

RIVEREAST

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We Are the Champions... Portland's 4th Grade Travel Basketball team was crowned the Shoreline Division Champion in the CT Basketball Conference for the 2019-20 season. The boys also competed for the overall league title before losing to Manchester in a tough final at PMS. They competed against both league and non-league teams and won an impressive 19 games along the way! Pictured from left are, bottom row, Ryan Nadolski, Joseph Phelps, Nolan O'Connor, Levi Srb and Ian Binnington; top row, Coach John Thompson, Noah Bryant, Luke Thompson, Colin Fitzgibbons, Alex Brown, Brooks Oliva and Coach Brian O'Connor.

RHAM to Scrap Sachems?

by Sloan Brewster

RHAM students are looking for a mascot to replace the Sachems.

In a meeting with the *Rivereast* Monday, RHAM High School Principal Scott Leslie said he and students simultaneously started having conversations about making the switch. He was speaking about it to Schools Superintendent Patricia Law while at the same time the students were chatting amongst themselves.

In those conversations, it became clear that it was the right thing to do, he said.

"It's clear to us that representatives of the Native American tribal nations find any mascot that's based upon the Native American imagery inappropriate," Leslie said. "The tribal nations, where in the past they were okay they now say no Native American name is appropriate. There've been very public statements that representatives of the tribal nations make."

The principal and students presented the idea to the Board of Education on Feb. 24. Upon receiving the board's go-ahead, they formed a committee to oversee the process. The committee is comprised of students in grades 7-12, including council leaders and club presidents.

In the presentation Leslie and students gave to the board, they referenced several newspaper articles in which Native American leaders voiced disapproval of Native American-themed mascots, including one about the town of Killingly where students requested and were

given approval for a name change from the Redmen. Then, after the town's education board agreed to rename the mascot the Red Hawks, it reversed the decision and went back to the original native-theme.

"I know that Killingly's decision to switch was a student decision to change the Redman to Red Hawks and undone by adults in the community," Leslie said. "That has really reverberated. Our own students have looked and think it was inappropriate."

In an article entitled *Ending the Era of Harmful "Indian" Mascots*, the National Congress of American Indians states opposition to Native American-themed mascots.

"The intolerance and harm promoted by these 'Indian' sports mascots, logos or symbols, have very real consequences for Native people," the article reads. "Specifically, rather than honoring Native peoples, these caricatures and stereotypes are harmful, perpetuate negative stereotypes of America's first peoples, and contribute to a disregard for the personhood of Native peoples."

Kate Corliss, a senior at RHAM, committee member and Hebron resident, is writing a series about the name change for *Rhambler*, a student publication.

She and Leslie said the name change is also a reaction to a proposal by a state legislator to

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Harry's Place Celebrates 100 Years

by Karla Santos

It's a popular summer spot that each year draws folks from across the state – and this year it's celebrating 100 years in business.

Harry's Place, the roadside burger joint in Colchester, has been tickling tastebuds for a century, offering up a slew of summer treats. Its opening each March is traditionally seen as a harbinger of warmer days to come, and generations of Connecticut families have made it a regular stop when going to, and from, the beach.

The restaurant was originally opened in 1920 by Harry Schmuckler. According to the eatery's website, it was located then in Crestwood Plaza on Main Street, across the street from the Colchester town green. In the late 1920s, the restaurant moved to the corner of Lebanon Avenue and South Main, also across from the town green.

Future Colchester legend Ruby Cohen bought the restaurant in the 1930s. Cohen would go on to serve in the state General Assembly for 40 years – and would operate the seasonal restaurant in between legislative sessions.

In the early 1940s, Harry's Place was moved, this time just down the street, to its current location. Cohen eventually sold the restaurant in 1978 to John Gareth and his wife Romilda. Gareth would pass away just five years later, in 1983 – but his son John still owns the eatery today, along with his mother and three sisters.

Gareth said his goal is to keep the business thriving even if his family passes it on to a different family.

"My goal is to get it ready for the next 100 years," Gareth said. "That's really what I've been focusing on the last couple of years as I've thought about the 100th. I've been here 40 years. I expect to be here a while longer but you never know – so my goal now is to make it so if tomorrow is my last day, they're ready to keep going and be successful."

In honor of the restaurant hitting the century mark, Gareth and his family recently painted the front of the business, adding the years 1920 and 2020. Gareth also said the business will undergo a couple of celebratory events, one in the spring and one in the summer.

"We'll have a one-day blow-out where maybe [in honor of the] 100 years, things will cost 100 cents," Gareth said. "We have a few different things and we are going to be announcing that really soon."

Gareth said while he doesn't know the exact deals they'll offer the customers during the anniversary celebrations, he noted that when the restaurant turned 80 in 2000, it had a special where it sold burgers for 25 cents.

"So everybody that came here could get a burger for a quarter," Gareth said. "We'll do something with that type of concept."

The summer event will not only have the



A Colchester institution, Harry's Place is turning 100 this year.

good deals, but it will include additional activities, Gareth said.

Gareth said these celebratory events are the family's way of thanking customers for their loyalty.

"What I find is that the customers are the ones that make this place happen," Gareth said.

"They've really taken care of this business. They've been very loyal and this is just a little way to give something back."

Gareth said that in 1994, his family expanded the building, adding "almost triple the space."

He said that as the town was growing, the

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business and its offerings also grew and they were running out of production space, which is why the family decided to expand.

The restaurant has also expanded its menu options throughout the years.

The restaurant started with a "very small" menu, Gareth said. It mainly included burgers, hot dogs, French fries, soda and doughnuts. Those items are still available, but Gareth said his sister Suzanne Caruso became "the culinary expert" of the business. She has expanded the menu including items like lobster rolls, fried scallops and fish. Sides have also been added to the menu, including macaroni and cheese bites and deep-fried poppers, Gareth said.

While the restaurant's menu and building have experienced changes, Gareth said the front of the business has purposely been kept with its original look.

For Gareth's mother, now Romilda Gareth-Neville, being in business for 100 years brings excitement as she said working with her family has been a "wonderful" thing.

"I feel very excited and I know that many people around us also feel the excitement for 100 years," Gareth-Neville said. "There are not many businesses, restaurants in particular that last as long as we have. We have a wonderful staff; my son and my daughter have done a wonderful job over the years and we have a great customer base."

Gareth-Neville said she's close to being 80 years old and is "really happy to be here to be able to see" the 100th anniversary. She said she continues to be involved because it is a "really good business," and added, "I have my children who are wonderful and have just done most of the work over the years."

She said her role has mainly been bookkeeping and handling payroll, but added, "little by little I've been letting a lot of that go."

She said her sons and daughters "have done an amazing job," and with pride boasted that everybody in the family has been involved.

But her favorite part of the business has nothing to do with running it.

"I look forward every year to go get my first cheeseburger, that's sort of the highlight for me," Gareth-Neville said. "I look forward to that every year. I never cook hamburgers or cheeseburgers at home; I eat them at Harry's."

Gareth said his parents lived in New York before moving to Connecticut in the early 1960s. Gareth called his father an "entrepreneur."

"He was one of those guys that always had three or four jobs and when he lived in New York he sold hot dogs on the street," Gareth said. He said his father learned Harry's was for sale "and he came up and talked to Ruby and in no time they had a deal. Ruby was ready to retire."

Gareth said Harry's Place was one of the dreams of his father. He was always really interested in working with his children, he said.

"We got old enough to work," Gareth said of himself and his siblings. "Generally the place is run by young people for the most part. Back in the '70s we were all between 12 and 20 years old so it was like a perfect fit."

When Gareth was asked if he thought that Colchester would be the same without Harry's Place, he said that he thinks a lot of customers feel that way.

"I feel like this is a big part of the community, not only the history of it but its central location," Gareth said. "I get that sense of connection and pride."

Gareth said he tells regular customers jokes every April 1, saying that they've sold the business and it will become a Burger King.

"I've had people get really upset and then I say April fools," Gareth said. "If we did do something like that people would be outraged I think."

He said the business is in the National Historic Registry, and it is not allowed to be teared down.

"This place will be here as long as this town is here pretty much," said Gareth.

Gareth said the businesses' inception came after Schmuckler came back from World War I and he was looking for something to do. Schmuckler decided to open up the business.

Gareth said that just about everybody in the family has been a part of Harry's Place at some point – and he's proud to be a member of that team.

He said that in the time he has been involved in the restaurant, he has felt that he's part of a team.

"I feel like a team player and I'm proud of everybody that's worked here," Gareth said. "I've been working here since 1978 and my favorite part of this job now is watching people come up to eat who I used to work [with in the past]."

He said that for him to still be at Harry's 41 years later is "awesome."

"There's so many aspects of this job I really appreciate – and I realize how fortunate and blessed my whole family is to be here and watch how the town changes and just to be a good central part of the community," he said. "It is just humbling."

Over the course of a summer, Harry's Place employs about 30 individuals. Gareth said that about three quarters of those employees come back every year. They are normally high school and college students that work at Harry's until they graduate college.

The restaurant opened for the season on March 3. Gareth said this was the earliest open-

ing they've ever had.

"Usually we open around the middle of March or late March," Gareth said.

But because of the warmer temperatures this year, he decided to open a little earlier. Harry's

Place is open every year from March through October.

Harry's Place is located at 104 Broadway St., and opens daily at 11 a.m. It can be reached at 860-537-2410.

Sachems cont. from Front Page

ban high schools in Connecticut from using Native American mascots.

The Associated Press reported in January that Democratic speaker of the House Joe Aresimowicz said state lawmakers should consider a ban on Native American-themed mascots and that he would like to see a bill introduced, have a public hearing and open the discussion.

Corliss said students did not want to wait for a law.

"We really felt that it was time," Corliss said. "We want to be inclusive of all communities."

The committee plans to send out an electronic survey to parents, students and community members about the idea, will post flyers with information about why the change is happening and may install suggestion boxes in local businesses.

"We really want to get the broader community involved," Corliss said.

There are already a few suggestions for the new mascot floating around the school.

"The social studies department is championing the RHAM Rhinos; they're going very hard for that," Corliss said. "They've worked out cheers."

Other possibilities circling through students include the Raptors, Golden Bears and Ravens.

"We're looking at a lot of alliteration," Corliss said. "I've heard RHAM Fisher Cats. RHAM Raiders is a big one too."

There has also been a call to return to the Rams, the mascot at the schools from 1957-61, Corliss said.

In 1962, Clyde Washburn, RHAM's first athletic director, had a strong interest in Native

American culture and mounted a call for a new name, Leslie said. The call was answered and in 1962 the mascot became the Sachems, a term for leader or wise individual.

"I'm certain that in 1962 it was chosen as a respectful gesture," Leslie said.

Another reason for the change is that the schools can't have a mascot dress up for games and it's difficult to write cheers based on the Sachems, Leslie and Corliss said.

"We don't have many cheers," Corliss said. "Because let's face it, that would be insensitive."

The student committee hasn't received a lot of backlash about the change from within the school, but alumni have weighed in in support of retaining the current mascot.

"They genuinely feel that it's a sign of respect," Corliss said. "We want to let them know that Native tribes don't feel this way. Changing our mascot doesn't change who we are. Having a new mascot doesn't change our academic achievements, our athletic achievements, the vibrant community that we are."

She said the hope is to find a mascot that everyone "can get together behind."

The committee's goal is to have a name chosen by the May 1 education board meeting in the hope the board would approve the change in time for a new symbol to be painted on the gym floors.

In her 2020-21 capital improvement budget proposal, Law requested \$62,000 to refinish the floors in the gyms, which she said have never been completely sanded and re-varnished.

If the funds are approved, the refinishing projects would be completed over the summer.

East Hampton School Board Scraps Field Trips, Spring Musical

by Jack Lakowsky

East Hampton's Board of Education unanimously voted to cancel all out-of-state field trips and the spring musical as precautions against the spread of the coronavirus, COVID – 19.

Two field trips, the high school music department's trip to a Virginia Beach festival and the middle school's world language trip to Montreal were cancelled at the board's Monday meeting.

The Belltown Drama Club's performance of Disney's *The Little Mermaid* was postponed indefinitely on Tuesday. The club, which is composed of high and middle school students, was to perform the musical next weekend.

Superintendent of Schools Paul Smith recommended the cancellations.

"I think it's prudent to cancel all out-of-state trips for the remainder of the year," Smith said in the meeting. "Unfortunately, there may be a loss of [parent] funds."

Smith cited the state's advisement against gatherings of more than 100 people and out-of-state travel as reasons.

Smith said upcoming in-school and in-state events will be handled on a case-by-case basis, with individual factors like expected attendance numbers, venue and location taken into consideration. Events scheduled from now through April 20 will be considered for postponement.

Refunding money paid to the schools by parents and students to attend the trips will be difficult, according to school officials.

The world language department field trip to Montreal was intended to give students cultural and linguistic exposure, as French is widely spoken in Canada's largest city.

"Given these extraordinary circumstances, we hope for some kind of recourse," East Hampton Middle School Principal Jason Lehman said in the meeting.

Middle school parents and guardians paid for the April Montreal trip in three installments totaling \$515. Lehman said he found vague language related to refunds on the website of the third-party vendor through which the middle

school bought trip tickets, but that specific information is still needed.

Lehman said he will contact the third-party vendor and try to negotiate a deal for at least partial refunds or some other recourse.

Lehman and Smith both expressed their worry about students traveling internationally amid the coronavirus epidemic, especially if dozens of eighth-graders end up stranded in a foreign country for an indeterminate amount of time.

East Hampton High School Principal Eric Verner explained that the high school music department's April trip to a Virginia Beach music festival cost \$761 per person. He said the third-party vendor for that trip offers a refund of \$364. He added that he will try to secure more substantial refunds given the extreme situation.

"Some funds are unavailable," Verner said.

Verner said the Virginia trip would have involved thousands of students traveling-and gathering together – from more than a dozen states

Verner said he has been in touch with schools along the state's shoreline, many of which have cancelled any and all of their out-state field trips.

Smith said he has been in touch with the Chatham Health District, local and state officials including the Connecticut Department of Public Health and the State Department of Education to stay updated on coronavirus developments.

"The governor's plan is to do more, sooner," Smith said, explaining the updates he's received from Gov. Ned Lamont.

As of Wednesday, state mitigation efforts include: the cancellation of the St. Patrick's Day parades in both Hartford and New Haven; forbidding state employees from interstate travel and; discouraging – but not prohibiting – gatherings of 100 or more people.

On Tuesday, the Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference cancelled its winter

tournament of games due to coronavirus. East Hampton schools posted on Facebook expressing their disappointment over the cancellation of the tournament, as EHHS boys' and girls' basketball teams were slated to play.

Smith wrote in a letter to the East Hampton community that administrators, teachers and staff of Belltown schools continue to be in a state of "active preparation" for any possible regional coronavirus concerns.

"In no way are we trying to heighten concerns of spread fear among our students and families," Smith wrote.

Smith wrote a list of possible reasons that would cause school closure.

Reasons include any medically-confirmed cases of the virus identified in any of East Hampton's public schools, authorities recommending or mandating closure due to coronavirus presence or if officials decide preemptive closure is necessary to contain the spread of the virus.

Smith wrote in the letter that teachers will spend part of today's professional development day preparing course or grade level plans for instruction continuity at home in the case of a possible shutdown of schools.

Smith said in the meeting that distance learning would be more challenging for younger learners.

The Little Mermaid Postponed

On Tuesday evening, Smith postponed the middle and high school's production of Disney's *The Little Mermaid* indefinitely.

Smith said in a statement that he is "very disappointed" to postpone the event, but that the schools will be following the state Department of Education's and state Department of Public Health's recommendations not to host any public events where more than 100 people will be present.

Smith said officials do not believe there is any local risk present, but that afternoon and evening events attracting people from outside the community, thereby increasing local risk to

exposure, will be evaluated to either be scaled back or postponed.

The district's principals will be contacting families on the status of events taking place from now through April 20, which is the first scheduled day back after April vacation. Smith added that only events up through this date will be considered for postponement.

Rachel Mansfield, director of the show and a social studies and drama teacher at EHHS, said she and Smith met with students in person to answer any question related to the cancellations of the coronavirus epidemic in general.

"It was very informative," Mansfield said. "Everyone walked away with the realization that this for their health and safety."

Mansfield said she and Smith hope to perform the show in May, but this presents difficulties, she said. Mansfield explained that restaging the show in the spring means scheduling around athletics like tennis and track and final exams. She said this is true for the drama club's team of volunteers, who may have further commitments.

A potential blow to the club, Mansfield would be if the money raised to produce the show was lost, an amount totaling around \$10,000, according to Mansfield.

The drama club is self-funded and raises money through ticket sales and fundraisers.

Mansfield said Music Theatre International, the company that owns the rights to the script of the theatrical adaptation, released a statement saying they have hired additional staff to assist customers in extending performance dates.

"They're really working with us," Mansfield said.

"[Tuesday] was a horrible day," Mansfield said, citing the field trip and CIAC cancellations. "It wasn't good, but we're rebounding. I was almost in tears. This has never happened before, but I'm so proud of all their amazing work."

Mansfield said those who had bought advanced tickets have already received refunds.

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Collins Announces Bid for State House

by Sloan Brewster

John Collins of Hebron has announced he is running for the 55th district seat in the House of Representatives.

The district covers Andover, Bolton, Hebron, and Marlborough. It currently is represented by Republican Robin Green.

Collins, a Democrat, said Tuesday he wants to be a spokesperson for the towns and bring more state money back to the district.

"We pay a lot in taxes – the four towns in the 55th – just statistically we paid \$55 million in taxes last year and we're a middle-class community," he said. "We got back about \$17 million. I'm saying what we need right now is somebody to be vocal in the legislature so that we get more back from the state so we can reduce property taxes."

Property taxes are not the ideal way for communities to fund services, he said. Bringing in more state funds will give the towns diverse ways to fund those services.

In addition, as more state funds come to the towns and taxes are reduced, that in turn, will bring on balanced economic growth and attract more businesses.

Collins, 61, who has been a member of the Board of Selectmen for about two and a half years, said in his first term he was vocal about reducing taxes in Hebron.

"We were able to keep it neutral," he said. "Last year we were among about 28 towns out of 169 that reduced taxes."

He called himself a leader in the effort and said he wants to bring that experience to the state House of Representatives.

"This year we're looking for more shared services between the towns and sister towns," he said. "I'm concerned that we are taxing ourselves out of having our children and grandchildren able to live here."

Collins, who is a soil scientist with a background in environmental risk assessment and remediation, also said he wants to share his understanding of the importance of clearing lead from water with folks at the capitol.

Hebron is paying Nutmeg Companies \$907,600, of Norwich, to replace lead-laced pipes at Hebron Elementary School.

The source of the lead, which was first discovered in November 2016, is believed to be solder used in piping in the wing of the school that was built in 1963, former schools superintendent Timothy Van Tassel has said. There was no lead problem in pipes in the wings added in 1988 and 2000, when the solder was no longer used.

"I was a leader in removing the lead-infested pipes at Hebron Elementary and flushing at Gilead Hill," he said. "If I do anything, I hope that every school in Connecticut that was built before 2000 is flushing."

He said flushing pipes takes 20 minutes and eliminates lead, which can cause neurological damage.

Another big item on Collins' list is climate

change and he mentioned Hebron's track record of brining solar power and energy efficiency to town buildings.

"Being who I am I think we should be doing more about climate change at every level," he said. "Climate change is important; I want to be a spokesman."

He also added that he believes in equal pay for equal work and said fairness in society is important and that people should be paid what they're worth.

Collins was born in Manchester and raised East Glastonbury. He received a Bachelor of Science in soil sciences from McGill University in Montreal.

After college he joined the Peace Corps and from 1980-82 was stationed in Nepal.

After he returned home, he received a Master of Science in soil sciences from the University of Connecticut and a PhD in soil chemistry from the University of California at Riverside.

He has been married to his wife Nancy Collins for 31 years. They have two sons.

He has worked in environmental risk assessment and owned multiple local businesses.

Currently he has 10 patents in remediation technologies and owns a real estate rental company.

Hebron's Democratic Town Committee Chairman Tiffany Thiele said the committee was "delighted" Collins had stepped for-



John Collins

ward to run for the seat.

"We know he'll work extremely hard and focus on the issues that are most important to the voters of this district," she said. "We are ready and prepared to work hard in the upcoming election; truly, one of the most consequential in our lifetimes."

Collins can be reached at 860-549-3273.



Petzold's Marine Center will celebrate 75 years of business with an open house running March 21 and 22. From upper left are Bob Petzold, Ken Petzold, their father Bill Petzold, Jr. and the incoming generation of Petzolds, Heather Petzold and Dominic Valente.



Petzold's Celebrates 75 Years in Portland

by Jack Lakowsky

Petzold's Marine Center on Indian Hill Avenue in Portland will celebrate 75 years of business with an open house running March 21 and 22, an event that co-owner's Bob and Ken Petzold said the business has hosted since the 1970s.

Open houses on both days will run from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

"It's an opportunity to see boats and buy supplies," Bob Petzold said. "There's going to be food trucks; it's a real boat show."

Ken Petzold said a knowledgeable group of people representing Petzold's suppliers will attend to answer any questions from customers and boating enthusiasts.

Petzold's open house and boat show will feature boats from Sabre, Back Cove, Regal, Edgewater, Sylvan and Sea Fox, as well as pre-owned vessels. Boats will be showcased in Petzold's 14,000-sq.-ft. heated showroom.

Petzold's massive boat show represents the company's exponential growth since its founding in 1945 by Bill Sr. and Agnes Petzold, grandparents to Bob and Ken.

Agnes Petzold worked as a teacher and Bill Sr. worked at Pratt & Whitney before becoming business owners. Bill began fixing and selling outboard boat motors, while Agnes handled administrative and business affairs.

"She was the brain and he was the brawn," Bob Petzold said of his grandparents. Bob and Ken Petzold are the third generation of their family to co-own the business. "It all started out of their basement."

Some of the money earned by Bill Sr. and Agnes through their full-time jobs and their business was spent on an old chicken coop,

which they refurbished to make into their first building on Route 66. As business increased, so did the size of the boats serviced by the founding Petzold's. In 1959, Bill Sr. and Agnes purchased a seven-acre lot that was once the Gildersleeve Shipyard.

Upon their retirement, Bill Sr. and Agnes turned the business over to their son, Bill Jr., daughter, Elaine Cote and son-in-law, Richard Cote.

In 1966, the company moved to its current Connecticut riverfront location. This was also the year the Petzold's discontinued outboard sales and service and began focusing on ship storage and supply sales.

"They knew we needed to be on the water," Bob Petzold said.

Under the leadership of Bill Jr. and the Cotes, the marine center grew and expanded, adding their massive showroom and additional storage, as well as travel lifts that can haul up to 55-ton's 70 feet high.

Petzold's can store up to 350 boats. Storing and maintaining these boats keeps the company busy in the winter months, as well as boat shows across the country, including the Hartford Boat Show and events in New York, Miami and Palm Beach.

In the 1990s, upon the semi-retirement of their parents, Bob and Ken Petzold took over the business as third-generation owners. The fourth generation of Petzold's can currently be seen working alongside their fathers in the company that they will likely see reach 100 years of service to Portland.

"We were born into it," Ken Petzold said.

Petzold's also operates two additional sales

centers – one in Norwalk and the other in Wakefield, R.I.

"We didn't grow all at once," Bob Petzold said. "We went as the economy allowed."

Bob and Ken Petzold attribute their valuing of systematic growth to business ethics instilled into them by their grandmother Agnes.

Petzold's also offers service beyond sales, including repairs, storage and maintenance.

"My father always wanted this to be a one-stop-shop," Bob Petzold said.

The Petzold brothers said they attribute the pride in their service and their numerous awards to their staff, saying they employ multi-skilled people who can help customers with any needs, from structural maintenance to servicing of a boat's electronic navigating systems.

"We have a very good crew who can use a tool box and a computer," Ken Petzold said. "They're jacks-of-all-trades."

The brothers went on to say that their skilled workers, their waterfront location, their knowledge and their variety of services are what set them apart and has allowed them to run a successful boating business 30 miles upriver from the ocean.

"We're an example of 'Build it and they will come,'" Bob Petzold said.

The Petzolds maintain a strong presence in the Portland community-at-large, believing in giving back to the town that has homed their business for so long. This community service, they said, is key to running a successful small business.

"You can't just take. If you're a business in a community you can't just be on the sidelines,"

Bob Petzold, who has served as Portland's fire chief and served on several town committees. Currently, he serves as chairman of the Brownfield Redevelopment Focus Group. In this role he will facilitate the introduction of new businesses and help Portland continue to prosper.

The company has also donated generously to the community throughout its history, with employees volunteering themselves to Portland's schools and youth sports, the local food bank and the Agricultural Fair.

The Petzolds said Portland's town government has had an important role in their success.

The Petzolds' service goes beyond Portland's borders. The brothers, along with the Connecticut Marine Trades Association, -which their grandfather helped found- successfully lobbied the state legislature to reduce sales tax on boats in the state from the standard 6.35% to less than 3%.

"We were able to prove that we collected more in sales tax at the lower rate," Ken Petzold said. "That's been tremendous for sales. We were able to hire more people, too."

Earlier this month, Petzold's was honored by the Middlesex County Chamber of Commerce for the marine center's 75th anniversary. Mary Dickerson, Portland Economic Development coordinator presented Petzold's with a Business Excellence Award on behalf of the Portland Economic Development Commission.

Petzold's was recognized as Portland's Business of the Year in 2016. They also received a citation from the Connecticut State Legislature.

New School Resource Officer in Hebron

by Sloan Brewster

Hebron Public Schools has a new school resource officer.

Monday, Thomas Regan, 48, of Wethersfield, started in the position. With two and a half decades of police work in Wethersfield behind him, Regan said he was looking for a new challenge. When he learned Hebron was looking for a school resource officer (SRO) it was as if it was meant to be.

“After 25 years here it’s definitely time to start to move on and to have an opportunity like this be presented to me, it almost seems too good to be true,” he said in a phone call last week.

Folks in town were nearly as enthused that Regan took the job as he was about getting it.

Monday, Board of Education Chair Heather Petit said Regan was an excellent match and fulfilled all the requirements the board was seeking.

“We’re very excited to have him here,” she said. “I think all the kids will be excited to meet him.”

Petit added that she was pleased Regan would be able to teach the children.

According to the SRO job description drafted by Tierney and former interim superintendent of schools Lynne Pierson and approved by selectmen in October, the SRO can implement lessons on a list of topics including stranger

danger, internet safety, alcohol and drug prevention, violence diffusion, stress management and building self-esteem.

In a phone call last Wednesday, March 4, Regan said he weaves themes of community, empathy, self-esteem and self-worth into conversations, imparting the value of citizenship, doing things for neighbors and recognizing that everyone is good at something.

Though he will work primarily in the schools, Regan is actually an employee of the town and was hired by Town Manager Andrew Tierney, who doubles as chief of police.

Based on his availability, Regan will occasionally work special duty for the town, Tierney said.

“We’re glad to have him aboard,” Tierney said Monday.

Last year after several discussions and a public hearing, the education board decided police presence was in order in the schools and brought the notion to selectmen. After months of back and forth discussions, in June selectmen decided to hire two part-time SROs for each of the two schools in the district but according to Tierney that plan didn’t produce any candidates.

The search was “grueling” and it became clear four was too many, he said.

“We finally agreed with one full timer,” he said. “It produced a well-rounded candidate.”

In December, Regan was offered the position,

In February, he accepted via email, thanking Tierney for his patience as it had taken “weeks of wrangling” before the town of Wethersfield would agree to a waiver he had requested.

“I am good to go for Monday, March 9th, 2020,” he wrote.

Regan was selected by a panel that included Pierson, Gilead Hill School Principal Katie Uriano, Hebron Elementary School Principal Michael Larkin, a police officer and a former officer, Tierney said.

Tierney and Petit pointed to Regan’s background as an SRO in Wethersfield and passion in explanation of why he was such a good fit.

“He has such a background with kids,” Petit said. “I think he’ll be able to build that relationship between student and law enforcement.”

Over the course of his career in Wethersfield, Regan, who most recently was the sergeant in command of the Patrol Division, has served in several capacities, including as SRO. He was also the schools’ dare officer and a youth services detective.

“One of my fondest memories was when I was working out of Wethersfield as SRO,” he said. “To be able to do all three at once was extremely rewarding.”

The fact that an SRO is new to Hebron

schools makes the job that much more attractive to Regan.

“I like to do something from the ground up,” he said. “I was the first SRO at Wethersfield High School. I’ll be the first SRO in Hebron Public Schools.”

Regan said he realized he was good with kids when he was about 23 and was working with Wethersfield’s cadet program and youth-based community opportunities.

“I found that I had a knack for relating to young people,” he said. “I enjoy the interaction and I enjoy the impact you can have on someone. I see too many kids try to pigeon hole themselves because they think they’re not good enough.”

Last Wednesday, as he was wrapping up his last day on the job in Wethersfield, Regan said as a sergeant he has been a supervisor and mentor to a lot of people and folks had been stopping by to say he would be missed.

Regan said he also coaches hockey for his sons’ teams and that his children help keep him current in the changing landscape.

“They’re kind of my boots on the ground in terms of what’s current in terms of kids,” he said.

Petit said the board was hoping to plan a time when parents and children could come out and meet Regan.

Hebron Maple Fest Postponed Amid Coronavirus Concerns

by Sloan Brewster

The coronavirus has led to a slew of event postponements and cancellations across the state and nation – and Hebron is no different, as the popular annual Maple Festival was indefinitely postponed on Thursday.

The two-day festival had been planned for next weekend, March 21 and 22. A make-up date for the event had yet to be determined as of press time Thursday.

COVID-19 is an outbreak of respiratory disease caused by coronavirus that was first identified in the city of Wuhan, China in January and has since spread globally, including to the United States, Vickie Han, a Public Health nurse at Chatham Health said last week in a presentation at the East Hampton Public Library.

Tierney said he made the decision to postpone the merriment in conjunction with the Chatham Health District, the state of Connecticut and the town.

It’s about preventing community transmission, Russel Melmed, director of Chatham Health District, said.

“This is what I’ll call the paradox of prevention, it is measuring what isn’t there and quantifying that and taking action,” he said. “The time to act is now.”

Melmed said the decision to cancel the event was in keeping with Gov. Ned Lamont’s recommendations on mass gatherings.

Earlier this week, the governor recommended that people avoid gatherings of more than 100.

Large gatherings of hundreds and thousands of people could lead to the spread of a dangerous virus such as COVID-19, Melmed said. Taking action before the spread of the virus is about noting where other states have failed to act and learning from that.

“If we don’t learn the lessons from our other state partners and other partners, then we’re falling down in our leadership roles,” he said. “What we’re looking at is a fairly significant event in all of our lives. We need to take these steps early to prevent the sustained widespread emergency as long as possible.”

Tierney expressed disappointment about the decision.

“We had 150 vendors, good weather; this was going to be the bomb,” he said.

This year, the plan was to return the festival to its roots and bring in more local vendors.

In January, Tierney said the town and Windham Chamber of Commerce, which organizes the annual festival, would be reaching out to local entities to spike up local involvement.

“Last year we had a very successful Maple Fest but some of the comments afterward were that it seemed to be more commercialized and that it didn’t seem to be as much of a Hebron event,” Tierney said then.

To combat that issue, the plan was to try to get more civic organizations and nonprofits involved and “make it more of a Hebron Maple Fest,” Tierney said.

That endeavor was a success, he said, and additional town entities had come onboard, including local churches, the senior center and more town departments.

“Everything made this year a banner year,” he said. “This is an unfortunate thing, cancelling this event – but it’s the right thing to do.”

When the *Rivereast* broke the news about the postponement to Ron Wenzel, owner of the Wenzel Sugar House, he was relieved.

“That’s perfect,” he said. “Postponement is better than cancellation, no question about it.”

It’s not the first time the fest was delayed, Wenzel said. One year it was rescheduled because of snow.

Despite the cancellation, Wenzel said his sugarhouse and Woody Acres would remain open next weekend and that folks could still stop by.

This year’s syrup is better than ever, he said.

The mild winter meant sap was ready earlier than usual and the season ended early, he said. Normally, the season begins in late February and ends in April.

While he could have put taps in the trees in January, Wenzel said he waited a little longer and put them in on Valentine’s Day. The March

9 end of the season was marked by sap that appeared cloudy and undrinkable.

“When they collect sap and it’s cloudy, it’s time to stop,” he said. “If I won’t drink it why would I boil it?”

Melmed advised folks to “take very basic precautions” to avoid the spread of COVID-19, including washing hands for 20 seconds with warm water and soap and avoid touching their faces.

“Stop shaking hands,” he added. “Do an elbow bump.”

He recommends that anyone who can stay home from work if they are sick to do so, though “that doesn’t work for everyone,” he said, pointing out that not all workers have sick leave.

“If people can stay home when they’re sick they should,” he reiterated.

Anyone caring for a sick loved one at home should keep that person separate from others whenever possible, including with a separate bathroom, Melmed said. Folks should clean and disinfect their homes, especially when there is someone sick there.

People should only to the emergency room if there is an actual emergency, Melmed added. They should go see their health provider if they think they have COVID-19 and not go to the emergency room.

“Do not rush to the hospital to get tested for COVID-19,” he said.

East Hampton Police News

2/29: Tania Robles, 45, of 29 Watrous St., was issued a summons for failure to obey a stop sign and operating an unregistered and uninsured motor vehicle, East Hampton Police said.

3/1: Lynn Salowitz, 66, of 125 Tartia Rd., East Hampton was arrested and charged with driving under the influence and failure to drive right, police said.

3/5: John Grimshaw, 54, of 26 N. Main St., turned himself in pursuant to an active warrant and was charged with possession of narcotics and possession of drug paraphernalia, police said.

Also, from Feb. 24-March 1, officers responded to 13 medical calls, three motor vehicle crashes and 14 alarms, and made 20 traffic stops, police said.

Portland Police News

2/8: John Ferrara, 49, of Prospect, was charged with disorderly conduct, third-degree strangulation, operating motor vehicle under suspension and possession of drug paraphernalia, Portland Police said.

2/14: Tonyaue Davis, 19, of 356 Main St., was charged with misuse of registration and possession of marijuana, police said.

2/15: Michael Birner, 55, of Weatogue, was charged with criminal violation of protective order, police said.

2/27: Donald Smith, 32, of Harrisville, RI, was charged with sixth-degree larceny, police said.

3/5: Steven Santill, 50, of Newington, was charged with offering home improvement w/o current certification, police said.

Hebron Police News

3/6: State Police said Samuel Biase Deleo, 23, of 99 Attawanhood Trl., Amston, was arrested and charged with operating under the influence, failure to drive upon the right, drug paraphernalia and possession of controlled substance.

Colchester Police News

3/6: State Police said Mathew William Deason, 25, of Stafford Springs, was arrested and charged with violation of probation.

Tierney Gets Praise, Raise from Hebron Selectmen

by Sloan Brewster

Once again, Andrew Tierney has received glowing accolades in his annual evaluation – as well as a raise.

Last Wednesday, March 4, the Board of Selectmen invited Tierney into an executive session to give him his review and, according to Board of Selectmen Chairman Daniel Larson and Vice Chairman Gail Richmond, he has done a great job in the past year.

Richmond, in a phone call last Saturday, said the board was pleased that Hebron has had the same town manager for 10 years, two of which he was the interim town manager.

For the 15 years prior to taking the position as town manager, Tierney was director of public works, bringing his total years of service to the town to 25.

“Basically, he got an excellent review,” Richmond said. “I think that continuity of one person makes a big difference.”

Based on the review, the board gave Tierney a 3% raise with a one-time \$1,000 bonus, Richmond said.

Larson said that Tierney has shown exemplary service to the town and complained that Hebron’s schools superintendent makes more than the town manager.

“[Andy] is highly-respected by mostly all of the surrounding towns; he’s an incredible town manager,” Larson said. “What’s sad is he oversees an entire town and gets what he gets, yet we have a superintendent who oversees a fraction of the town and yet gets so much more. It’s hard to fathom the difference.”

This year’s raise brings Tierney’s salary to \$135,287, Finance Director Elaine Griffin said. By comparison, Superintendent of Schools Thomas Baird makes \$170,000.

As evidence of Tierney’s commitment to economic development, Larson and Richmond pointed to Toomey’s Crossing, a mixed-use development under construction in the town center behind the Douglas Library.

“He seems to find more businesses to come to town,” Larson said.

An office building that’s up is the first in the series planned for the development, according to Roderic “Mac” McCarrison, of McCarrison D.W. Fish Real Estate, a partner in SYM, LLC – the project’s developer. The project will include several new buildings and incorporate a historic house and barn on the property.

Larson said he is looking forward to when the building is occupied – possibly by mid to late spring or early summer – and to the business bringing tax revenue and job opportunities to town and at the same time drawing more traffic to established businesses in the area.

Tierney, in a phone call Monday, said he had heard the building was under contract.

Larson gave Tierney kudos for the \$7.6 million sewer upgrade project passed at referendum last November.

“That was a tremendous undertaking,” Larson said. “Hebron continues to be a leader amongst communities.”

Larson also extended praise to Griffin for her part in the effort

The \$10 million bonding package also included \$2.4 million for roads and parking lot improvements at local schools, Tierney said. The sewer project will begin this spring.

“[Andy] has shown exemplary work for the town and I don’t think there’s anybody that can say he doesn’t have the best interests in the town,” Larson said.

Water, Sewer Price Hikes Proposed in Portland

by Jack Lakowsky

The Portland Water and Sewer Commission proposed raises in water and sewage usage rates in a Board of Selectmen meeting held March 4.

Selectman and chairman of the Water and Sewer Commission James Tripp said the deficits in the town’s water and sewer funds are longstanding issues.

“We made some changes a couple years that really should have done some good on the water side,” Tripp said in the meeting.

Tripp said these raises are in response to price increases enacted by the Metropolitan District Commission (MDC), the group that sets water prices in the Greater Hartford region. Tripp said the extreme price increases were not anticipated.

Portland’s current water usage rate is \$4.90 per ccf (one ccf is about 748 gallons). The commission proposed two raises of 4.25%, once in July of this year and another in April of 2021.

Portland’s current sewage usage rate is \$6.55 per ccf. The commission proposed two increases of 3.5% to follow the same schedule as the water price increases.

Additional proposed changes to the sewer rates are as follows; a flat rate fee of \$40 per quarter, per customer, effective through July 1, which will then be adjusted to a flat fee of \$45 per quarter, per customer effective April 1 and; an increase in septic waste receiving fees from its current total of \$85 to \$100, also effective July 1.

According to Tripp, these hikes are to help close the \$55,000 deficit in water funds and the \$90,000 deficit in sewer funds.

Shea said the prices increases are to close these deficits and balance the town’s budget.

At the end of 2019, the MDC raised the water rate to customers by 13.5%. The MDC budget also called for adding an extra dollar to sewer rates, rising to \$7 per month from \$6.

Since 2017, MDC has raised rates by roughly 25 percent, which has been met with outcry.

Tripp said these increases have created a lot of havoc in the cost to public works of importing Portland’s water.

The MDC said in December they increased prices to make up for revenue lost from people being more conscientious about water use.

Tripp said Portland’s contract with MDC expires in six years. In the time between now and then, Tripp and other officials will explore alternative means of bringing water to Portland.

The selectmen scheduled a public hearing on this matter for Wednesday, March 18 at the Waverly Senior Center.

In an interview following the selectmen, Shea said MDC plans to continue raising its water prices by at least 10% per year for the foreseeable future.

“That worried us,” Shea said. “It’s not what we’re used to.”

Before the dramatic MDC price hikes, Portland wouldn’t plan for increases for more than 5 percent.

Shea said MDC will be holding firm to these price increases, despite public backlash.

Shea said, when the town’s debt is paid, he and other officials will take a look at other vendors. He added that MDC does provide good water and offer good service.

“We’re locked in,” Shea said. “There’s no choice until our contract comes up for renewal. In a nutshell, we’re balancing ourselves with users in mind.”

Colchester Trail to be Closed for Fuel Cell Construction

by Karla Santos

According to Bloom Energy representatives, Colchester’s part of the Air Line Trail will be closed for approximately six weeks to allow the company to start the construction of its 10-megawatt fuel cell.

Information about the project was provided in a question and answer forum last week at Colchester’s town hall.

Three Bloom Energy representatives were on board at the meeting to interact with town residents and answer their questions and concerns regarding the project.

They said that the Air Line Trail could be closed for more or less than six weeks starting at the end of March and hoping to have it re-open while it’s still spring. Bloom representatives said they will prioritize the trail, but the total construction duration for the project is expected to be around 21 weeks. They said their hope is to have the fuel cell powered up before the end of September.

Bloom Energy’s Kolin Loveless, Paul Evan and Justin Adams also provided background information about the company and the type of fuel cells it normally builds.

The construction of the fuel cell will include a three-foot gas line and a five-foot water line.

One of the concerns residents expressed at the meeting was safety and vandalism. Bloom representatives said the site will be fenced and locked to avoid any kind of vandalism.

They said the fuel cell itself can detect if something is wrong, if damage was ever to happen to its units.

Bloom independently operates and monitors

the systems 24 hours a day, seven days a week from their locations in India and in San Jose, Calif. The goal is to ensure the fuel cells are monitored to avoid any kind of issues.

Bloom representatives said the company’s fuel cells have operated through hurricanes, wild fires and earth quakes.

During the meeting, they also presented a video of the sciences and chemical reactions that occur in the fuel cells.

According to the video, Bloom’s energy servers convert fuel into electricity through an electrochemical process without combustion.

Some of Bloom’s fuel cells consist of three main parts, an electrolyte, an anode electrode and a cathode electrode, the video explained. An electrolyte is what the electrical ions move through in a fuel cell. The anode and cathode are made from special inks. The anode, which is a negative electrode and the cathode, which is a positive electrode sandwich around the electrolyte to undergo an electrochemical reaction to produce an electric energy. The video also explains that Bloom’s processes produce energy that is “clean, reliable and affordable.” In addition, Bloom’s energy server is a stationary power generation platform “built for the digital age and capable of delivering highly reliable, uninterrupted always on power that is also clean and sustainable.”

The fuel cells also undergo periodical maintenance to ensure efficiency. Bloom representatives said that some of that efficiency also depends on the quality of the natural gas, which gets filtered by Bloom Energy.

The individual power modules of the fuel cell are also replaced periodically throughout the contract. That replacement process could take up to 24 hours.

Bloom has 350 megawatts of energy in 600 sites country-wide. Cells in Hartford and at Connecticut College are some of the locations of Bloom Energy fuel cells in Connecticut.

First Selectman Mary Bylone spoke during the presentation and said the town is excited to have the project going for a number of reasons. She said natural gas is one of those reasons and she is looking to explore the option of using natural gas for heating at the town hall building and schools.

“It also allows us to be able to attract some small to medium manufacturing [businesses] looking for another source besides electric as a way for them to be able to produce energy within their business,” Bylone said.

Bylone also said that the town will upgrade the Air Line Trail spur.

“When we put it back it’s going to look better than it looks right now,” she said.

Another benefit of the project is the money the town will appreciate in tax money, which is more than \$455,000 a year for 20 years.

“It’s going to enable us to do some things that we’ve been putting off,” Bylone said. “There are just lots of really positive things about this and as far as the fuel cells go we have had some businesses that have talked to us about the opportunity of putting in small fuel cells where there are existing businesses.”

In addition, Bylone said that Eversource’s

next area for installing the gas lines is in Route 16 towards Middletown.

“You can imagine there are already some businesses along that line but there’s also some ground out there for opportunities of development so that part is very exciting,” Bylone said. “Eversource has talked to us about renewable energy sources which would be methane captured. It’s lots of things happening and this is part of it so we are really excited to have you here in the town.”

The fuel cell will be built at 160 Old Amston Rd., a 13-acre parcel owned by Eversource. Bloom Energy will lease the land for 20 years. Previous *Rivereast* reports explained that the energy generated by the fuel cell is not intended for any particular property owner and will be sold back to Eversource for use on the grid.

The 10-megawatt fuel cell is expected to bring to town a total of \$9.11 million in personal property taxes.

Bloom requested that the town take the estimated \$9.11 million that they would pay over the 20 years and stabilize that amount into 20 equal annual tax bills of \$455,535.36. That tax stabilization agreement was approved last fall.

The gas lines that are being installed as the result of the project will go from the Salem town line to the project’s location. Those gas lines are also taxable as personal property and will bring additional revenue to town, but it is unknown exactly how much.

Previous *Rivereast* reports also said that the “personal property costs” of the fuel cell project are estimated to be \$35 million.

Traversa Expresses Concerns with Marlborough Budget Process

by Karla Santos

Last week at a special Board of Selectmen meeting, selectman Amy Traversa expressed concern over the town budget and said she wasn't comfortable with the process that was used.

"I am disappointed in the process for preparing the budget this year," Traversa told the *Rivereast* this week. "The town operations and capital budgets were presented without backup documentation immediately prior to each of the two special meetings that lasted a combined total of 1 hour and 45 minutes."

In addition, Traversa is concerned because selectman Joe Asklar did not attend either of the two meetings.

"The full board has not discussed the operations or capital budgets, nor was there a vote to recommend this budget to the Board of Finance," she said. "Presenting this year's budget to the Board of Finance without discussion by, and without the recommendation of the Board of Selectmen, sets a bad precedent."

She said she hopes the Charter Revision Commission clarifies the requirements for the budget process, and that that "the first selectman will support a more interactive collaboration in preparing future budgets," Traversa added.

First Selectman Greg Lowrey said that as part

of his budget preparation process he conducted a series of budget planning meetings with department heads and the assistant finance director.

In addition, he said the Board of Selectmen then held two special meetings related to the budget with the first one discussing the operations budget and the second one discussing capital and debt.

"Each of the meetings were noticed with agenda, open to the public and documented with minutes," Lowrey said. "The assistant finance director and I then reached out to department heads again for further discussion regarding prioritization of department requests, such as vehicles for fire department and public works as well as aligning fire marshal compensation adjustment with the same percentage, 1.75% increase, used for most employees outside of collective bargaining and smaller capital requests."

Lowrey said that at the Board of Selectmen meeting prior to the presentation, members of the Board of Selectmen had the opportunity to suggest further changes and no changes were suggested at that time.

"Based on the three waves of meetings and a canvass of the Board of Selectmen at the March 3 Board of Selectmen meeting, a pro-

posal was presented to the Board of Finance," Lowrey said. "We have no plans to adjust debt during FY21."

Asklar said that while he hasn't been at the recent meetings because of the extent of the injuries he received on a skiing accident, he has been involved in the budget process and has had a chance to revise it.

"I think the budget that we've put together is as best as possible," Asklar said. "All we do is make a recommendation to the Board of Finance. They basically have the final word."

He said he was able to review the budget and although he wasn't at some of the meetings, he has been in the process "ever since the very beginning."

There were two budget workshops last month, and according to the meeting minutes, he wasn't there either.

Asklar said he wasn't able to attend the budget workshops because they were not after hours and he had to be at work.

"Usually the second selectman and the third selectman those are individuals who are employed elsewhere," he said.

He said the board gathered "important" information from each of the town departments to make sure their needs were reflected on the

budget. Asklar pointed out that there is "a big difference of what we want and what we need."

"It carries a lot of weight," he said. "We want a lot of stuff but what do we really need?"

Asklar said the board continues to work on the budget and he hopes they provide the Board of Finance "with the best input that we can."

Asklar also said he is concerned about the RHAM budget because it seems to increase every year with a fewer number of students.

"I know that they have direct cost but there has to be some explanation why, if the enrollment goes down, why the budget still continues to go up," he added.

At the March 3 meeting, Traversa also expressed concern about a fundraiser that was scheduled for March 10 in benefit of the town's police department safety fund.

Traversa said that she didn't support it because if police needs something it should be included in the town budget.

"The fundraiser scheduled for today is being held at the suggestion of the local business owner," Lowrey told the *Rivereast*. "In addition to raising funds, we look forward to strengthening public relations through this outreach. Funds raised may be used for optional programs such as a bicycle safety initiative."

Colchester Farm Wineries Oppose Bill

by Karla Santos

In 1993, Gloria Priam purchased 26 acres of land and started to plant vineyards, transforming it from grazing pasture land to what today she proudly calls Priam Vineyards.

Because of the extensive process of growing grapes, producing wine and obtaining a license, it took many years for Priam to see the product of her work.

Priam went through a process of planting, producing and even giving her product away for free before she was able to sell it.

But on Feb. 18, Priam joined a number of farm winery owners from across Connecticut along with members of the Connecticut Vineyard Winery Association and local legislators to fight against Senate Bill 647, which will give wineries without a farm the same rights as farm wineries.

Senate Bill 647, "An Act Streamlining the Liquor Control Act," was signed by Governor Ned Lamont on June 4, according to the Connecticut Republicans' website. The bill enhances business rules for Connecticut breweries, wineries, hard cider producers and distilleries.

The bi-partisan supported bill was introduced by State Senator Kevin Witkos – of the eighth district, which includes Canton, Simsbury, Avon, Barkhamsted, Colebrook, Granby, Hartland, Harwinton, New Hartford, Norfolk and Torrington – at the beginning of the 2019 legislative session.

Jonathan Edwards, owner of Jonathan Edwards Winery and president of the Connecticut Vineyard Winery Association, said the group is concerned with non-farm wineries created in the bill that will have the same rights as farm wineries, but will not have to grow any fruits within the state.

Farm wineries farm, own land, have tractors and other equipment and must produce at least 25% of their products on their own farms.

"That's expensive," Edwards said. "It's expensive to pay the taxes; it's expensive to buy a farm."

It also takes years to yield a crop of grapes.

"It's a long process," Edwards said.

The part of the bill that affects farm wineries is a "big change" from years ago when Connecticut was losing a lot of farms and sought farm wineries as a viable option to preserve open space, Edwards said.

"Since then, there are over 40 wineries that sprung up all throughout the state," Edwards said. "People have invested millions and billions of their own dollars [and] decades of their lives to carving out vineyards throughout Con-

necticut."

But that process came with some special rights to incentivize farming and has worked well, Edwards said.

"We have a thriving tourism industry that moves around the state from farm winery to farm winery and now the state is basically kind of turning its back on farmers by giving the same rights to people that don't farm," he added.

Edwards said owners of Connecticut farm wineries are concerned the bill will lead to people bringing "cheap wine or juice from all over the country." If that happens those dollars would be sent out of Connecticut without an investment in Connecticut's agriculture.

The law is scheduled to go in effect into in July but the Connecticut farmers hope to "either delay it, at a minimum or get rid of it," Edwards said.

He suggested tweaking the bill so that rules, such as having to buy Connecticut fruit, are applied to non-farm wineries.

Another benefit non-farm wineries will have under the law is that they won't have to go through distributors to sell to restaurants or package stores, which Edward believes is a perk that should only be afforded to farm-wineries.

Edwards also takes issue with allowing non-farm wineries the same ability to have wine tasting rooms as farm wineries have.

"Where is the incentive to farm?" he said. "That's the huge problem. If Connecticut wants this new group of non-farmer wineries, then they should be different than us. We are not the same. We are the farmers. We have a lot of legislators that are pro-farm, pro open space, they want to help us. We have some people that don't care at all."

Priam said the bill will nullify the investment she made in land to plant her vineyard and get her license, something required by farmers but not non-farm wineries.

"I'd be better off turning it into a gravel pit or putting 40 houses on it," she said. "They have given the same rights to anyone who wants to basically open a garage and bring wine in from anywhere and slap a label on it. All the same rights that I have had to fight for, for the past 20 some years."

Legislators who support giving these benefits to non-farm wineries have devalued farm land in Connecticut, she said. She reiterated that non-farm wineries should not be granted the same rights as farm-wineries and said they should not be referred to as wineries.

Connecticut shows a lack of support for its farmland compared to other states, Priam said. She considers the bill a threat to her business and farm wineries across the state and wants legislators to change it.

In 1993, Priam purchased 26 acres of grazing pasture land originally part of a 300-acre family farm, she said. She purchased an additional 12 acres about 10 years later.

Then she prepared to grow grapes and had a research scientist analyze the land to ensure it was suitable for a vineyard.

"There has been a lot of blood and sweat that has gone into keeping this piece of property a farm," Priam said. "Between the year 2000 and 2002, we started producing wine and we couldn't sell it because we weren't licensed to sell it yet."

In those first years of wine production, the winery did charitable events, giving wine away and letting people taste it.

"People were loving it and they were ordering cases and we couldn't sell it yet," Priam said. "I had a whole client list when I finally opened in 2003."

The winery building, which opened in 2003, has a bar and wine tasting room.

In addition to doing retail sales in the tasting room, Priam distributed her product to a few local package stores and "got a lot of support locally from different businesses," she said.

About five years ago, Priam said she saw the need to expand and make room for events such as weddings on her property.

The 12 extra acres she bought included a "beautiful pasture at the top of the hill" overlooking the vineyard and valley and made for an opportunity to put up wedding tents, she said.

"The view from up there is spectacular," she said.

About three years ago, Priam added a new bar room and production space.

The business now offers a variety of public and private events including comedy nights and small concerts.

Priam was the seventh farm winery in Connecticut, she said. The state now has approximately 47.

Priam said having this discussion about farm wineries in Connecticut is "incredibly upsetting."

"It's completely depleting a business that I've put 22 to 23 years of my life into building and with the goal of saving farm land, doing something locally and benefiting people that are

around me."

A Legislator who Created the Bill Responds

Senate Bill 647 was introduced by Witkos and supported by State Representative Mike D'Agostino, of the ninth district, which covers a portion of Hamden from Whitneyville to WestWoods

Witkos said he created the bill mainly to modernize liquor laws in Connecticut since they had not been updated in a long time.

He disagreed that the bill gives the same benefits to non-farm wineries as farm wineries have.

"Farm wineries, they are actually promoted by the state of Connecticut," Witkos said. "They get to be on the wine trail passport that the state provides, so you have tourism people directed to their wineries whereas somebody who doesn't have a farm winery permit, just has a wine manufacturing permit."

In addition, Witkos said farm wineries are not "telling the whole story."

"They don't want a wine manufacturer to have a tasting room," Witkos said. "Anybody can go to a bar or restaurant and get at glass of wine. It's the same thing. People go to a winery for the ambiance and to look at what's happening."

He added that he doesn't see Senate Bill 647 as something that would harm farm wineries.

"Farm wineries, unfortunately, they are in fear that it's going to put them out of business," Witkos said. "It's not the case. We already have, and they won't acknowledge this, there are six wineries in Connecticut right now that are not farm wineries that bring grapes from outside of the state of Connecticut and make their own wine."

Witkos said farm wineries want only farm wineries in Connecticut.

"They said if you do this, than we don't want you to have a tasting room, you can just sell," Witkos said. "We are here in Connecticut to promote all kinds of businesses. Competition is good for the market."

Witkos said breweries normally don't "complain" about "any other brewery in the industry" because it brings people from their establishments and customers tend to visit different breweries on different occasions.

When Witkos was asked if he planned to make any changes to the bill, he said he didn't think there was anything wrong with it, added it may need a "couple of tweaks" or "minor changes" but those changes don't have to do with the wineries.

Obituaries

Amston

Robert J. McKay

Robert J. McKay, "Bob," 63, of South Windsor and Amston, passed from this man's earth and into God's kingdom on Tuesday, March 10, due to injuries sustained from a motorcycle accident.

Bob was predeceased by his parents, Barbara (Muldoon) McKay and Charles McKay.

Bob leaves behind his wife, Candida Stapleton McKay; his sons, Gavin Michael McKay, and Grady Daniel McKay; his stepchildren, Natalie Krebs and Benjamin Krebs; his brother, Donald "Skip" McKay and his wife Luanne and their sons Dalton, Justin, and Steven; his sister, Patti McKay; his brother, Jeff McKay; his brother, John McKay and his wife, Francine; his best friend, Dan Moore; his aunt, Maryellen Muldoon; his cousin, Mike Muldoon and his wife Jeannie; his cousin, Pam and her husband Mike; his cousin, Rick and his wife Heather.

He also leaves many other cousins, nieces, nephews, relatives, and more friends than any man could hope for. What Bob was most proud of and what made him the happiest were his sons Gavin and Grady. You could not help but smile whenever you heard him speak of them, and he spoke of them often. Bob was an active member of the Hebron Sportsman Club amongst many other organizations throughout his life. Bob was very strong in his Catholic faith and was an active member and former treasurer for the Church of the Holy Family in Hebron.

There was never any idle time in Bob's life. He was a rock for many people. Bob was very civic minded and was always involved in his community. He could never pass up an opportunity to be of service to others. Whether friend or stranger, if Bob saw someone in need, be it building a house, or helping someone less fortunate, Bob was there to help. He was kind, generous and selfless; to meet him for the first time was to have made a new friend. He will be sadly missed but remembered fondly with love.

Calling hours will be held on Sunday, March 15, from 1-3 p.m., at the Aurora-McCarthy Funeral Home, 167 Old Hartford Rd., Colchester. The memorial service will be held Monday, March 16, at 11 a.m., at the funeral home. Burial will be private. Reception to follow at Butterballs Greenleaf Café in Hebron.

In lieu of flowers, the family asks that donations be made in Robert's name to ECSU (Eastern Connecticut State University) Foundation, checks can be sent to the Development office Eastern Connecticut State University, 83 Windham St., Willimantic, CT 06226, with the memo line filled in "McKay Memorial"; or take your children out to dinner and tell them how much you love them.

For online condolences, visit auroramccarthyfuneralhome.com.

East Hampton

Gary Christensen

Gary Christensen, 77, of East Hampton, and formerly of Middletown, beloved husband of Patricia (Troiano) Christensen died Wednesday, March 4, at Middlesex Hospital. Born Dec. 1, 1942 in Ellendale, Minn., he was the son of the late Horace and Marjorie Christensen. Gary proudly served his country in the U.S. Navy during the Vietnam War.

Besides his wife, he is survived by his two sons, Michael Christensen and his wife Michelle of East Hampton, Christopher Christensen of East Hampton; a daughter, Michelle Christensen and partner Bob of Upton, Maine; two brothers, Jerome Christensen of Roxbury, Joseph Christensen and wife Diane of Minn.; a sister, Susanne Christensen of Minn.; sister-in-law, Jenny Manship and husband Dave of North Branford; his beloved grandson, Tristan; and several nieces and nephews.

A celebration of Gary's life will be held Saturday, March 21, from 1-4 p.m., at the East Hampton VFW Post on North Maple Street in East Hampton.

To leave online condolences, visit spencerfuneralhomeinc.com.



Portland

Stephen Reed Johnson

Stephen Reed Johnson, 93 of Portland, passed away Tuesday morning, March 3, in the care of Portland Care and Rehab after his final bout with pneumonia. Born in Akron, Ohio, on Oct. 31, 1926, he was the son of John T. Johnson II and Josephine (Robinson) Johnson.

His early education was at Western Reserve Academy. Upon graduation he joined the Navy attending college in Iowa and Michigan. After the war ended he completed his education at Yale graduating in the class of 1948 with a degree in mechanical engineering. He was drafted into the Army during the Korean conflict.

He went on to work as a commercial building estimator. He worked with his friend Cliff Westergren in his commercial construction business. He later worked for Dean Philips Home Inspector. He was always willing to share his knowledge helping his children with their projects and his dear friend, Jim Keser.

He's predeceased by his wife, Mary Barron Johnson. He leaves his daughter, Gail J. Landry and her husband, Jim Landry and his son Reed A. Johnson and his wife Judy Ulozas Johnson. His grandchildren Patrick M. Landry, Kayla C. Landry, Christopher and Rebecca Johnson.

He was an active member of the Portland community before he moved to Florida where he lived for 15 years. He enjoyed his associations with the Portland Exchange Club, and Warren Lodge 51. He served on the Zoning and Planning Commission, Inland Wetlands and served on various building committee. He was a member of the Republican Town Committee. He was an avid golfer.

Graveside services will be held at a later date in the Swedish Cemetery, Portland. The Portland Memorial Funeral Home, 231 Main St., Portland, is in charge of arrangements.

We would like to thank the wonderful staff at Portland Care and Rehab for their kind and caring care they took of Dad.

In lieu of flowers, donations can be made to the charity of your choice or the Humane Society.



East Hampton

Helene Allen

Helene "Vicki" Allen, 86, of Edgewater, Fla., formerly of East Hampton, passed away Tuesday March 3. She was born in New Britain to Irving and Sadie (Richman) Wachtel and grew up in Coney Island, N.Y., and Manchester.

Starting first grade at the early age of 4 years, she excelled throughout her school years. She was involved with the drama club throughout high school and after. She worked shortly in the insurance field and then spent a number of years in the financial aid dept of Wesleyan University. She was most proud of earning her CDL license and driving cross country with her husband Earl. She ended her work career at Connecticut Yankee Power Plant, making lifelong friends from her work family.

Vicki and Earl spent many years RV'ing around the country with friends and splitting their time between Florida and Connecticut. They both loved to fish and shrimp and spent as much time on their boat as they could. Vicki was a member of the Eastern Star in East Haddam. One of her greatest pleasures was baking and sharing her treats with family and friends. Her famous carrot cake will be missed by many!

Vicki was predeceased by her beloved husband of 53 years, Earl Allen. She is survived by her daughters, Susan (Dougherty) Baroni-Schaeffer (Hank) of Colchester, Cathy Sue (Allen) Moebius (Joe) of Middletown, Son Guy "Chip" Allen (Lorraine) of East Hampton; grandchildren, Sean McKinney, Kate (Baroni) Salathe, Cathleen (McKinney) Virgalla, Genna Baroni and Marshall Allen; brothers and sisters-in-law, Roger and Deanna Allen and Darlene and Steve Deuso; numerous nieces & nephews & many dear friends including her partner in crime, Lois Metz. She was predeceased by her parents and sisters, Elaine Winer and Judy Epstein.

Calling hours will be today, March 20, from 6-8 p.m., at Spencer Funeral Home, 112 Main St., East Hampton, CT 06424. Funeral will be Saturday, March 21, at 10 a.m., at Spencer's with burial following at Lake View Cemetery.

Donations in Vicki's honor may be sent to a local pet shelter of your choice.

For online condolences, go to spencerfuneralhomeinc.com.

Portland

James Thomas Cleary

James T. Cleary, 71, died Tuesday, Feb. 18, after a brief illness. He was born in South Bend, Ind., the son of the late Robert E. and Barbara F. Cleary. He attended Xavier High School and Central Connecticut State University. James enjoyed dancing, darts, playing cards, and fishing. He also was a huge fan of the New York Giants and the Red Sox.

He is survived by his son Ryan and his wife Danielle of Bristol; daughter Alison and her husband Luis J. Villanueva of Alexandria, Va.; his siblings and their spouses, Michael and Theresa Cleary of Portland; David and Candace Gray-Cleary of East Hampton, Barbara A. Cleary and David M. Hart of Salem, Mass., and Ellen (Cleary) and Philip Dube of Easthampton, Mass.

He was predeceased by his brother, Robert E. Cleary, Jr.

Funeral services are private.

Portland

Robert A. Hale

Robert A. Hale, 87, of Portland, formerly of Windsor, passed away peacefully Friday, Feb. 28, at Middlesex Hospital in Middletown with his daughter, Kimberly, and beloved beagle, Barney, by his side.

Born June 30, 1932 in Middletown, to the late Titus S. and Maryon Hastings Hale, Bob grew up in Portland where he attended Glidersleeve School and Portland High School. He graduated from The Hill School in Pottstown, Pennsylvania in 1951 and was a 1955 graduate of Colby College in Waterville, Maine, with a B.A. in government, economics and history. Bob began his career as an insurance underwriter with State Mutual Life in Worcester, Massachusetts, where he met his wife, Vienna Charles. In 1960, he joined Connecticut General, which later became CIGNA, where he progressed from underwriter to senior underwriter and ultimately to Assistant Vice President, Head of Underwriting. He was a Board Member of the Institute of Home Office Underwriters (IHO) and Chair of the IHO Education Committee.

During his years as a Windsor resident, Bob was a member of the Civitan Club and a volunteer at the Hartford Bushnell. He was an active member and generous benefactor of the First Congregational Church of Portland, where he established the Robert A. Hale Memorial Fund and played an instrumental role in the planning, funding and completion of the Memorial Garden. He was a member of the Sons of the American Revolution, an enthusiastic supporter of the UCONN women's basketball team, and an avid golfer.

Bob was predeceased by his wife of 45 years, Vienna Charles and a son, Christopher Robert. He leaves a son, Jeffrey C. Hale and his wife, Nancy, of Foothill Ranch, Calif.; two daughters, Cynthia A. Hale and her husband, Piet de Boer, of University Heights, Ohio, and Kimberly M. Hale-Riccio and her husband, Michael Riccio of Rocky Hill; five grandchildren, Heather Lynn, Emily Sage, Christopher Charles, Olivia Vienna-Lynn and Ashley Marie; numerous nieces and nephews; and his beloved beagle, Barney.

A memorial celebration was held Monday, March 9, in the First Congregational Church, 554 Main St., Portland. Burial was private in Center Cemetery, Portland.

Donations may be made to the First Congregational Church of Portland, 554 Main Street, Portland, CT 06480.

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



Colchester

Thomas P. Dombroski

Thomas P. Dombroski, 84, died Thursday, March 5, at W.W. Backus Hospital in Norwich. He was born in East Haddam May 2, 1935 to the late Peter and Katherine (Kurek) Dombroski.

Tom graduated from Nathan Hale Ray High School and served in the Connecticut National Guard. On June 14, 1958, he was united in marriage to Rosaria "Sadie" Guarnaccia at Old St. Andrew's Church. Tom, a proud member of the Teamsters, drove for UPS for 23 years, and was an avid bowler.

Tom is survived by Sadie Dombroski, his loving wife of 61 years, of Colchester and their sons Thomas S. Dombroski and his wife Sharon of Old Lyme and Robert M. Dombroski and wife Dawn of Colchester; grandchildren Georgia, Noah and Lucie Dombroski, Andrea and Hillary Goldstein; and his sister-in-law Josephine Guarnaccia.

A 10 a.m. graveside service will be held on Saturday, March 14, at New St. Andrew Cemetery, Gillette's Lane, Colchester. Donations in Tom's memory can be made to the Alzheimer's Association.

Visit belmontfh.com to leave condolences.

Belmont Funeral Home LLC has been entrusted with these arrangements.

From the Editor's Desk

Observations & Ruminations

by Mike Thompson

I think we could all use a laugh right about now.

As the coronavirus spreads throughout the country – with Connecticut’s first confirmed cases reported in the past week – people seem to be on increasing high alert. I was in France for a week late last month and noticed the spread of fear and preparation intensify as the week went on. In the U.S., in the last week or so things have really ramped up – from coast to coast.

Here in Connecticut, some schools have closed and some colleges have moved, or will soon move, their classes online. The New Haven and Hartford St. Patrick’s Day parades have been cancelled. And even in the little *Rivereast* corner of Connecticut, planned events are getting scrapped, from school plays to Easter egg hunts. There’s also the big news of the CIAC winter sports tournaments being cancelled, which I know has understandably devastated kids statewide.

Everybody is trying to protect themselves, and others, from this disease for which there is no cure. And while it’s true many who become infected with this will ultimately be okay, and will just briefly suffer flu-like symptoms, it’s also true that this has a much higher mortality rate than the standard flu. I don’t blame people for being cautious, especially when they have very young or very old in their homes.

I believe this too shall pass. I’m not sure when, but it will. I hope things don’t get worse before they get better, but I’m not optimistic – not when I look at how quickly this disease has spread in other countries, and heck even in this country. The speculation is that as more test kits get distributed across the country, the number of confirmed cases – at the moment there are an awful lot of “suspected” cases – will skyrocket.

But I don’t think this will be the pandemic to end all pandemics. I don’t think it will wipe us out. I think we’ll survive. We’ll have to be sensible and take the necessary precautions – please, people, start washing your hands more – but I think we’ll make it.

In the meantime, though, I know it’s bleak. And a good laugh may be what a lot of us need right now. I know I could sure use one.

The internet is full of “favorite jokes” lists. Anyone can put a list together. I wanted the crème de la crème, though. And I found it when I learned that *Reader’s Digest* once had eight comedy writers sit down and come up with their 10 favorite jokes of all time. And the panel that selected them included writers for such TV classics as *M*A*S*H*, *All in the Family* and *Maude*, the chief gag writer for Bob Hope, and the legendary Sid Caesar. (Okay, so I like the old-timey show-biz folks.)

Here are the jokes. You’ll find some are real groaners – but admit it, you laughed. And like I said, we could all use a laugh.

* * *

A turtle is crossing the road when he’s mugged by two snails. When the police show up, they ask him what happened. The shaken turtle replies, “I don’t know. It all happened so fast.”

* * *

A poodle and a collie are walking together when the poodle suddenly unloads on his friend. “My life is a mess,” he says. “My owner is mean, my girlfriend ran away with a schnauzer, and I’m as jittery as a cat.”

“Why don’t you go see a psychiatrist?” suggests the collie.

“I can’t,” says the poodle. “I’m not allowed

on the couch.”

* * *

A priest, a minister, and a rabbi want to see who’s best at his job. So they each go into the woods, find a bear, and attempt to convert it. Later they get together. The priest begins: “When I found the bear, I read to him from the Catechism and sprinkled him with holy water. Next week is his First Communion.”

“I found a bear by the stream,” says the minister, “and preached God’s holy word. The bear was so mesmerized that he let me baptize him.”

They both look down at the rabbi, who is lying on a gurney in a body cast. “Looking back,” he says, “maybe I shouldn’t have started with the circumcision.”

* * *

A man is walking in a graveyard when he hears the Third Symphony played backward. When it’s over, the Second Symphony starts playing, also backward, and then the First. “What’s going on?” he asks a cemetery worker.

“It’s Beethoven,” says the worker. “He’s decomposing.”

* * *

A guy spots a sign outside a house that reads “Talking Dog for Sale.” Intrigued, he walks in.

“So what have you done with your life?” he asks the dog.

“I’ve led a very full life,” says the dog. “I lived in the Alps rescuing avalanche victims. Then I served my country in Iraq. And now I spend my days reading to the residents of a retirement home.”

The guy is flabbergasted. He asks the dog’s owner, “Why on earth would you want to get rid of an incredible dog like that?”

The owner says, “Because he’s a liar! He never did any of that!”

* * *

Two hunters are out in the woods when one of them collapses. He’s not breathing and his eyes are glazed. The other guy whips out his cell phone and calls 911.

“I think my friend is dead!” he yells. “What can I do?”

The operator says, “Calm down. First, let’s make sure he’s dead.”

There’s a silence, then a shot. Back on the phone, the guy says, “OK, now what?”

* * *

Every ten years, the monks in the monastery are allowed to break their vow of silence to speak two words. Ten years go by and it’s one monk’s first chance. He thinks for a second before saying, “Food bad.”

Ten years later, he says, “Bed hard.”

It’s the big day, a decade later. He gives the head monk a long stare and says, “I quit.”

“I’m not surprised,” the head monk says. “You’ve been complaining ever since you got here.”

* * *

A ventriloquist is performing with his dummy on his lap. He’s telling a dumb-blonde joke when a young platinum-haired beauty jumps to her feet. “What gives you the right to stereotype blondes that way?” she demands. “What does hair color have to do with my worth as a human being?” Flustered, the ventriloquist begins to stammer out an apology. “You keep out of this!” she yells. “I’m talking to that little jerk on your knee!”

* * *

Okay, so a lot of them were groaners. But it got your mind off the coronavirus, right?