

**RIVEREAST****News Bulletin**

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

Volume 44, Number 38

Published by The Glastonbury Citizen

August 21, 2020



Garden in Bloom... The vegetable garden behind St. John Fisher Church in Marlborough is in full bloom, and all grown there is donated to the town food bank each week. So far this season, more than 200 pounds of fresh produce has been given out to those in need of food assistance. The garden's youngest volunteer, Connor Hoffman, is shown with some carrots that were recently donated. Anyone is welcome to join in and help at the garden; no experience necessary. Any town gardeners that might have an excess of their own homegrown veggies can bring them to the garden on Monday afternoons and they will be donated to the food bank as well. For more information, email Peg at pegfilly922@yahoo.com.

Hebron Schools to Fully Reopen

by Sloan Brewster

Hebron schools will fully reopen next month, as the Board of Education Tuesday rebuffed the recommendation of its own superintendent of schools and will only go with hybrid learning for the first week.

After a meeting that stretched more than five hours – and began with an extended private session – the Board of Education voted 5-2 to open schools Tuesday, Sept. 8, with a hybrid model that will bring half of students to the Gilead Hill and Hebron Elementary schools on Tuesday and Wednesday, and the rest on Thursday and Friday.

Starting Monday, Sept. 14, all students will return to both schools full-time, five days a week.

The board opened the combination virtual and in-person meeting – after returning from the private session – with a motion to fully open schools on day one, but Superintendent of Schools Thomas Baird made the case for going with the hybrid model for three weeks to help students and staff transition to a new school environment amid COVID-19 guidelines, including mask wearing and social distancing.

In March, Gov. Ned Lamont closed all schools in the state in an effort to curb the spread of COVID-19 and students took on remote learning.

For the fall, Lamont originally mandated that all districts draft full in-person, hybrid and distant learning models but plan to have all children return to school five days a week.

Then last month, the governor said districts could make the decision to bring all students back at once or shift to a hybrid model.

At a school board meeting last week, Baird recommended opening with a hybrid model for five weeks, until Columbus Day, Oct. 14, which he said “would be consistent with what we see other districts doing with hybrid open-

ings as well.”

Gilead Hill School Principal Katie Uriano and Hebron Elementary Principal Michael Larkin supported his recommendation.

After Baird’s presentation, however, board members spoke in favor of a full reopening.

Joseph Margaitis said he was “100% behind full reopening.”

“I think we owe it to the families of this town to allow children to come here full-time,” he said.

Christopher Aker also said he supported fully reopening as doing less would be to the “the social and emotional detriment of the children.”

“There’s never been a better time than right now to reopen schools,” he said.

Based on board and community feedback at last week’s meeting, Baird on Tuesday, presented more details about school re-opening and offered tweaks to his hybrid plan, including that it would be for three weeks only.

Uriano and Larkin once again supported his recommendation.

When school opens, Baird said there would be temperature checks for staff and students, health screenings and enhanced cohorting for preschool children.

While state guidelines mandate mask-wearing among students and staff, preschool children will not be required to wear them, a plan Baird said was based on new guidelines.

“To be very frank, when the requirement for masks for preschool went away that caused some concern for us,” Baird said.

Per state guideline, the maximum class size for pre-school is 14, Baird said.

Baird said he had consulted with the Chatham Health District and a nurse on safety metrics.

“We’ve done everything that we possibly can
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Primary Snafus Lead to Concerns About November

by Sloan Brewster

Delays by a third-party mail house in getting absentee ballots to voters in time for last week’s primary left local town clerks with extra work; now they are concerned about dealing with the thousands of mail-in ballots anticipated for the November presidential election.

Due to COVID-19, Secretary of State Denise Merrill is allowing all voters who wish to do so to vote by absentee ballot in the upcoming election. Primary Day on Aug. 11 was the dry run for the process.

In phone calls this week, town clerks said they worked overtime and came in on weekends to deal with “hiccups” and “snags” caused by the failure to meet deadlines by the mail house Merrill hired.

“There were delays in getting [absentee ballot] applications to voters and delays in getting the voter database updated in order to process those ballots and then delays in issuing ballots,” said Portland Town Clerk Ryan Curley.

Specifically, he said, the mail house dropped

the ball on 20,000 ballots that voters were supposed to receive by July 21. Subsequently, the secretary of state cancelled the contract with the mail house and waited days before telling town clerks, putting the onus and “a great strain” on them to get the ballots to voters before the Aug. 11 primary.

In addition, ballots the mail house did send were late in coming, he said.

“Aug. 1 and 3 were the two days that Portland voters began receiving them,” Curley said.

“Twelve days late at the bare minimum the voters received the ballots.”

According to a press release from Merrill’s office, due to power outages caused by Tropical Storm Isaias, Gov. Ned Lamont extended the deadline for voters to get the ballots in, allowing them to be counted as long as they were postmarked prior to Aug. 11 and received by town clerks by Aug. 13.

“The statewide power outages and connectivity issues caused by Tropical Storm Isaias

have resulted in disruption to mail delivery and election offices across the state,” Merrill said, according to the press release. “This executive order would respond to postal delays caused by the storm to make sure every vote is counted.”

Despite the extension, however, some votes were left uncounted.

“Unfortunately, I just had a ballot come in today that was postmarked prior to Aug. 11,” Curley said Tuesday.

In total, as of Tuesday, he has received five since the 13th.

When asked where the failure was, Merrill blamed town clerks, Curley said.

“Our [Town Clerks Association] president was trying to issue her own ballots,” Curley said. “We couldn’t get the real story out there, as much as we would have liked to.”

In total, Curley issued 1,102 ballots for the primary and received 879 back.

In a typical primary, the number “would be

a fraction of that,” he said, estimating that he generally gets between 100 and 150.

With 6,400 registered voters in Portland, Curley anticipates 3,000 to 4,000 absentee ballots for the November presidential election and said he will have to hire helpers.

Anna Posniak, Town Clerks Association president, sent out an email to members Monday informing them that Merrill had announced that for the November election her office will mail absentee ballots to all eligible voters but will not hire a mail house to process and mail them. Rather, town clerks will do so.

“Anyone who wants to vote by absentee ballot can,” Curley said. “What this does create, though, is a great demand on town clerk offices all over the state. I know many of my colleagues are concerned about this rapid increase.”

In a statement issued Wednesday, Gina Atanasoff, Merrill’s press secretary, said the

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to assure that our kids are safe,” he said.

The measures, which Baird described as going “above and beyond safety requirements,” include cleaning heating ventilation and air conditioning, running air ducts in bathrooms, following Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommendations for enhanced cleaning, mask use, desk shields and social distancing.

Baird said since students would be required to wear masks, he spent a day without air conditioning wearing one, taking it off for a break for lunch.

“It wasn’t the end of the world,” he said “By the end of the day was I relieved to take the mask off after eight hours? I certainly was.”

Whenever possible, classes such as music and physical education will take place outside, where space allows for extended social distancing and mask removal.

Several residents vocally favored Baird’s hybrid plan, remotely addressing board members assembled in the gym at Gilead Hill.

One speaker was a student who will be entering sixth grade at Hebron Elementary.

“I think we should listen to my principal, Mr. Larkin, and start part-time and then go to full-time,” said Brendan Connolly.

His mother Carol Connolly – a former member of the Hebron school board – echoed his sentiment, advising the board to listen to

“the experts” and take a phased-in approach. Connolly also told Baird he can override any decision the board makes.

“The governor made a point [Tuesday] that you — the superintendent — have the final call on reopening,” she told Baird, referring to what Lamont said at a press conference. “I think you have final authority. ... I say, have the courage tonight to lead them.”

Meg Clifton, a teacher at RHAM and parent of two students at Hebron Elementary, also encouraged the board to listen to the people familiar with the schools.

“I fully support starting with hybrid,” she said. “If the goal is to have to avoid doing distance learning full time then a hybrid approach is the way to go.”

Board member Amanda Veneziano suggested using a hybrid model for two weeks as a compromise between Baird’s five-week hybrid approach and a recommendation by Board Chair Heather Petit to allow one week of hybrid learning to give students and educators a chance to acclimate to new school norms.

A motion to go with Veneziano’s approach failed, with Keith Petit, Joe Zuzel and Veneziano in favor but Heather Petit, Allyson Schmeizl, Margaitis and Aker opposed.

The motion to open with a week of hybrid learning passed with Heather Petit, Aker, Schmeizl, Margaitis and Keith Petit in favor and Veneziano and Zuzel opposed.

Primary Snafus cont. from Front Page

office believes letting town clerks administer ballots for the November election is in the best interest of voters and offers the most timely service.

Atanasoff said Merrill’s office wants to help and support town clerks, will be providing additional resources, including funding, and is open to suggestions.

“When we utilized centralized fulfillment for the primary in August, which was somewhat of a dress rehearsal for the general election, we were trying to alleviate the workload that increased use of absentee ballots would have on the town clerks. At the time, many town halls were closed due the COVID outbreak,” she wrote in the statement. “Because things are more open now than when they were leading up to the primary, and with the slowdown of the United States Postal Service, it has since been decided to return the process to the local officials who have always had the responsibility to do it.”

Hebron Town Clerk Carla Pomprowicz said she processed 1,000 absentee ballots for the primary, compared with the 2016 presidential primary, when she received a total of 52.

“And it was all we could do in our office to keep up with our regular town clerk duties and the duties of a town clerk during an election,” she said.

There were also some mail delivery glitches, with Hebron receiving a few ballots that should have been delivered to other towns and other towns getting some that should have gone to Hebron.

“Town clerks across the state personally went about delivering and picking up these stray ballots so they could be received in time to be counted,” Pomprowicz said. “I went to Columbia to pick up one ballot and then delivered three to Andover and then to East Hartford to retrieve one.

Of the 8,000 registered voters in Hebron, Pomprowicz said she anticipates 6,000 will opt to vote by mail in November. She said she is honing her process and planning to hire additional staff.

“If we closed our office to every other duty we still couldn’t keep up with it [alone],” she said – adding that this was not something she would do. “So for November, our biggest concern is how we’re going to. We will handle it, but it’s a matter of how we’re going to handle the volume.”

Processing absentee ballots applications involves several steps, starting with opening envelopes and stamping them with the time and date they were received, Pomprowicz said. Then the applicant’s name is entered into a database as an individual looking to vote by mail.

Once that part is done, clerks prepare packets for mailing the ballots.

“We have to set up an assembly line to put together the ballot package,” Pomprowicz said.

The office also fields phone calls and answers questions.

When the ballots are returned, the clerks put them in order by street address, similar to how voters are lined up based on address at the polls, Pomprowicz said. The ballots are opened and the names double-checked against the vote by mail list and, if necessary, added to the list.

“Every person who voted has to be on the list,” Pomprowicz said.

Marlborough Town Clerk Lauren Griffin said her office did approximately 700 absentee ballots. In a typical primary, the office would get about 30.

“The numbers were through the roof,” she said.

While Griffin dealt with the ballots, Assistant Town Clerk Nancy Dickson kept up with daily duties.

For such things as marriage and birth certificates, Griffin would meet folks outside – since the building is still not open due to COVID-19 – and encourage them to put paperwork in the drop box in front of Town Hall.

Griffin said she would likely hire someone to help during the November election.

Colchester Town Clerk Gayle Furman said

she mailed 1,547 absentee ballots. Of those, 1,218 were returned. In the 2016 primary, about 150 absentee ballots came back.

Colchester was also among three towns to lose access to the state voter registry system after the power outages caused by Tropical Storm Isaias, so during the last few days of the primary, Furman traveled to Salem to get into the system.

“We didn’t have access until about 15 minutes ago,” she said in a phone call Wednesday. “We’re finally back up and running.”

To process ballots in November, Furman said she plans to hire additional staff

“We have to process all our ballots through our office, which I’m fine with,” she said.

Andover Town Clerk Carol Lee said she received 174 Democratic absentee ballots and 53 Republican ballots, compared with between 30 and 40 each during a typical primary.

Lee said she does not have any concerns about the next wave of absentee ballots, which will start rolling in in September and will hold off hiring additional staff until she has an idea of what the volume will be.

“We’ll just deal with whatever it is,” she said.

East Hampton Town Clerk Kelly Bilodeau said she issued 1,236 absentee ballots and 924 were returned, adding that some came in late. Since it was her first presidential primary she said she could not compare the volume to a typical year’s.

Curley, a Republican, said he is concerned about how the November election will play out — and criticized the office of Democrat Merrill.

“There’s been many broken promises from the secretary of state,” he said. “I am very concerned in the secretary of state’s ability to be able to deliver on the promises.”

In a phone call Wednesday, Curley clarified that he was referring to issues that took place during the primary, including delays in when ballot applications and ballots were sent out and received.

The secretary of state’s office would say one thing in conference calls about when things would go out, would not put it in writing and then it would not happen, he said. In addition, he said, there were promises made about when online system updates would go live that also did not happen and left town clerks unable to process ballots.

Despite the issues, Curley said town clerks and the secretary of state have one common goal.

“The bottom line is, the town clerks and the secretary of state are committed to making sure everyone can get their vote in,” Curley said. “We’ve got a big task ahead of us.”

Other clerks echoed his sentiment.

“I think it’s important that people have a choice on how to handle their vote,” Pomprowicz said. “The presidential election is extremely important so know your choices.”

To get ballots in by the Nov. 3 deadline, most of the town clerks encourage voters to use locked drop-boxes at Town Halls.

They said they check the secure boxes daily, and as the election gets closer, even more frequently.

“We’re so lucky because we’re a small town so it’s easy to get to that office drop box,” Pomprowicz said. “You could drop your stuff off at midnight.”

The clerks said they were already getting absentee ballot applications for November and asked that folks not wait until the last minute to submit them.

“The sooner the better,” Griffin said. “The goal is to have a steady stream rather than to have a giant pile waiting for us.”

Despite Pandemic, East Hampton Library Circulation Climbs

by Jack Lakowsky

East Hampton Public Library Director Ellen Paul said Monday the library is still on track to exceed last year's checkout rate, despite the library's lengthy closure between mid-March and July 6.

Paul told the *Rivereast* that the library was originally predicted to reach 100,000 items checked out this year, but COVID-19 disrupted this steady traffic flow.

"Despite being closed for more than three months, we still did more than 82,500 checkouts between June 2019 and July 2020," said Paul.

Paul said this is still an increase over checkouts rates for the 2018-19 fiscal year, which saw 70,000 items loaned out.

Paul said e-book borrowing has also increased by almost double.

The library's children's programs and activities also saw an increase in participation in 2019-20. Even with the months-long closing, Paul said about 7,500 attended the library's programs, compared to about 5,900 the prior year, a difference of 1,600 attendees.

"Imagine what we'd have done if we were open the entire year," said Paul. "Imagine if we'd been able to have summer reading as planned."

Paul said the number of children who participated in the library's summer reading program was down to about 200 this year, compared to 400 last year.

"We knew we wouldn't sustain 400 this year," said Paul. "We're proud of 200, at this point."

Paul said, although the number of participants may have decreased, actual participation rates increased. The group was smaller, but more engaged, she said. Paul explained that, last year, 55% of the 400 children returned for three consecutive weeks. This year, participation was more consistent, with that figure rising to about 70%.

The library partnered with Belltown's Epoch Arts to create for summer reading participants eight serialized short films, one for each week of the summer reading program. The one-act shows were tailored to this year's theme of "A Hero's Journey." As kids met their weekly reading goals, they unlocked episodes in the story to be viewed online.

"Hopefully, next year, we're able to boost those numbers back up," said Paul.

Paul said the library's momentum continued because it was propelled by years of previous work, and therefore able to withstand the statewide shutdown started in March through executive order by Gov. Ned Lamont. The shutdown was initiated to combat the spread of COVID-19.

Paul said, over the past few years, improvements have been made to the library building, its services and collections. Paul said the community is seeing returns on its investment. Paul said patrons who hadn't visited the library in years have once again become regular visitors.

"People are recognizing that we're an integral part of the community," said Paul. "And that we're here for them."

Library-goers have been diligent about COVID prevention protocols, Paul said.

Cyndi Shirshac, vice chairperson of East Hampton's Library Advisory Board, said instilling these safety rules was the board's first priority. Shirshac said the board ensured safety measures were in place and well-known to staff before the library reopened.

"Our main concern was safety for staff, safety for patrons, and having enough PPE and sanitizer," said Shirshac.

Shirshac said that, once the "hurdle" of safety was dealt with, library staff and the board worked on delivery of materials, specifically offering curbside pickup from an outdoor bookrack.

Shirshac said finding the best ways to reintroduce the library's activities and programs through streaming and platforms like Zoom will be the board's next tackling.

"We already know that a benefit of streaming is that you can reach a larger audience," said Shirshac. "But we're also aware that people may be burnt out from their computers, so we're trying to work with that, too."

Both Paul and Shirshac commended library staff for their efforts. Paul was on family leave while her staff retrofitted the library and worked with town officials to ensure the library was ready to reopen promptly, and safely.

"I can't say enough about how they picked up the ball and ran with it," said Shirshac. "Its not in their job description to be on the front

lines of [a pandemic response]."

Shirshac added that Paul has also gone "above and beyond."

Paul said the library's "laser focus" has been aimed at community relations and communication.

Unlike many libraries in the state, the East Hampton library is open for browsing. Computers are also available for use, although every other device was removed to accommodate social distancing. Also, to this end, some furniture has been removed. Visitors must wear masks.

Paul said, due to reduced hours and capacity, library's traffic has yet to reach pre-pandemic checkout rates, seeing about 60 patrons per day. But she said this is rising steadily. Paul said the library saw a spike in visitations during the widespread power outages caused by Tropical Storm Isaias, jumping to about 80 per day before leveling back out as electricity was slowly restored.

Paul said reduced hours are currently the library's biggest challenge.

Paul said the library's crowd has been made up of older adults and seniors. She said she is happy to have them back, but that she also severely misses seeing children and families in the library. She said she understands this caution. As a parent to a toddler and newborn, Paul said she is only bringing her children out for absolute necessities.

Paul knows many are not yet comfortable browsing and perusing the bookshelves. Therefore, the library will continue curbside pickup service indefinitely. Curbside pickup has been popular with patrons, Paul said.

In fact, Paul said she and library staff had discussed curbside pickup before the onset of the pandemic, a rare instance of COVID-19 not stalling plans but accelerating them into fruition.

Patrons can reserve items over the phone or go to the library's website. The materials will be prepared and can be picked up on a rack near the building's entrance.

"We're working on a number of things to enhance browsing for those who don't want to come in," said Paul.

One way of improving browsing for patrons who want to walk the safe route can try the library's newly created "exploration kits." Staff will curate these mystery kits, whose contents will be unknown to the borrower.

"It's a great way to discover something new," said Paul.

Another new library offering is the "family fun pack." Packs are sorted in one of three categories: vacation, hobby, or esoteric. Vacation packs, for example, will be stuffed with an array of memoirs, cookbooks, and folktales, all originating from diverse cultures. Paul said these offer the enrichment of learning about a new culture from the safety of the home.

Paul said these fun packs have been popular, with 30 families checking them out in three weeks. Paul said, given their popularity, they are likely to remain a permanent offer.

The library, Paul said, has plans to bring back its popular weekly program, "baby-rhyme time" through an online, remote platform. Paul said this program was sidelined due to the pandemic, and that between 30 and 40 people take part each week. To celebrate the program's return, Paul said the library is planning to host a diaper drive sometime in September.

Along with returning programs, Paul hopes to in September expand the library's schedule to normal hours. Paul guessed this could happen sometime around Labor Day, but that the ever-changing pandemic situation makes any future planning tenuous.

However, despite the uncertainties of the COVID-19 era, Paul said the Library Advisory Board will continue with plans it developed in response to a strategic planning survey which was issued to the public at the beginning of the year.

"The community is going to see a lot of their thoughts in the plan," said Paul.

The board, Paul said, will present its final draft of the plan to the Town Council at its Sept. 22 meeting.

Melmed: Area Better Prepared For EEE, West Nile

by Jack Lakowsky

Chatham Health District Director Russell Melmed said last year's widespread distribution of mosquito-spread Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE) was "unprecedented in Connecticut."

"We saw EEE in areas that it had never had it before," Melmed on Wednesday told the *Rivereast*.

Melmed said the reasons behind this sudden outbreak in mosquitoes remain a mystery to researchers at the state Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) and the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station, although they have posited a few theories.

Melmed explained that officials have identified a EEE cycle where there seems to be an uptick every 5-7 years. Melmed recalled a previous outbreak in 2013, albeit a smaller one than in 2019.

State and local agencies are far more prepared this year, said Melmed. In Chatham, mosquito trapping and testing stations are operating in Hebron, Colchester and East Haddam. The Chatham Health District also includes East Hampton, Portland, and Marlborough.

Last year, a horse in Colchester died of EEE, and there was a nonfatal human case in the Chatham district.

This year's first EEE-positive mosquito was caught in Stonington in Eastern Connecticut. This is not unusual, Melmed said, especially

around the 27,000 acre Patchaug State Forest, which abuts Stonington. The EEE virus thrives in hardwood swamps where grow red cedar and maple trees. The root systems of these trees are pitted with chambers that allow mosquitoes to overwinter, according to Melmed.

"Luckily, people don't normally live in those sorts of areas," said Melmed.

However, people who enjoy hiking through forested wetlands should take precautions against EEE, many of which will also shield against West Nile Virus, which is more common than EEE.

Melmed said an effective measure against these viruses is simply covering up. Leave the tank-top at home and wear long sleeves and full-length pants. Common bug repellent is also effective, Melmed said. Mosquitos are most active between dawn and dusk. Avoiding these hardwood swamplands is the most effective prevention method, Melmed said.

However, EEE and West Nile-carrying bugs don't need deep, dark woods to find a home. People should take care to eliminate mosquito breeding areas in their yards and properties, said Melmed.

Melmed said to dump old water from bird baths regularly, and to tighten window screens. Water puddles in used tires, Melmed said, have proven to be popular mosquito nurseries. Chil-

dren's toys are often left in the yard, Melmed said, and these also hold water that can quickly become infested with mosquito larvae.

Gutter cleaning, Melmed said, is especially essential. Plant matter and water accumulate in gutters and make for a perfect bug breeding ground.

Natural treatments are available for large bird baths and decorative ponds, Melmed said, which will introduce mosquito larvae-killing bacteria.

Symptoms for West Nile and EEE are similar, Melmed said. They include weakness, confusion and persistent headache. EEE cases often also present a very high fever, said Melmed.

As a measure to increase preparedness against EEE, DEEP and other agencies this year released the EEE Response Plan. According to

this information, three of the state's 2019 EEE cases were fatal to humans.

The plan reads that, in most years, EEE is transmitted between mosquitoes and birds by a mosquito species that feeds specifically on birds. However, in years where the virus thrives, it spills over into other mosquito species that subsist on both birds and mammals, including humans.

One theory regarding the sudden outbreak in areas like Chatham, which had seen very few cases in the past, was a shift in migratory bird patterns.

According to the state, mosquitoes are unlikely to be active when morning temperatures drop below 50 degrees. Most adult mosquitoes are killed during the year's first frost.

Some Portland Businesses Struggle, Some Grow in Pandemic

by Jack Lakowsky

Darlene Lisle, owner of Brownstone Barbers on Portland-Cobalt Road in Portland, told the *Rivereast* Tuesday that operating during the COVID-19 pandemic has proven “terrible” for her business.

“Even through we’re open, this is crippling,” said Lisle.

Lisle said her struggle is common to many businesses in her industry. She said many salons and barbers did not open at all or have again closed their doors since the state’s reopening phases began.

“It’s going exactly as we said it would when they first opened us up with restrictions,” said Lisle.

Lisle predicts that a vast majority of salons and barbershops will not survive the current economic slump.

“I’m not even comfortable enough to say that we’re gonna make it,” said Lisle.

Lisle said she was caught in a catch-22. She said, ideally, she could have reopened when the pandemic was over or significantly quelled. However, she said, this was not financially feasible, either.

“We won’t be out of the woods for a long time,” said Lisle. “We’re hoping for the best but expecting the worst.”

Lisle said she received both state and federal financial aid.

“The money was helpful, but that reality is that it wasn’t enough,” said Lisle. Lisle added that government aid covered about a month of expenses.

Lisle said her shop can operate with a 50% customer capacity, per state requirements. She explained, though, that this does not mean half of her customers have returned.

“Many clients haven’t returned,” said Lisle.

Restrictions like this have prevented Brownstone and other shops from operating at a profit, Lisle explained. Lisle added that her overhead expenses, such as capital, labor, stock, and rent, have not decreased in price.

“Nothing’s changed,” said Lisle. “Vendors are charging the same. I’m hopeful that we’ll survive, but I’m far from feeling confident.”

Some of Portland’s businesses, however, have managed to grow despite the current economic downturn.

One example is Chris Cote’s Golf Shop, which in July introduced a new Northeast Performance Institute (NPI) facility to the community.

Peter Egazarian, owner and director of performance for NPI, told the *Rivereast* that a surge of new golfers is a surprising byproduct of the pandemic.

“Golf is a great, safe, outdoor activity,” said Egazarian.

Egazarian said golf is naturally “pandemic-friendly.” Players cannot as a standard precaution stand within six feet of other players. Otherwise they might get smacked on the backswing, he said.

Egazarian said the uncertainty of whether high schools and colleges will hold fall athletics is one reason behind the recent influx of golfers. He explained that student athletes who are unsure of the safety of playing football, for example, have found golf as a safe, fulfilling alternative.

“We’re seeing quite a few of those instances,” said Egazarian. “You’re definitely seeing a rise in that 25-45 demographic as well.”

Cote’s Golf and NPI were not entirely immune to the pandemic, however. They closed

in March and stayed closed for 8 weeks. During this time, Egazarian said, NPI’s team of 10 coaches “hit pause” and adjusted their programming to adhere to COVID-19 prevention protocols.

NPI offers golf instruction and extended coaching. Egazarian said NPI’s spacious facility eases the delivery of socially distanced instruction, with some classes being able to space individuals as much as 15 feet apart. Egazarian said he is glad NPI can offer an activity that can still be enjoyed by seniors, who must take extra precaution against COVID. NPI’s oldest student is 88, according to Egazarian.

NPI had also planned to have a 12-week extended coaching program for children aged 3-5, but this was nixed for safety. The program for ages 6-12 was held at a reduced capacity of six learners.

NPI had also planned on scheduling visits by special instructors of renown in the golf world, but these were also postponed.

“Otherwise, we haven’t had a lot of disruptions,” said Egazarian.

Mary Dickerson, Portland’s economic development coordinator, said several existing businesses are still moving forward with expansions, and that a few grand openings are still in the works.

Dickerson said, for example, Concentric Brewing still plans to have a “soft” opening in early October, probably around Columbus Day weekend. According to minutes from a July 15 Economic Development Commission meeting, the brewery will open at 50% capacity, and will be able to expand their outdoor seating with extra tables, and will be able to have about 100 customers at a time.

Construction of Portland’s new Dairy Queen was delayed by complications at the corporate level, Dickerson said, but work has resumed, and construction should be well underway by fall. Dickerson said she is especially excited about the DQ because it will offer drive-through service.

Dickerson said, in general, Portland’s restau-

rants have seen steady sales since reopening.

“Residents have been very good about patronizing our local restaurants,” said Dickerson.

Dickerson said local retailers, like Savvy Swap Consignment on Main Street, have adapted and are offering online and outdoor shopping.

Unfortunately, Dickerson said, losses incurred from the COVID-19-induced slowdown were inevitable.

Dickerson said a yoga studio that was scheduled to open in town postponed its opening indefinitely.

According to Economic Development Commission meeting minutes, local dental practices are also struggling.

Dickerson said Brownstone Exploration and Discovery Park is running at 25% capacity. The park often sells out at its 750-guest limit, but she said this still accounts for only one-fourth of normal revenue. According to commission meeting minutes, park-goers have been diligent about obeying COVID-19-prevention rules.

Dickerson said event venues, such as Portland’s popular St. Clements Castle, have been among the most impacted by the pandemic, due to restrictions on mass gatherings.

“The bulk of [St. Clements’] business is on hold,” said Dickerson. She said the owners of St. Clements are using this time to renovate their space in a way that allows them to welcome back customers without detracting from the social, communal experience of their business.

At the residential level, Dickerson said many have reinvested into home improvement projects money normally set aside for vacation trips. Dickerson’s office has seen an influx of swimming pool installation permits, especially.

Dickerson said there are also many new permits that have been issued for swing sets, patios, decks, construction of small structures like sheds, and basement renovations. These additions and renovations will make for an increase in tax revenue, which will help to grow Portland’s grand list.

Location Determined for New Community Center in Andover

by Sloan Brewster

If all goes as planned, the Andover Community Center will be built between Town Hall and Andover Elementary School.

Jeff Murray, chair of the Community/Senior Center Building Committee, said the committee at its meeting last Thursday finalized a decision to recommend adding a building behind the existing Town Hall complex.

“We’re going to start putting out plans,” he said.

There are septic tanks in the spot but they can be moved, Murray said. In fact, they were moved to that spot when the addition with the community room was added to the building in 2005.

Moving the septic tanks would cost approximately \$20,000, he said.

The next step in the process will be to look at the septic plans and make sure nothing else is there to hinder the construction. The committee is putting together specs for what the building footprint will look like and will eventually get an architect to do drawings, Murray said.

Before that happens, the committee would need Board of Selectmen approval.

In the meantime, Adrian Mandeville, Board of Selectman vice chairman, is assisting the committee in completing renderings and making printouts using computer aided design software.

The committee has an engineer and members with other related skills but no one in construction, so Mandeville volunteered to pitch in.

“I’m just doing what our community does as

a whole,” he said. “You help out.”

He is also giving the committee advice on construction methods and costs.

“Jeff Murray had asked me to brief the committee on construction and kind of be their construction advisor and I’m trying to help with that because that’s my background,” he said.

As plans stand now the 2,500-square-foot free-standing building would consist of one floor and a basement, Murray and Mandeville said.

The main floor would have some office space, possibly for a nurse or for someone to help folks complete their taxes and for someone to do community outreach for senior citizens, Mandeville said.

There will also likely be a kitchen, though not a full commercial kitchen, he said. Instead, it would give folks the ability to rewarm meals.

There will also be rooms for meeting space for boards and commissions and local community groups, such as Boy Scouts. Rooms would possibly have dividers to make the space smaller or larger depending on needs.

The basement could be finished at a later time and the building could be connected to Town Hall via an atrium, Murray said.

Mandeville said he would make renderings as the committee tweaks the plan and until it is ready to bring the design to the community for vetting or have an architect create more detailed drawings.

The town has \$450,000 set aside for the construction of a senior/community center.

The rest of the funding could be bonded, Murray said. The bonding would run about the same as a bond from a school project that the town will be retiring next year.

“It would be tax-neutral,” he said.

The committee had considered putting the center where the gazebo stands but opted for between the two buildings because there’s a spring in that spot, Murray said.

Other ideas include, putting a band shell and “giant movie screen” in back of the building for concerts and movies, Murray said.

“It’s a work in progress,” he said.

Since October 2018, when due to a mold infestation the Board of Selectmen shut down the old firehouse on Center Street, which was used for a senior center and meeting space, the town has been talking about building a new community/senior center.

Town Administrator Eric Anderson said he would help the committee in moving the plans for the community center forward.

“I think it’s a good decision,” he said.

“They’re moving in the right direction and I’m

going to try to support it as best I can.”

* * *

In other town news, after power outages caused by Tropical Storm Isaias left work at the transfer station unfinished, the town is wrapping up that project, Anderson said.

“The town’s mostly put back together so that’s good,” he said.

The town crew has been working since the storm to pick up brush left on the sides of the road in the wake of the storm.

“Now they’re refocusing on the transfer station,” Anderson said. “And trying to get that up and running.”

Next Friday, Aug. 29, there will be a free concert at the Town Hall gazebo, said Town Clerk Carol Lee. Sonic Theory will give a live performance from 6:30-8:30 p.m.

There will also be a concert on Sept. 19.

The concert held last month had a “wonderful turnout” and folks were complying with the social distancing requirements, Lee said.

RHAM Schools are Going Hybrid

by Sloan Brewster

RHAM schools will open with half of students gracing the hallways per day.

On Monday, the RHAM Board of Education decided to move to a hybrid reopening due to COVID-19. Interim School Superintendent Scott Leslie said in a phone call Tuesday.

The model will bring 50% of students back to school on Mondays and Tuesdays and the rest on Thursdays and Fridays, leaving Wednesday as a cleaning day. On days that students are not in school, they will be learning remotely.

In March, Gov. Ned Lamont closed all schools in the state in an effort to curb the spread of COVID-19 and students took on remote learning.

For the fall, Lamont originally mandated all districts to draft full in-person, hybrid and distant learning models but plan to have all children return to school five days a week.

Then last month the governor said districts could make the decision to bring all students back all week or shift to a hybrid model.

“What has happened since is the vast majority of middle and high schools have moved to a hybrid model because of the difficulties of maintaining social distance,” Leslie said. “Also, subsequently, all elementary schools have done likewise.”

On Tuesday, however, the Hebron Board of Education decided to go with a hybrid model only for the first week, with schools returning to full in-person learning starting Sept. 14.

While the state is on the low end as far as COVID-19 cases and it would be possible to bring all kids back, the decision to go hybrid “is not really about COVID,” Leslie said.

A big challenge to returning all students to school is maintaining social distance guidelines.

“It’s really, do we have the resources, do we have the staff do we have a building that we can keep students distant enough to remain safe,” he said. “It’s really looking at can we reopen and ensure everybody’s safety. The reality that schools have found is it really isn’t.”

Also, bringing all the students back every day would require additional cleaning and more staff would have to be hired to monitor for social distancing.

Costs to Reopen with All Students Full-Time Last month, Leslie put a \$1.078 million price tag on returning all students to school full-time, including a fix to keep a fire door between the middle and high schools open and upgraded filters for the air filtration system.

The list included a licensed practical nurse for approximately \$47,000; \$235,000 for substitute teachers; additional teacher coverage for \$250,000; more paraprofessionals for \$151,000; and Zoom and instructional tools for \$15,500.

He also listed about \$306,000 in personal protective equipment, cleaning supplies and building modifications; \$22,000 in student supports; \$24,000 in technology upgrades and \$5,000 in additional police coverage.

While the board gave him the go-ahead to use \$46,000 in capital funds for the “non-negotiable” filters and door fix, the rest of the money isn’t there, he said.

“Those are funds that none of us had,” Leslie said Tuesday. “The bottom line is we do not have enough to do what we need to do [for a full reopening].”

The hybrid model will be less pricey, he said.

Hybrid Benefits

By splitting students in half, the hybrid model makes it easier to increase physical distance in classrooms, hallways, on buses and

during in-class lunch – when students will not be wearing masks – Leslie said.

In addition, a number of parents informed the district they would be more likely to send children back to school if a hybrid model was adopted, Leslie said. Likewise, more staff indicated they would return under the model.

“We have a number of staff that qualified for leave under [Family Medical Leave Act] and this increases the sense of security for staff too, so we have a number of staff returning to the building,” he said. “There are some districts across the country that have announced that they are not opening because of the simple reason they don’t have enough staff to open.”

Previously, Leslie informed the board that in a survey of staff, 38.7% indicated they were in a high-risk category for contracting COVID-19.

It’s not about simply letting high risk staff take leave and not having the funds to hire someone to fill in, it’s also about the inability to find replacements, Leslie said.

“The pool of teachers doesn’t exist,” he said.

Another issue is about parents of elementary school children, including RHAM teachers, who rely on older high school siblings for childcare, he said.

“With the significant reduction in childcare that presents a huge challenge for all districts,”

he said.

Remote Learning Makeover

Remote learning will have some changes in the fall, Leslie said.

“We have a number of teachers working this summer to reimagine our remote learning program,” he said.

There will be synchronous learning with students who are home following and engaging with what is taking place in classrooms and a newly created program will better replicate the in-class experience.

“We’re ratcheting up the expectations,” Leslie said. “[Students] are going to be engaged in their full schedule five days a week.”

Board Approval

In a phone call Tuesday, Stephanie Bancroft, RHAM Board of Education chair, thanked Leslie and the members of the reopening committee “for doing some really great work this summer.”

“They’ve just done an outstanding job,” she said.

The board unanimously agreed to go with the hybrid model.

“There was no question in anybody’s mind that that was the right way to go,” Bancroft said. “Safety wise, to make sure that it was safe for students, staff and their families.”

First Day of School Delayed to Sept. 8 in Colchester

by Karla Santos

Colchester’s Board of Education met on Monday and discussed the implementation of the hybrid learning model while it also voted in favor of delaying the first day of school – which will now be Sept. 8.

The board also agreed to drop pre-kindergarten tuition to half of its planned price.

The first day of school was changed again based on feedback from the reopening task force and the teaching and learning department. The decision was made in the hopes of better planning given the challenges of not being able to offer the same learning experience that was offered previous to the pandemic.

Superintendent of Schools Jeff Burt said an additional week off will also give parents the opportunity to look into which cohort their children will be in as well as more time to find day care.

The first day of school was originally planned for Aug. 26, then it was changed to Aug. 31, but now it was pushed back again to start Sept. 8. From Aug. 31 to Sept. 4, staff training will take place. In addition, during that week, staff will have an opportunity to adjust their planning to the hybrid and distance learning models.

After Governor Ned Lamont offered flexibility to school districts in terms of choosing the learning model that best fits their needs, Colchester Public Schools chose to go with the hybrid plan.

Schools will have two cohorts identified as A and B. Students in group A will go to school on Mondays and Tuesdays; and students in group

B will go to school on Thursdays and Fridays. On Wednesdays, all students will learn from home but it will only be a half day of classes.

“The afternoon will be reserved for planning,” Burt said. “There’s tremendous amount of planning and collaboration that’s going to be required for this to really work.”

Each school will communicate with parents about its individual plan, especially cohorts, so that students know which group they will be part of.

Burt said administrators are taking into consideration the stress that teachers may go through in adjusting to managing students both inside the classroom and outside of it – in addition to supporting students that opt for full-time distance learning.

According to Burt, the district has been surveying parents and about 2,100 have responded so far out of 2,300 sent surveys. He said about 12% of respondents have indicated their children will be distance learning full-time, and 7% have said they will homeschool their children.

Burt said that although all students will be assigned to a classroom, students in the distance-learning plan will not get the same amount of support as those in the hybrid plan. Burt said that as the schools adjust to the new ways of teaching, staff will continue to look into how they can provide as much support as possible to students in the distance-learning plan.

“When a teacher is working in front of students in the classroom, we are not necessarily

expecting them to plan for an implemented instruction for the students who are voluntarily opting to that at-home learning,” Charles Hewes, director of teaching and learning, said.

A document detailing what will and what will not be provided to students in the distance learning model was to be published this week. Other curriculum updates will be provided as the school year goes on so that those students in the distance-learning plan keep pace with those in the hybrid model, Hewes explained.

Burt noted that teachers will have some opportunities to plan for the distance-learning model before school starts. Special education services will continue to fully serve students including those in the distance learning plan.

There will be enough staff working at the schools to serve students at a ratio of 10 students to one teacher.

“A 1 to 10 ratio could involve a lot more personalized learning for all the students at home, based on their individual need,” Burt said.

Also, Burt said, student meals will continue to be provided whether students are at school or at home.

* * *

The board also decided to change the pre-kindergarten tuition rate.

Burt noted that this was the first year that the district was going to charge a pre-k tuition. The total amount to be charged was \$2,500, or \$250 per month for 10 months. But, now that children are going to be outside of the school

part of the week, the board’s budget committee recommended that tuition be reduced by half, for a total of \$125 a month or \$1,250 for 10 months. Burt noted that the reduction in price would not fully fund the positions that were part of that tuition. He said the district was using the tuition to offset new staff, to create that new section, but now they will have to look at new funding options.

* * *

The Colchester Public Schools administration has published a question and answer video and there will be a question and answer document that will be updated regularly to keep parents informed.

Monday’s Board of Education meeting celebrated and acknowledged the efforts of community member Karen Hobbes and paraprofessional Karla Staubach. Hobbes provided more than 600 masks for students, food services and youth services in Colchester. Burt said that some of the masks were given with the meals that were distributed to students throughout the summer. Staubach, meanwhile, was recognized for donating 160 face shields for Colchester Public Schools.

To learn more about happenings throughout the Colchester School District, visit www.colchesterct.org.

Elections May Prompt Earlier Reopening of Marlborough Town Hall

by Karla Santos

The Marlborough Board of Selectmen discussed on Tuesday the possibilities of reopening the town hall to the public earlier than anticipated due to a more extensive than planned election process.

Lowrey said that in conversation with the town clerk, Lauren Griffin, they realized that reopening the town hall will allow for more “free flow of traffic.”

In addition, he explained he and Griffin also talked about new information they received related to the November presidential election, indicating that the towns will be managing the election process. Lowrey noted that this process includes “what looks to be a pretty heavy flow of absentee ballots.”

Lowrey said that based on that, the town clerk and he realized they will need to be better prepared for the election with more equipment, people and space.

Selectman Amy Traversa said she understands the additional responsibilities this process brings to the town clerk’s office and

argued that many other town halls have already opened.

“If it’s a matter of simply limiting the number of people who come into the building at any time, then that’s something that can happen,” Traversa said.

She noted people should wear masks and take appropriate precautions. In addition, there should be limited interaction in the building, Traversa said.

“If you ask people to stay away as necessary, I think it certainly can be done,” Traversa added.

Selectman Joe Asklar also agreed that reopening to the public should take place while opening a number of safe guards.

Lowrey said there are already a number of safeguards in place and the town has been allowing people into Town Hall, but on a limited basis and with a lot of the work being done outside when possible.

Lowrey said the building could be reopened – but stressed the town should be prepared to shut it down again if necessary.

The selectmen agreed that within the next two weeks a reopening plan should be created and discussed at the next Board of Selectmen meeting.

“I think it’s contradictory for us to open up the elementary school and not the town hall,” Traversa said.

She also suggested Lowrey check in with Chatham Health District to see what its recommendation would be.

* * *

The board meeting also featured a brief storm update.

Lowrey said he took a look at some roads that were in rough shape immediately after the storm and said conditions have improved, save for some debris off to the edges.

Lowrey said the town is seeking FEMA reimbursement but is concerned it might not be received during this fiscal year.

Trees were also part of the discussion as some are still falling in town, due to weather conditions, and Traversa recommended taking

care of “every single tree we possibly can.” She said she has noticed many trees are dying. Lowrey agreed in that they should take care of trees before winter.

The selectmen also talked about the Emergency Management Director position. The current emergency management director (EMD), Richard Antonelli, is resigning effective Aug. 23. While all members of the Board of Selectmen thanked Antonelli for his service, they also expressed concern that Antonelli’s last day is fast approaching and no one has been hired for the role yet.

The position has two deputy directors and the selectmen agreed to see if any of them is interested, and has the time, to serve as an interim EMD while they find someone permanent to fill the role.

Lowrey said he has launched the search for a new EMD, and although he has received interest from different parties, only one application has been submitted.

Marlborough Finance Board OKs Transfer for Library Work

by Karla Santos

Last week the finance board made a motion to approve the transfer of \$398,000 as the town’s match to do accessibility work at the Richmond Memorial Library.

The board’s motion was to approve the proposal as presented by the Board of Selectmen including the transfer of funds as needed to support the application, contingent upon receipt of the Small Town Economic Assistance Program (STEAP) grant funds of \$128,000.

All members of the Board of Finance voted in favor except for Vice Chair Dieter Zimmer who abstained from voting.

Zimmer said that it wasn’t that he didn’t support the project, but that he was concerned about it being a big investment and not being the final product. This phase of the project would only give the building Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessibility. Zimmer also showed concerned about when the entire project could be completed.

First Selectmen Greg Lowrey said that to finalize the project in its entirety he has ideas about where they could obtain funding in the future including the mill rate, additional rounds of STEAP funding and the Community Match Fund of Sustainable CT.

In the meantime, the town is looking into renovating the second floor of the library with potential money from the STEAP grant. STEAP funds would be used for accessibility work at the library – which would cost about \$526,000. The work would involve installing an elevator and a new exterior staircase.

The maximum amount the town could receive from a STEAP grant has been reduced

substantially from recent years. It’s now \$128,000 – and towns also have to front their share of the project cost before they apply. The application was due on Aug. 14, but it has been extended to Aug. 28.

Since the total cost of the project is about \$526,000, the town needed to secure the balance of \$398,000 before the application’s due date.

The Board of Selectmen proposed and the Board of Finance approved arriving at this amount by: using \$38,000 of the retired capital projects non-recurrent fund; make a special appropriation of up to 1% of the municipal budget, which would be \$258,000; take \$60,000 from capital reserves; and take \$42,000 from contingency funds.

At a recent Board of Selectmen meeting, Selectman Joe Asklar brought his concern about the building’s need for sprinklers on the second floor – adding more money to the price tag of the entire project. This was discussed at the Board of Finance meeting last week, where Lowrey gave a quick overview of the project and noted that the cost of sprinklers is about \$100,000. Lowrey said that in conversations with the fire marshal there are options that can replace the sprinklers such as leaving the library in the business use that it currently sits “where we would have office space.”

Retaining business use would allow the library’s second floor to hold meetings of less than 50 people and office space.

Lowrey explained that business use envisions a person sitting at a desk and thus features approximately 100 square feet of space per

person. He said that at 3,600 square feet, which is the size of the second floor of the library, they would keep the occupancy to below 50 people.

Lowrey added that assembly use, on the other hand, envisions standing room and assigns a per person space of approximately seven square feet. He noted that “assembly areas that accommodate more than 49 people, absent a relevant exception, require enhanced fire protection, particularly for second and higher floors.”

Lowrey said that there’s also a chance that the town can get a modification to the sprinkler requirement from the state, and that if it can’t, “we could either install sprinklers or retain the business use,” Lowrey said.

Susan Leser, chairman of the Board of Finance, said that she finds the decision of making the investment in the library a difficult decision because of the economy and the unknown economic future after the pandemic. But she said she understands the project could be of “tremendous benefit” to the town.

Selectman Amy Traversa sent a letter to the Board of Finance regarding the library project and it was read during the public comment section of the meeting.

“The build-out of the large space on the second floor at Richmond Memorial Library has been discussed ever since the library was first designed,” Traversa said in the letter. “Resident surveys have repeatedly shown that residents both understand and support the needed community space that would be provided by such expansion.”

Traversa said that although there is a concern

about the extra cost of putting sprinklers in the building, she is “confident” that it can be resolved as the project develops. She said she is also aware that the project would require a commitment of a multi-phase approach.

“As a resident I support this project and I ask the Board of Finance to approve the matching funds be used as proposed and contingent on receiving the 2020 STEAP grant to begin this long awaited and much-needed project,” Traversa noted in her letter.

Earlier this month there was a public hearing in which residents had a chance to share their thoughts on the project, and those who spoke were mainly in favor. However, this week at the Board of Selectmen meeting, there was a letter read from a resident who said he would prefer if the town used the STEAP funds in the start of the development of a business park in town. The letter mentioned the creation of jobs and the expansion of a tax base as benefits of the project.

The letter suggested the money that would be used for accessibility work at the library to be used instead to build a portion of road into the industrial park on Route 66.

The selectmen agreed to talk about the business park development at the next Board of Selectmen meeting to see how the project may be moved forward.

Obituaries

Colchester

William Frank Schumacher

William Frank Schumacher 71, of 111 Loomis Rd., Colchester, passed away peacefully at his home Thursday, July 23. He was born onto Howard and Marie Schumacher on May 26, 1949, being the third child of nine children.



William grew up in Naugatuck, where he attended high school and graduated class of 1968; soon thereafter he enlisted for the United States Navy. During his service he was awarded the National Defense Service Medal for his time served during the Vietnam War. William was a proud veteran and often talked about how he visited the Parthenon in Greece, witnessed the formula races in the streets of Barcelona, and the beautiful beaches of Cuba. When he returned to civilian life he worked at Pratt and Whitney as a machinist and setup engineer, but that was not his true passion, which was cooking.

While working in his grandmother's restaurant when he was young and serving as a cook for many other restaurants thereafter, in 1986 he partnered to open Diane's Restaurant in Westchester, which is now in its 34th year of business.

Of his many cooking jobs throughout his life, William was also a food director for Chestelm Health & Rehabilitation in Moodus. While there he ran the kitchen for food production and special events. Of his many talents, playing classical piano, having a knack for telling witty jokes and being a chef in the kitchen stood out the most. He loved working with people, especially the elderly and would often play piano and tell jokes for the residents of Chestelm after meals.

William was a proud member and deacon for the Congregational Church in Westchester. There he was a member of the choir where he shared his love for God, passion for music and even taught to young members of the church. He would also participate in most of the church events and cooked for fundraisers.

William is survived by many, including his eight siblings and spouses: Nancy and Siv Kropo, Howard Schumacher, Bobby and Lorraine Schumacher, Rodger and Mercedes Schumacher, George and Susan Schumacher, Michael and Carlynn Schumacher, Debbie and Paul Munns, Christopher and Patty Schumacher. He is also survived by his three sons, William, Jarett and Nicholas, his grandson, Maddox; and many nieces and nephews.

"Billy," as friends and family would call him, will always be remembered best for his love and way with people, comedy, and his passion for cooking, he will sorely be missed.

There will be a private family service with no calling hours.

East Hampton

Susan Day Laplant

We are deeply saddened to announce the passing of Susan Day Laplant, wife of Richard Laplant Jr., of East Hampton, formerly of Portland. Born March 18, 1957, in Middletown, she was daughter of Ronald Day Sr. and the late Caroline (Jordan) Day.

Susan also is survived by her brother Ronald Day Jr.; two stepdaughters, Melissa and Nicole; two beloved grandchildren, Aliyah and Kameron; also several nieces, nephews and cousins.

Susan was the former payroll manager of Bob's Stores, with over 30 years of service. Susan was a very caring person and cared for all those around her. Sue, you will be very missed by all of us.

Graveside services were held Thursday, Aug. 20, in Center Cemetery, Portland.

Those who wish may make memorial donations to the American Cancer Association, P.O. Box 188, North Haven, CT 06473.

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

Colchester

Sidney Abraham Gitlitz

Sidney Abraham Gitlitz, 89, passed peacefully, surrounded by his loving family, Monday, Aug. 10, after a long illness.

Sidney always wore a smile and had a joke to tell. He was many things to many people, and his generosity was felt by many. He was a resident of Colchester for 64 years, and a small business owner of National Drug with his brother Irving for 42 years. He enjoyed learning and being immersed in his faith. He remained a member of his weekly Talmud class and was a fixture at Shabbat services at Congregation Ahavath Achim.

He derived happiness from simple things, like watching old western films and UConn basketball games with a homemade full sour kosher pickle and a corned beef sandwich. His greatest accomplishment was his family, whom he spoke about with a loving pride only a truly great man can cultivate.

He is predeceased by his daughter, Karen Abrams (Gitlitz), and her husband, Jeffrey Abrams; his parents, Louis and Millie Gitlitz; his sister, Beatrice Bolz (Gitlitz); and his brother, Irving Gitlitz.

He leaves behind his beloved wife of 67 years, Edith Gitlitz (Mirlis); his daughter, Marcy Hutchinson (Gitlitz) and her husband Peter Hutchinson; his daughter Maureen Reid (Gitlitz) and her husband Michael Reid; his four granddaughters, three grandsons and two grandsons-in-law.

Burial and services will be private due to COVID-19.

In lieu of flowers, please consider donating to the Special Olympics or Ahavath Achim Synagogue.

Colchester

Anita May Kemp

Anita May Kemp, 65, of Colchester, passed away Tuesday, Aug. 11, at Marlborough Health and Rehab Center, where she had been residing. Born in Westfield, Mass., Aug. 15, 1954, she was a daughter of the late Theolon and Lillian (Phillips) Kemp.

After her mother passed away, Anita was raised by her grandparents, Irving and Theresa Evans. She graduated from Bacon Academy in Colchester with the Class of 1974.

Anita had worked for Harrington Court Genesis Health Care for 30 years as a certified nurse aid and a housekeeper. Anita enjoyed cooking and spending time with her family and friends.

She will be sadly missed but remembered with love by her brother, Thomas Kemp of Ledyard; uncle, Barry Evans of Haddam; and many extended family members and friends.

In addition to her parents and grandparents, she was predeceased by a brother, Gary Kemp and a sister, Sherry Kemp.

Walk-through calling hours will be held Saturday, Aug. 22, from 10-11 a.m., at the Aurora-McCarthy Funeral Home of Colchester, 167 Old Hartford Rd. Burial will follow in the Linwood cemetery.

Donations in Anita's memory may be made to the Lupus Foundation (www.lupus.org).

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



Marlborough

Belisario Nino DiTaranto

Belisario Nino DiTaranto, "Nino", 93, devoted husband of the late Gertrude Marie DiTaranto (nee "Gorizia Maria Melillo") for 55 beautiful years, departed this life peacefully Sunday, Aug. 9, in Marlborough, after a period of declining health which included a May bout with COVID-19.



Nino was born Nov. 25, 1926, in Gravina di Puglia, Bari, Italy, to the late Domenico and Anna Nicola (Pappalardi) DiTaranto, and immigrated to Stamford in 1957, after marrying his beautiful bride, the American-born daughter of Italian immigrants who met him on a trip to Italy.

In his youth, Nino fantasized about a life in the States, the land of opportunity, where he imagined a cozy house with two cars in the driveway and a beautiful garden. With Gertie by his side, he found the American dream through hard work and a conscientious approach, despite a limited education. Nino sacrificed his academic dreams after seeing his six sisters toiling on the farm in the hot sun. Contrary to his father's wishes for his only son, he decided to "throw away his books," as he put it, to lessen his sisters' labors. Before leaving Italy, Nino also led crews paving roads, but it was the 32 years as a machine operator at Pitney Bowes in Stamford that he was most proud of. He earned numerous annual awards for perfect attendance and worked many hours of overtime. He was "never afraid of hard work" and was always a wonderful provider for his lucky wife and daughter who never lost sight of his above-and-beyond efforts to give them the best life possible.

Like Gertie, Nino loved music and together they passed this passion on to their grateful daughter and grandchildren. Whether it was opera or popular music, Nino sang his favorite tunes in Italian and English. Known as the songbird at the nursing home, he serenaded those within earshot with Italian opera or classic Italian music like "Vicino 'O Mare," and popular music like his favorites, "Somewhere My Love" and "Please Release Me."

Nino appreciated the beauty in nature and always had unusual flowers in his garden while also tending to tomatoes and basil and had a talent for shaping treetops and bushes into perfectly rounded shapes. His appetite and appreciation for food, especially Italian cuisine, were as big as his loving heart. Directed by Gertie's father in his father-in-law's cellar, he was central to the Melillo

Colchester

Douglas Francis Millard

Douglas Francis Millard, 77, of Colchester, passed away peacefully at home Tuesday, July 28. Born Jan. 5, 1943, in Syracuse, N.Y., he was a son of the late Douglas and Winifred (Leogough) Millard Sr.

For years, Douglas worked as a police officer in Hartford.

He will be forever loved and remembered by his wife, Gayle Millard of Colchester; his brother, Daniel (Carol) Millard of Fort Myers, Fla.; his sister, Mary (Larry) Keefe of Syracuse, N.Y.; and numerous extended family and friends.

Care of private arrangements has been entrusted to the Aurora-McCarthy Funeral Home. For online condolences, please visit www.auroramccarthyfuneralhome.com.

homemade wine-making process that included many family helpers and culminated in a feast of roasted chestnuts.

A devout Catholic with unwavering faith, Nino regularly attended Mass with his family prior to his declining health and was blessed to attend monthly mass and receive Holy Communion at the nursing home.

Nino was a very proud member of the Gravenese Mutual Aid Society in Stamford and served this philanthropic brotherhood as president for a term. He thoroughly enjoyed his brief residence at the Florence Lord Senior Housing Center in Marlborough where he moved after Gertie passed so he could live near his daughter and her family, and his afternoons at the Marlborough Senior Center, where he made many friends and shared many laughs.

Besides his parents, Nino was preceded by an unborn son, and, in Italy, six sisters, Teresa Cappiello, Maria Trionfo, Giacomina Raguso, Eufemia Ventola, Rosa DiTaranto, Donatella Laddaga (and their spouses), and a niece and two nephews.

Nino leaves his beloved daughter and son-in-law, Marianne and Ed Matunas of Marlborough, and his two adored grandchildren, Adrienne Matunas of Rutland, Vermont, and Greg Matunas of College Station, Texas. Also missing him are 17 nieces and nephews in Italy, five nieces and nephews in Connecticut (on Gertie's side), and their families. Nino leaves behind so many who love him, but he is finally reunited with his beloved Gertie and the rest of his family who have been patiently waiting for him, and this gives his family peace. It is not "Goodbye", it is just "See You Later"..."We Love you So Much!!!"

After a morning viewing at Spencer Funeral Home, East Hampton, a beautiful funeral Mass was celebrated by the Rev. Thomas J. Sas at St. John Fisher Church in Marlborough, Friday, Aug. 14. Entombment followed at St. John's Cemetery, Darien. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, a "Celebration of Life" will be scheduled at a later time.

Nino's family would like to thank the staff of the Marlborough Health Care & Rehabilitation Center, who took such compassionate and tender loving care of Nino for almost three years, and his parish family at St. John Fisher Church who embraced him and nourished him spiritually until his passing.

Memorial contributions in Nino's name may be made to Catholic Relief Services, St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, the Alzheimer's Association, or the Roy B. Pettengill Ambulance Association.

To leave online condolences, visit www.spencerfuneralhomeinc.com.

Amston

Ryan Milano O'Connell

Ryan Milano O'Connell, 42, passed away at his family's home in Amston Tuesday, Aug. 11. Ryan was born June 8, 1978, and was survived by his dad Rocco and sister Kate Piazza of Amston. He also leaves behind uncles, aunts, nieces and nephews of the O'Connell, Milano, Diberardino and Piazza families, among others.



He is predeceased by his mother and his two brothers, Rocco and Jay.

Ryan was a lifelong entrepreneur, even from a young age. He owned his own landscaping company and he traveled the world over while living his life freely. Ryan had many friends and acquaintances across many spectrums of life. Ryan was a connector of people and was gifted with an ability to negotiate almost any situation with a confident attitude. He was known to be gregarious and friendly to all. Ryan was a lover of history, cars, motorcycles, and anything that could go fast. He was knowledgeable in many trades and crafts with a gift to repair and sell almost anything.

Just as he lived, Ryan's spirit now soars with the wind.

Services will be private to family at this time.

Condolences may be sent to Aurora-McCarthy Funeral Home in Colchester. Visit www.auroramccarthyfuneralhome.com.

Observations & Ruminations

by Mike Thompson

There's lots of negative stuff I could write about again this week – such as that I think it's too soon for in-person learning to resume, or that, despite what our esteemed president continues to say, fraud with mail-in ballots doesn't pose much of a concern and is in fact pretty rare – but I'll focus on some positives instead.

I got a nice little note from the Colchester Parks and Recreation Department about a pretty cool-sounding day coming up next month: World Gratitude Day.

The day will be celebrated Sept. 21, and Parks and Rec. calls it “Thanksgiving in September.” The department writes, “We could all use a day to reflect on the positive things in our lives. Together, we have so much to be grateful for. Let's take a day to celebrate and reflect on the good, the positive and the opportunities that we are blessed with.”

According to Parks and Rec., the global celebration “joins individuals, nations, and organizations sharing their gratitude in various ways. ... The observance gives every person in every country a chance to think about what they are thankful for.”

Indeed, even in this coronavirus-tainted year, there is a lot to be thankful for. For me personally, I've been extremely fortunate to not have lost anyone close to me to this dreadful disease. Considering most of my immediate family lives in areas of the country that have been “hot spots,” I find myself quite thankful for that.

Also, while I long for a return to normalcy, this time has also shown me how much of that normalcy I took for granted. “You've got to live every day,” a co-worker often says. But, at least for me and I imagine for many of you, that's always been easier said than done. There always seemed to be one thing or another that got in the way.

But in March, all that changed when everything ground to a halt, almost quite literally overnight. And while initially it was quite depressing, it also provided an opportunity to realize all of life that I was letting pass me by. Believe it or not, as much as I hate this virus and the havoc it has caused, I'm thankful that

I was given that opportunity. When this is all behind us – and I'm confident there will come a day when it's all behind us – I feel more inspired than ever to take each day and, as the former pastor at North United Methodist Church in Manchester used to say, “live it to the full.” I vow to do the best I can to no longer make that easier said than done.

Anyway, Colchester Parks and Rec. noted there are many ways to celebrate World Gratitude Day: “Gather a group together and play the Alphabet Gratitude Game. Write thank you notes and give them to those you appreciate. Eat dinner together as a family and let them know how thankful you are for them. Ask each member of your family what they're thankful for. Is there a person in your life you're thankful for? A physician, teacher, babysitter, or relative? Whoever it is, today is a great day to tell them thanks!”

Parks and Rec. even said folks can start a “gratitude journal” – a list of things they're thankful for. Post the list to Facebook or write it up as a blog post – and, when sharing the list on social media, be sure to use #WorldGratitudeDay.

According to Parks and Rec., the idea for World Gratitude Day first came about in 1965 during Thanksgiving dinner in the meditation room of the United Nations building. Parks and Rec. writes: “Sri Chimnoy, a spiritual leader and meditation teacher, suggested a day of thanks the whole world could celebrate together. Each member present resolved to hold a gratitude gathering each year in their country on Sept. 21. In 1977 a group that ran the meditation room requested a resolution that gave recognition for World Gratitude Day. This occurred at the New York Headquarters during a special ceremony that honored Sri Chimnoy for his work. It has been an annual observance ever since.”

All in all, it sounds like a pretty cool day – and one that seems especially meaningful in a year that has been so difficult for so many. There are always blessings to celebrate. We mustn't ever forget that.

* * *

See you next week.