

**RIVEREAST****News Bulletin**

Serving Amston, Andover, Cobalt, Colchester, East Hampton, Hebron, Marlborough, Middle Haddam and Portland

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That's a Lot of Root... Jamie and JoAnn Leonard pose in front of a giant root ball from a fallen oak tree in Portland after Tropical Storm Isaias last week. It measured approximately 18 feet wide and 15 feet tall.

'Eversource Failed to Be a Teammate'

by Jack Lakowsky

Portland First Selectwoman Susan Bransfield said about 99% of Eversource customers in Portland lost power because of last Tuesday's Tropical Storm Isaias.

When Bransfield spoke to the *RiverEast* on Monday, she said the utility company expected most customers to have power by 6 p.m. On Tuesday, Bransfield said on Facebook that 22 Portland customers were still in the dark.

"Basically, Eversource failed to be a teammate," said Bransfield. "We have an extremely capable [Eversource] liaison, but the problem was the communication from Eversource management. They were not giving information to our liaison."

Bransfield said she had difficulties communicating with Eversource – both as a municipal leader, and as a ratepayer herself. In a Facebook post from the selectwoman's page, Bransfield described Eversource's response as "inadequate," a descriptor also used by Gov. Ned Lamont.

Bransfield explained that towns collaborate with Eversource to establish as restoration priorities critical infrastructure like schools, town halls, and water and sewer pumping stations. Bransfield said this prioritization plan broke down due to Eversource's poor communication.

"All of this critical infrastructure was on generator power for a significant period," said Bransfield. "This is 'Emergency Management

101.'"

This disorganization and delay caused some locals to be trapped for days in their homes by trees that blocked roads, Bransfield said. Between 15 and 20 Portland roads were totally obstructed after the storm.

According to East Hampton Town Manager David Cox, blocked roads are a significant issue for a number of reasons, including that blockages prolong response times for first responders, forcing emergency vehicles to take detours.

Bransfield said she was especially concerned because she knows of residents who need to use at-home electrical medical equipment.

Bransfield said it is important to note that the necessary resources for efficient restoration do exist, and that she recognizes the skills and sacrifices of both town and Eversource crews. She explained what caused such unacceptable delays was the lack of coordination Eversource had with town leaders.

Normally, Bransfield said, municipal leaders will coordinate emergency responses with Eversource's emergency dispatch. Eversource will perform specialist work, like clearing and deactivating fallen wires – which should always be assumed to be live. Then, town crews clear brush and debris from roads. Third, Eversource crews will then restore any lost power. Brans

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Aruba Trip Leads to Missed Vote on Amendment

by Sean Brewster

controversial components of the recently-passed police accountability bill – the clause eliminating qualified immunity – was nearly stripped via a proposed amendment by the state House of Representatives. But the amendment failed in a tie vote, largely down party lines, on the House floor.

One of the state representatives missing from the July 24 vote was Republican Robin Green of Marlborough – who was vacationing in Aruba at the time. She said this week she would have voted for the proposed amendment, which may have broken the tie and culled the immunity clause from the bill.

Green represents the 55th Assembly District, which covers Andover, Hebron, Marlborough and Bolton.

The proposed amendment to strip the clause eliminating qualified immunity failed in the wee small hours of the morning July 24, in a 72-72 tie. Green was one of seven state representatives to miss the vote.

Qualified immunity shields officers from being sued over actions taken during the course of their police work as long as the actions are deemed reasonable.

The accountability bill wound up passing the House altogether a few hours later, in an 86-58 vote. The bill then passed a divided state Senate 21-15 on July 29, and was signed into law by Gov. Ned Lamont two days later.

Green was on a family trip to Aruba when

the amendment and bill were being voted on. In a phone call Monday, she said she had planned the trip months earlier, anticipating the legislature would be out of session, as is always the case in July.

"I had a family obligation that I had made back in January and I had committed to that obligation to be out of the country," Green said. "I had made that knowing that we would be 100% out of session."

Green said that, had she been at the July 24 vote, she would have voted for the proposed amendment stripping qualified immunity, and against the overall bill.

Green, who is seeking re-election this fall, said she had not anticipated the special session when planning her trip. She added that special sessions are usually reserved for budget and budget-related votes, and said the police accountability bill was finalized and "rushed out" shortly before the vote. She said lawmakers are already talking about the need to "fix it."

"Their bill wasn't ready to be presented," she said. "There was no public hearing; there was a listening session. It's not the same."

Green said she could have made it to the special session had it taken place any other week – and said she did not know the vote on the proposed amendment would end in a tie. She floated another theory about where blame for the tie lies.

"I know we had one Republican who did vote against that amendment," she said. "That made it a tie."

According to the *CT Mirror*, state Rep. Jesse MacLachlan (R-Westbrook) was the only Republican to cross party lines and vote against the proposed amendment.

House minority leader Themis Klarides (R-Derby) said Wednesday the police accountability bill passed with overwhelming support from Democrats. Klarides added that the amount of support from the party indicated it "had no interest in adopting that amendment."

"They [considered the amendment] for cover," she said. "And regardless of how many votes we had for the amendment, they would have gotten one more because they truly wanted this bill to pass as is, regardless of what else they said."

John Collins, a Hebron Democrat who is running against Green for the state House seat this November, said he would have voted with Republicans.

"There were 15 Democrats who voted with Republicans to remove qualified immunity," Collins said. "And I would have been one of them."

Collins said he was opposed to eliminating qualified immunity because it does not do anything to "deter bad cops" and puts the onus for paying for civil suits on municipalities.

"It puts all the financial responsibility on towns like Bolton, Andover, Hebron and Marlborough," he said. "There's a real possibility there'll be more lawsuits and insurance rates will go up and the cost to towns will increase and our taxes will go up again."

At a virtual Town Hall meeting Collins held last month, Hebron Sgt. Marc Rubera and Officer Ricardo Martinez voiced concerns about eliminating qualified immunity.

Rubera, who worked for the Hartford Police Department for 25 years, said he knows of police officers planning to retire because they are worried they will be sued.

"I've had three or four of my friends say they're going to retire," he said. "These are guys you don't want to retire. These are guys you want to stay."

"It's going to be difficult to get police if we don't have qualified immunity," Martinez, who worked in Hartford with Rubera, said.

Rubera and Martinez are among many officers concerned about the loss of qualified immunity. East Hampton Police Chief Dennis Woessner is also in that group.

Woessner described the portion of the legislation dealing with qualified immunity as "deadly" to his fellow officers.

At a July 28 East Hampton Town Council meeting, Woessner said the bill makes it more

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field said this approach continues in a “fashion that follows priorities.”

“I thought we had a well-oiled machine for outages,” said Bransfield. “I don’t know what happened, or why that system failed.”

Bransfield explained that Portland’s crews kept track of reports from local meteorologists and said they were on standby before the storm even struck.

At an Aug. 5 Board of Selectmen meeting, held via Zoom the day after Isaias struck, Bransfield said crews of Portland’s Public Works Department worked through the night to clear every road that didn’t present the threat of downed wires

As part of the town’s continued clean-up effort, Portland will collect brush from residents until Aug. 17. Bundles should be stacked on the curb without blocking driveways or sidewalks and should not be more than four inches in diameter.

Bransfield encouraged Portland residents to contact state Rep. Christie Carpino (R-32) and state Senator Norm Needleman (D-33) with concerns or complaints about Eversource’s response. Needleman serves as chairman on the state legislature’s Energy and Technology Committee.

On Aug. 8, Needleman in a statement called for Eversource CEO James Judge to resign from his position. On Tuesday, he called for the entire Eversource board of directors to resign as well.

“This is an absolute embarrassment,” said Needleman.

Needleman, the state’s Public Utilities Regulatory Authority (PURA), and other officials have announced an investigation into Eversource’s preparedness for this storm, or lack thereof.

“Accountability for errors of this magnitude starts at the top,” said Needleman. “If direct action isn’t taken now, events like this will continue to happen, and I refuse to let that happen on my watch.”

“We know Eversource was not prepared for this storm, and we know their response has been unacceptable,” said Needleman. “This [is the] latest in a long history of poor preparation and slow responses. Eversource’s line crews have declined [while] restoration times grow. When Connecticut ratepayers are charged the highest power rates in the continental [U.S.] and Eversource executives’ pay continues to swell. This is unacceptable.”

Connecticut Senator Richard Blumenthal, a Democrat, also called for Judge’s resignation in a Facebook post.

“[Judge] was paid \$19.8 million last year, but can’t be bothered to face the public, return phone calls, restore power, or say when [it will be restored],” wrote Blumenthal. “He should go. Perhaps CT should seek a different company to run our utilities.”

* * *

Despite Eversource’s heavily-criticized response and widespread power outages, Bransfield said Isaias’ aftermath could have been far worse.

Bransfield said only one small transformer fire was reported and was easily dealt with by local fire crews. She said the local chapter of the Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) was “invaluable.” Officials were able to open Portland High School as a charging/cooling/internet center. Residents were able to fill containers with water at Fire Company #2 on Main Street.

Bransfield said many civic and religious organizations banded together to help the town through the widespread power loss in the same way they did – and continue to do – when the COVID-19 pandemic first hit Portland.

“Our community works together,” said Bransfield, adding that she admires the continued efforts of residents and local officials.

East Hampton manager Cox said, as of Tuesday, about 50 East Hampton residents were still in the dark. By Wednesday, Eversource was reporting no outages.

Cox said East Hampton’s outages peaked at about 65%. By Sunday, this was lowered to about 40%, followed by a significant amount of restorations on Monday.

Cox said Eversource did not provide to him power-loss estimates until Saturday – four days after Isaias struck the state. Fallen trees trapped

some residents in their homes until as late as Sunday, said Cox.

Cox said, fortunately, no one in town was injured by treefall, and aside from less than five homes, damage to property was minimal.

Cox said road blockages can at times be more concerning than power outages. He explained that, if people are mobile, they can more easily find helpful resources. If they are trapped, however, issues are compounded.

“If people can move, it helps mitigate the problem,” said Cox.

Cox also said that Eversource’s response was “a little chaotic” and was made worse because the utility asked the town to shift its already-established priority areas.

Both Cox and Bransfield said town crews have been working around the clock which, inevitably, has driven up overtime costs for both Portland and East Hampton. They said that, because of President Donald Trump’s disaster declaration for Connecticut, they both expect that the towns will be reimbursed for this increase, either through FEMA relief, or, possibly, from Eversource itself.

“Who’s going to pay for this is what the state is investigating,” said Bransfield.

* * *

As of late Wednesday morning, one of Portland’s sewer pump stations was still working with generator power. Bransfield last week said Portland’s backup generators are not designed for such long-term use.

Bransfield said most Portland residents had their power restored by Monday evening. However, she said, around 40 people were in the dark until Tuesday afternoon – a full week after the storm.

“When you’re the one without power, numbers don’t make much difference,” said Bransfield.

Bransfield added that normally, Eversource crews update town leaders on their work progress. This time, she said, Portland’s crews kept local leaders in the loop. Bransfield went on to say that Eversource’s work crews and linemen were “excellent”, and that the poor communication is the fault of Eversource leadership.

Bransfield said PURA also needs to be held accountable for not properly overseeing the utility company, which Bransfield described as a monopoly.

Cox on Wednesday morning also said that Eversource’s information showed no remaining outages in East Hampton. However, he said around 10 Belltown residents were without power until as late as Tuesday evening.

Cox explained that most power restoration was done between Friday and Monday, with most of the work performed on Saturday and Sunday.

“Residents couldn’t get in touch with Eversource, and some roads were inaccessible until Sunday,” said Cox.

Last week, Eversource media relations official Mitch Gross told the *Rivereast* that residents across the state must prepare for several days without power. Gross said nearly all the 149 towns Eversource serves saw extensive damage from Isaias. Gross said he counts Isaias among the worst of the state’s storms.

Gross said Connecticut has a major “hazard” tree problem, trees that are dead or diseased and more likely to fall on homes or power lines during a storm. This magnified the problem, he said.

In a video posted to Facebook last Saturday, Needleman joined Colchester First Selectman Mary Bylone in front of a huge tree that fell onto power lines. Bylone in the video said local crews had been waiting for hours to hear from Eversource as to when they would arrive to deactivate the wires. Needleman added that this Eversource issue has been the most frustrating of his time as first selectman of Essex and as a state senator.

In the video, Bylone said Eversource dispatched a single crew to assist in Colchester’s recovery.

Needleman said he and PURA are working on legislation that will give the agency more authority penalize Eversource without costs being passed to ratepayers.

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difficult for officer to invoke qualified immunity.

“This could cause second-guessing,” Woessner told the council. “That delay could cost the life of a [third-party] individual or officer, especially in an active situation.”

Woessner explained that, in Connecticut at least, qualified immunity never covered officers who “go rogue” and knowingly violate the law but instead protects those who had to make “split-second decisions.” He added the new law will doubtless cause more lawsuits to be filed against police officers and will “tie up” the judicial system.

Life Returning to Normal in Andover

by Sloan Brewster

Tropical Storm Isaias took out all the power in town when it hit last week – but it has been all restored.

On Tuesday, Town Administrator Eric Anderson said power in the town was at 100%.

“As of Sunday night we had about 97% power back and we pretty much had everybody – by Monday evening – back on line,” he said. “Got the last stragglers in Monday evening.”

Last Wednesday – just one day after the storm brought high winds to the state, resulting in widespread power loss, Bunker Hill Road was left blocked on both ends, with folks unable to get in or out.

Selectman Jeff Murray said Anderson called him and told him some folks were trapped, so he, fellow selectman Paul King and Anderson went door to door to make sure everybody was okay.

“Now everybody’s got power in town,” Murray said Tuesday.

Also last week, resident Dianne Grenier said she was on a generator and had limited communication with outside world.

“Living in a black hole,” she wrote in a text last Wednesday, Aug. 5. “Andover got hit hard. Trees and wires down everywhere a lot of roads closed. Word on the street says five

Cities and towns will take the financial responsibility of civil suits as cops are indemnified, Collins said. The exception to that is when the court finds an officer’s actions to be “malicious, wanton or willful,” he said, in which case the officer must reimburse the municipality for any financial damages awarded the plaintiff.

In addition to eliminating qualified immunity, the large Connecticut bill includes de-escalation and bias training, more recruitment, additional requirements for body cameras and certification as well as de-certification.

to seven days to fix.”

Wednesday, Grenier said her power was restored at 3 a.m. Friday, and her phone, television and internet were back online at the same time.

Tuesday, however, Anderson said some folks were still awaiting the restoration of telephone and internet service.

By then, the town crew had cleared local roads of downed trees and debris.

“The last road we had out was East Street and we got that cleared last night so were in pretty good shape in terms of closure,” Anderson said.

Anderson estimated that the last phase of local cleanup – town crews chipping all the debris on the sides of the road – would take a couple weeks to complete.

“So everything’s clear, just prettying it up a bit,” he said. “Life’s getting back to normal.”

Anderson added that trees and brush that had covered portions of the local rail trail had also been cleared. The effort was completed with the Public Works crew doing the cutting of the bigger pieces and volunteers helping get rid of smaller stuff.

“The rail trail’s pretty well open now and heavily in use,” Anderson said. “People are getting out and doing stuff, so that’s good.”

Colchester Officials Slam Eversource Storm Response

by Karla Santos

Because of the slow response to power outages, state Sen. Norm Needleman (D-33) called for Eversource CEO James J. Judge to resign through a Facebook post over the weekend.

Needleman, whose district includes Colchester, said in his post that Eversource has to be held accountable because of its “epic failure in responding to the power outages after tropical storm Isaias.

Over the weekend, Needleman also met with First Selectman Mary Bylone and made a Facebook video where they talk about the outages and the response from Eversource.

“This storm response was the worst I’ve ever seen,” Needleman said in the video.

The *Rivereast* requested comments from Eversource’s CEO in response to the call for resignation, but the response instead came from the company’s media relations team, which said Eversource will evaluate its approach to the response of power outages following the storm.

“We recognize the tremendous impact the storm and resulting outages have had on customers across the state,” said spokesman Mitch Gross. “As with all storms, we will participate in an after-action review with regulators and community stakeholders to evaluate our ap-

proach to emergency response efforts and storm restoration. But today we’re focused on one thing – doing everything we can do to restore power to our customers.”

About 99% of Colchester lost power following the tropical storm last week.

Bylone said that to her knowledge the town had no structural damage to any homes or buildings other than an enclosed porch that had a tree fall through the roof and an older car that ended up with a damaged windshield.

Bylone said the storm itself caused no injuries, although she noted some hurt themselves cleaning up afterwards.

Bylone said she worked with a “very good” Eversource liaison and has no argument with the way the company set priorities. However, she said she has “a significant issue” with the lack of preparation and resources they had to be able to address the issues quickly.

“We knew the storm was coming [and] we knew when it was coming,” Bylone said. “We didn’t know it would be sustained winds of 50 to 60 miles an hour but we knew there were going to be some significant winds. They didn’t have any pre-staging done.”

It was “frustrating” to see how the restoration

process progressed so slowly, she added, and explained that she was with a tree crew from North Carolina that waited for over an hour to take down a tree because Eversource’s line crew wasn’t there to ground the wire.

“Why send the tree people ahead of the people that have to make sure that it’s safe to work on the tree?” Bylone wondered.

While on Tuesday there were still about 50 households without power in Colchester, most of the power in town was restored between Friday and Saturday, Bylone said.

The town had water and charging stations at the fire station available 24 hours a day. Once the library had its power restored on Friday, it was open on Saturday and Sunday for cooling, charging and internet access.

The transfer station, which is normally closed on Sundays opened last Sunday and will be open again this Sunday. Residents will not be charged for tree and branch removal.

While there were many issues caused by the storm, kindness was also seen throughout town as The Colchester Lions Club donated funds to some pizza establishments. The goal was for those businesses to provide a large pizza per family without power on Sunday in an effort to ensure people didn’t go hungry in the process of restoring power. The free pizza was offered on a first-come, first-served basis while funds lasted.

Throughout the days of power restoration Bylone provided daily updates through Facebook as well as the town’s website.

Colchester Officer Celebrated for Saving Jogger’s Life

by Karla Santos

During the past few months, people across the country have been condemning police brutality – but kindness among officers still exists and Colchester Police Officer Robert Labonte is an example of that, as he saved a jogger’s life last month.

According to First Selectman Mary Bylone, there are plans for Labonte to be recognized by the State Police and the Board of Selectmen. The Colchester Police Commission is also planning to acknowledge his life-saving actions.

The morning of July 18, Labonte said that officers received a call from a person reporting a runner that had collapsed and was lying face down on Cabin Road. Labonte said he was in the center of town at the time of the call and responded as quickly as he could. When he arrived to the scene the Fire Department was not at the scene yet.

“I just happened to be so close, I was the first one to get there,” Labonte said. “I checked for his pulse and his breathing and he had none.”

Labonte said there a few people standing at the scene and a Good Samaritan helped roll the victim so that he would be laying on his back, which made it easier for him to check on the vital signs.

Labonte then started CPR on the victim. About two to three minutes later, the fire department crew arrived and set up appropriate equipment including a CPR mechanical device.

“As I was doing CPR, at one point the gentleman opened his eyes and he took a couple of deep breaths and we were pretty excited about that,” Labonte noted. “Right about that time my partner had shown up and he was checking a pulse as I did CPR.”

Labonte said the victim again lost his breath and pulse and he continued to do CPR.

Emergency responders “eventually hooked him up to the chest compression device and

got him on the ambulance,” Labonte said and explained that prior to leaving to the Middlesex Health Marlborough Medical Center, the victim had a pulse again.

While Labonte started the life-saving actions, he doesn’t give all the credit to himself as he told the *Rivereast* it was a team effort.

“Any one of my brother and sister officers, they would’ve done the same thing that I did,” Labonte said. “I just happened to be the police officer that was closest to the scene and I got there first.”

In addition, Labonte explained that the victim had no identification on him when he was found and a few hours later his son called the police to report that his dad was missing and they realized that the missing dad and the jogger were the same person.

Labonte kept in touch with the victim’s son and a few days later, after the man had been hospitalized, the son told Labonte that the hospital staff was expecting a full recovery.

“We were ecstatic; we were pretty happy about that,” Labonte said. “The timing must have been perfect. I would guess that he didn’t go that long without breathing, which is one of the reasons that the CPR was a success.”

Labonte said he learned the victim, who was a daily runner, had suffered a heart attack.

Labonte said that the fact that he was able to get the man back to breathing is a “great feeling.” He has been a police officer for 19 years and has lived and worked in Colchester for about the same time.

Labonte pointed out that he had a visit with the victim who is a “real nice person,” and that at the time of the incident the man had only been living in Colchester for two weeks. Labonte said the victim told him he was overwhelmed with the amount of attention and care he has received from everyone in Colchester,

including his neighbors.

“He was really impressed with the citizens of Colchester,” Labonte said.

Bylone said police officers are required to be CPR-certified.

“Some people might think well, this is just the job they do, but the truth is he really saved this guy’s life,” she said.

She also said people shouldn’t underplay that it all started with the citizen that found the jogger and called 911.

“Sometimes people just ignore things like that, so that’s really where it started,” Bylone said.

Bylone said that while it may be part of the officers’ job to act as Labonte did, his rapid response and willingness to make sure that he continued to work until the remaining medical personnel arrived to the scene made a difference in the victim’s life. Despite having a heart attack, the victim was “discharged from the hospital, he’s walking and talking,” she said.

Labonte is getting a special recognition from state police. In addition, at the next Board of Selectmen meeting, he will be acknowledged by the town with a resolution along with the other emergency personnel – Eric Watrous and three firemen – that responded to the call.

ATM Lifted from Colchester Gas Station

State Police said that an ATM was stolen from the Gulf gas station at 738 Middletown Road July (August) 10 at about 3:38 a.m.

Police said the amount of money stolen is unknown at this time.

This case is still under investigation, and anyone with information is asked to contact Troop K at 860-465-5400.



On July 18, Colchester Police Officer Robert Labonte quickly responded to the report of a jogger on the floor without pulse or respiration. Labonte did CPR on the victim who later showed vital signs again. Labonte will receive recognition from the Police Commission, Board of Selectmen and State Police.

Letter Criticizing Hebron's Collins Causes Consternation

by Sloan Brewster

A letter from the Hebron Republican Town Committee was posted on Facebook that alleged Hebron Selectman John Collins was misrepresenting himself – and this week the posting was “disavowed” by local Republican town committees.

In a phone call Wednesday, Collins, a Democrat who is looking to oust Republican Robin Green as state representative for the 55th Assembly District, said Republican town committees in Andover, Bolton and Marlborough had pulled the post from their respective Facebook pages, and said they had no part in it and had in fact “disavowed” it.

The Hebron RTC itself had also deleted the post from its page.

In a phone call Tuesday, Liz Gorgoglione, Marlborough RTC chair, said her committee had deleted the post the day before – and noted that the signature at the bottom of the letter appeared to imply it had been signed by all four town committees, when in reality it was the work of just Hebron's.

The letter, whose writer was not identified, was forwarded to the *Rivereast* before it was deleted. It claimed Collins had been representing himself as first selectman on Facebook and in television interviews and “fails to correct the record!”

Last Friday, Collins was interviewed by WTIC-TV Fox 61 about the massive number of homes without power following last Tuesday's storm. During the five-minute clip, words printed on the screen initially identified Collins as first selectman. The reporter, however, referred to him as “Hebron selectman John Collins” and when the screen next flashed with Collins' name, it read “Hebron selectman.”

That did not stop the accusatory letter from being posted.

“Fact: We have a full time town manager

who manages our town along with department heads,” the post reads. “Fact: John is one of five members on the Board of Selectmen. He is not chairman, nor vice chairman.”

The letter also alleges that Collins has been difficult with staff at Town Hall.

“Since being elected John has made a habit of calling the town manager and town hall staff at all hours of the day, night and weekends,” it reads.

Town Manager Andrew Tierney said Monday he was also sent a copy of the letter and was dismayed that it appeared that he had launched the complaints.

“It looks like I went and complained about him, but I never did,” Tierney said.

While agreeing that Collins went on the news and spoke despite Tierney's position as “spokesman for the town,” Tierney said Collins “intentions were good.”

“I think he's a little overzealous but I think he's trying to help,” Tierney said. “John was a little overzealous, but that [letter] was a little over the top.”

Regarding a point in the letter stating that Collins had “asked if the town will be picking up the storm debris at our homes on one of Hebron's [Facebook] pages,” the town manager clarified that Collins wanted the town to go to properties and chip brush left by the storm and said the town was not equipped for such an endeavor.

Tierney added that the town is allowing residents to throw away brush leftover from the storm free of charge.

Collins, for his part, denied ever saying he was first selectman.

“I never said it; I would never say that,” he said. “I don't care about those things.”

He forwarded the *Rivereast* an email from Ashley Coughlin of Fox61 taking responsibility for the error.

ity for the error.

“Sorry for the mistake by our web team in your title,” the note reads. “I have sent an email asking them to correct the subtitle from “first selectman” to “selectman.” I have read through the rest of the article and it appears the mistake was only made that once.”

Jeff Murray, the Andover selectman and RTC member who posted then deleted the letter on the Andover RTC's Facebook page, said originally he thought it was “legit” and shared it – but noted Andover Republicans had nothing to do with writing it.

“Once I saw that it was in error, I took it down,” Murray said. “I think it was a giant misunderstanding and I think things got heated and were a little out of control.”

Collins said after last week's storm he was working feverishly to get power restored to the town and to get the correct information to residents. He pointed out that his Facebook page was alight with posts from folks offering their gratitude.

“People needed help,” he said. “We weren't getting action from Eversource so I did what I could.”

As of Wednesday afternoon, only three homes remained in the dark in the town.

“I'm not taking credit for anything,” Collins said. “My intention was just to help people. I'm really at a loss. I actually don't bother the town staff.”

Collins forwarded a post written by Andover resident Charlotte Nelson, a Democrat, in response to the now-deleted missive.

“This letter is rife with political partisanship, with a focus on semantics,” Nelson wrote. “Thank you John for caring. In a state of crisis,

true colors are revealed. Those who choose to do nothing but whine, complain, and criticize and those who stand up and take action to help those impacted. John Collins is the clear choice for the 55th – he is not even holding office but is already in the throes fighting for us and standing up to Eversource who not only raised their rates during a pandemic and historic unemployment, but left us in the dark for days.”

Green said she had heard about the news clip and that it was “concerning if [Collins] is misrepresenting himself.”

She also mused over how Collins ended up on the TV news.

“Typically Channel 61, they would reach out to the town manager,” she said. “I don't know how John was contacted.”

The news channel contacted him at 5 a.m. the morning of the broadcast, Collins said.

“They probably saw my posts that went out to 1,300 households in the area,” he said. “Seven residents had power at that time. By the end of the day, 60% of the town had power. [Democratic State Sen.] Cathy Osten, Andrew Tierney and the Public Works Department deserve great credit.”

Collins, who said he intends “to run a clean campaign,” called the situation “all nonsense.”

Murray blamed the situation on the fact that “people are still trapped in their houses” and said he wants the elections to be over.

“I think from what I've seen from John, he's an upstanding guy,” he said. “There's been some mudslinging.”

Catherine Marx, chair of the Hebron RTC, did not respond to calls and an email before press time. Rodney Fournier, chair of the Bolton RTC, had no comment.

All Power's Back on in Hebron... Almost

by Sloan Brewster

By Wednesday, power had been restored to most of Hebron with three homes lingering in the dark.

That morning, Town Manager Andrew Tierney said he “raised holy Hell” with Eversource Energy when 11 Hebron homes were still without power in the town and he saw four trucks working near his home in Marlborough – which was 100% restored.

“They had crews working in towns with 100% power,” Tierney said “It's been ridiculous.”

Based on his phone call, Tierney said the electric company sent a crew to town and brought three of the houses back in the light, then two more and, by noon, there were only three left sans power.

The crew was working to fix a transformer to get power on for those customers, Tierney said.

On Monday, about 800 residents remained without power, then Tuesday at about noon, 27 were still waiting for the moment their lights flashed back on. The crew that was out working to restore power was taking a bit longer to complete the task because the dark homes were scattered throughout town, Tierney said.

“It's spotty,” he said.

Last Tuesday's storm left 99% of town in the dark and the following day, Tierney said there were more than 45 roads with trees and wires down. At that point, the town's main focus was on opening up roads, especially ones that were blocked on both ends, leaving residents unable to get in or out.

Since the storm, the Public Works Department has been working collaboratively with Eversource crews, Tierney said. Eversource first makes sure downed wires are safe, then the local crew moves trees out of the way.

“We were lucky that we have our own bucket truck to clear trees,” the town manager said.

The truck also allowed the Public Works Department to get to work during the storm, moving trees that were not tied up with wires. Residents even pitched in with the effort, Tierney said, adding that town staff appreciates the help “as long as everyone stays safe.”

On Wednesday, the local crew was still out there.

“The guys were out there all weekend clearing up hangers,” he said. “They worked through the storm and through the weekend. Looks like by this Saturday they won't have to work. I just can't thank them enough. They did a great job.”

Selectman John Collins said power started popping back on Thursday. He said he put in his own effort to get the lights back on, making calls to Eversource, finding internet access to see what folks were saying online and checking on residents.

“Most of the town has power,” he said Monday. “Ninety-nine percent of the town was out [Thursday] and by the end of the day it was only 40%.”

On Monday, Collins – who is running for state representative this fall – was still making those calls and visits.

“I think the important thing is that we are all in this together,” he said. “Until the last person has power, I'm going to be working on this.”

In a Facebook post he made Monday about the town's status, he said Old Hall Road was one of the last without power.

“Almost there,” he wrote, giving a shout-out to some folks on Old Hall that were still in the dark. “Help is on the way.”

According to the post, at that time, 0.35% of Andover, 1% of Bolton and 6% of Marlborough were still without power, with the percentage of dark Hebron households remaining the highest at 9%.

Tierney said the town “had some trouble with Eversource.”

“We've got to change the way we do things,” he said.

He said it was “unacceptable” that elderly residents and families with children were being inconvenienced and that roads need to be cleared and gas stations opened so folks can get fuel for generators and “not have to go two towns over to get gas.”

During the height of the outage, Tierney said locals were heading to Willimantic and Marlborough for fuel.

Tierney credited the tireless efforts of state Sen. Cathy Osten (D-19), for getting through to Eversource.

“I do have to say that Cathy Osten was instrumental in helping me get power back to Hebron. She was on the phone at 5 o'clock, 5:30 every morning,” he said. “That woman deserves a medal [for] what she helped me facilitate, at times pissing people off at Eversource, but she didn't care. She was a godsend.”

Tierney added that he was “not trying to get her promoted or elected.”

State Rep. Robin Green (R-55) also reached out to Tierney, he said, telling him she was there if he needed her.



A crew of tree trucks stages for cleanup in Hebron last weekend. By Monday most of the power was back on but about 800 Eversource customers were still in the dark.

Tuesday, while power was being restored in town, cable and internet were still out, making it difficult for people in a post-COVID-19 world – where working remotely has become the norm – to connect with employers.

“Comcast and internet are not on, people are still working from home because of COVID-19,” Tierney said. “You think Eversource was slow – I don't have any pull with Comcast.”

People were being told internet would be

back up by “Friday at the soonest,” he said Tuesday. The following day, he said cable and internet were slowly coming on.

Tierney said he plans to work with Osten to get RHAM High School fully generated to serve as a regional facility for Hebron, Andover and Marlborough where people could shower and charge devices during power outages.

“We've talked about that for a couple years,” he said. “It never gets done, but after this storm it's a must.”

Storm Wreaks Havoc on Marlborough

by **Karla Santos**

The number went down as the week wore on, but at one point last week more than 99% of the town was without power following Tropical Storm Isaias – and the outage rate remained at that level for more than 24 hours.

Those that lost power include all critical infrastructure – the medical center, nursing facilities, town hall, fire stations and the school – First Selectman Greg Lowrey said. He added that the high use of generators because of the outage resulted in many carbon monoxide alarms going off in town, prompting emergency responders to visit a number of households.

Lowrey, who was the emergency management director prior to becoming first selectman, said the carbon monoxide issue was only one of several caused by the storm.

Issues related to electric power were abundant in Marlborough following the storm. Monday morning there were still more than 19% of Eversource customers in town without power.

Lowrey said crews that fix electricity first take care of safety issues, providing power to the critical infrastructure and clearing blocked roads. Then, individual power is restored.

Lowrey said that although Eversource may have miscalculated the severity of the storm, over all, they did well.

“I think they have done a good job,” Lowrey said. “I think that people have complained about the pace of the work, but personally I’m familiar with their sequence of events and I think they have kept to the plan.”

Lowrey said that in the efforts of restoring

power in Marlborough the crews struggled with buildings identified as critical infrastructure which includes town hall, the school, the medical center, the firehouse and two facilities serving the elderly community – Marlborough Health & Rehabilitation Center and Florence S. Lord Senior Housing. He said power at the critical infrastructure was restored “fairly quickly.”

In addition, blocked roads in town became an issue with trees and wires that came down after the strong winds.

“Blocked roads were a challenge,” Lowrey said, while noting that at the 48-hour mark after the storm, Marlborough had about six roads that were blocked with trees or wires. Two bridges that are under routine construction were also blocked.

“We had eight points in our 62-mile road system that were completely blocked,” Lowrey said.

Other issues in relation to the storm include several transformer fires caused by trees that fell over the wires.

“The transformer fires required the teams to sort of immediately shift their efforts to this situation where the live electric lines were causing danger and therefore delaying the work that they were doing in restoration,” Lowrey said.

Lowrey said that the transformer fires caused further outages.

In addition, he explained that there are safety reasons why Public Works employees can’t touch a tree that’s on wires – and that, for liability reasons, Eversource can’t touch a tree that has fallen on a structure such as a house or a garage. These rules slow the restoration process, he said.

At least one tree fell on a structure in town, Lowrey said.

“Not only did the tree fall on the structure and not only did it take out a power line, it took the primary lines for that neighborhood,” Lowrey said, adding that until they figured out who could work on that tree, that whole street remained without power. The tree had been removed by Monday, he said.

Uncommon issues caused by the storm also happened in Marlborough, Lowrey said.

He said that typically when utility poles are damaged during a storm, they’re replaced in the same spot. But the town had at least one situation where a new pole was in a “slightly different position” from the old one.

As a result, to move that pole to the position it needed to be in, workers needed to contact Call Before You Dig, to get information on underground utility pipes before they worked on the area.

Lowrey said the Call Before You Dig crews must then physically mark the ground to show if there are utilities in that area or not. Power can’t be restored in that area of about 50 households until that process is completed, Lowrey said. Monday morning that area still had no power.

Communication throughout the post storm activity was a challenge, Lowrey said. Marlborough offered residents Wi-Fi access at Richmond Memorial Library to enable communication and internet access. In addition, the town offered water at the two fire stations.

He said that given the communication challenges there were sandwich boards placed in the center of town to announce the Wi-Fi and water offerings.

“We are going to take lessons learned from this storm and we are going to look into the possibility of extending the number of public places that offer Wi-Fi,” he added.

Lowrey said that although the storm caused many challenges, generosity within the town’s people was abundant.

“I think citizens have shown some neighborly behavior,” Lowrey said, while noting he knows people with a generator that helped their neighbors that didn’t have generators.

In addition, Lowrey said that individuals in town that have gone through the Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) program checked on people to make sure their generator was at a safe distance from the house to limit carbon monoxide poisoning.

Richard Antonelli, the town’s emergency management director said working to restore all the damage caused by the storm was “very stressful.”

“I really think that Eversource dropped the ball and it made it difficult,” he said. “Every town in the area had the same stressful difficulties I did.”

While it was stressful, Antonelli added it was also “rewarding” to see households go back to normal as power was being restored and streets became unblocked.

New Emergency Management Director Sought in Marlborough

by **Karla Santos**

Marlborough is looking for a new emergency management director as Richard Antonelli is resigning effective Aug. 23, due to extended work commitments.

Antonelli works as a paramedic at Windsor Emergency Medical Services and at Connecticut Children’s Medical Center as a transfer coordinator, arranging for all the emerging transfers into the hospital. He said his hours of work at the hospitals are starting to pick up, and he realized he doesn’t have the proper amount of time to dedicate to the emergency management director (EMD) position in Marlborough.

Antonelli said that if he is at the hospital and there are emergencies such as the storm last week, he doesn’t have the flexibility to answer the phone or to dedicate the time it takes to respond to an emergency in town.

“I just don’t have the time and it’s not fair to Marlborough,” Antonelli said.

Antonelli is also a member of the Marlborough Fire Department, a volunteer position he has served in since 2008.

“Rich was able to develop a rapport with the town hall staff, public safety, public works and emergency services,” First Selectman Greg Lowrey, said. “I wish Rich the best in his future endeavors.”

Lowrey said he has launched a search for the next EMD. Lowrey was the EMD prior to Antonelli, who started in the role in January. Lowrey said he is looking for candidates for the position that “possess a mix of knowledge, ability to learn, availability, ability to develop rapport with the unified command and the ability to train and motivate volunteers.”

The job application for the position is available at marlboroughct.net.

Antonelli said one of his main tasks had been working on an upgrade to the radio system for

the town. But the responsibility that took the most time was responding to COVID-19. He said that included many meetings and devising a plan to reopen the main town services within the “new norm” and proper safety. He also noted he took many trips to West Hartford as that’s where state allocated supplies for the first responders.

“Every week we were going and picking up supplies so the Marlborough EMS [Emergency Medical Services] was able to respond properly with the proper supplies,” Antonelli said. “They were going through a lot of PPE [personal protective equipment], a lot of hand sanitizer and there were certain items that we had to request from the state.”

Antonelli said much of his COVID-19 work also had to do with ensuring that first responders were prepared to handle emergencies while following safety protocols.

Duties identified by Lowrey for the position include: acting as the day-to-day authority for overseeing emergency management programs and activities for the municipality; reviewing and approving the annual Local Emergency Operations Plan; and administering the statutory “Loyalty Oath” to local volunteer civil preparedness force members such as the local CERT members. The EMD is also responsible for recommending activation of volunteers, as guided under state statute, and ensuring that volunteers are properly trained for all potential activities, since the EMD provides a certification to that effect at the time of activation.

Marlborough town’s website has a full description of the position.

The Emergency Management team in Marlborough consists of the emergency management director, two deputy directors and a clerk.

East Hampton Schools to Start Year with Hybrid Learning

by Jack Lakowsky

After a decade-long career as a school leader, East Hampton Superintendent of Schools Paul Smith had thought he'd tackled every type of challenge that comes with his job.

"This is totally new territory," Smith on Monday told the *Rivereast*, referring to the process of preparing East Hampton Public Schools against the COVID-19 pandemic.

Beginning Tuesday, Sept. 8, all four East Hampton schools will use a hybrid learning model. This model will have 50% of Belltown students organized in an 'A' group, and the other half into a 'B.'

Group A will attend in-person classes on Mondays and Tuesdays. Group B will attend in-person classes on Thursdays and Fridays. Both groups will distance learn on Wednesdays. Without students, the schools can be cleaned between groups every week. When a student's group is not in school, they will distance learn.

The first week of school is short due to Labor Day, so there will be no cleaning day that week.

Currently, Smith plans to reopen schools for week-long in-person learning on Oct. 5, with all COVID-19 prevention protocols, like mask-wearing and distancing, in place. However, plans can change, Smith said, as they so often do in the COVID-19 era.

"We're operating under the assumption that these plans are fluid," said Smith. "Transmission rates are fluid, information from the state is fluid. We're being cautious at this point."

Smith said the Oct. 5 reopening date was to give a cushion of time to observe pandemic developments and to introduce families to the new normal of spread-prevention measures.

"The plan is to give student and staff four weeks to get used to these new routines," said Smith.

Schools will stick to this phased reopening plan if transmission rates in East Hampton and the Chatham Health District (CHD), which includes Portland, Marlborough, Colchester,

Hebron, and East Haddam, remain at their current lull.

According to information from CHD Director Russell Melmed, the district in August tested more than 1,300 people, 0.1% of which came back positive. CHD's peak cases were seen in May, with 6.3% of almost 2,000 tests coming back positive.

Mary Clark, director of curriculum and instruction for East Hampton schools, said the additional time for COVID-19 training is the "biggest advantage."

"Our teaching team is working so hard," said Clark. "This has been a time of constant problem solving and preparation. Things we plan and design today might have to be adjusted tomorrow."

Clark said this process is attempting to meet an "intense, broad need."

Clark said that schools across the nation are anticipating that the pandemic will exacerbate student learning loss, a typical summer phenomenon.

"We're eager to see where our students are,"

said Clark. "Our first focus will be welcoming them back, then we'll work to understand where they are and design responsive instruction."

Clark echoed Smith in saying preparing schools against the pandemic has been one of the most complex challenges of her career. Clark, who said she has worked in many school districts and dealt with many complicated issues, said such "widespread disruption" is unprecedented.

"We've had to look at how we provide teaching under all this uncertainty and ambiguity," said Clark. "I think our teachers have been inventive and adaptive."

Smith said Monday that whether schools will conduct athletics, clubs and musical activities was still in question. However, late Wednesday, the Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference (CIAC) announced it would proceed with high school fall sports, with practices and games starting next month.

Portland Schools to Reopen with Hybrid Model

by Jack Lakowsky

Superintendent of Schools Charles Britton on Tuesday told the town's Board of Education that he plans to open schools using a hybrid education model, a decision the board supported.

Britton said that, should Chatham Health District COVID-19 transmission rates remain low, schools will use this hybrid model until Friday, Oct. 9.

Britton said this Oct. 9 date will be the district's "checkpoint," at which time his administration and the Board of Education will determine whether or not to fully reopen to in-person classes or to continue with the hybrid model, which uses both in-person and distance learning.

Britton said most school districts are using this method, starting with hybrid and then allowing more time to plan for a full reopening to students.

"The majority [of districts] are buying themselves September and some of October," said Britton at the school board meeting. "It allows for more planning and observance."

Britton said he wrestled with the decision because he knows the hybrid model presents a challenge to working parents and single-parent households.

In the hybrid model, students are "cohorting" into separate groups that remain together throughout the day. This reduces the number of people in a given building and makes contact tracing easier, should a case of COVID-19 be found.

Group A will attend in-person classes on Mondays and Tuesdays. Group B will attend in-person classes on Thursdays and Fridays. Both groups will distance learn on Wednesdays. Without students, the schools can be cleaned between groups every week. When a student's group is not in school, they will distance learn at home.

Schools will stick to this phased reopening plan if transmission rates in East Hampton and the Chatham Health District, which also includes Portland, Marlborough, Colchester, Hebron and East Haddam, remain at their current lull.

According to information from CHD Direc-

tor Russell Melmed, the district in August has so far tested more than 1,300 people, 0.1% of which have been positive. CHD's peak cases were seen in May, with 6.3% of almost 2,000 tests coming back positive, according to Melmed's information.

Britton made no firm commitment to fully reopening on Oct. 9, saying this will be the time when officials decide what to do moving forward.

Last Friday, parents received a survey gauging their opinions about reopening schools. About 1,100 parents replied, and about 200 still need to complete it, Britton said.

Portland parents were almost evenly split in their stance on hybrid or in-person reopening. According to Britton, a slim majority of parents said they prefer the hybrid model, at about 50.2%. Around 49% said they want a full reopening in September.

Parents also answered whether they'd be transporting their child to school. According to Britton, a little more than 60% of parents will bring their child to school, with about 39% saying they will use school busses.

An encouraging response, Britton said, was that 98% of Portland school families have stable internet access. Britton said the 24 families who don't will be provided Wi-Fi hotspots.

Britton said almost 90% of families said they will provide their children with masks. The rest said they expect the schools to provide, which Britton said will be done.

Overall, the board said it supports Britton's decision and is confident in the abilities of Portland's administrators, classroom teachers and other staff – but some members questioned the hybrid model.

Board member Lauren Christensen, a Democrat, said the hybrid model might create a "false sense of safety."

"Teachers are going to be exposed [to COVID-19] as much as they would be in a full reopening," Christensen said in the meeting. "Students will only get two days of quality learning time."

Christensen explained that she sees merit in using the hybrid model for the high-school level, given the difficulties with cohorting older

students due to their different schedules, but that she doesn't think it's safer for younger students.

Christensen went on to say that schools can only control so much. Younger students will very likely be involved with other childcare programs, which could potentially nullify the benefits of in-school student grouping, especially when working parents decide how their students will be supervised during distance learning time.

Board member Laurel Steinhauser, also Democrat, said the hybrid model presents a challenge to families with two working parents, as well as single-parent families.

"I'm questioning if it's as safe as we think" said Steinhauser.

Steinhauser said she understands that, no matter how schools choose to operate in the coming academic year, coming to a decision that everyone agrees with will be next to impossible.

Board member Meg Scata, a Democrat, said she is in favor of the hybrid learning model.

"In general, we're seeing more infection with higher numbers of students in the classrooms," said Scata.

Hybrid learning, Scata said, will halve the number of students in classrooms. Scata said using Wednesdays to clean and sanitize schools is a "good idea."

Board of Education Chairperson Sharon Peters, a Democrat, also expressed support for hybrid learning, saying it will "acclimate everyone to new procedures."

"This allows for a more conservative start," said Peters.

Peters explained that she doesn't think introducing the "full load" of Portland's students is wise, and that a phased integration of students and staff into this new normal won't be perfect, but it will be better.

"And then, hopefully, we can transition to a full, regular school day," said Peters. "[The hybrid plan] isn't the best, but it offers some benefits of both options to kids."

Board member Tim Lavoy, a Republican, also said he supports a hybrid learning model.

Fellow Republican board member Dave Murphy said that some districts have used an alternative model wherein some grades attend school fully in-person, while other grades use the hybrid model. He said the hybrid model may confuse some parents and added that it makes parents responsible for half of the prevention effort.

"There's just no perfect way," said Murphy.

Board member Chris Darby, a Democrat, said many major employers in the state are using telecommuting workers for the rest of 2020.

"Nothing in the state is fully reopened," said Darby. "To put a bunch of kids in a room for a full reopening is asking for disaster."

Darby said the hybrid model is the "best of the bad options." Darby went on to say that it will be difficult to regulate outside childcare.

Britton said every opening option has "pros and cons." He said the hybrid model creates consistency because teachers still see every student, every week.

"This is a fluid document," said Britton. "It's very likely to change."

In the meeting, Britton and Portland schools athletics director Chris Serra discussed how to handle the fall sports season. Both Serra and Britton agreed they'd follow whatever guidelines are released by the Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference (CIAC).

Earlier this week, CIAC said it recommends suspension of the football season until 2021. The conference changed course, however, late Wednesday and said fall sports, including football, will indeed proceed.

Steinhauser said she is concerned that discussions of how to conduct sports and athletics have started before schools are completely prepared to reopen. Steinhauser said, if sports are played, students will then have different cohorts for their school day and for practices and games.

Christenson echoed Steinhauser, saying schools should not plan for both a hybrid academic model and athletics.

Obituaries

Portland

Ernest F. Peterson

Ernest Frederick Peterson passed away Saturday, Aug. 1, just two weeks shy of his 95th birthday. Until the moment he passed, Ernie was able to remain in his home, enjoying the views of his beloved property, the smells of his freshly mowed lawn, and the sounds of his favorite bluebirds. Despite the pandemic, family and friends creatively found safe ways to visit and remain connected to him, so he was surrounded by their love and presence right through his last breath.



Ernie was born in Portland, to William R. and Clara Emelia Bergeson Peterson, on Aug. 15, 1925, and remained a very proud lifelong resident of Portland. He graduated Portland High School in 1943, after becoming a four-letter athlete in soccer, baseball, and basketball, feats which ultimately earned him membership in the Portland Sports Hall of Fame.

Upon his graduation, the world was entangled in World War II and Ernie heeded the call of duty, enlisting in the U.S. Navy. He proudly served his country on the USS John Birmingham DE530, a destroyer escort operating in convoys across the Atlantic Ocean. After the conclusion of the war, Ernie was honorably discharged and he matriculated to Upsala College, where he earned his degree in 1950. It was at Upsala, through the window of the science lab, that he met the love of his life, Phyllis Ray Smith, who went on to become his wife of 66 years before her passing in 2017.

Ernie and Phyllis settled in his beloved Portland, where they built their home, welcomed their three children (and later grand- and great-grandchildren), and became valued members of the community. Alongside his brothers, Ernie took the reins of Peterson Oil Company from his father, who had been the founder, and helped grow it into a prominent local business. He became its president and an owner and took great pride in serving Portland and the surrounding area.

Ernie was active in local politics and was elected to the Portland Board of Selectmen for three terms (1969-75). He was also engaged in many community organizations, serving as director of Farmers and Mechanics Bank (1970-93), past president of the Portland Exchange Club, member of the Masons AM&FM (Warren Lodge), member of the American Legion (Ormont Post 69), past Zion Lutheran Church Council member, past president and board member of the Swedish Cemetery, club champion of Portland Golf Course (1982), president of the Portland United Fund (1964-65), director of the New England Fuel Institute, and Portland Citizen of the Year (1978).

Ernie was charming, sincere and kind – a man of the utmost integrity who was devoted to his family, friends and community. He took great pride in his Swedish heritage, but he was unabashedly proud to be American. His shock of white hair from a young age made him stand out, but it was his effervescent smile, his firm handshake and his extra-tight embraces that made him unforgettable. His faith was central to him, and he was a proud member of Zion Lutheran Church and its community.

Ernie also had a special devotion to his property – the same land where his father established the family's farm, and where he and Phyllis built their two family homes. He took immaculate care of his lawn and could be found mowing and riding his Gator until he was 94! Ernie and Phyllis traveled the country and the world, and they created a second home in Chatham, Cape Cod, where they gathered their family for years of fun and countless memories. Having acquired his "sea legs" while in the Navy, Ernie loved time on his boat 'SugarBabe' during their years at the Cape.

Ernie enjoyed many lifelong friendships, including decades with the Friday Night Group, and he was constantly bumping into someone he knew, everywhere he went. In his later years, Ernie took great pleasure in the simple things – his home, beautiful music, rides around town, and most importantly, being surrounded by the family he adored and who relished every moment they had with him.

Ernie's memory will be cherished by his family: his two daughters, Ann Linnea P. Gilmour and partner Judy Gleason of Lambertville, N.J., and Martha P. and husband Jay Swanson of Portland. He also leaves his grandchildren and great-grandchildren – Thomas Gilmour IV (wife Courtney, daughter Janelle, son Elijah) of Easton, Pa., Amy Linnea Gilmour (fiancé Jim Schubert, baby girl on the way) of Jackson, N.J., Daniel Peterson Gilmour (wife Bevin, daughters Clara and Zelda) of Roswell, Ga., Dr. Christopher Swanson (wife Margaret, son Tucker Frederick) of Atlantic Beach, Fla., Ingrid Swanson Moss (husband William, son Callum, daughters Emelia and Isla) of Portland, Raymond Peterson (daughter Mya) of Portland, and Lauren Peterson Kerr (husband

Shawn, daughter Madeline) of Walpole, Mass. – as well as several cherished nieces and nephews.

Ernie was predeceased by his wife, Phyllis; his son, William Raymond Peterson; his brothers, W. Arthur and J. Paul Peterson; and two sisters-in-law, Pearle J. and Sherrill P. Peterson.

Ernie and his family are grateful for the compassionate care he received from Dr. Robert Levy and Hannah, as well as the loving support provided by his caregivers Linda, Gosia, Susan and Maria.

A private graveside service will be held at the Swedish Cemetery. A celebration of Ernie's life will be planned in the future when circumstances permit.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to Zion Lutheran Church Memorial Fund, P.O. Box 202, Portland, CT 06480.

Messages of condolences may be sent to the family at www.doolittlefuneralservice.com.

Portland

John James Yurko

John James Yurko, 63, of Mount Juliet, Tenn., formerly of Portland, died Monday, May 18, at Trevecca Center for Rehabilitation and Healing in Nashville, Tenn., due to complications from a traumatic spinal injury.

John is predeceased by his mother, Catherine (Ford) Yurko of Portland; father, Peter Yurko Jr. of Hartford; sisters, Paula Yurko of Hartford and Sandra Moore of Portland; and his faithful companion, Lilly.

He leaves behind his partner, Shirley Bougor of Mount Juliet, Tenn.; daughters, Mandy Yurko of Warwick, Mass., and Tia Yurko of Ashburnham, Mass.; brothers, Leon Yurko of Dorchester, Mass., Bob Yurko of Simsbury, and Tom Yurko of East Hartford; sisters, Linda Stone of Portland and Candie Dipersio of Lynn, Mass.; grandsons, Dustin and Colin Estelle of Warwick, Mass., and Kalvin Richard of Ashburnham, Mass.; and many nieces and nephews.

John graduated from East Hampton High School in 1975 and received an Associate degree in Art from Middlesex Community College. He was a member of Wesleyan Potters in Middletown.

An artist through and through, he was passionate about painting and cooking and spent his career perfecting both skills. A man for all seasons, he enjoyed fishing, skiing, tennis, playing guitar and good food, wine and friends. John was a man about town and a friend to all who knew him.

A memorial service will be held Sunday, Aug. 23, at 11 a.m., in the Portland Memorial Funeral Home, 231 Main St., Portland. Burial will be Monday, Aug. 24, at 11 a.m. in Cedar Hill Cemetery, Hartford.

Cobalt

Charles M. Burns

Charles M. Burns, 83, of Cobalt, husband of the late Norma (Griswold) Burns, passed away peacefully in his sleep Sunday, Aug. 9. Born Dec. 10, 1936, in Middletown, he was the son of the late James and Helen (Porter) Burns.

Charles grew up in Portland along with his siblings, Jeanne Burns Helenek, James H. Burns, and Rita Burns Southard. From 1954-58, he served in the U.S. Army, volunteering in 1956 to travel to the Bikini and Eniwetok atolls in the South Pacific to witness the testing of the hydrogen bomb as part of Operation Redwing.

Following his service, he worked for over 40 years at JH Metal Finishing in New Britain until his retirement. He was a longtime member of VFW Post 5095 in East Hampton.

He is survived by his brother-in-law Harry Southard and nieces and nephews and friends.

At the request of the family, services will be private.

Colchester

Rodney D. Higgins

Rodney D. Higgins, 71, of Lebanon, formerly of Colchester, passed away peacefully at Hartford Hospital Wednesday, Aug. 5, following a courageous and valiant battle with pancreatic cancer. Born in Bangor, Maine, March 12, 1949, he was a son of the late Ernest and Erma (Gould) Higgins Madaras.



As a young man, Rodney enlisted with the U.S. Army and proudly served our country during the Vietnam War; he received several awards including Sharpshooter M-14, Expert M-16 and a National Defense Service Medal.

Rodney married the great love of his life, Lori (Blais) on Jan. 5, 1985, at Colchester Federated Church. The couple settled in Colchester where they built their home and raised their family together. Rodney worked first as an HVAC technician and then as a property manager for Phoenix Mutual Life Insurance Company for 30 years. His career journey also included managing properties for Citi Group, Cushman & Wakefield, MetLife, Prudential and Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art. In his free time, Rodney enjoyed hunting, fishing, and camping and hiking in his beloved home state of Maine, and was an avid golfer. Watching western television shows and movies brought much joy to him. Enjoying Boston Red Sox, New England Patriots and UConn basketball games was a favorite past time of Rod's.

Above all, Rodney was a gentleman and a family man; he loved his family beyond measure and would do anything to ensure their happiness and well-being.

Rodney will be greatly missed and always loved by his beloved wife of over 35 years, Lori Higgins of Lebanon; his daughter, Justine Higgins of Coventry; his son, Walker & his wife, Kylen Higgins of Hayden, Colo.; his siblings and their spouses, Philip and Tammy Higgins of Winterport, Maine, Erma and John Evans of Dexter, Maine, Laszlo and Babi of Dedham, Mass.; his sisters-in-law, Margot Higgins of Bangor, Maine, and Joyce Higgins of Middletown; his brothers-in-law, Marc Blais of Colchester and David and his wife Terry Blais of Fairfield, Maine; his sister in law, Joanne and her husband Steven Cohen of East Hampton; and many nephews and nieces; and numerous extended family members and friends.

In addition to his parents, Rodney was predeceased by his brothers, Robert, Elwyn, Ronald and Howard Higgins and Johnny Balint Madaras.

Rodney's family extends their heartfelt thanks to all the staff at the Hartford Healthcare Cancer Centers at Windham Hospital and Hartford Hospital, as well as, all the staff on floor CB2 at Hartford Hospital for their compassionate and expert care of Rodney.

Rodney will be laid to rest in the Connecticut State Veterans Cemetery in Middletown. Due to the ongoing pandemic, services will be private; however, a memorial service will be planned at a safer time.

In lieu of flowers, memorial donations can be made to the Ron Foley Foundation, "Fighting Pancreatic Cancer" (www.ronsrun.org) or to the Lustgarten Foundation for Pancreatic Cancer Research (www.lustgarten.org/donate).

The Aurora McCarthy Funeral Home of Colchester has been entrusted with arrangements. For online condolences, please visit www.auroramccarthyfuneralhome.com.

Andover

Patricia J. McCann

Patricia J. McCann, 68, of Andover, died Tuesday, Aug. 4.

Patricia (Patty) was a lifelong resident of Andover and a quintessential farm girl. As a younger woman, she showed horses in halter classes and Western riding, winning awards throughout New England. Patty loved her many dogs and cats, tending to her flock of chickens, sewing, baking, cooking, and crafting. She took great joy in her beautiful flower gardens. Patty always felt her best at home on Jurovaty Road.



Patty will be remembered for her side-splitting sense of humor and generous personality. She was a champion shopper and has the shoe and pocket-book collection to prove it! She adored her family; her best friend was also her sister Heidi, and the two talked or saw each other every day. She was a mom to everyone and spoiled her nieces and nephews as though they were her own, though her daughter, Tian, was her true pride and joy. Patty wasn't a beach or mountain person because she loved both and took many a trip to Maine, Cape Cod, and New Hampshire.

Patty loved to sing, though she was a terrible singer. She wasn't particular about what she sang, though Patty was a Neil Diamond super fan. She was loyal to the Red Sox and the New England Patriots and especially enjoyed watching shows about the Alaskan wilderness. A highlight of her life was a trip and cruise that she and her husband took to Alaska in 2018.

She was a 1970 graduate of RHAM High School and was then a baker at Edward's Food Warehouse where she met her husband, David. She later earned an associate's degree from Manchester Community College.

Patty was a feminist who believed in equal rights and empowering women. Returning to school and earning this degree was a great source of pride for Patty. But her greatest achievements, by far, were being a loving mother to Tian, who she cherished above all else, and her nearly 40-year marriage to her devoted husband and soulmate, David.

Patty is survived by her husband David McCann of Andover and daughter Tian McCann of West Hartford; her sister, Heidi Palka and her husband Ray Palka of Andover; a brother, Edward Jurovaty and his wife Valerie Jurovaty of Andover; a brother-in-law, George McCann and his wife Catherine McCann of Manchester; as well as numerous nieces, nephews and great-nieces and nephews.

She was predeceased by her mother, Janet Jurovaty, and father, Edward Jurovaty; mother-in-law, Minnie "Gram" McCann and father-in-law George J. McCann; and sister-in-law Cheryl Forostoski and her husband Stanley Forostoski.

Calling hours were Monday, Aug. 10. There was a private funeral service Tuesday, Aug. 11. Her burial was the same day at Townsend Cemetery in Andover.

In lieu of flowers, memorial donations may be made to the Connecticut Humane Society.

Patty's family would like to thank everyone for their warm condolences during this time.

To sign an online memorial guestbook, visit www.potterfuneralhome.com.

Obituaries continued

Marlborough

Roger J. Albert

Roger J. Albert, 74, the beloved husband of Yveline (Viel) Albert for the last 53 years, died Tuesday, Aug. 4, at Hartford Hospital.

Roger was born Dec. 4, 1945, in St. Agatha, Maine. He served in the U.S. Army for three years. He had lived in Marlborough the last 46 years and was an employee of AT&T in New Haven and Hartford for 30 years retiring as a director of MLT. Roger had a heart of gold and was a great Samaritan to all.

Besides his wife Yveline, he is survived by his son, Roger Brian Albert and his wife Kristina and their daughter Makenzie, all of East Haddam; he was predeceased by his son, Craig Albert, but is survived by Craig's wife Amanda of Andover, and children Caleb McMullin of Granby and Zoe Albert of Andover. Also surviving Roger are his brothers Carl and his wife Maureen Albert, Ron Albert; his sisters, Georgette and her husband Ron Beaulieu, Carlene Bourque, Jacqueline and her husband Herman Cyr, and Carmen and her husband Roger Theriault; and many nieces and nephews.

Family and friends called at Mulryan Funeral Home in Glastonbury Wednesday, Aug. 12. A private burial will be held at the family's convenience.

In lieu of flowers, memorial donations may be made to Tunnel 2 Towers Foundation, 2361 Hylan Blvd., Staten Island, NY 10306.

For online condolences, please visit www.mulryanfh.com.



Andover

Laurie Grele Cain

Laurie Grele Cain left an indelible mark on her family, friends and community and departed this earthly life Sunday, Aug. 9. She exhibited a rare blend of selfless love and devotion to others and an outsized passion for living life to its fullest.

Laurie was the beloved first daughter of the late Milton and Jean Grele and spent her formative years in Naugatuck with her sister Lisa Grele Barrie of Raleigh, N.C., and several lifelong friends. She leaves behind four accomplished children and their partners: Elizabeth and Drew, Molly and Rob, Tucker and Yulia, and Sam and Emma.

She attended Naugatuck High School and participated in many clubs including choir, modern dance, synchronized swim, ski club, Future Teachers, and Future Nurses. Laurie graduated as the class Salutatorian and received numerous awards including 1st place Bio-Science Award, Girls Engineering Award in Math and Science, and National Merit Scholar Award. The class concurred that the ideal senior would have the brains of Laurie Grele and she was also voted "Class Apple Polisher!"

Laurie graduated from UConn with a degree in elementary education, taught at Hillside Middle School, then worked as a computer programmer at Uniroyal in Naugatuck. She attended law school at Northeastern University in Boston, Mass., received her JD, clerked for the Honorable Anthony Grillo of the Connecticut Supreme Court, then began working as a lawyer for the Travelers while settling down to begin a family, where she dove into the role of "Mother" with unbounding love and devotion.

After leaving the corporate world, she began her career as an impartial arbitrator at the State Board of Mediation and Arbitration. She became an active member of the American Arbitration Association, the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service, the Connecticut Employee Review Board, and the Department of Corrections and served as the deputy chair for the State Board for over six years. She was known for handling her cases in a timely manner with integrity, fairness, respect for the parties involved and a dose of her renowned sense of humor.

Laurie's extended network of friends remember her irreverent wit, vivacious personality and unbridled joy that she shared with so many, seemingly effortlessly. She went out of her way to nurture others and gave of her time and talents to many community organizations. Perhaps the greatest adventures of her life began when she met her soulmate and partner Dale Ploski in 2014 and they rebuilt their lives together, ending up in their cherished lake house in Andover. Laurie's zeal for biking, kayaking, and skiing climbed to fearless, new heights and she spent countless hours outdoors in the woods, water and slopes with Dale and their faithful dog, Billy Joel.

She was beloved by many. She will be missed beyond measure. She will remain deep in our hearts. To honor her memory, love, live, laugh and forgive with wild abandon.

A celebration of her life will be held in the spring when it is safe to gather.

Donations can be made to the Grele Scholarship Fund that awards outstanding seniors at Naugatuck High School and is administered by the Rotary Club of Naugatuck, P.O. Box 484, Naugatuck, CT 06770.

O'Brien Funeral Home, 24 Lincoln Ave., Forestville/Bristol, is honored to assist the family with the arrangements. To leave an online message of condolence, share a memory or a photo, please visit Laurie's tribute page at www.O'Brien-FuneralHome.com.



From the Editor's Desk

Observations & Ruminations

by Mike Thompson

What the hell, Eversource?

Here in Glastonbury, the *Rivereast* offices finally regained power Monday morning – after being without since last Tuesday. (Hearty thanks to the folks at the *Rare Reminder* in Rocky Hill for letting us use their printing press last Friday.) And while I was fortunate to only lose power for half an hour at my home, many friends of mine were without for several days; one friend in Manchester, who lives only a few minutes from me, was without power until Sunday night.

Tropical Storm Isaias was a bear of a storm, no doubt, and definitely caused a lot of damage. There were downed trees all over the state; not just limbs, but entire trees, just completely uprooted. So I know the clean-up was intense. But still, this was a tropical storm. The predictions are out that it will be a very active hurricane season in the Atlantic this year (I mean, the way 2020 has been going, of course it will be), so what happens if a hurricane hits Connecticut? It's certainly possible. And after last week, I have my doubts that Eversource will be able to handle it.

I'm certainly not alone in these doubts. One of my favorite Connecticut meteorologists (yes, I'm a hopeless nerd), Ryan Hanrahan, tweeted on Monday, "The most important story once everyone has their power back is how woefully unprepared the state is for a major hurricane like 1938 or Carol."

And that, to quote a 1940s radio game show (see above re: hopeless nerd), is the \$64 question.

Now it's true that not all of that falls on Eversource. Public Works crews need to be a bit more prepared as well. The overall clean-up from this storm seemed to be remarkably slow in some places. As recently as Saturday, a friend in Manchester – a pretty well-populated part of Manchester at that – still had fallen trees blocking part of his street.

Still, Eversource's response certainly gives one pause. You compare Connecticut to other states that were also hit hard by Isaias, and you see those states not only had power restored more quickly, but power companies that seemed to, well, care more. In New York City, Con Edison offered reimbursement of up to \$540 for spoiled food and medication for customers who lost power for more than 48 hours. But here in Connecticut, not only

is reimbursement not happening, Eversource has suggested yet more rate hikes may come from the storm – the *CT Mirror* reporting last week that "Ultimately, ratepayers bear the cost of hiring crews to stand by, as well as keeping them on the payroll for as long as it takes to restore power."

Eversource's CEO – whose salary is more than \$19 million, by the way – stayed out of the public eye after the storm, instead dispatching the company's president of regional electric operations, Craig Hallstrom, to speak with the media. Hallstrom, according to the *Mirror*, offered no apologies about his company's performance.

"I think we were ready," the news website quoted him as saying. "With all our tools, we made a decision what the storm was most likely going to do. The rest is history. It's a lot bigger than we thought it was, probably what a lot of people thought it was."

Hallstrom does have a point. While Isaias had been predicted for days, for most of that time the forecast called for a heavy rain event. It wasn't until last Monday that it became clear the storm was shifting course and that Connecticut would be in for stronger winds. Still, as Hanrahan tweeted, "That's why it is important to prepare for a reasonable worst case scenario because these things are fluid."

It's not like other states were unaffected by Isaias' winds. But their power outages weren't nearly as long lasting. In New Jersey – which as Hanrahan noted had stronger winds than Connecticut did – more than a million customers lost power, and by Aug. 6 – two days after the storm – 73% of those affected had seen their power restored. Meanwhile, only 32% of Connecticut had been restored by that date.

So it looks like other places were able to better adjust on the fly. Why wasn't Eversource? Particularly given the sharp bill increases all of us have seen in the past month, it's a more than reasonable question.

And, again, what happens when a hurricane hits us? As one will, probably sooner than later. How long will the outages last then?

If Isaias was a dress rehearsal, it showed us that we're not nearly ready for Opening Night.

* * *

See you next week.

