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Brooke Grant, 7, was one of the first children to test out the new Seamster Park playground after a ribbon cutting ceremony Sunday. Hundreds of volunteers worked over six days to build the play space, which was designed with the help of local elementary school students. Photo by Elizabeth Regan.

## Helpers Come Through For New Playground

by Elizabeth Regan

Several hundred volunteers rallied after a slow start last week to complete construction of a \$205,000, custom-designed playground at Seamster Park in East Hampton.

A sea of eager children spilled onto the site Sunday evening after organizers used kid-sized scissors to cut the ribbon in front of the 14,000-square-foot play space. Volunteers – some of whom had worked 14 hours a day for six days straight – looked on as small feet ran up and down the playground that just days earlier had been an empty field.

Jim McKinney was one of the core group of volunteers who worked from Tuesday through Sunday to construct the playground that sits near Memorial School. The architectural plans were drafted by Ithaca, N.Y.-based Play By Design, with input from local elementary school students. The firm also oversaw the volunteer construction crews.

McKinney was skeptical at the start that such a large undertaking could be completed in such a short time. The problem was exacerbated by low volunteer turnout during the first few day-time shifts.

“I said, ‘there’s no way this is going to be finished,’” he recalled.

But word-of-mouth and calls for help on social media yielded an influx of volunteers.

The volunteer count went from a low of 15 people on Thursday morning to a high of 125 people per shift on the last day of the build, according to Parks and Recreation Department Director Jeremy Hall.

McKinney said the help came from people of all ages and experience levels.

“There were some people that you had to show them which end of the hammer to use,” he said. “I never turned them down. They were there, they wanted to help.”

A staple of the East Hampton playground construction scene, McKinney also worked on the original wooden playscape in 1992. It was demolished last spring.

He said he came out this time around to ensure future generations can enjoy the same playtime opportunities his children and grandchildren did.

“Now I have great-grandchildren that I hope will play here,” he said.

Among the excited children trying out the playground on Sunday was 7-year-old Brooke Grant, who will be entering second grade at Memorial School.

She said one of her favorite things about the playscape is the set of sway steps that consists of several hanging bars with round bases to stand on. The feature requires kids to place their feet on the round base, grip the vertical bar and use their upper body strength to move from one to the next. But Grant said she prefers to pretend the round bases are “lava,” which means she relies on her upper body and core muscles to make it all the way across the bars without her feet touching down.

The new plastic tire swing is also a big improvement over the previous version, according to Brooke.

“The old tire swing didn’t swing as much, and it was an actual tire,” she said. “I don’t really like to sit on tires. They feel weird.”

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## Lake Residents Worry About Dogs’ Health

by Elizabeth Regan

With stories about the deadly effects of toxic blue-green algae on dogs making national headlines, residents in East Hampton are more concerned than ever about the threat to local pups.

Several dogs in North Carolina, Georgia and Texas died after ingesting water in lakes and ponds affected by blue-green algae blooms, according to the *New York Times*.

The news stoked fear in East Hampton, where Lake Pocotopaug has been experiencing annual algae blooms since the 1980s.

The public beach at Sears Park has been closed since the beginning of the month due to high levels of blue-green algae per order of the Chatham Health District. Signs at the park indicate the swimming area is closed to both humans and dogs.

The blooms are characterized by a green, blue-green, or reddish-brown hue.

Blue-green algae, also known as cyanobacteria, has the potential to be toxic. But health district director Russell Melmed said tests conducted by the health district look at the numbers of blue-green algae cells, not whether they’re harmful or not.

The health district does not typically test for toxicity, according to Melmed.

Low amounts of exposure to toxic cyanobacteria can cause allergic-type reactions, skin irritation or nausea and diarrhea in humans and animals, according to the Department of Public Health. The agency cautions that swallowing relatively large amounts of tainted water can cause liver damage and nervous system effects.

“Dogs are particularly vulnerable because they consume large quantities of lake water, and they’re small,” Melmed told the Town Council this week. Children are also at risk because they’re more likely than adults to swallow water while swimming.

Melmed said there’s been one case reported to him about a rash on someone who’d been swimming in the lake. Melmed also received a call from a physician whose patient complained of several days of watery diarrhea after swimming.

He said it’s not clear if the symptoms were caused by blue-green algae.

Jasper Hobbs, an environmental analyst with

the New England Interstate Water Pollution Commission, told the *RiverEast* last year that canine deaths were one of the first indicators of the danger of blue-green algae blooms.

“Back before people really started looking into this and understanding these algal blooms could become toxic, pets ended up dying because they were swimming in the water,” he said at the time.

Brian Toal, a supervising epidemiologist with the Department of Public Health’s environmental health section, has said there are a lot of variables when it comes to assessing the risk of blue-green algae to the public.

He said ingesting “large amounts” of water with high blue-green algae levels can lead to more serious health effects, but cautioned “it’s hard to say what ‘large amounts’ corresponds to in terms of cups of water.”

He said “at least a few mouthfuls” would be necessary to cause symptoms.

Other variables include where the water is ingested, because toxic blue green algae could be present in much higher levels along the shore where the scum washes up.

Melmed said it’s difficult to pinpoint toxicity in a blue-green algae bloom because the cyanobacteria could produce the toxins one day but not the next. The tests are also prone to false negatives, he said. That’s why the health district has decided not to do regular testing for toxins, he said.

But the district did send out one water sample last month to GreenWater Laboratories in Florida to be tested for toxins. The results came back negative, according to Melmed.

He cautioned that he didn’t “want to give people false confidence that one negative result means there’s nothing to worry about.”

### Testing Discrepancies Continue

One factor confusing the situation is the significant discrepancy between blue-green algae testing results from the laboratory used by the health district and those obtained by the town’s consulting lake expert, George Knoecklein.

The health district has been making determinations about the risk to the public based in part on the laboratory results it receives from Berlin, Conn.-based Northeast Laboratories,

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**The splintery, old Seamster Park playground, which was demolished last year after almost 30 years in service to the community, was replaced last week with a state-of-the-art play space constructed by volunteers. Photo by Cheryl Gioielli.**

#### Playground cont. from Front Page

Brooke's mother, Jen Grant, said she came down with her own mother to volunteer so they could have a hand in constructing a safe place for kids to play.

"It gave me a really great sense of pride and ownership. I felt good after. I was part of something bigger than myself," Jen Grant said.

Play By Design co-founder Lee Archin, who was on site as one of several supervisors, said the East Hampton community really "stepped up" to complete the project.

He said the four volunteer crew leaders were integral parts of the project.

Each crew leader had to be at the site every day for all three shifts, which spanned 8 a.m. to 8:30 p.m.

"It takes a core group of people to sacrifice and commit to the process. It's not the easy solution or an easy way to put a playground in," Archin said.

One of the most important benefits of the process comes in the form of a truly unique playspace designed with input from the community, according to Archin.

"This isn't something you purchase in a catalog," he said.

East Hampton's unique playground is 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.

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

Hall noted during the ribbon-cutting ceremony that it would have cost about \$100,000 more if the town hired a contractor to build the playground instead of using volunteers.

Crew leader and retired East Hampton music educator Curtis Weybright was also involved

in building the original playground. He said that's how organizers got his name as a potential volunteer this time around.

He agreed despite the daunting schedule so he could help make the playground available to kids for the next 30 years.

"I wanted to see this," he said, gesturing to the completed project. "Five or six days ago, there was a pile of dirt. Now look at it."

Weybright is no stranger to volunteer construction projects. As the construction manager for the Middlesex County chapter of Habitat for Humanity of Connecticut, he said he has worked on five houses since he retired from teaching in 2010.

He said his experience with Habitat for Humanity taught him not to panic about the low volunteer turnout at the beginning of the week.

"There's no point in worrying," he said. "If there's something you can do about it, you do it. If you can't do anything about it, you don't worry about it."

According to volunteer coordinator Sheryl Dougherty, the total number of workers per shift added up to almost 1,000.

"I would say about 50% or more came back every day and worked multiple shifts," she said.

Marketing volunteer Cheryl Gioielli said she spent Thursday on the phone and on Facebook in an effort to spread the word about the volunteer shortage. Television news coverage, posts on social media and video updates by Hall helped recruit an expanded pool of volunteers that carried the project to its conclusion.

Gioielli said many of the volunteers were timid and unsure when they arrived, only to leave with confidence and huge smiles on their faces.

"It's really a transformation, and it's not just the playground. It's a transformation of people," she said.

#### Dogs' Health cont. from Front Page

which have been consistently lower than the test results produced by Knoecklein.

Northeast Laboratories has for years been used to determine if blue-green algae levels are high enough to warrant a swim-at-your-own-risk advisory or beach closure at Sears Park. The state-recommended threshold for closing a public beach is greater than 100,000 blue-green algae cells per milliliter, according to guidance published jointly by the state Department of Public Health and the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection.

In order to reopen a beach, guidance suggests counts should be on the decline for two consecutive weeks and should not exceed 70,000 cells per milliliter.

In an effort to better understand the situation, the town has been sending split water samples – which are taken at the same time from the same location by the same sanitarian – to both laboratories since the discrepancy was first revealed a year ago.

Melmed said the sample tested last week for the health district by Northeast Laboratories came in at 82,000, down from a peak of 110,000 cells per milliliter earlier in the season.

Melmed said Knoecklein's unofficial results from the split sample last week showed 398,000 cells per milliliter. The health district is awaiting the official report.

Despite ongoing differences in the two reports, the health district has only once sent a

sample to another laboratory for a third opinion. That happened with a split sample collected on July 24, when the health district's chosen firm found 83,000 cells per milliliter and Knoecklein found 234,490 cells per milliliter.

A third test was conducted by GreenWater Laboratories in Florida, which found 213,632 cells per milliliter.

Melmed emphasized that laboratory testing is only one prong of the public health protocol used to determine if the lake is a health hazard. The district's risk assessment also includes visual observations of the lake and takes into account any reports of illness or disease that could be caused by exposure.

He said sanitarians who go out to assess the lake are not seeing indications that typically show up when cyanobacteria is present in large numbers – like water that is discolored throughout.

"It's a little murky, but it doesn't look green," he said.

What sanitarians have observed this season aligns more closely with the lower numbers being reported by the Berlin-based laboratory, according to Melmed.

He said the health district will be using all the data compiled over the course of the year to decide which laboratory will better serve the district's mission to prevent illness.

"At the end of the year when we look at all the data, we'll probably make a change," he said. "But I can't guarantee you we will."

# More Lake Pocotopaug Solutions Floated in East Hampton

by Elizabeth Regan

Amid accusations that town officials have not been proactive in addressing water quality concerns in Lake Pocotopaug, the Town Council on Tuesday issued a directive to the Conservation-Lake Commission to find out if property owners around the lake are willing to help tackle the problem.

The lake has been beset by potentially-toxic blue-green algae blooms for decades. The blooms thrive on nitrogen and phosphorous that can come from fertilizer, wastewater and stormwater runoff.

Councilors unanimously passed a motion to have the Conservation-Lake Commission gauge the “willingness” of property owners in the lake watershed area to grant an easement so the town can make improvements to keep polluted stormwater runoff from getting into the lake.

The council also told the commission to find out if lakefront residents are amenable to putting in vegetative buffers between their lawns and the lake so the dense vegetation and root mass can filter runoff.

According to a comprehensive 2017 watershed management plan from Northeast Aquatic Research, examples of low-impact development strategies that can be done on both public and private property include installing swales to capture runoff in shallow, vegetated depressions or adding rain gardens to absorb large amounts of runoff.

The plan from the town’s consulting lake

expert, commonly referred to as the 9-point plan, includes specific changes that can be made on numerous streets in the lake watershed. The plan also lays out steps that can be taken by town staff members, land use commissions and community groups to ensure progress.

Council member Dean Markham told the *Rivereast* this week that getting property owners to agree to the easements must happen before the 9-point plan can be implemented.

“What this is doing is having the Conservation-Lake Commission start that process so we can actually go ahead and begin doing work,” he said.

Based on rough estimates included in the plan, the recommended improvements cost about \$1.4 million. Broken down by price, the plan includes 14 recommended fixes that can be undertaken as part of regular maintenance or by volunteers; 21 areas that each need up to \$10,000 in funding; and eight areas that will each cost more than \$10,000 to address.

Markham cautioned the cost estimates are general, preliminary figures that have not been vetted by engineers or construction professionals. He said the project price tag must be firmed up before the town can figure out how to pay for it.

Several residents at Tuesday’s meeting said they wanted to use bond money to pay for the improvements all at once instead of making yearly allocations as part of the budget process.

Spellman Point resident Judd Landon

stressed the importance of fixing the enduring problem.

“We should get a bond and get this lake cleaned up as fast as we can,” he said. “If I wait 10 years, I’ll be dead by then.”

Council Chairman Melissa Engel emphasized she would not support bonding the project until there’s a firm dollar figure associated with it.

She questioned the assertion by Conservation-Lake Commission Vice Chairman Joe Carbonell that the cost could actually be closer to \$10 million.

Carbonell has said his estimate is based on an almost 25-year-old lake management plan that he adjusted for inflation.

According to Engel, it’s the commission’s job to determine the actual cost.

“To say ‘give me \$10 million and we’ll figure out a way to spend it’ doesn’t work in a rational, plan-minded group of people, which I like to think we are,” Engel said.

In the meantime, she said it would be “interesting” to see how many residents are willing to give the town an easement onto their properties for stormwater management improvements.

“And it’ll be even more interesting to see how many people are willing to give up a bit of their lawn to grow a vegetative buffer, which costs you nothing, in an effort to provide a natural filtration system into that lake,” she said.

Low-impact development engineer Steve Trinkaus recommended at an Aug. 1 forum that lakefront homeowners create the buffer area

between their lawns and the lake. He said the size of the buffer could range from one foot to 12 feet, depending on the size of the lawn.

The buffers can be made by letting grass “grow up as a meadow, where you only mow it once or twice a year,” he said. “You can have your lawn but you can also protect the edge of the lake from additional nutrients.”

“That’s a simple thing for a homeowner to do to reduce runoff from the property,” Trinkaus said at the time.

Carbonell told the *Rivereast* on Wednesday that he has asked Trinkaus and lake consultant George Knoecklein to “come up with a realistic number” for the total project cost.

Details about the easements – including whether property owners would be compensated – have not yet been discussed.

Markham said he hopes residents will be willing to grant the easement “in a public spirit.”

“There would obviously have to be some design specifications people would want to see before they signed off on such a thing,” he said. “I wouldn’t necessarily want someone coming in with a backhoe and digging a trench and leaving it. What are the recourses and responsibilities?”

The council directed the Conservation-Lake Commission to provide monthly updates on its progress in assessing the will of residents to allow easements and to grow vegetative buffers. A final report is due Jan. 31, 2020.

# Crowded Selectmen Race Set for November in Portland

by Elizabeth Regan

The Board of Selectmen race for the November election is shaping up to be a crowded one with multiple third parties represented.

There may be as many as nine candidates for six open selectmen seats, including Democrats, Republicans, and a member of a newly-formed third party.

The first selectman is elected separately. Democrat Susan Bransfield, the town’s current chief executive, will face two third-party candidates: longtime Bransfield critic Lambros Lambrinides, of the American Independent Party, and small-government proponent Shaun Manning, of the Back to Basics Party.

Hopeful third-party selectman candidate Michael Wrang will be added to the ballot if his paperwork is approved by the Office of the Secretary of the State, according to Town Clerk Ryan Curley.

Wrang is planning to run for selectman under the Independent Progressive Party banner. The new party is in the process of being officially recognized by the secretary of the state’s office, Curley said.

Requirements in state statute dictate that Wrang had to get at least 25 signatures from qualified voters in town to start a third party and another 24 signatures – or 1 percent of the number who voted for the Board of Selectmen two years ago – to get his name added to the November ballot.

Wrang, 60, is a civil and structural engineer who runs his own building and consulting businesses. He said he is registered as a Democrat, but decided to start his own party because the Portland Democrats already had a full slate of candidates.

He said he doesn’t see a big difference between Democrats and Republicans when it comes to making policy in town.

“We basically all want the same thing,” he said, referring to fiscal responsibility and economic development.

Wrang has lived in Portland for 17 years. Previously a Middletown resident, he served on the Board of Ethics for several years and was

involved in campaigns for Democratic candidates in the 1980s and ‘90s.

“I have a lot of energy,” he said. “I think I have a lot of experience in running a small business. I’ve been doing it for 24 years. I look at how things can be done versus why they can’t be done.”

The Democratic and Republican slates were finalized during party caucuses in July.

Republican Town Committee Chairman Tim Lavoy said the party will not be putting up a candidate for first selectman.

“We really felt we needed to put up a serious candidate and we just weren’t able to find someone who wanted to step up and take on that role,” Lavoy said.

Bransfield is running for her ninth term as first selectman. She worked previously for the state Department of Education as an education service specialist for the Child Nutrition program. She holds a master’s degree in public administration from the University of Hartford and a Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Connecticut.

Lambrinides first challenged Bransfield as a write-in candidate in 2009 and has been a fixture in every municipal election since. He received 5% of the vote in 2017. Retired from Pratt & Whitney, he was associated with his family’s 70-year-old sign business until it closed in 1998.

Manning is a partner in family-run Manning Home Builders Inc. The Libertarian-influenced candidate said taxes should be collected only for education, infrastructure and public safety, and that a well-functioning government focused on the basics will drive up property values and increase the Grand List.

All four Democrats for the six open selectmen seats are incumbents: Louis J. Pear, Benjamin R. Srb, James K. Tripp and Ralph R. Zampano.

Republicans are running incumbents Michael Pelton and Edward “Rick” Sharr, as well as current Board of Education member Dave

Murphy and newcomer Michael Hernandez.

Lavoy said there are some “great people” running for office this year.

“We have a wonderful slate of folks from town who were willing to step up and take responsibility to help guide us,” Lavoy said.

Lavoy, who is seeking reelection on the Board of Education, ran two years ago for the Board of Selectmen. He lost to Srb by 30 votes.

Lavoy said Hernandez, who has never been elected to office in Portland before, “expressed a real interest in getting more involved” in local government.

Hernandez, 45, is a project manager at Environmental Systems Corporations. He has lived in Portland for his entire life, except for a stint in the U.S. Navy that took him to Somalia. He has been the commander of Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 6121 for five years.

Hernandez told the *Rivereast* he decided to run to help infuse some “new blood” into local government.

“I was born and raised in my town, and I care very much about it. I’m just hoping I can contribute to the prosperity of Portland,” he said.

He said he’d like to see the town get spending under control, referring to land purchases over the years.

The town’s latest plan to buy three parcels of land on Brownstone Avenue for \$385,000 is going to a town meeting in September. Possibilities for the site include a waterfront restaurant operated as part of a public/private partnership. Other land the town bought over the past two decades includes 40 acres of riverfront property and quarries on Brownstone Avenue, the site of the recreational complex under construction on Route 17 and the trailhead for the Air Line Trail on Middle Haddam Road.

“I think we’re taking the tax base out by purchasing all this land,” Hernandez said.

Pelton, owner of Portland-based Inner Circle Family Martial Arts, has served three terms as selectman and two on the Board of Education. Sharr is the retired CEO of Tri-Town Foods who

was elected as a selectman in 2017. Murphy, a planning manager for Stanley Black & Decker, was appointed to the school board in 2016 and won election the following year.

All four incumbent Democrats on the Board of Selectmen are running for reelection.

Democratic Town Committee Chairman Brian O’Connor could not be reached for comment.

Pear, a retired educator, was first elected to the Board of Selectmen in 2017. Srb, a local business owner and developer, was elected as a selectman in 2015 after seven years on the school board and 12 years on the Zoning Board of Appeals. Tripp is a data network consultant with AT&T who was appointed to the board in 2017 and elected later that year. He served on the school board for a little more than two years before becoming a selectman. Zampano, an IT project manager, was the nine-year chairman of the Parks and Recreation Commission when he was elected to the Board of Selectmen in 2017.

While there are six open seats for the Board of Selectman, each voter can only select four candidates on the ballot.

Board of Education candidates on the Republican side are Lavoy, small business owner Emily Randall, and state Department of Correction employee Robert “Bobby” Hetrick. The Democrats are running incumbents Meg Scata and Laurel Steinhauer along with educator Lauren Christensen.

Candidates for the Board of Assessment Appeals are Democratic incumbents John H. Dillon and Thomas F. Malecky and Republican incumbent Peter A. Castelli.

Running as a Republican for the Zoning Board of Appeals term to begin this year is recent Democratic Party defector Richard W. Basso. He is challenging Democrat Kenneth A. Kearns. Candidates for the Zoning Board of Appeals term to begin in 2020 are incumbent Republican Robert J. Casati and Democratic challenger Joan M. Giesemann.

# Korea and Vietnam Veterans Receive Overdue Recognition in Colchester

by Karla Santos

A Colchester veteran who served in Korea or Vietnam is still basking in the glow of recognition received earlier this summer.

Dennis Williams, 73, of Colchester, was one of the Vietnam veterans honored in a June 24 ceremony at William J. Johnston Middle School.

Connecticut Lt. Governor Susan Bysiewicz, the Connecticut Department of Veterans Affairs and First Selectman Art Shilosky joined in a partnership to honor the veterans at the ceremony, where they received a certificate recognizing them for their service.

The Colchester ceremony honored veterans from the town who served in Korea, Vietnam or both.

Williams in a phone interview this week said he was not in full combat like other veterans because he was in counterintelligence, but he was able to see firsthand the sacrifice his fellow soldiers made.

"I saw a lot of hardship over there, other people having to sacrifice their lives," Williams said. "They had it a lot more difficult than I did."

Williams said the ceremony was "very inspiring."

"I think for most of the veterans, it really was a very satisfying experience," Williams said.

During the ceremony, veterans were called individually to receive a certificate. They were each given the opportunity to stand up and speak

about their service.

"There were very humbling stories from some of these men regarding the particular battles they were in, the comrades that they lost in battle and their thankfulness that they were able to tell these stories and come back and contribute to society," Williams said.

The ceremony is one of many Bysiewicz began hosting when she was secretary of the state. She has hosted ceremonies for World War II, Korea and Vietnam veterans.

"There were some towns like Colchester where we hadn't had the opportunity to honor the Korean veterans," Bysiewicz said this week. "When I became Lt. Governor and the Veterans Affairs Commissioner wanted to partner with us to honor Korean and Vietnam veterans, I met with Art Shilosky, who was delighted to post and sponsor the ceremony with the Lt. Governor's office and the Veterans Affairs commissioner."

The goal of the ceremony was to honor about 42 veterans, but not all attended.

"I know we had someone who attended who had served in both Korea and Vietnam," Bysiewicz said. "We also had a good number, I think there were more than 30 veterans that were there with their families."

Bysiewicz said that one of the things that stood out to her about the Colchester ceremony was the modesty of those who were honored

and the stories they told.

Shilosky was one of the Vietnam veterans who received recognition during the ceremony.

"The first selectman is quite modest," she said. "Some of their stories were quite emotional. Some of the veterans were very appreciative of what the nurses did for them."

Bysiewicz said that for many of the veterans, serving in Vietnam was bittersweet. They were happy to have served and sacrificed for their country, but some received disrespect when they returned to their homes.

"For Vietnam of course, that war was so controversial and unfortunately, there were many people who instead of honoring their service of those who served in Vietnam, insulted many of the soldiers," Bysiewicz said.

She recalled that some Vietnam veterans during the ceremony talked about being called "baby killers" when they arrived back to the United States in uniform.

"I think that many Vietnam veterans did not receive a proper welcome home or a thank you for their service and I think we have learned in them that regardless of what we think of war, we should always thank those that served," she said.

Williams, who served in Vietnam from 1971 to 1972, said that while "the war did not accomplish anything," people such as him "were very willing to go over there and do whatever

the country was asking of them."

"They were not looked upon as heroes doing anything for the country because it was such an unpopular war," Williams said. "It's not until recently that the veterans have been honored in this kind of a way. For Vietnam veterans it was a ceremony that you might say it's years and years and decades overdue."

Among the recognized were Harry Robert Riley, Robert Kenneth Judge, Francis Stanley Barry, Richard Steven Zalusky, Dana Edward Bradstreet, Anthony Harasimowitz, Richard Frank Plaza, William John Bogert, Charles James Venti, Paul Sherman, Clifford Claude Albert Daigle, Zachary John Garr, Leo John Parciak Jr., Ronald Ernest Holt, Thomas William O'Meara, Peter John Bass, William Louis Dickerson, George Thomas Chrostowsky, Bob Constantin Setschinsky, Norman Leon Ravagnani, Timothy John Durato, Herbert Joseph Santerre, Paul Albert Bates, Steven Arthur Schuster, Ronald Edwin Felciano, Jeremiah Frances Ryan, William Charles Planeta, Thomas Duane Prescott, Richard Chris Felciano, Joseph Martin Gorrick, Arthur Shilosky, Roger D. Congdon, Donald Francis Smith, Harry Robert Riley, Ray John Ryan Jr., James McAlpine Hardy, Robert Kenneth Judge, Francis Stanley Barry, Richard Steven Zalusky, John Francis Stackowski, Peter Albert Falco and Eugene Louis Carli.

## Old Bacon Academy Undergoes Facelift

by Karla Santos

Old Bacon Academy looks new again – after the building underwent a facelift that was completed last week, restoring the 1801 original brick and adding a fresh coat of paint.

But the Old Bacon Academy Board of Trustees is not done with its efforts to help keep the building alive. According to Arthur Liverant, member of the Board of Trustees, the group of about 13 members is planning to continue to restore the building.

"We are going to start on a major restoration of replacing the bathrooms," Liverant said.

The plan also includes adding an elevator to the building to make it handicapped accessible. In addition, The Board of Trustees wants to add new electrical, new plumbing, new heating – "all the mechanicals basically," Liverant said.

The start date of that project depends on funding. Liverant would not divulge the cost of that project – or indeed any of the restoration work.

A big part of the building's rejuvenation involved restoring the original Colchester-made brick. Liverant said that part of the making of a brick involves creating "a transparent skin that seals the brick so water doesn't get in."

That skin can fail over time as part of the aging process – a process that was inadvertently sped along due to a car crash many years ago, Liverant recalled.

Once upon a time, he said, there was a hedge in front of the building, until a motorist drove through it and hit the building.

"About five to six years later, paint started peeling off because [the crash] upset the brick enough and upset that transparent skin on the brick, moisture started to get in and paint started to peel," Liverant said.

With the brick starting to deteriorate, the Bacon Academy Board of Trustees decided to hire Russak Restoration, a general contractor in Portland, to restore the brick and paint it.

Liverant said the building was last painted approximately 25 years ago and it has always been painted in its original color, a light yellow.

Over the 217-year history of the building,

there have been some minor changes to the building – one of them being to the cupola, where the bell is. The original cupola started to leak.

"Around 1880, they built a whole new cupola over the original," Liverant said. The original is still there because they figured probably someday maybe somebody would restore it down the way."

Another change was an overhang that was added over the front door.

Liverant also said Board of Trustees member Tom DesSureau has restored all the windows of the building. The window restoration was started three to four years ago and finished "a couple of months ago," Liverant said.

"Those are the original windows – with almost all of the original glass," he added.

Old Bacon Academy is a three-story building with six rooms – two on each floor.

The rooms in the first floor are used by the Alternative Education Program, which offers a curriculum to high school students facilitated by two teachers and a social worker.

The rooms on floors two and three are used in partnership with the Colchester Historical Society as a storage unit for historical objects.

A \$35,000 estate was left by Pierpont Bacon and his wife Abigail Newton Bacon before they died, both in the year 1800. They left the money for the construction of a school in their name.

According to an article on the Colchester Historical Society's website, only \$7,000 was used for the construction of Bacon Academy. Liverant said that the remaining money went to an endowment.

The building first opened its doors in 1803, serving as the town's high school for over 150 years, before the high school moved to a larger home in the 1960s.

The building got its name not just from the couple that left the money for it, but also from its location, Liverant said. The front door of the building is located directly across from Norwich Avenue – which was originally called



**Old Bacon Academy, located at 84 S. Main St. was recently repainted and its original brick was repaired. The school opened its doors to students in 1803. Photo by Karla Santos.**

Academy Street, Liverant said.

Dolores Sawchuk, 89, moved to Colchester when she was 3 years old and attended Bacon Academy from 1944-48.

"It was so completely different than what we have today but it was a family," Sawchuk said. "You knew everybody in school because there were only under 100 of us for the four classes. We had the basic classes – you know, history, English, Latin, French, sciences – and we had an agricultural program and a commercial program. The agricultural program was very important because back then, Colchester was a farming community."

Sawchuk said the school has not changed much since she was a student.

"We are so proud of that building and we want to keep it because it has a big place in

history and a big place in some of our hearts," she added.

According to Liverant and the Colchester Historical Society, Bacon Academy has had three locations over the years. Enrollment had reached 530 by 1962 – a far cry from the under 100 Sawchuk went to school with in the 1940s. That year the high school moved to a new home on Norwich Avenue, where the Colchester Education Center is now. By 1993, the school had outgrown that location as well, with a total of 824 students. So, the school moved to a new \$26 million facility, which is the current location of the high school.

Meanwhile, the Bacon Academy Board of Trustees continues to manage Old Bacon Academy.

# Colchester School Board Extends Superintendent's Contract

by **Karla Santos**

The Colchester Board of Education recently decided to extend Superintendent of Schools Jeffrey Burt's contract through June 30, 2022.

The school board in June unanimously approved the contract after his annual performance review. A summary of the superintendent's evaluation was released this week.

Burt currently earns \$174,000 per year.

The summary said Burt has exceeded the board's expectations.

Burt, who started his role with the Colchester Public Schools on June 4, 2018, said the review "went well."

The Board of Education evaluates the superintendent on a yearly basis.

Burt's evaluation was based on the goals set for him as superintendent of the \$40 million district.

"It's part of the process, it's part of my contract," Burt said. "Typically what happens is I set my goals, I share them with the board chair and then I share them with the board and then I give them regular updates on the progress of my goals and then they evaluate them based on those goals in the spring, in June."

Part of Burt's goal was to get to know the district and the community, and to open up communication, he said.

Other goals were to incorporate efficiencies in the schools' budget and to look at a long range plan for specific areas including of technology, safety and facilities.

In addition, helping create a mission and vision statement for the district was on top of Burt's list.

Burt said a mission and vision statement would help the school district move forward while continuously improving. Burt said the district did not have a vision or mission statement "for quite a few years."

"To help move the district along you need to have some sort of vision," Burt said. "You have to know where we are heading with the mission of the district to move forward. [The Board of Education and I] spent time working collaboratively."

The mission of the Colchester Board of Education is to "ensure the success of each and every student."

The summary also mentions Burt's efforts

to facilitate curriculum reviews and updates.

"Teams across the district have collaborated to create curriculum updates that modernize instruction while synchronizing instructional goals from grade to grade and building to building," the summary said.

The updated curriculum includes world language, career technical education, visual literacy, science and the capstone program.

"The Board recognizes the breadth of this work and the leadership required to move these curriculums forward," the summary said.

According to Burt, it was important to get to know the district and the community, which is why he spent his first six months mainly trying to meet as many people as possible - including parents, students and staff.

Another major area of focus was making sure the budget process is clearly communicated to the school board, the district and the wider community.

"It's like running a big business. It's just making sure that we are moving forward together," he said.

He added that getting to know the buildings, meeting more folks and being able to listen is the best way for him to find out what's happening in the district.

"I love this district, I love this community; it's just so rewarding," Burt said. "I enjoy going to work every day. The people, the staff, the parents, the students, the community as a whole is amazing. [The] reward is I get to work in the best district of Connecticut."

According to Bradley Bernier, chairman of the Colchester Board of Education, Burt's contract started with a salary of \$168,000 for the 2018-19 school year, and included an escalation for year two, which would be the 2019-20 school year.

The evaluation did not impact the raise because it was already part of Burt's contract, according to Bernier.

Burt's salary is \$174,000 as of July 1<sup>st</sup>, which is when the fiscal year started.

Bernier said Burt's salary will be adjusted on his third year, but the board has not determined by how much.

## East Hampton Police News

8/4: Robert Johnson, 33, of 116 Skyview Dr., Cromwell, was charged with failure to drive right and driving under the influence, East Hampton Police said.

8/6: Brennan Gibbons, 26, of 21 West St., was charged with violation of probation, police said.

8/9: Jason Hobby, 45, of 23 Mountain View Rd., was charged with sixth-degree larceny, police said.

Also, from July 29-Aug. 4, officers responded to 17 medical calls, three motor vehicle accidents and 10 alarms, and made 12 traffic stops.

## Portland Police News

7/30: Jamie Guitard, 40, of 23 Eastern Dr., Middletown, was charged with third-degree burglary, Portland Police said.

8/8: James Platt, 32, of 44 Buttles Rd., Granby, was charged with criminal violation of protective order, police said.

## Hebron Police News

8/4/19: State Police said Tracey Allen Parks, 44, of 92 Rixtown Rd., Griswold, was arrested and charged with failure to carry an operator license, DUI and improper parking.

## Colchester Police News

8/9: State Police said Shellie Fiano, 44, of 325 New London Ave, Warwick, R.I., was arrested and charged with third degree assault, disorderly conduct and interfering with police.

8/10: State Police said Bobby Thomas, 38, of 208 Tanitor Hill Rd., Apt. A, Colchester, was arrested and charged with third degree assault and disorderly conduct.

## Obituaries

### Portland

#### Louis Michael Coronella

Louis Michael Coronella, 81, formerly of Portland, died unexpectedly Wednesday, Aug. 7, at Hartford Hospital.

He leaves his two sons, Michael Daniel Coronella of Bethesda, Md., and Matthew Jared Coronella and his wife Lorena Iturrino of Portland; his granddaughters, Portia Rose and Mara Luisa Coronella; his former wife, Susan R. Colella; his cousins, Sal Gallitto and his wife Angie of Middletown, Robert and Vanessa Gallitto, Christina Gallitto of Middletown, Carmie Cooper and her husband Jack of Berlin, Natalie Chang and her husband Dr. Jason Chang of Avon, Jack Jr. and his fiancée Alexandra of Lincoln, Neb., and Joseph Cooper of Middletown.

He was born (March 1938) and raised in Middletown, the son of the late Sebastian (Mike) and Anna (Gallitto) Coronella. He was predeceased by his brother, Emile (Sal) Coronella and uncle Nate and aunt Tina Gallitto, and uncles Nick Gallitto and Salvatore (Tutti) Coronella.

He was an Army veteran and an accomplished carpenter. He attended North Bennett Street School in Boston, graduating in 1960 with a degree in cabinet and furniture making. He was the owner of the Portland Laundromat in Portland since 1968.

He enjoyed playing cards on Wednesday nights at The Elks Club in Middletown and having coffee with friends at Dunkin' Donuts. He loved to travel and was a devoted Sinatra fan. Feeding the seagulls at Harbor Park made him happy.

He was a good father who always took care of his children and did the best he could to teach and guide them. The loves of his life were his granddaughters and he liked nothing better than spending time with them. He loved to be with family and was always up for a picnic, reunion or gathering of friends. He is loved and will be missed by many.

Calling hours were Thursday, Aug. 15, at D'Angelo Funeral Home, 22 S. Main St., Middletown. Funeral services will be today, Aug. 16, at 10 a.m., at St. Sebastian Church, 155 Washington St., Middletown. Burial will follow at the State Veterans Cemetery in Middletown.

We would like to thank all the doctors, nurses and staff at Hartford Healthcare and Middlesex Healthcare for their service.

In lieu of flowers, memorial donations in his name may be sent to the St. Vincent De Paul Society in Middletown.

### Colchester

#### Ryan Russell Clauss

Ryan Russell Clauss, 25, of Colchester, died unexpectedly in New Mexico while traveling out west. He was born Oct. 11, 1993, the son of Gary and Suzanne Clauss. He attended Bacon Academy High School, where he graduated in 2011 with honors, and went on to obtain a Bachelor of Science in Chemical Engineering from the University of Connecticut, class of 2015 with honors.

Ryan enjoyed hunting, fishing, camping, and living off the land. He was an enthusiastic traveler, taking every opportunity he could to visit a different corner of the United States or add another national park to his roster. Ryan was also deeply loyal and committed to his family. He spent a lot of time with siblings and close family friends, pioneering family construction projects and partaking in competitive family game nights. Ryan had a contagious personality and a disarming laugh; he was loved, is missed, and his memories will always be cherished.

Ryan is survived by his parents, Gary and Suzanne; his brothers, Kyle and Gary; and his sister, Erica.

A private memorial service will be held to celebrate Ryan's life. The family thanks all for their support and love.



### Colchester

#### Stanley Walter Wilson

Stanley Walter Wilson, 94, of Salem, passed away Thursday, Aug. 8, in Colchester. Born April 30, 1925, in Wylam, Ala.; he was a son of the late Walter and Mary (Morgan) Wilson. Stanley married his wife Barbara (Oelkuct) in 1950.

The couple settled in Salem, where they raised their family. Stanley was employed at Electric Boat in Groton for 35 years, retiring in 1984. He was a founding member of the MDA union retirement group. He also served the town of Salem and several other towns as building inspector for 20 years. Stanley was a member of the Masons Bayview Lodge 120 for 70 years. He will forever be remembered as a loving husband, father and grandfather.

In addition to his loving wife Barbara, he is survived by his three children, Katherine and her husband Arthur Clauson of Niantic, Joanne and her husband William Ouimette of Florida, and Douglas Wilson and his wife Maryann of North Carolina; his grandchildren, Neil Clauson and his wife Kate, Faith Clauson and her husband Nick Traggis, Jeffrey Wilson and his wife Kerri, Gregory Wilson and his wife Laurie, and Melanie Mendoza and her husband Tony; and six great-grandchildren, Avery, Brooke, Riley, Ryan, Chloe and Travis.

In addition to his parents he was predeceased by siblings Norma Clyde, Gladys Hall, Ruth Hollingsworth, Lucille Suit, Laura Manning and James Wilson.

Care of private arrangements has been entrusted to the Aurora-McCarthy Funeral home in Colchester. For online condolences, visit [auroramccarthyfuneralhome.com](http://auroramccarthyfuneralhome.com).



### Haddam Neck

#### Patrick Henry Danaher

Patrick Henry Danaher, "Scrapiron," passed away peacefully at home in Haddam Neck Thursday, Aug. 8, at the age of 73.

Born in Meriden Nov. 11, 1945, to Francis and Dorothy (Foell) Danaher, Pat graduated from Maloney High School and attended St Michael's College in Santa Fe, N.M., before completing hotel management school in Washington, D.C. In 1963, Patrick met the love of his life, Terry, at Lake Pocotopaug, where their families both vacationed. They married in 1974 and moved to Haddam Neck in 1976.

Patrick was gifted at knowing how things worked. He innately understood everything from mechanical and electrical systems to plumbing and carpentry. If he didn't have the part or tool he needed, he could make it. He put these skills to use every day when he built and maintained a home for his growing family, on the job at Value Office Furniture where he worked for 43 years, retiring in 2016, and while serving his community as a 43-year member of the Haddam Neck Volunteer Fire Department.

Pat's selfless devotion to family, friends and neighbors, sense of humor, loyalty, and gifts for storytelling and song, endeared him to all who knew him. When Pat wasn't working on one of his endless projects, he enjoyed fishing, boating and skiing. Above all, he loved his family and the times he spent with them.

Patrick was predeceased by his brother, Francis. He leaves behind his wife and best friend, Terry Cella Danaher; sister-in-law, June Danaher of Hebron; brother, Terrence and his wife Loretta; sister, Alannah and her husband George Coshov of Middle Haddam; brother, Kenan and his wife Anne of Hebron; daughters, Meghan and her husband Jason Gagné of East Hampton, Molly and her husband Matthew Bickford of Haddam Neck, Aidan and her husband Tony Sottile of Waterford; sons, Patrick Gilchrist and his wife Kate Jones of East Hampton and Brennan and his wife Samantha; 16 nieces and nephews; and 12 grandchildren.

A funeral Mass will be held at 11 a.m. Saturday, Aug. 17, at St. Bridget of Kildare Church, 75 Moodus-Leesville Rd., Moodus, with reception to follow.

Memorial donations can be made to Haddam Neck Volunteer Fire Department, 50 Rock Landing Rd., Haddam Neck, CT 06424.



### Colchester

#### Rosemary Nericcio Peck

It is with great sadness that we announce the passing of our beloved mother, grandmother and great-grandmother, Rosemary Nericcio Peck, on Sunday, Aug. 4, just several months short of her 84th birthday.

She was the widow of the late Richard H. Peck of Cromwell and the daughter of the late Joseph and Mary (Szankovics) Palma. Her greatest joy was being a mother, and then a grandmother and great-grandmother. Her family was the most important thing in her life.

She will be dearly missed by her children: Debbie (Fred) Wolf of Colchester; Donna Little of Cocoa, Fla.; Alfred Nericcio Jr. of Liberty, N.C., and Mary (Steve) Boyce of Liberty, N.C.; her grandchildren and great-grandchildren, Heather (Derek) Little Gilbert and their children Sloan and Dane; Jenny Morton and Adrianna, April Wolf, Matthew and Stephanie Johnson; her stepchildren, Gregory (Felise) Peck of Georgia, Richard (Maria) Peck of Cromwell and Susan Peck Graham of Maine; eight step-grandchildren and two step-great-grandchildren; her beloved sisters-in-law, Dolores Peck Filanda and Lorraine Peck; and many longtime friends, nieces and nephews. She will also be missed by her furbaby, Willie the fat cat.

In addition to her husband and parents she was predeceased by her beloved brother, Harold Szankovics; her stepson, David Peck; several brothers- and sisters-in-law; and her former husband and father of her children, Alfred Nericcio Sr.

She worked at the former Colchester Convalescent Home in the housekeeping department until her retirement. She made many good friends while there: Anita, Suzanne, Harriet, Linda, Nancy, Pat, Beverly, Phyllis, Sue, Joanne, Betty, Betsy, Sandy, Barbara, and Diane. They continued to get together for their monthly retirees' lunch that she greatly enjoyed and looked forward to attending.

She also had a smile and a kind word for everyone she met. Her words of wisdom were "You get more with honey than with vinegar." She was a great friend and she had longtime friends that she kept in touch with for many years. Many of her friends were like sisters to her. One was her childhood friend, Jeannie Gress, that she met in third grade and they became fast friends and their friendship lasted to the present. She also was very close to Philomena Tyrseck, Joan Gleason, Jean Haggerty and Mary Vachon with whom she shared many laughs, tears, vacations, lunches and life adventures.

The funeral will be held on Saturday, Aug. 24, at 11 a.m., at St. Andrews Church in Colchester, with visiting hours from 10-11 a.m. at the church. Burial will be in the Marlboro Cemetery in Marlborough at 2:30 p.m.

Aurora McCarthy Funeral Home is in charge of the arrangements.



### Portland

#### George Thomas Rowe

George Thomas Rowe, 76, of Portland, passed away peacefully Thursday, Aug. 8, at home, surrounded by his loving wife of 42 years, Susan (Taylor) Rowe, sister Janet (Rowe) Derick, and daughters Krista Larson, Tammy Rowe and Lindsey Farmer. He was born in Hartford to James Rowe and Eleanor (Gulliksen) Rowe and grew up in West Hartford and Glastonbury before moving to Portland in 1985 to raise his family.

In addition to his wife and daughters, George is survived by his grandchildren Lily and Jack Larson, Ethan and Dylan Wells, and Audrey and Natalie Farmer. He referred to them as the "light of his life" who brought him immeasurable happiness. He is also survived by his brother-in-law Bill Derick and three sons-in-law, Kurt Larson, Mike Wells and Jon Farmer.

George was a proud, honorable man who served his country in the United States Air Force before a long career in banking. He will be remembered for his integrity, kind heart, joyful smile and unwavering commitment to those he loved. A note from his doctor summed it up beautifully: "He showed a genuine love for everyone he met, and I know for a fact that he brightened the lives of many of the people in the cancer center during his time with us."

Calling hours were held Wednesday, Aug. 14, at Mulryan Funeral Home, 725 Hebron Ave., Glastonbury.

Should friends desire, the family is requesting contributions may be made to the American Brain Tumor Association ([abta.org](http://abta.org)) in lieu of flowers.

For online condolences, visit [mulryanfh.com](http://mulryanfh.com).



*From the Editor's Desk*

# Observations & Ruminations

by Mike Thompson

An interesting press release floated across my inbox this week about a study UConn School of Medicine researchers are conducting on the impact of video games on older adults – and they're already seeing some promising results.

Dr. Kevin Manning, a UConn Center on Aging neuropsychologist, is leading the study, which examines whether video games can improve late-life depression in older adults.

According to UConn, Manning and his colleagues are studying gaming in older adults who continue to show symptoms of depression despite being on antidepressants. "With only gaming added to their treatment plan, and no other changes, these study subjects have already experienced a statistically significant reduction in their depression over just six weeks," he said.

Manning added, "Cognitive stimulation through computerized video games might be a new alternative way to treat depression in older adults and an additional way for us to help our older patients improve their cognitive fitness."

Imagine that – a study into the effects of video games on people, and not just head-in-the-sand baseless Republican talking points about them. It never ceases to amaze me how far some on the right will go to avoid looking at the real issues in all of these mass shootings. After the latest ones in Texas and Ohio, the pundits and lawmakers came out against violent video games and social media – as if we're the only country on the planet to have violent video games and social media.

More gun control is needed. Connecticut has some great gun control laws on the books – we actually did something after Sandy Hook – and the country needs to follow suit. I've pushed for more gun control time and time again after these horrific mass shootings, so I won't dwell on it much further. But additional gun control needs to happen.

Opponents argue it won't make a difference; that if people want to kill a bunch of other people they'll find a way to do so. And maybe they're right; maybe it won't. But where's the harm in trying it, and seeing if it does make a difference? Don't we owe it to all of those killed in recent years – as well as their friends and family – to give it a chance?

Something needs to be done – and banning video games sure isn't it.

\* \* \*

If you're out and about the next couple of weeks, you may spot helicopters in the sky. Don't worry, it's not the feds coming to get you – hopefully not, anyway – or the paparazzi on your tail. Through the end of the month, Eversource is conducting aerial inspections of high-voltage electrical equipment on rights of way throughout the state.

This semiannual inspection involves the use of helicopters equipped with heat-sensing, infrared scanning technology. Weather permitting, flights will take place from 8 a.m. to 4

p.m., Eversource said.

The *Rivereast* towns the blue and silver helicopter will be flying through are Andover, Hebron and Portland.

\* \* \*

This month marked five years since the brilliant Robin Williams tragically took his own life. Starting with watching *Mork & Mindy* reruns as a little kid, I was always a big fan of his. I found him hysterical in just about every comedic role I saw him in – and his drama parts were equally well-done, as he conveyed a gentle, approachable, comforting side. Comedy is traditionally never recognized at the Oscars, so it was a drama that brought Williams his only Academy Award, for his memorable role in *Good Will Hunting*.

Recently, I came across one of Williams' very last films. Released in May 2014 – just three months before he died – *The Angriest Man in Brooklyn* stars Williams as, well, a very angry man, who is told by a doctor he only has 90 minutes to live. The film tries to have heart, and its ending does have a certain warmth, but mostly it's just depressing as anything. Williams' character is a very angry, sour, cruel man, and while we get told why in flashback, it's still just not enjoyable to watch. And Williams himself, as he could be in roles toward the end of his life, is rather low-key. In short, the film's a disappointment, and not how I want to remember him.

No, I want to remember the Robin Williams that would leave me howling, sometimes crying, with laughter all those years. And also the Robin Williams who could be incredibly profound, and very wise. He was a smart, smart man, and it showed not just in his work but in what he chose to say.

So, here are a few quotes of his from over the years. Some are funny, some profound, and all of them make me wish he were still here:

"Some are born great. Some achieve greatness. Some get it as a graduation gift."

"I used to think the worst thing in life was to end up all alone. It's not. The worst thing in life is to end up with people that make you feel all alone."

"What's right is what's left if you do everything else wrong."

"If it's the Psychic Network why do they need a phone number?"

"Why do they call it rush hour if no one moves?"

"All it takes is a beautiful fake smile to hide an injured soul."

"I think the saddest people always try their hardest to make people happy because they know what it's like to feel absolutely worthless and they don't want anyone else to feel like that."

I hope Williams has found the peace and the joy in death that he provided so many of us during his life.

\* \* \*

See you next week.











