neighbors in need.”

Observations & Ruminations

by Mike Thompson

I was *very* sad to hear Wednesday night of the passing of state Rep. Linda Orange. Yes, I knew she had pancreatic cancer and had a tough road ahead of her – but she just announced not even two weeks earlier that she had the disease and would be resigning from office come February.

I was floored that she went as quickly as she did.

For me, on a professional level, it’s just bizarre that Linda isn’t here. For literally the entire time I’ve been editing the *Rivereast*, she has been representing Colchester in the general assembly. Heck, she started in her state representative role when I was still in high school.

And through it all, she worked tirelessly for the town. She did a heck of a job and was justly rewarded with winning re-election year after year. No one ever really came close to defeating her – and for good reason. She was great in the role.

Linda’s passion benefitted not just Colchester but all surrounding towns. Several years ago, in a cost-cutting move the state went through with a consolidation of state police coverage, which left state police barracks around the state, including Troop K in Colchester, closed at various times of day. Linda fought hard against consolidation, and was ultimately successful, as 24-7 police coverage eventually returned.

Though she was a Democrat, it’s tough to find anyone, on either side of the aisle, who didn’t love Linda. She will definitely be missed – and frankly, whoever next takes her seat in the state assembly will have some rather gargantuan shoes to fill. Linda was one in a million. My heart goes out to all of her family and friends, and everyone that knew her.

* * *

In happier news, I took advantage of the three-day weekend we’re afforded each week at the *Rivereast* to hop on a train last Friday and head down to New York, to spend a few days in the Big Apple. I’ve always loved the city, and was just feeling the urge to get away from it all for a couple of days. And so I did.

The highlights of the trip for me were definitely the two Broadway musicals I saw. Okay, one technically isn’t *on* Broadway – it was the current revival of the hit show *Little Shop of Horrors*, which for a limited time is running in a tiny but gorgeous little theater located just off Broadway. It’s a fitting venue for the show, as *Little Shop* started in an off-Broadway theater when it was first performed in 1982.

Growing up, *Little Shop* was one of the musicals that made me fall in love with musicals. Like probably a good chunk of the country, I was first introduced to it as a kid by way of the 1986 movie adaptation, which starred Rick Moranis. The story, which is

based on a 1960 movie with the same name, is a lot of fun, and the songs are even better. The songs can make you laugh and also make you cry, and are expertly crafted to stick in your head long past the final scene.

The score was by the delightful team of Howard Ashman and Alan Menken, which, buoyed by the success of *Little Shop*, went on to do the songs of the Disney classics *Little Mermaid* and *Beauty and the Beast*. Ashman was at work writing the lyrics for songs in *Aladdin* when he passed away due to complications from AIDS. Disney films have continued to have great songs in the years since, but, in my opinion, nothing has quite reached the level of those initial Ashman-Menken films.

The current revival of *Little Shop* features a terrific cast, who all did fantastic jobs. It’s playing to a full house every night – I very much lucked into a ticket – and runs through Jan. 19. I highly recommend getting down to NYC and seeing if you can score seats.

An easier ticket to get – because, sadly, the play hasn’t been doing terrific box office, apparently – would be the other musical I saw, *Tootsie*. This is based on the 1982 Dustin Hoffman movie, in which an actor decides the only way he could get a break is if he pretended he were a woman. Sure enough, he lands a big role on a popular soap opera. For the musical adaptation, the basic plot is the same, although instead of a soap opera, the lead character (here played terrifically by Santino Fontana) gets a big part in a Broadway musical.

The book and songs are hilarious. I laughed harder at *Tootsie* than I had in a long time. It felt great. And as I said, Santino Fontana did a great job. He was the main reason I wanted to see the musical; I’ve been a big fan of his since I first saw him in the delightful recently-ended TV series *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*. I even got to meet him after the play, which was an absolute thrill.

Like *Little Shop*, *Tootsie* is set to have its final curtain call in January. The last show is scheduled for Jan. 5 – and indeed, it will have not even lasted a year on Broadway. While *Little Shop* was along meant to be a short run – in fact, it was originally supposed to close in November, until sheer audience demand extended it – *Tootsie* was meant to be a long-running hit. And while it won well-deserved Tony awards for Fontana and for the book (written by Robert Horn), I’ve read the play never played to overly big box office. I’m not exactly sure why, and it’s a shame, since it really is quite terrific.

In short: both plays are highly, highly recommended. I’m so glad I was able to see both of them last weekend.

* * *

See you next week.

New Residential Care Home in Marlborough Keeps People Smiling

by Karla Santos

Sandy McGugan's mother has been through a variety of healthcare facilities in the last five years. But McGugan recently moved her mother into a brand-new residential home that put a smile back on their faces.

"My mother smiles a lot – but she hasn't smiled like this for quite some time," McGugan said.

After going through a variety of facilities including assisted living, rehab centers and hospitals, McGugan made the decision to try a new place: the new residential care home By the River in Marlborough.

McGugan said that what she was looking for was a place that gave her mother the feeling of home.

"I adore it," McGugan said. "I think what draws mostly is the kindness of the staff, the thoroughness of the staff and how much they go out of their way to make you feel special, welcome and loved."

Joyce Lence, McGugan's mother, told the *River* that By the River does feel like home.

"I love it here," Lence said, adding that what drove her to the residential care home was "the happy people and the beautiful place."

Corinne DiBacco, a 27-year geriatric nurse, is the owner of By the River.

Seeing By the River come to a reality was DiBacco's dream for the last nine years.

DiBacco was officially licensed earlier this month for a residential care home. She said the property had been in her family for a long time but it took about five years to make it a reality and she had to work with the town and the state to get all of the approvals.

The recently built 6,800-square-foot building carries an open concept floor plan and modern style throughout the wide array of living areas.

The property features patios in the front and back areas. The house includes family rooms, a sunroom, a dining room and the large kitchen has an island with seating. There is an elevator to accommodate residents with walkers or wheelchairs and all showers and toilets are equipped with bars to ensure safety.

By the River is designed to accommodate 10 residents, but only five slots are currently available.

The house includes individual rooms instead of apartment-style living to ensure residents enjoy all the aspects of the home.

"The kitchen, that's where we all gather," DiBacco said. "So watching the caregivers cook or hang out while other people are sitting at the dining room table or watching a movie, things like that on a smaller scale."

DiBacco said she's been told that this is the first residential care home like it in the state.

The reason she can accommodate only a small number of residents is because she wants to offer personalized care, she added.

"I have seen the way the industry has changed and I just wanted to have something small, manageable, someplace where we can still personalize care," she said.

The idea is to have a home where seniors can be accommodated to their likes, dislikes and preferences so that their living style is "more molded to the individual person," DiBacco said.

The home offers 24-hours care with certified nursing assistants on each shift assisting residents with their daily living activities.

By the River also offers residents someone to do meal preparation.

Custodial care, assistance with scheduling doctor's appointments, transportation, medication reminders and administering medication are also available.

The meal plans and recreation calendars are also fitted to the residents' needs and preferences.

"We have a mix of 10 people who can sit and learn to eat together as a family, they are going through the same things as someone else," DiBacco said. "They are going to form friendships, they are going to be able to play cards together, watch movies together, talk about the same things that they are going through in their lives and being at the same point in their lives in a more intimate way."

According to DiBacco, when families place



By the River Marlborough, a new residential care home, recently opened, and so far has been getting rave reviews. The house features individual rooms instead of apartment-style living to ensure residents enjoy all the aspects of the home – which include this large communal area. Photo by Alan Camp

a caregiver in a resident's home, the resident not only has to pay for the caregiver but is still responsible for paying the mortgage, taxes and food as well as keeping up with the home and yard work. But when clients live at By the River, they have everything included, while still feeling like they are home.

"We are more cost effective than having an aid come in to your home," DiBacco said. "We are more cost effective than going into an assisted living. It's like living at home."

DiBacco also said the price doesn't change depending on the level of assistance.

In addition, people who have visited the home, have given her positive feedback about all the living area the home includes, she said.

"We could literally have 10 people in one

different room and nobody will see each other," DiBacco said.

One of DiBacco's goals is to make it family-friendly and oriented for both the residents and their families.

"Family members love to visit," DiBacco said. "It's not a chore to visit their family because they feel like they are part of the family when they come here. Nobody wants to leave."

DiBacco said she is looking into adding a small hair and nail salon for the residents and there are plans in the works to construct a second home with another 10 residents on the same road.

By the River is located at 370 Jones Hollow Rd. To learn more about the home, visit bytheriverllc.com or call 860-467-6614.

New-Look Marlborough Selectmen Board Has First Meeting

by Karla Santos

Change was on display Tuesday, as the new Marlborough Board of Selectmen held its first meeting – this time to a slightly larger crowd than usual.

The fast-moving meeting was the first under new First Selectman Greg Lowrey. He is joined on the board by fellow Republican Joe Asklar and Democrat Amy Traversa. Traversa lost her re-election bid to Lowrey on Election Day Nov. 5, but garnered enough votes to win a seat on the board.

Tuesday's meeting, held at Town Hall, was packed house compared to recent meetings. There were eight residents in attendance plus the Board of Selectmen, the board clerk and a newspaper reporter. The Board of Selectmen meetings in the last few months were only attended by two or three residents, the Board of Selectmen, the board clerk and a reporter.

The new board quickly got down to work. A new business item added to the agenda featured the American Legion's request to have a lim-

ited waiver of transfer station fees related to three-pickup truck loads of demolition materials from their job site.

Asklar seconded the motion for comments and said that the American Legion is "definitely an asset to our town."

He suggested the town to take responsibility for a one-time waiver and the motion was approved.

A Christmas Gathering on the Green on Dec. 7 was also an item added to the agenda for possible discussion during the meeting. The gathering includes a parade and fireworks.

The board also discussed a request from public works for a transfer of funds in the amount of \$40,000 for tree removal. There was originally a budget for \$45,000, Lowrey said. That number was down to about \$7,000 by October, he added. There's also a grant for municipal projects that's about another \$7,000, he said.

"So they would have about 14 if we did noth-

ing," Lowrey said. "I would like to make a motion that we move \$26,000 from road crew salary to tree-trimming."

Traversa seconded the motion for discussion – but made it clear she was opposed to the idea, telling Lowrey that "to take money out of road crew payroll before the end of the winter seems short-sighted. We don't know what the winter is going to be, but that's your call."

Lowrey told Traversa that he agreed to the fact that they need to be cautious about the pace at which they spend that money.

"We don't want to go through all this money and then toward the end of the fiscal year have a new priority show up," Lowrey said. "I think we should maybe pace this at a day or two a month. And that way we can progress priorities that could result in damage."

Traversa told him about what had been done in the past, which was to first focus on trees that need to be taken down.

Asklar asked how much the town has currently for tree removal and Lowrey said that since the end of October the town has \$6,675.

"I don't feel that I have enough information to make an intelligent decision at this time," Asklar said.

On Tuesday Lowrey also wanted to make a motion to put in a new phone system at town hall, and said he had some information about some options available. Ultimately, the board opted to study the options further before making a decision.

Lowrey also shared some updates and correspondence.

Another resident spoke during the final public comments section of the meeting – and shared she was already a fan of the new board.

"I like this," Michelle Kacy said. "In 15 years in this town, this is probably the best lineup we've had. The dynamics are good. Keep it. It's respectful; it's inclusive."

Colchester Teacher Honored with Presidential Award

by Karla Santos

The Colchester school district has been focusing part of its work on creating “innovative thinkers,” an effort that has already started to show success, as one of the district’s teachers recently received a Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching.

Kristina Ngai has been teaching for six years at William J. Johnston Middle School. She teaches science and a Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Math (STEAM) course called Innovations. Innovations is an elective class that focuses on a project-based learning format.

Ngai said she started the application process for the Presidential Awards for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching (PAEMST), about three years ago.

The process involved filming in the classroom, gathering recommendations, looking into what she teaches and how she teaches.

Ngai then became a state finalist and early in October she was given the news – that she had been selected to receive the presidential award. She was one of two K-6 awardees from Connecticut.

“On behalf of Superintendent Burt, Dr. Hewes and the Board of Education, we are proud to celebrate the following national news about our William J. Johnston Middle School teacher, Kristina Ngai,” Dawn Shea, from the office of the superintendent, told the *RiverEast* through an email. “William J. Johnston Middle School innovations teacher, Mrs. Kristina Ngai was awarded the highest recognition that a K-12 STEM and/or computer science teacher could receive for outstanding teaching in the United States! Mrs. Ngai is one of the two K-6 recipients in Connecticut and one of 215 in the United States.”

Ngai had about two weeks to prepare for the recognition in Washington D.C.

The award recipients were not only invited

to D.C. for the actual award ceremony. They participated in a series of events throughout Oct. 16, Oct. 17 and Oct. 18.

White house employees and representatives of the National Science Foundation spoke to the award recipients.

“During the three days we were there was a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) teaching summit, where we got to work together with people on the different white house committees and people from NASA to talk about STEM education in the United States and kind of what we can do to keep improving it,” Ngai said. “That was a really good opportunity.”

The three-day events for the awardees started with introductions.

“We got to meet teachers from all different states,” Ngai said. “Then, we had a dinner at the Kennedy Center, where presidents of two different colleges spoke to us.”

The next day, teachers participated in the STEM summit with members of the white house staff in charge of STEM education for the country, members of the National Science Foundation and some directors from NASA.

“It was a big professional development opportunity to work with other science teachers and people in policy positions to discuss the state of education in the country,” Ngai said.

Dr. Charles Hewes, Director of Teaching and Learning in Colchester, said not only has Ngai received recognition herself, but she has also opened the doors for students to also be recognized.

According to Hewes, a student that has worked with Ngai through the Innovations course work was a national finalist for the Invention Convention - an annual celebration of K-12 inventors across the country.

“We run a very unique course at the middle school that engages students in the design thinking process, marketing strategies and engineer-

ing and science,” Hewes said. “. It supports nicely the Invention Convention and this particular student went on to receive awards”

Hewes said the student also received funding to help with her invention.

“Kristina has really facilitated the process for the student,” Hewes said. “The student is a rock star as well but Kristina has really taken that to the next level. Just a good example of how a teacher can really open doors for students.”

These kinds of recognitions speak for themselves, he added.

“I think it is fantastic,” Hewes said. “This is now the second national winning teacher we’ve had in the last five years. I think it’s pretty awesome that we have some unbelievable teaching staff in the district. When you have two national award winners, the people that are right beneath that level are of a high quality too. We’ve really been blessed with the fact that we have some very motivated, dedicated and inspiring teachers within our district.”

Ngai, who currently teaches grades six through eight holds a National Board Certification in Science teaching and Biology, she said.

Before teaching in Colchester, she was a high school science teacher in Tacoma, Wash., where she taught biology, chemistry and AP environmental science for six years.

Ngai, an East Lyme resident, also collaborates with the computer science teacher on engaging projects for children, she said. Hewes said that Ngai is a trainer in the NGSX at the Connecticut Science Center and state level for the new frame work for science and engineering education. Through the Innovations course, she also teaches marketing and strategy.

According to the PAEMST website, the award is “The Nation’s Highest Honors for Teachers of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM, including Computer



Kristina Ngai, who has taught at William J. Johnston Middle School for six years, recently received a Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching.

Science).”

PAEMST was established in 1983 by Congress. Among the award recipients are “teachers from each of the 50 states, the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, the Department of Defense Education Activity schools, or the U.S. territories as a group (American Samoa, Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and U.S. Virgin Islands),” as stated on the PAEMST website.

Andover School Board to Hire Two New Paraprofessionals

by Sloan Brewster

The Andover Board of Education decided to hire two new paraprofessionals to help alleviate overcrowding issues in grades two and five.

The decision was made last week in response to parents converging on last month’s meeting with concerns about class size in fifth and second grade at Andover Elementary School.

There are 21 students in second grade and 22 in fifth, Doyen said Wednesday. In the near future, one fifth-grader will be moving out of the area and the class will drop to 21 students.

There are three pre-k classes for a total of 42; kindergarten has 21 students split in two classes; first grade has 22 students divided in two classes; grade three has one class of 18 students; grade 4 has 24 students broken into two classes and grade 6 has 27 students spread in two classes.

While lauding fifth grade teacher Lisa Hopkins, parents said there were too many students in her class. They said the crowded room left children unable to concentrate or hear.

“This is a great school. It’s sad to see what’s happening; my child is miserable. He doesn’t want to come to school,” Kristin Solloway said. “It’s too cramped in the room. It’s hard to concentrate.”

Solloway and other parents said other schools had part time help in classrooms.

“We don’t have that here,” she said.

At last week’s board meeting, Principal John

Briody said since the beginning of the school year, the four fulltime and one half time paraprofessionals in the school have been supporting teachers.

“What we’ve been doing is we’ve been providing support to the neediest of the classrooms,” he said. “For about a month now we’ve been bringing in two [substitute teachers] a day for the support of those classrooms.”

Laura Webb, financial operations for the district, presented the board with the costs of different options to solve the problem.

One new paraprofessional to help out in the classrooms from January through the end of the school year would run \$11,000 plus \$10,000 in benefits for a \$21,000 total; two would double that and cost \$42,000.

Going to half-time paras “drops benefit costs significantly,” with one running \$6,000 and four costing \$24,000, Webb said.

“If we wanted to add a class, which would mean hiring a teacher, the average compensation would be \$40,000 and \$10,000 in benefits for a \$50,000 total for one and \$100,000 for two,” she said.

After going line by line through the budget looking for increases and decreases in line items to see how if the adjustments would cover the added expenses, Webb said the board would need to save \$43,000 more to pay for a new teacher, adding that it would not be a huge chal-

lenge to find the cash.

“We don’t really have to do anything differently to get that \$43 in savings, it’s going to be there,” she said. “It’s right about the cost of your two paras.”

She mentioned possibilities that would mean “a little more pain,” such as taking \$15,000 out of the technology account and putting off replacing Chrome Books until next year; or suggested being “more strict” about classroom supplies to find \$10,000.

“We could probably find more,” she said. “Look harder but it’s also going to be more painful.”

Board member Gerald Crème brought up concerns at the idea of adding a class as it would mean splitting students up midway through the year and separating some from the teacher to whom they have already grown attached.

“What parent is going to want their kid taken out of that classroom?” he said. “That [new] teacher is going to have to build a community in the middle of the year.”

Hopkins concurred, saying she had “lost sleep over it” and would have concerns about “these kids that I’ve made a connection with.”

The only way Hopkins said she could see it working was by going with a middle school model.

A middle school model would have students

changing classes throughout the course of the day, with one teacher or the other taking on certain subjects, such as language arts versus math and science, Doyen said.

“It means the students have different experiences with teachers and classes,” she said.

While board member Daniel Foran lauded the prospect of trying a middle school model, the board did not see it as a workable possibility and opted for hiring two paras.

Paras are part of the school’s non-certified bargaining group and “fulfill a lot of important tasks in the school and classroom,” Doyen said.

“They can work with a small group of students while the teacher works with another group,” she said. “So it relieves the teacher of having to present all the instruction.”

For example, there may be two reading groups; while the teacher works on reading aloud with one group, the para can hone the skill with the other group.

To prevent future concerns over class sizes, the board voted to break into 16 classrooms for the 2020-21 school year. Currently there are 14.

The new number means the classes with high numbers will be split as evenly as possible into two groups, Doyen said. Teachers will determine which students would do better together or apart.

Space at Andover Town Hall to be Interim Senior Center

by Sloan Brewster

The Old Firehouse is in mothballs, the plan to repurpose part of the elementary school has been scrapped, and now there is another plan for the town senior center: Put it in Town Hall.

Town officials have agreed to transfer \$5,000 from the town's multiuse building fund to transform the community room at Town Hall into a temporary senior center.

To ready the room for seniors, it will be spruced up and furnished with a couch, chairs, a coffee table, and possibly a television, said Town Administrator Eric Anderson.

The \$5,000 is for "just making it work for a group that uses it for something besides just meetings," he said.

Last month, selectmen shelved plans to convert the mostly empty third- and fourth-grade wing at Andover Elementary School into a senior center. Since then, the board has been trying to determine where to house the seniors, who have been without a space for a year.

A year ago, selectmen, due to a mold infestation, closed the old firehouse on Center Street

where seniors had been holding their functions for about 30 years.

Shortly after the closure, the school board offered the wing as potential space for the seniors. Schools Superintendent Sally Doyen said the wing was going to be emptied out due to declining enrollment.

Before school opened this fall, the classrooms were moved around, but after meeting with Doyen and asking questions about the school's classroom needs, Vice First Selectman Adrian Mandeville said – at last month's Board of Selectmen meeting – he was not convinced the wing was available.

A resident in the audience said she felt the town was split about moving the seniors into the space and that it was a "false impression" that there is empty space at the school.

"You are correct, that is a false impression," Mandeville replied.

Other residents also decried the plan to convert the wing for senior use.

Some said mixing the school's population

with others would put students at risk, others questioned that there was empty space at the school and still others bemoaned the expense when it would have only been a temporary solution contingent on the continued lag in student enrollment.

Selectmen ultimately concurred with Mandeville's doubts and decided not to move forward with the conversion.

At last week's Board of Education meeting, Doyen said the wing was currently used for physical and occupational therapy for special education students and as a timeout space if needed.

The school board is now considering how to use the wing when it is not in use and some folks at last Wednesday's meeting put in special requests for the space, including for use by an afterschool program currently run in the cafeteria.

In the current year's budget, selectmen set aside \$250,000 for a multi-use building. The

money can be used to cover costs for converting space for the seniors or toward the purchase of property for a free-standing center. The account has a total of \$450,000.

Selectmen have also formed a committee to move forward with plans for constructing a community or senior center in town. During its one-year tenure, the committee will look at possible designs and costs bring proposals to the Board of Selectmen.

The committee will not meet for its first session until January 2020.

In the meantime, officials are also on the prowl for meeting space for boards and commissions, which has been short and difficult to come by since the closure of the old firehouse, where many town meetings were held. Last week, Mandeville brought a request from selectmen to the education board for use of a room for meetings. The board said, that if the music teacher gives her approval, it will open the music room to the town for that purpose.

Hebron Hero Seriously Injured on Way to Call

by Sloan Brewster

A Hebron first responder was seriously injured after he crashed while driving to a call Monday night, state police said.

On Monday night at about 11:23 p.m., the Hebron Fire Department received a call for mutual aid at a structure fire in the town of Lebanon, said Hebron Deputy Chief Dan Huppe.

Lieutenant Eric Saunders was one of the firefighters to answer the call, Huppe said. While en route, his vehicle left the road and struck a tree.

According to state police, the one-vehicle crash took place on Wall Street in Hebron. Saunders' Ford F350 was travelling south on Wall Street just north of Loveland Road when for an unknown reason it veered off the right shoulder and struck a large tree, causing heavy damage.

Lieutenant Steve Barrett was also on the way to the fire when he came upon the crash on Wall Street, Huppe said. The collision had already happened when he arrived.

"So no one witnessed the crash," Huppe said.

In the meantime, the department was made aware that the Lebanon fire "was a no-fire," and turned out to be in a chimney, the deputy chief said.

"We were canceled," he said.

By then, Barrett had called in Saunders' accident. The department diverted apparatus and rescue crews to extricate the unconscious firefighter from his truck.

"We had to use the Jaws of Life to extri-

cate him," Huppe said.

Once Saunders was removed from the vehicle, he was put him in a Hebron Fire Department ambulance, where a paramedic from Windham provided advanced life support and then he was transported to Hartford Hospital, Huppe said.

"He went through several hours of surgery when he got to Hartford," he said.

After the surgeries, Saunders was put in the intensive care unit, and then moved to the Neuro ICU for intensive care for head injuries.

Huppe said Wednesday Saunders is "not responsive – he's unconscious, he's on a ventilator."

While a head injury can be difficult recovery, firefighters said they are hopeful that their brother will come out of the trauma, according to Huppe.

"It's touch-and-go right now but he is wiggling his fingers and toes, which we take as positive sign," Huppe said. "He's a young guy. He's a strong guy; he works out a lot."

According to a press release from the department, Saunders, 23, appears to "be going in the right direction" and in the next few days it will have a better indication of his status.

The Hebron Fire Department asks that people keep Saunders and his family in their thoughts and prayers and state police ask anyone who may have witnessed the crash to contact Trooper Kevin Dwyer at 860-465-5400 ext. 4070.

EH

East Hampton Police News

10/28: A 15 and a 16-year-old juvenile of East Hampton were each issued a summons for breach of peace and second-degree threatening, police said.

11/7: Michael Van Jeune, 35, of 24 Swan Lake Trl., Killingworth, was arrested and charged with driving under the influence and failure to drive right, stemming from an incident involving a single car motor vehicle accident that occurred on July 5, 2018, on Wopowog Road.

11/8: Patrick Janeiro, 29, of 217 James St., New Bedford, Mass., was arrested and charged with second-degree burglary, conspiracy to commit second-degree burglary, first-degree larceny, conspiracy to commit first-degree larceny, possession of burglary tools, third-degree

criminal mischief, interfering with an officer, and possession of more than half an ounce of marijuana. During the same incident it was discovered that Janeiro had an active warrant for his arrest held by another department and was charged with failure to respond to a violation.

11/12: David Johnson, 30, of 85 N. Main St., East Hampton, was arrested and charged with disorderly conduct, third-degree assault and second-degree threatening, and issued a summons for illegal operation of a motor vehicle while under suspension.

Also, from Oct. 28-Nov. 10, officers responded to 24 medical calls, five motor vehicle crashes and 27 alarms, and made 36 traffic stops.

Obituaries

Marlborough

William F. Leger

William (Bill) F. Leger, 81, formerly of Marlborough, died peacefully, surrounded by family and close friends, on Saturday, Nov. 16. Bill was born in Fall River, Mass., son of the late William C. Leger and Edna (Kennedy) Leger. Prior to his retirement, Bill was employed as a Mechanical Engineer with Westinghouse in Windsor.



Bill is survived by his wife of 59 years, Sally (Mann) Leger; his son, William F. Leger Jr. and his girlfriend, Paula Taveres; two daughters, Elizabeth Lokiec and her husband Ed, and Kathryn Stackpole and her husband Will; nine grandchildren, Heather Descart, Katie Leger, William Leger III, Garret and Kyle Ward, Megan Noorali, and Hannah, Rachel and Matthew Stackpole; 10 great-grandchildren, Joey, Alison, Corey, Kaydence, Riley, Billy, Wyatt, Ayva, Layne and Adam; two brothers, Edward Leger and his wife Jane, and Peter Leger; two sisters, Maureen Sheerin and her husband Don and Mary Anne Purrier; and a brother-in-law, Robert Forbes. He was predeceased by a sister, Marguerite Forbes.

The family would like to extend their love and gratitude to the angels of Vitas Hospice and Colebrook Village.

Calling hours were Tuesday, Nov. 19, at Mulryan Funeral Home, 725 Hebron Ave., Glastonbury. A Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated Wednesday, Nov. 20, at 10 a.m., at St. John Fisher Church, 30 Jones Hollow Rd., Marlborough, followed by a graveside service at Marlboro Cemetery.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the Alzheimer's Association at alz.org.

For online condolences, visit mulryanfh.com.

Hebron

Marla Jean Palmer

Marla Jean (Jensen) Palmer, 81, of Hebron, previously from Clearwater, Fla., and South Kingston, R.I., passed away Tuesday, Nov. 19. She grew up in Prattsburg, N.Y., where she graduated from the Prattsburg Central School and was daughter of Oliver (Slim) and Mildred Jensen. Marla was a Glastonbury resident for 32 years and worked at Heublein, Inc. for many years in accounts payable.



Marla is survived by her husband of 63 years, John; by her daughter, Kim Kowsz and her husband John of Hebron; and sons Steven Palmer and his wife Susan of East Hartford and Scott Palmer of Amston; grandchildren, Stacy, Erica, and Lynn Kowsz, Caitlin, Sarah, and Jillian Palmer; and a great-granddaughter, Madison Jeski. She is also survived by her sisters, Shirley (Vallere) Roy of Tucson, Ariz., Sandra Fazio of Clearwater, Fla., Linda (Gary Sr.) Brainard of Tucson, Ariz., Jackie (William) LaBarr of Penn Yan, N.Y., Joni Jensen of Bath, N.Y.; and one brother, Harry (Elaine) Jensen of Farmington, N.Y., and Dunedin, Fla.; and many extended cousins, nieces, and nephews.

Marla was predeceased by her parents, brother John R. Jensen and her sisters Dorothy (Paul) Hidek, Alice (Tilly) Brunetti, and Carolyn Morris.

There are no calling hours. A private memorial will be held at the convenience of the family.

In lieu of flowers, memorials can be made to the Alzheimer's Association.

Hebron

Veronica Faith Nelson

Veronica Faith Nelson, "Ronnie," 79, of Hebron, passed away at Hartford Hospital Thursday, Nov. 14. Born in East Lyme July 10, 1940, she was the daughter of the late Edward and Edith Bangston. She grew up and attended school in Old Saybrook.



After high school, Ronnie worked for a time as a telephone operator. She married her beloved husband, Robert, on Sept. 26, 1959. The couple made their home and raised their family in East Lyme. Ronnie worked diligently with her husband for several years as they started building their business known as Niantic Tool Company.

After the company was well-established, she retired to be the homemaker and fulltime mother to her three sons, Daniel Nelson of Manchester, N.H., David and his wife Linda Nelson of Oakdale, and Gary Nelson of Harbenson, Del. She will be forever loved and missed by her 10 grandchildren; Joanne and her husband Robert, David Jr. and his wife Lea, Katie and Marc, Anthony and his wife Ashley, Timothy, Ashley, Brianna, Taylor, Stephanie and Robert. She also leaves behind several great-grandchildren, who fondly knew her as "GG," including Matthew, Kaylee, David III, Collin, Julian, Rylie and numerous extended family members and friends. She was predeceased by her beloved Robert on Dec. 22, 2012.

A celebration of Ronnie's life will be held today, Nov. 22, from 6-8 p.m., at the Aurora McCarthy Funeral Home, located at 167 Old Hartford Rd., Colchester.

For online condolences, visit auroramccarthyfuneralhome.com.

Colchester

Scott Michael Poole

Scott Michael Poole, 57, of Norwich, formerly of Colchester, passed away Monday, Nov. 18, at Hartford Hospital, after a valiant battle with congenital heart disease. Born in Norwich April 17, 1962, he was a son of the late Clyde and Margaret (Sisson) Poole.

Scott grew up in Colchester and graduated with the class of 1982 from Bacon Academy. He married his beloved wife, Janis Moquin on Aug. 16, 1986. The couple made their home and raised their family in Norwich. Scott had a long and successful career as a construction worker with the Teamsters Union 493 out of Montville.

Scott was an avid Boston Red Sox and Patriots fan. He enjoyed staying physically fit by going to the gym. Scott will be remembered as a man who put other people before himself and loved to make people laugh. He was a loving husband, father and grandfather and will be sadly missed but remembered with love by his wife of 33 years, Janis; his daughter, Crystal Poole and her fiancé, Anthony Machabee and their son, Ryker, all of Norwich; his son, Michael Poole of Norwich; siblings, Richard and his wife Linda Poole of Middletown, Susan and her husband Tim Northcutt of Hawaii, Tim and his wife Susan Poole of North Franklin; and numerous extended family members and friends.

In addition to his parents, he was predeceased by a brother, Mark Poole and a nephew, Dana Poole.

Calling hours will be held Saturday morning, Nov. 23, beginning at 9 a.m., followed by sharing of fond memories and a celebration of Scott's life at 11 a.m. at the Aurora-McCarthy Funeral Home, 167 Old Hartford Rd., Colchester.

Donations in Scott's memory may be made to the American Heart Association, heart.org.

For online condolences, visit auroramccarthyfuneralhome.com.

Colchester

Rita E. Janco

Rita E. Janco, 85, of Colchester, formerly of Fairfield, passed away at home Saturday, Nov. 16. Born in Bronx, N.Y., on May 13, 1934, she was the daughter of the late Robert and Edith Harrold along with eight other siblings.



She married Robert "Bob" Janco, the love of her life, on Aug. 20, 1955 and the couple raised seven children at their home in Fairfield. They relocated to Colchester in 1988. They spent over 55 years in love together until Bob's passing on April 26, 2011.

While raising seven children she was a homemaker and then worked as a bookkeeper. However, Rita's greatest joy in life was her family. She was a dedicated wife, mother, grandmother, great-grandmother, and friend. Especially in her later years, she relished the role of matriarch in the family.

She was an avid reader who loved the beach, spending as much time as possible in Misquamicut, R.I. In retirement, Bob and Rita spent several years traveling via mobile home to the Florida Keys, seeking bigger and better beaches to relax at with a good book. A devoted woman of faith, she attended Mass at St. Andrew Church, sitting in the front row. This faith enabled her to show a strong sense of resilience that comforted those around her when life presented its toughest challenges.

Rita will be sadly missed but always remembered with love by her children, Kenneth (Amy) Janco of Jewett City, Debra Andrysiak of Colchester, Jennifer (Troy) Johnson of Carthage, Maine; eight grandchildren, Michelle (James) Stotler, Matthew Metz, Michael Janco Jr., Sabrina (Jay) Pallotti, Paige Matheson, Nicholas Janco, Jack Matheson; great-grandchildren, Jimmer Stotler, Gia Pallotti, Charlotte Eleanor Stotler (named after her GG); goddaughter, Kathleen Harrold; and best friend Linda Heller along with numerous extended family members and friends.

In addition to her parents, siblings and husband, Rita was predeceased by four beloved sons, Mark, Michael, Steven and Keith; grandson, Jonathan Janco; and most recently son-in-law John Andrysiak.

Calling hours were held Thursday, Nov. 21, at the Aurora McCarthy Funeral Home, 167 Old Hartford Rd., Colchester. A funeral Mass will be held today, Nov. 22, at 10:30 a.m., directly at St. Andrew Church 128 Norwich Ave. Colchester. Burial will be held privately.

Donations in Rita's memory can be made to the American Heart Association by visiting heart.org/donate.

For online condolences, visit auroramccarthyfuneralhome.com.

Colchester

Anthony Louis Hernandez

Anthony "Tony" Louis Hernandez, 49, of Colchester, left this earth to be with our Creator on Thursday, Nov. 14. His final days were spent surrounded by his loving family.



Tony was born in 1969 in Paterson, N.J., the first son of Lydia Esther Hernandez. Tony had six younger siblings: his only sister, J'net Lopez, and his five brothers Jesse Rodriguez, Andy Rodriguez, Sergio Rodriguez, Joel Rodriguez and Abisai Rodriguez.

Tony was the loving husband of Joyce Pribyson and father of Chanel, Ciara and Anthony Hernandez, and stepfather to Tia Ahern and Martin Howlett. Tony was the tallest uncle of 27 and grandfather to three.

Funeral services were held Thursday, Nov. 21, and today, Nov. 22, at 11 a.m., at Dillon-Baxter Funeral Home, 1276 Berlin Tpke., Wethersfield. Burial will follow at Cedar Hill Cemetery in Hartford.

Visit dillonbaxter.com to share a memory with the family.