

RIVEREAST

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Remembering the ‘Day the Clowns Cried’

by Elizabeth Regan

Wayne Duff remembers holding his mother’s hand.

Amid the chaos of approximately 7,000 people trying desperately to escape a flaming circus tent, he hurried to keep up with Dorothea Duff’s long strides.

He was almost 10 years old.

“I just held my mother’s hand and followed her out of there,” the lifelong Portland resident said. “As soon as I looked back, I could see the inferno.”

The Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus fire killed 168 people on July 6, 1944, according to the *Hartford Courant*.

Survivors said the 48-foot tall tent burned in less than 10 minutes. The flames were fueled by a mixture of paraffin wax and gasoline that had been applied to the canvas as a waterproofing agent. The cause of the fire, which allegedly began on the southwest side of the tent, remains unknown.

Duff told the *RiverEast* in 2008 that their tickets were for section C, which was only two sections away from the expansive set of bleachers where the fire originated. But Dorothea at the last minute found a better spot from which to watch the Greatest Show on Earth. They settled in section E, along the center aisle.

Duff, now 84, said he had been watching the lions when someone yelled “fire!”



Wayne “Duffy” Duff

“My mother and I were lucky,” he said. “There was an exit right there.”

He recalled knocking over a railing so they could escape through the exit; then they spilled out into a nearby field. He never got separated from his mother.

They were among the earliest wave of people to escape the tent, he said.

Those that didn’t make it were burned to death, suffocated or trampled.

Most of those at the circus that day were women and children. It was a Thursday afternoon, and many men were at war. Others were at work in support of the war machine. The Invasion of Normandy was raging in France, where Allied forces had landed exactly one month prior.

Duff doesn’t remember much else about the chaos of what would become one of the deadliest days in Connecticut history. That’s the thing about being a child singularly focused on survival 75 years ago.

“I can’t hardly think of anything else that went on, other than getting out safe,” he said.

His mother worked back then as a nurse at Elmcrest Hospital in Portland, which had only recently opened the gates to a campus dominated by three grand, old homes. She died many years later in 1996.

Duff grew up to become a truck driver and a volunteer firefighter, though he said that day under the big top did not influence his decision to fight fires.

He married his high school sweetheart, Marie; the couple had two daughters.

Then he “almost kind of forgot” about the

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by Sloan Brewster

Failure to complete her chores on the morning of July 6, 1944 may have saved one little girl from dying in the Hartford circus fire.

Tomorrow marks the 75th anniversary of the fire at the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus in Hartford. According to an article published in April in the *Hartford Courant*, about 40 minutes into the July 6, 1944 circus shouts of “fire” rang out in the tent, which had been waterproofed with a mixture of 6,000 gallons of gasoline and 1,800 pounds of paraffin wax.

Eyewitnesses claimed it took less than 10 minutes for the 48-foot tall big top tent to burn, the article states. Some people were burned to death by flying canvass, sealed with gasoline and paraffin wax. Others were suffocated and still more were trampled to death. All told, 168 people, including 100 children, perished. Nearly 700 more were injured, some scarred, disfigured and disabled for life. The death toll included 59 children who were 9 years old or younger.

Last week, a Hebron woman shared a family tale of tragedy and, at the same time, providence.

Kathy Kirsche Dwyer said it was a story her mother, Phyllis Kirsche, had told her when she was growing up. “It’s not my story; it’s my mom’s story,” Dwyer said.

In 1944, Phyllis – who passed away May 27, 2007 – was 9 years old and loved playing with her best friend Valerie Nogas, who lived across the street on Lexington Street in Wethersfield.

“They were inseparable best friends and one of their favorite things to do was play dolls,” Dwyer said of her mom and Valerie. On the

morning of July 6 that year, the two girls were playing dolls when they got exciting news: Valerie’s grandmother was bringing her granddaughter to the afternoon circus to celebrate her upcoming birthday. They invited Phyllis, who called her mother at work in the office at the Bushnell Memorial and asked if she could go.

“My grandmother asked my mother one simple question: ‘Did you do your chores today?’” Dwyer said “And my mother answered honestly and said ‘no.’ Therefore my grandmother told my mother she couldn’t go.”

To make her friend feel a bit better about missing the circus, Valerie told her to take home the doll she was playing with, telling her, “You take it home and take care of it today and when I get home from the circus we’ll finish playing dolls,” Dwyer said.

But Valerie never returned home; nor did her grandmother.

Later that afternoon, Valerie’s father identified her body by her shoes she was wearing – the white shoes she had worn for her First Holy Communion, which she had made with Phyllis just months earlier in May.

“I cannot imagine what a horrible experience for a tender 9-year-old – and days later it was Valerie’s ninth birthday,” Dwyer said.

Valerie’s mother, Catherine Nogas, later gave Phyllis all of Valerie’s dolls.

“I’m sure Valerie would want you to have these,” she told the child, according to Dwyer.

Dwyer recalled watching a documentary about the fire on PBS every July 6 when she was growing up.

“We were always at our summer cottage and

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Long-Awaited Belltown Playground Build Draws Near

by Elizabeth Regan

The East Hampton Parks and Recreation Department is looking for hundreds of volunteers to help build a sprawling, state-of-the-art playground near Memorial School.

Parks and Recreation Director Jeremy Hall said the construction of the new, 14,000-square-foot Seamster Park on the existing footprint will require 80 volunteers for each of three shifts scheduled every day from Aug. 6-11.

Hall said organizers are seeking volunteers of all ages and experience levels.

Volunteers can help out for a shift, a day, multiple days or the whole week.

The volunteer-based construction process is part of the “community build” framework used by Ithaca, N.Y.-based Play By Design. The firm was selected to spearhead the project back in 2016.

Architects that same year guided elementary school students from Memorial School and Center School through interactive workshops as the kids pitched their ideas for amenities including adaptive swings, a rock wall, monkey bars, bridges, slides and tunnels.

The result was a design for a \$205,000 playground of structural plastic built around a bell tower evoking the town’s proud industrial history. A section geared toward kids ages two to

five features a play camper donated by Nelson’s Family Campground in town.

Hall said organizers are hoping to add a splash pad as part of a future, unplanned phase. Estimates back in 2016 put the splash pad at \$150,000.

The need for a new playground to replace its pressure-treated predecessor became apparent three years ago, after the town’s insurance company declared the playground a safety risk and Hall subsequently made a presentation to the town council recommending the removal and replacement of the structure.

Volunteers built the original playground in 1992, according to Hall. It was demolished last spring.

Hall said many people at the time of demolition told him they had been a part of the playground’s construction decades prior. Hall hopes this year’s build will instill the same sense of pride and accomplishment in a whole new group of volunteers.

“It’s not only a great experience for people who come out; it’s more than that,” Hall said. “This is what we’ve invested in.”

Town officials through the budget process allocated \$65,000 to date; the rest of the cost has been covered through fundraising efforts.

See Playground page 2



A rendering reveals details about the 14,000-square-foot Seamster Park playground that will be constructed by hundreds of volunteers next month. The playground was designed by elementary school students with the help of architects from Ithaca, N.Y.-based Play By Design. Volunteers are encouraged to sign up with the East Hampton Parks and Recreation Department.

Duff cont. from Front Page

circus, he said.

Duff kept busy after retiring from truck driving by taking on a job with Logano Waste Management in Portland and then driving a motorhome for NASCAR star Joey Logano's father, Tom. He followed Logano from track to track for years, until his wife became ill and died in May.

Duff said it was several years ago that his daughters convinced him to attend one of the remembrance ceremonies held at a memorial where the tent once blazed on Barbour Street. The memorial was erected in 2002.

What stands out for him about each ceremony

he has attended since then is the reading of the victims' names.

"It's tough to listen to," he said.

The list of the dead includes 59 children under the age of 9, according to the *Courant*.

Sometimes, the names of whole families are read intact.

"Ages 3, 5, 8, 11," he said. "All these kids with their parents."

This year's ceremony, scheduled for Saturday at 2:30 p.m., will mark the 75th anniversary of the fire. Duff plans to attend.

He will remember holding his mother's hand.



Kathy Kirsche Dwyer (sitting) and her daughter Victoria pose for a photo in the Douglas Library in Hebron after sharing the story of their mother and grandmother, Phyllis Kirsche, who lost her beloved best friend Valerie Nogas in the July 6, 1944 circus fire in Hartford, when she was 9 years old.

Dwyer cont. from Front Page

I can remember glancing over at my mom and always remember wondering if she was looking for Valerie and I'm sure she was, but Valerie never made it out of the tent," she said.

At some point, Phyllis also learned that she was actually supposed to go to the circus that evening – and that the real reason her mother had said 'no' was not because of the neglect of her chores but to preserve the surprise.

"Both my grandparents had already planned to take her to the circus that evening," Dwyer said, adding that under different circumstances, she would have allowed the girl to go.

"My grandmother was not a tyrant for any reason," she said, "My grandmother was a fun-loving Irish woman who always understood the value of good friendship and she understood the importance of that friendship between my mom and Valerie."

Phyllis was not the only one in Dwyer's family who missed the circus on the day of the fire by a twist of fate. Both her maternal and paternal grandmothers nixed their children's circus plans.

Her father was planning to go that same day with a bunch of his friends, but a week before he had lost a toenail, Dwyer said. His mom was afraid the toe would become infected at the circus, so she too said no.

Valerie Jean Nogas is buried at St. Benedict's Cemetery in Hartford, Dwyer said.

Valerie's father, Joseph Nogas died in 1968, while still young, according to Dwyer.

"Mrs. Nogas always said she felt she died of a broken heart after losing his one and only child and his little baby girl," Dwyer said. "My

mother and Mrs. Nogas stayed in touch until Mrs. Nogas's passing in 1986."

Valerie is mentioned in Kirsche's obituary, "Phyllis always spoke of losing her best friend Valerie Nogas at age nine in the great Hartford circus fire," the line reads.

Dwyer's daughter Victoria mused over one detail in her grandmother's life.

"My grandmother never named one of her three daughters Valerie, even a middle name, or was it just too hard to name her Valerie?" Victoria asked rhetorically. "Being her childhood best friend and being mentioned in her obituary it's just surprising."

Dwyer said she never asked Phyllis whether she discussed with her own mother the twist of fate that potentially spared her daughter's life.

"There's so many questions and as a child growing up, I did not want to upset my mom," she said. "As a child it was a subject that brought sadness to mom so I never wanted to broach that subject so, yes, I do wish I had more answers."

But she said she learned a lesson from the tale.

"I have to say from this whole story, one thing Mom taught me was to cherish your friendships," Dwyer said.

Another way the story has played into her life is in the sheer absence of the circus during her childhood and into her adulthood.

"My mother never brought any of us to a circus and to this day I've never been to a circus – and have absolutely no desire to go to one," Dwyer said.

Playground cont. from Front Page

"We want people to come out, enjoy themselves, and have some memories they can take with them for years to come," said Hall.

Volunteers who are 18 years old and up can choose to work with power tools if they're comfortable doing so, Hall said. Kids from 15-18 years old with a signed waiver from a parent can work on projects that don't involve power tools.

Each crew of volunteers will have a specific task for its four-hour shift, Hall said. That could mean constructing a slide, installing a play boat or putting up swings.

A continental breakfast, full lunch and full dinner for all volunteers is provided each day by a collection of local caterers, restaurants and church organizations.

Children under the age of 15 can help with projects including color-coding nails with paint, working on murals or preparing for the culminating celebration on Aug. 11. Babysitters will be on hand at Memorial School.

Volunteer coordinator Sheryl Dougherty said organizers are also recruiting eight volunteer

crew leaders who are familiar with the construction process and have an ability to lead.

She said crew leaders would ideally be able to commit to the entire week.

Hall said crew leaders do not necessarily have to be professionals in construction.

"We're looking for someone who can build," she said. "They don't have to be a contractor. It's good if they are, but they don't have to be."

Dougherty said volunteering for the build is a unique opportunity to make a difference.

"It's just the sense of camaraderie and community you can get," she said. "Just being part of something that's going to last a lifetime."

Volunteers are also being sought to provide childcare and to serve food. Organizers are currently seeking tool sponsors and donors to supply a wide range of tools.

For more information, contact Hall at jhall@easthamptonct.gov or 860-267-7300.

Those interested in volunteering can register online at <https://tinyurl.com/PlaygroundBuildVolunteer>. Pre-registration is helpful, but not required.

*From the Editor's Desk***Observations & Ruminations**

by **Mike Thompson**

Childish. Petty. Disappointing.

Those were the words that sprang to mind last week when I saw the town of East Hampton had gleefully shared, right there on the main page of the town website, news that the Freedom of Information Commission had dismissed the FOI complaint filed against the town by *Rivereast* reporter Elizabeth Regan.

Elizabeth, you may recall, had been seeking to view hand-counted ballots from a 2017 referendum in which a proposal for a new town hall and police station was narrowly approved by voters. There had been some question about the accuracy of the count, and Elizabeth, being a strong reporter, had wished to see the ballots herself.

The town – preposterously, in my opinion – said no, stating that this would compromise the integrity of the secret ballot. I didn't understand that reasoning at all, since the ballots were anonymous. Unless someone had a very distinct way of filling in a bubble with their felt-tip pen, there was no way of telling who voted for what. No identities were in danger of being leaked. Instead, it would have been a way to affirm that a multimillion-dollar building project – one which town officials had made no secret of supporting – was indeed passed by voters.

Still, the town refused Elizabeth's request, even after she filed an FOI complaint, and continued to battle her before the FOI Commission, spending thousands of taxpayer dollars in the fight to prevent Elizabeth from seeing the ballots. In other words, thousands of taxpayer dollars to usurp democracy.

It is indeed true the FOI Commission ruled against Elizabeth last month. There's in fact a story about this in this week's *Rivereast*. Where my problem lies is in the fact they felt inclined to share this news on the town website. This was an unprecedented move on the town's part. I've been editing East Hampton for a dozen years now, and I can't recall a single instance where the town has posted on its website links to legal decisions or resolutions of FOI complaints. They certainly didn't share the multiple times they've *lost* FOI cases. So why start now?

It's certainly not a leap to think town officials are angry about things getting this far. They spent so much money and time fighting Elizabeth on this, and I'm sure they expected her to just go away after a while, but one of the great things about Elizabeth is she doesn't go away. She persists, and will fight to the end if journalistically it's the right thing to do. It's a fantastic quality. So Elizabeth's persistence combined with the town's stubborn refusal to let democracy happen meant the town spent thousands defending its case – and in the end, town officials were probably a little pissed about the whole thing. So, they – and specifically outgoing Town Manager Michael Maniscalco, in one of his final acts before heading to his new job in South Windsor – went ahead and posted the decision on the town website.

Accompanying the decision is a letter from

one of the town's attorneys, Richard D. Carella, in which he condescendingly writes "Ms. Regan and her counsel failed to address this matter with the sincerity and importance with which it deserved." He wrote that neither Regan nor her attorney showed up at the FOI Commission hearing on June 14 to argue the case further.

First of all, he got the date wrong; the hearing was June 12, which was a Wednesday, and Elizabeth was slammed with work in the *Rivereast* office. But more importantly, Elizabeth, her counsel and I'm sure Carella himself had all been notified of the commission's draft decision that it was dismissing the complaint. Anyone who's been around FOI cases knows that the draft decision is basically the final call. The hearing is just a formality. It would've been a waste of Elizabeth's time – again, on a Wednesday – as well as her attorney's to go to the hearing. In fact, one could even argue it wasn't necessary for the town's attorney to go, that it was a still further waste of taxpayers' money.

The town had every right to be happy it won the case; I view it as a loss for democracy, but the town pretty obviously didn't see it that way. I disagree with the FOI Commission's decision, but I accept it. What the town didn't have to do, however, was gloat about it by sharing the victory on the town website – especially since, again, it hadn't shared news about FOI decisions in the past.

It's just a petty move on the town's part, and a disappointing one. Maniscalco had maintained a pretty good working relationship with the paper during his time in Belltown, so it's disappointing that, on his way out the door, he chose to figuratively flip off Elizabeth and myself, by posting this prominently on the town website for all to see.

It was a wholly unnecessary move – and a sad way for Maniscalco to end his dealings with the *Rivereast*. I certainly hope the next town manager – whomever he or she might be – is more professional than this in the future.

* * *

I've generally laid off President Trump in this column in recent months; I've made it pretty clear where I stand on the guy and he's made it pretty clear he's unfortunately not going to change. But this gigantic Fourth of July parade he planned for this year is just too much to ignore.

When I wrote this the Fourth of July hadn't happened yet, but all reports indicated Trump was foregoing the normal Washington fireworks display and going with a huge event featuring war plane flyovers, speeches – and even tanks. Yes, tanks, right on the Washington Mall.

Beyond the large cost of all this – couldn't the money be put to better use? – the imagery frankly seems appalling. The whole thing conjures up visions of a military dictatorship. That's not a good look for Independence Day.

* * *

See you next week.

East Hampton Ballot Case Dismissed Despite Lingering Questions

by Sloan Brewster

The Freedom of Information Commission has dismissed an appeal by the *Rivereast* alleging that the town of East Hampton violated the Freedom of Information Act.

The dismissal, which means the town won't be sanctioned for destroying ballots from a 2017 municipal election for the new \$18.98 million municipal hub, leaves unanswered questions about the town's actions, according to attorney Kenneth J. Krayske, who represented *Rivereast* reporter Elizabeth Regan in the complaint.

"I think that the town should've gotten sanctioned for destroying the ballots," Krayske said in a phone call Tuesday. "If there was nothing to hide, why destroy the ballots? What was the reason to destroy the ballots? If everyone was on the up-and-up, why was the town in a hurry to destroy the ballots?"

According to the nine-page decision issued by the Freedom of Information Commission on June 14, the commission cannot order the town to provide ballots that no longer exist.

The decision goes on to say the ballots were destroyed under the authorization of the secretary of the state – and even if the destruction were not authorized, the commission does not have the power to enforce criminal penalties.

The commission is authorized through the state Freedom of Information Act to order the disclosure of public records and to fine public officials for violating the provisions of the law.

Krayske said that while he understands the ruling that the commission doesn't "have jurisdiction" over election ballots, he does not agree with it.

"I think that the FOI Commission could sometimes be a toothless administrative agency that passes on important questions of law," he said. "Something just doesn't feel right about the town going ahead and destroying ballots."

He said he is disappointed the office of the secretary of the state didn't simply tell the town to hold the ballots.

"Destruction of the ballots is going to leave a lingering question," he said.

A previous appeal to the Freedom of Information Commission by Regan was dismissed last year due to a provision in state election law that requires election ballots to be sealed for 180 days after the election. Only a judge can order the ballots be unsealed, according to the statute.

Her second appeal was filed after the 180-day period had elapsed, but before the documents were destroyed by the town under the guidance of the secretary of the state's office.

The town has long argued that state law dictates access to ballots must be sought through the court system, not through the Freedom of Information Commission.

But with the ballots already gone and the town facing no penalty for destroying them, the *Rivereast* has no recourse to take the matter to court, Krayske said.

"What's the point of us going to court, because the town has already destroyed the ballots," he said. "Even if I wanted to go to court and I won an order that basically says Elizabeth has the right to see the ballots, that doesn't matter because the town got rid of them to make

sure she can't go to court or to make sure court would be pointless."

The *Rivereast* made its first request to view the documents on Nov. 20, 2017, one week after a recount revealed an unspecified number of ballots had been counted twice. The request was denied in December by town attorney Richard Carella, who subsequently fought the newspaper's effort to see the documents.

The ballots were destroyed last August, Republican Registrar of Voters Lori Wilcox told the *Rivereast* shortly thereafter.

The destruction came the same day the office of the secretary of the state sent an advisory opinion to Carella. The three-page opinion, signed by Secretary of the State Denise W. Merrill and authored by staff attorney Theodore Bromley, stated the ballots should "not be made available for public inspection."

The right to vote privately and secretly is "of the utmost importance to the integrity of Connecticut's elections" as a way to ensure voters are not victimized by fraud or intimidation, according to the letter.

"It is the opinion of the secretary that the right to secret voting is undermined if, after voting, a voter's individual ballot is routinely subjected to public inspection and scrutiny," Bromley wrote.

According to the opinion, allowing public inspection of individual voters' private ballots "poses an unacceptable risk of invading voter privacy, intimidating voters and eroding voter confidence in our electoral system."

The documents were shredded despite the

Rivereast's ongoing complaint.

Carella, in an email to Town Manager Michael Maniscalco – which was dated June 21 and posted the following week on the town's website – lauded the dismissal and chastised Regan and Krayske for not appearing at the June 14 hearing.

"This finally puts to rest this issue," Carella wrote to Maniscalco. "It's unfortunate Ms. Regan and her counsel failed to address this matter with the sincerity and importance with which it deserved. I am glad the Town and you did because I do think this provides clear guidance to other Towns on how to address concerns about the public's right of access to the ballots, and the correct legal process to do so."

Krayske, when asked why he didn't attend the commission meeting, pointed out that the hearing officer had already made a decision recommending the commission dismiss the complaint. Krayske said he would have been hard-pressed to convince the commission on oral argument to take a different tack.

"It's a fait accompli," he said of the commission's record of upholding the hearing officer's decision.

He likened the chance of getting the hearing officer's decision overturned by the commission to "the chance of being struck by lightning three times in a day."

He then turned the question back on Carella. "My question is why Attorney Carella showed up at that meeting and cost the taxpayers money when they already knew the outcome?" he said.

'Glorious Celebration' Returns Next Week in East Hampton

by Elizabeth Regan

The 41st annual Old Home Days Glorious Celebration will once again lure current and former East Hampton residents to the Village Center from July 11-13.

This time around, the event includes a revamped road race that will take participants along a portion of the Air Line Trail.

The Rails to Trails 5K will replace the Glorious Gallop. The popular race wound its way around the lake for 20 years under the direction of volunteer Sheila Oakes.

Old Home Day Association President Pam Joslyn-Greenwald said the change in the race venue was prompted by traffic safety concerns from the former and current police chiefs.

She said former chief Sean Cox wanted organizers to consider changing the route; then current Chief Dennis Woessner insisted on it.

Woessner said this week that concerns about the former Glorious Gallop route revolved around the number of road crossings that were not protected by traffic control.

He said this year's route, which does not go near the lake at all, "has sufficient police coverage to ensure the safety of the runners."

The new route will begin Friday, July 12 at 7 p.m. at the Connecticut Draft Horse Rescue farm, 113 Chestnut Hill Rd. Runners will cross Route 16 to Alden's Crossing and will continue

on the Air Line Trail for about 2 miles before emerging in the Village Center at the Company One Firehouse on Barton Hill Road. The race ends at the Old Home Days fairgrounds on the Center School grounds.

Joslyn-Greenwald said she will be alerting area residents that Chestnut Hill Road will be closed for a short time when the race starts.

Also new this year is "Chickens-t Bingo," she said. The game, on loan from the Farm at Carter Hill in Marlborough, will be available on all three days of the Glorious Celebration to give players the chance to win if a chicken poops on their square.

Schedule of Events

The three-day celebration will begin with Family Night at 6 p.m. on Thursday. The family focus includes \$15 "all-you-can-ride" wristbands that can be purchased at ticket booths on the Center School grounds. A magician will perform at 6 p.m. The popular bicycle and helmet giveaway will return at 8:15 p.m. with many bikes for kids 12 and under.

Bicycles will also be given away on Friday at 8 p.m. and Saturday at 7:45 p.m. Free raffle tickets will be given out to children as they enter the fairgrounds; the child and parent must be present at the drawing.

The bands Scatterhead and Alex Shillo &

Badlands will perform Thursday evening.

Festivities will continue Friday at 6 p.m., with rides, games, and food; "all-you-can-ride" wristbands will be \$20. Entertainment will begin at 6 p.m. with the Watkins Glen Band, followed by the '60s and '70s sounds of the Neybas at 8 p.m.

Those participating in the Rails to Trails 5K can take a shuttle from the fairgrounds to the Chestnut Hill site beginning at 6:15 p.m. on Friday.

Bib pick-up will be in the gym at Center School on Friday before the race. The race starts promptly at 7 p.m. The cost is \$20 to preregister or \$25 to sign up the day of the race. Children 12 and under pay \$15.

To register, visit tinyurl.com/y3mveooj. For more information, email Elisha Kissinger Milton at emkiss44@gmail.com or visit ehohd.org.

Saturday brings the Old Home Days Parade at 11 a.m. This year's theme is "Superheroes," with organizers inviting participating organizations to use their floats to recognize local or widely-known heroes that exemplify their mission.

The 1.5-mile route extends from East Hampton High School to Route 66 and then on Route 196 to the fairground entrance. Parade parking

and shuttle buses will be available at East Hampton Middle School.

The Congregational Church of East Hampton will sell refreshments and cold drinks for \$1 from 10 a.m.-1 p.m. on Saturday at their tent on the church lawn near the gazebo.

The final day of the Glorious Celebration will also bring back the \$20 "all-you-can-ride" wristbands, good from 1-11 p.m. Bands over the course of the day will be Big Deal Rock, Dropping Quarters, The Mighty Soul Drivers, Coyote River Band, and headliners Savage Brothers Band.

Another annual highlight of the festival is the raffle, which this year features 16 prizes. Some of the highlights include an Arien's Deluxe snowblower, season passes to Six Flags, a Cape Cod getaway, a Weber gas grill and a \$500 gift certificate to Big Y Supermarket.

Tickets are available for \$10 each at Paul's and Sandy's, Too, the East Hampton Public Library, and Ace Hardware. Only 1,500 will be sold. The drawing will be held Saturday at 8 p.m. at the fairgrounds. Winners do not need to be present.

More information is available online at ehohd.org and on Facebook by searching East Hampton Old Home Days.

Burbank Already Ousted as Interim Administrator in Andover

by Sloan Brewster

That didn't last long.

Not even a month after he was picked to be the new interim town administrator, former first selectman Robert Burbank is out – thanks to a unanimous decision made by the Board of Selectmen in a special meeting Monday.

It was the first meeting of the newly-seated board, which features Jeff Maguire as first selectman and four all-new selectmen.

Maguire opened the meeting with a statement that it was “strictly a housekeeping meeting.” He subsequently made a motion to terminate Burbank “effective immediately” from the job that he held for about three weeks. The motion passed unanimously.

Selectmen replaced Burbank with themselves, with a plan to each fill in as “town administrator” for a day or two per week. Maguire said the hope is to have a permanent replacement for the job in 30 days.

And while Burbank was being paid a weekly pro-rated version of former town administrator Joseph Higgins' \$85,000 salary, the selectmen agreed to do the work for free.

On June 5, the outgoing Board of Selectmen named Burbank, who was the outgoing first selectman, as interim town administrator. It was a move not supported by Maguire, who was the sole ‘no’ vote – and he has now undone it.

Maguire said the decision was not personal

and lauded Burbank for all his service to the town. As first selectman, Burbank was the de facto town manager from 2006 to 2017, when Higgins was hired and many of Burbank's duties as first selectman were transferred over to him.

“I appreciate all of Bob's service to the town and to the community,” he said. “Bob, I told you this morning I greatly appreciate everything you've done for the town.”

Burbank, in a phone call Tuesday – after thanking residents for all their support – said he was not surprised by the decision and even appeared to agree with it.

“It was not unexpected,” he said. “I think it was appropriate that the first motion that Jeff Maguire made was to terminate my service. I think we have completely different philosophies and my philosophy that I worked on when I was first selectman was conservative, trying to keep taxes in check and as low as possible for the residents, and I think we have different philosophies – and I'm not sure I could have worked under the board that's in place.”

Burbank said the different philosophies were apparent in the budget that passed with voters this year, which included spending \$976,000 of the \$2.27 million fund balance for capital needs and long-term planning commitments.

Burbank said he felt the funds would have

been better spent to alleviate taxes.

“I think everybody's already seen their tax bill and they probably saw some of that in the tax bill,” he said. “Instead of alleviating taxes, [the new town officials] would rather use it for other things.”

Burbank said he plans “to try to enjoy my retirement” and has other jobs to keep him busy.

“I will always keep the best interests of Andover, in my opinion, in my head,” he said.

Before the vote, selectman Jeff Murray, selectman, asked if the decision would impact residents in any way, to which Maguire said it would not.

“I don't think there's anything [happening] this month that not having someone there would preclude the town from getting things done,” Maguire said. “I believe this motion will have no impact on the town residents.”

After the motion unanimously passed, Burbank asked if they would like him to stay for the remainder of the meeting and Maguire said yes, reiterating that Burbank “should be commended” and that the decision “has no bearing on his past record for this community.”

“I made my point at the last Board of Selectmen meeting,” he said. “I really don't believe [paying Bob to do the job is] the best use of money.”

June 6 was Higgins' last day as Andover town administrator. On Monday, May 6, about a week and a half after new selectman Adrian Mandeville – in a pre-election interview – said a “day of reckoning” was coming for Higgins, he handed in his resignation with 30 days' notice. That very night, he was hired as town administrator for Putnam, according to Putnam radio station WINY. The *Norwich Bulletin* reported in May Higgins will start in his new role this month.

Following the vote to terminate Burbank, the board appointed a committee to search for a new town administrator but not before selectman Eric Anderson announced he was recusing himself from the discussion and leaving the room.

“I did submit a resume to the search committee for the position of town administrator,” he said before getting up and going.

With a plan to schedule interviews this month and make an offer to the next town administrator prior to Aug. 2, the board named Maguire, Mandeville, Board of Finance member Diane Choquette and at large members Eric Shevchenko and Paula King to the search committee.

The board also named Mandeville as vice first selectman.

Fire Displaces Some Cobalt Lodge Residents

by Elizabeth Regan

An electrical fire in the ceiling of Cobalt Lodge led to the evacuation of the north wing of the 60-bed facility Sunday night.

East Hampton Fire Chief Greg Voelker on Monday morning said there were no injuries to residents, staff or emergency responders. About 15 residents were displaced by the fire, according to Voelker.

Firefighters were called out at approximately 11:30 p.m. Sunday after reports of smoke in the building. He said the fire, which was between the suspended ceiling and the roof, was filling the wing with smoke “pretty rapidly.”

Firefighters, police officers and Cobalt Lodge staff evacuated the north wing, according to Voelker.

East Hampton Fire Marshal Richard Klotzbier said the electrical fire started in a bathroom exhaust fan.

Voelker said the fire was under control in about 60 minutes, with firefighters remaining on scene for several hours.

The rest of the building was unaffected by the fire, Voelker said.

Mutual aid was called in from fire departments in Colchester, Portland, Haddam Neck, East Haddam and Marlborough, according to Voelker.

Cobalt Lodge owner and vice president of operations Marc Zgorski said this week that the residents in the affected wings were moved to other facilities in the area as part of a regional emergency preparedness framework.

“We drill for this regularly,” Zgorski said. “I can't say enough about the community and how everyone came together.”

He credited local first responders, state officials with the Department of Public Health and the Department of Social Services, and staff for their hard work.

“Nobody panicked. Nobody was nervous. Everyone knew exactly what to do. It was amazing to watch,” Zgorski said.

He said East Hampton Fire Marshal Richard Klotzbier and Deputy Fire Marshal Joey Guest were on hand for 16 hours in the aftermath of the fire.

Zgorski said the displaced residents “will be back home before you know it.”

East Hampton Police News

6/10: Kirtland Belz, 58, of 1503 Portland Cobalt Rd., Portland, was issued a summons for failure to renew license and operating an unregistered and uninsured motor vehicle, East Hampton Police said.

6/19: A 15-year-old juvenile was issued a summons for using a motor vehicle without permission and operating without a license, police said.

6/21: Norman Ward, 66, of 54 Lake Rd.,

Portland, was arrested and charged with driving under the influence, police said.

6/22: John Spaulding, 56, of 83 Pleasant St., Colchester, was issued a summons for traveling unreasonably fast and operating an unregistered and uninsured motor vehicle, police said.

Also, from June 17-23, officers responded to 23 medical calls, seven motor vehicle accidents and three alarms, police said, and made 19 traffic stops.

Obituaries

Colchester

Richard S. Simko

Richard S. Simko, 85, of Colchester, formerly of Monroe, passed away Thursday, June 27. He was born in Stratford May 20, 1934, a son of the late Joseph and Ann (Facsco) Simko. He married his beloved wife Virginia Schiro May 6, 1967. She survives him.

Richard was a proud veteran, having served with the U.S. Air Force. He later earned a bachelor's degree and went on to work as an engineer for Textron/AVCO. He retired several years ago after a successful career.

Richard was a man of strong faith; for many years he was a member of the Knights of Columbus at the St. John XXIII Council in Monroe, and later a member of the Spellman Council in Colchester. He will be remembered as a sociable and friendly man who enjoyed working with his hands while tilling his garden, and had a talent for music; he had a gift for playing the organ and was a former member of the Connecticut Valley Theater Organ Society.

In addition to his loving wife Virginia of 52 years, he leaves to mourn his loss his daughter Michelle and her husband Richard Linane of Colchester; two grandchildren, Richard Jr. and Rebecca; and many extended family members and friends.

Calling hours were held Tuesday, July 2, at the Aurora-McCarthy Funeral Home, 167 Old Hartford Rd., Colchester. The funeral liturgy was celebrated Wednesday, July 3, at St. Andrew Church, 128 Norwich Ave., Colchester. Burial was private.

Donations in his memory may be made to the Knights of Columbus Spellman Council, c/o St. Andrew Church 128 Norwich Ave. Colchester, CT 06415.

For online condolences, visit auroramccarthyfuneralhome.com.

East Hampton

Albert R. Lavigne

Albert R. Lavigne, 72, of East Hampton, died Friday, June 28, at Curtis Home in Meriden. Born Oct. 28, 1946, in Hartford, he was the son of the late Dennis and Louise (Flemke) Lavigne.

Albert was retired from the State of Connecticut, where he worked as a truck driver. He proudly served his country in the U.S. Army during the Vietnam War. Albert was wounded twice in combat and was the recipient of two Purple Hearts. Al was a life member of the East Hampton V.F.W. Post 5095.

He is survived by his daughter, Daphne McPhail and her husband Peter of Harwinton; brothers, Dennis Lavigne Jr., Charles Lavigne; sisters, Alice Langlois, Leanna Lavigne and Lottie Burger; and his three grandchildren, Devin Doyle, Kaylee Carnline, and John "Will" Carnline.

He was predeceased by his brothers Arthur and James; his sisters, Mary Barber, Margaret Braun, Theresa McArthur, Jacqueline Chester and Kathleen Lavigne.

Friends called at the Spencer Funeral Home, 112 Main St., East Hampton, Wednesday, July 3, from 10 a.m.-noon. A graveside service will be held at 12:30 p.m. at Marlboro Cemetery, with military honors.

In lieu of flowers, memorial donations can be made to VFW Post 5095, 20 North Maple St., East Hampton.

To leave online condolences, visit spencerfuneralhomeinc.com.



Colchester

Alan R. Clark

Alan R. Clark, 71, of Colchester, died late Tuesday night, June 25, at Backus Hospital, after years of health issues. He dealt with his illnesses with dignity, grace and the utmost courage.

He was born in New London Nov. 30, 1947, the son of the late Robert F. Clark and Edith Dias Clark Sherman. Al was a 1965 graduate of New London High School and was a veteran of the U.S. Air Force, serving from 1965 to 1969. On Oct. 13, 1995, he married Denise Sullivan Clark in Niantic. The couple were former communicants of Christ Church in Norwich, and regulars at the St. Peter's church in Hebron. Additionally, Alan was a "Friend of Bill W" for many years, an accomplishment that both he and his family were very proud of.

In addition to his loving wife Denise, he is survived by two stepdaughters, Heather Sullivan and Denis Kogan, Jennifer Sullivan; three grandchildren, Michelle, Misha and Jacob Kogan, all of New York. Al is also survived by two sisters, Lorraine and Nickie Fantacci of Waterford and Karen and Ron Capozza of East Lyme.

The family wishes to express deepest gratitude to the staff of A2 at Backus Hospital for their excellent and compassionate care to Al and his family.

A memorial service will be announced at a later date.

For online condolences, visit auroramccarthyfuneralhome.com.



Colchester

Wanda J. Mrowka

Wanda J. Mrowka, 96, of Colchester, formerly of Oakdale, passed away Saturday, June 29, at Harrington Court GHC, where she had been residing. Born at home in Colchester Jan. 7, 1923, she was one of 10 children born to the late John and Mary (Reznik) Zawisza.

Wanda married her beloved husband Henry Mrowka Oct. 23, 1947. Henry predeceased her several years ago.

Wanda was retired after having worked as a seamstress in the clothing and apparel industry. She enjoyed planting flowers, and spending her time with family and friends at the St. Joseph's Polish Society, where she also participated with the Ladies Auxiliary.

Wanda was truly devoted to her mother, siblings, nieces and nephews. She will be sadly missed, but remembered with love by her many extended family members and friends.

Funeral services will be held Saturday, July 6, beginning at 10:30 a.m. with visitation, followed by the funeral service at 11 a.m. at the Aurora-McCarthy Funeral Home, 167 Old Hartford Rd., Colchester. Burial will follow in St. Joseph's Cemetery in Colchester.

Donations in her memory may be made to Beacon Hospice, 111 Founders Plaza #1803, East Hartford, CT 06108.

Colchester

Judith Lee Olson

Judith Lee Olson, 83, of Colchester, passed away peacefully Sunday, June 30, at Harrington Court, surrounded by family and friends. She was born April 8, 1936, in Portland, Maine, the daughter of Henry and Margaret Hey. She was the oldest of three siblings, Henry, of Sanford, N.C.; preceded in death by Elizabeth.

On Jan. 17, 1960, she married Roger Olson of Braintree, Mass., who survives. Roger and Judy enjoyed 59 wonderful years of marriage together.

Judy, a loving wife and beloved mother to three children, attended two years of nursing school at Boston Children's Hospital. In addition to raising her family, Judy worked in elder home care and taught preschool for 10 years in central Connecticut. She dedicated her retirement to full-time evangelistic missionary work with her husband, travelling the eastern seaboard to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Judy was deeply loved by her children, adored by her grandchildren, and highly respected by all who knew her.

She is survived by her son and daughter-in-law, Carl and Kathy Olson of Buxton, Maine; son and daughter-in-law, David and Lisa Olson of Chesterton, Ind.; daughter and son-in-law, Karin and Wade Shepard of East Hartford; grandchildren, Zachary Olson and wife Paige of Norway, Maine, Sarah Olson of Urbana, Ohio, Bradley Shepard of Rocky Hill, John and Deborah Olson of Chesterton, Ind., Ethan Olson of Buxton, Maine, and Jackson Shepard of East Hartford.

Judy was preceded in death by her grandson Samuel Shepard of East Hartford.

The family would like to thank Harrington Court for their enduring support through Judy's battle with dementia. We deeply appreciate the genuine loving care from individual members of the staff.

Pastor Douglas Meader will preside over a Memorial Service for all friends and family at Lakes Pond Baptist Church at 1144 Hartford Tpke., Waterford. A receiving line will begin at 10 a.m. and a memorial service will follow at 10:30 a.m., on Monday July 8. Immediately following the memorial, a graveside service will be held at the Connecticut State Veterans Cemetery at 317 Bow Ln., Middletown, at 1 p.m., for all who would like to attend.

Aurora-McCarthy Funeral Home of Colchester is in charge of arrangements.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to Fishers of Men International (FOMI) at 9587 East 131st Street, Fishers, IN 46038, in memory of Judy Olson. Checks made out to FOMI on memo line put c/o Judy Olson.



Colchester

Madeleine Sforza

Madeleine (Galiotto) Sforza, 99, beloved wife of the late Vincent Sforza, passed away peacefully Saturday, June 29. Madeleine was born Nov. 2, 1919, in Castellammare del Golfo, Sicily, and was the daughter of the late Salvatora and Rosalia Galiotto.

Madeleine immigrated to the United States in 1931 with her father and sister to begin a new life in Brooklyn, N.Y. She worked as a seamstress in New York City where she eventually met her husband and were married for 49 years. She was a dedicated mother who instilled a commitment to excellence in her children. She always loved to watch her favorite television game shows throughout her life, and loved her sweets and was a great cook. She was happiest spending time with her children, granddaughter and great grandchildren.

Madeleine leaves behind her son, Michael Sforza and daughter-in-law Laura Baribault Sforza of Hebron; daughter, Linda Sforza Ferretti and Billy Ferretti of Levittown; granddaughter, Jennifer Sforza Paragone and Christopher Paragone, as well as three great-grandchildren, Anthony, Vincenzo and Dominic.

She was predeceased by her one sister, Carmella Pierini.

The family will receive relatives and friends today, July 5, from 7:30-8:30 a.m., at the Aurora McCarthy Funeral Home on 167 Old Hartford Rd., Colchester. The funeral Mass will follow immediately at 9 a.m. at St. Andrew Church, 128 Norwich Ave., Colchester. Burial will be private in Flushing, N.Y.

Donations in her memory may be made to the St. Jude Children's Hospital, stjude.org.

Madeleine's family wish to thank the nurses and aides at Harrington Court for their exceptional dedication and care given to her during her stay.

