

RIVEREAST

News Bulletin

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

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East Hampton Gets Into the Holiday Spirit

By Anne Lilburn

East Hampton kicked off its Christmas season with a Jingle Bell Parade and a tree-lighting on the town green last Friday. The evening started off warm and toasty, with cocoa, cookies and a concert, and ended up seasonally frosty, on a chilly night with temperatures in the 20s.

The event started at the library, with East Hampton High School's jazz band performing Christmas carols for an audience of a few dozen, while in another room, kids enjoyed cookies and hot chocolate, and volunteers handed out bells near the entrance.

After the concert, it was time for Santa to show up — on his fully decorated fire truck, of course. A crowd of 50 or so people walked from the library to the Town Green, with a few families hopping off the chilly parade route as they passed by their cars.

Other kids had no problem with the cold. Lana Maher, 7, and her mother Carrie said they came to this event every year, and Lana, who is a second grader at Memorial School and was dressed in a red skirt for her dance recital, said she wasn't cold at all.

At the Town Green, Santa lit the tree after a couple of countdowns, and parents and grandparents lined up with their children to take pictures with him.

Diane Koch was there with her 6-year-old granddaughter and 3-year-old grandson. She said she lived nearby, and had walked over with the kids, for whom the fire truck was maybe as much of an attraction as the tree and Santa were.

Laura King and her 6-year-old granddaughter Alaina Williams came running up to Santa just as the crowd was dwindling. They were worried they had missed seeing him.

"We were running up the hill, saying, 'There he is, there he is!'" said King.

King said she was in town visiting for her grandson's first birthday, and had just flown in



Santa Claus came to Belltown last Friday, as East Hampton held its annual Jingle Bell Parade and a tree-lighting on the town green.

from South Carolina.

"My flight was two hours delayed, so we were supposed to be here at the library and following Santa, but I got here late," she explained. Both granddaughter and grandmother seemed relieved that they had made it.

East Hampton Fire Department Chief (and Chief Santa) Robb Rainville said he had been the department's main Santa for the past 14 years now, though he said he often has help for some of the department's "Santa Runs," where Santa drives through neighborhoods on a fire truck to hand out candy canes and say hi.

Rainville said his favorite part about getting to play Santa was "just the joy in getting to know the community and the people. Like the young lady that just left — you know, I've seen her pretty much grow up through these events, like her coming every year."

One attendee who had grown up with the event was now working at it, as part of the fire department's junior firefighter program. East Hampton High School sophomore Kaeden Owen has been volunteering with the department for about a year and a half, following in her dad and uncle's footsteps. She said that this event, along with the Santa Runs, was her favorite time of year.

"This is like my favorite activity that we do in the year," she said. "I love riding on the trucks, because you don't get to ride outside on the trucks a lot. And then I like going to every house and handing out candy canes."

Rainville said he loves this time of year, too, though he did concede that it sometimes can be

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Pledge Debate Splits Marlborough Board

By Toriana Williams

A debate over whether the Marlborough Board of Selectmen should recite the Pledge of Allegiance at the start of meetings has sparked significant public attention, questions about constitutional boundaries, and visible disagreement among board members themselves.

The matter first appeared on a meeting agenda on Nov. 18, placed there by Town Manager David Porter, according to selectman Joe Asklar, a Republican. He said during an interview with the *Rivereast* that the agenda item "was to vote for the pledge of allegiance," but confusion arose when the motion made during the meeting did not match the posted wording, according to Asklar. He described it as "a difference between what the motion that was made and what was on the agenda for the evening."

The board that night ultimately voted 4 to

1 against adding the Pledge of Allegiance as a standing agenda item. Asklar was one of the four who voted against it, though he later told the *Rivereast* he "misunderstood the motion."

Asklar said board members later agreed the vote should be revisited. He described receiving calls from residents, with many feeling "it's a good idea" to add the pledge to meetings. As a result, the matter returned for discussion at the next meeting.

At that second meeting on Dec. 2, Asklar said he formally asked to add the Pledge of Allegiance to the agenda "at the beginning of the Board of Selectmen meeting," and Selectwoman Louise Concodello, also a Republican, seconded his motion. He explained that his proposed language made the pledge optional for any attendee.

Asklar and Concodello voted in support of the measure. The three Democrats on the board voted against it. Asklar emphasized that a motion needs four votes to pass.

The three Democratic board members — Anthony Bratz, Susan McFarland and John Rizza — later issued a joint written statement responding to the inquiry. They explained that at the Dec. 2 meeting, members of the board did stand to recite the pledge when an attendee requested it during public comments. They said, "We are all proud citizens committed to serving the residents of Marlborough in accordance with the oath we took."

In their statement, the Democratic members said their opposition to adding a formal pledge recitation to their Rules of Procedure

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CIT11-13-25

Cover Story • Cover Story • Cover Story • Cover Story • Cover Story • Cover

★ *Holiday Spirit, cont. from page 1*

challenging being both Santa and the fire chief.

“Santa still has to go to emergencies,” he said, adding that he’s had to change out of his Santa suit and beard, and into his fire gear, quickly in the past.

Luckily, there were no emergencies last Friday — just a lot of happy faces, a decked-out fire truck, and a smallish tree lit with white lights.

Rainville said they shifted from decorating the extremely large tree next to it over to the smaller tree a few years ago, and his department maintains the new tree, even pruning it into shape. He said the idea was that that new tree would grow taller with each passing year.

“It’s going to grow through the community [caring for it],” he said.

HO HO HO Santa

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★ *Marlborough Board, cont. from page 1*

“was rooted in our commitment to our oath of office, and the core principles of governance in a diverse community.” They argued that making the pledge a required ritual within an official governmental proceeding “raises Constitutional and coercion concerns,” saying, “a formal, board-led Pledge could blur the line between patriotic observance and governmental endorsement of a specific expression of patriotism.”

They also voiced concern that some members of the public might feel compelled to participate, writing that it “creates an environment of implicit societal pressure, where individual board members, staff or public attendees may feel compelled to participate against their personal conscience to avoid appearing disrespectful.” They cited longstanding Supreme Court precedent supporting voluntary expressions of patriotism, stating that “true patriotism is voluntary, not compulsory.”

The Democratic selectmen also framed the decision as an effort to keep meetings accessible to all residents regardless of background, saying that “for some in our community, due to personal history, faith or philosophical belief, the mandatory ritual of the Pledge may create a barrier to participation and a feeling of being ‘other.’”

They emphasized that declining to add the pledge to the meeting procedure “is not an indication of a lack of love for our country,” and wrote that they believed their approach showed “a profound respect for the very freedoms the flag represents, including freedom of speech and conscience.”

Following last week’s vote, longtime resident and veteran Ross Dmochowski issued a forceful public comment urging the board to reconsider. At the meeting, he recited the pledge in full and

stated, “I am going to make my pledge of allegiance, and invite everyone to stand, face our United States flag, place your right hand over your heart, and join me.”

After concluding the pledge, he questioned the board’s vote, and referred to a statement Bratz had made at the Nov. 18 meeting of the selectmen. “Some members of the Board of Selectmen said they pledged to the flag from K through L and that was enough,” Dmochowski said. “I guess their allegiance to our United States has ended.” He then called for Bratz to resign.

Dmochowski challenged the idea that reciting the pledge is not a matter of local government, noting that by the same reasoning, “Veterans Day is not a town thing, yet we close all town offices,” and listed several other national holidays and observances that the town recognizes through closures, events or committees.

He spoke about his military service and said that when he enlisted in the U.S. Navy and volunteered for the submarine force, he and others had essentially given “a blank check ... for an amount up to and including our life.” He said this commitment came from belief in “one Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all,” and argued that the board should be willing to devote “13 seconds every two weeks” to reciting the pledge.

The joint statement from the Democratic board members concluded by reiterating their belief that focusing meeting time on governance best serves the community, writing, “We believe that focusing our meeting time on the complex legislative work for our community is the best approach to honor that oath and serve the people of Marlborough.”

As of the most recent meeting, the board remains divided, and any future reconsideration would require a four-vote supermajority.

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Margaret Wilcox

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Holiday Open House

Diana Tyler Watercolors

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artwork by Diana Wythe Tyler

Sat., Dec. 13th & Sun., Dec. 14th 11AM – 4PM

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From the Editor’s Desk

Observations & Ruminations

By Mike Thompson

’Tis the season for weight gain.

If your office is anything like mine, there are lots of candies and other sweets around at this time of year. Add in holiday parties and get-togethers with family and friends, and stress-eating to cope with the latest disastrous offseason move your baseball team made (it’s not been a good few weeks for the Mets), and you’re probably stuffing your face a fair amount of the time. Throw in the fact that it’s rather difficult to go for a run or a brisk walk when it’s 4 degrees outside, and before you know it you’ve added a pound or six to the waistline.

But fear not – the new year is coming, and with it a chance to burn off some of those December calories, right out of the gate.

In Colchester, the Youth First Coalition and Colchester Youth and Social Services are once again putting on the annual New Year’s Day 5K Resolution Run. The race will begin at Colchester Town Hall at 10 a.m. on Jan. 1. Bib pick-up begins at 8:30 a.m.

Same-day registration also begins at 8:30 a.m., and costs \$45. Or, for \$35, you can register in advance at raceroster.com or by visiting the CYSS Facebook page at www.facebook.com/ColchesterYSS. For ages 18 and under, registration is \$25.

Proceeds benefit youth scholarships and youth center upgrades.

For more information, contact Marquis Lawson at CYSS at 860-537-7255 or mlawson@colchesterct.gov.

“But wait!” I hear you saying. “I don’t want to think about New Year’s yet; it’s only Dec. 11!” First of all, excellent reading of the calendar. But also, don’t worry, there are still plenty of December-y things to do this month.

Next Thursday, Dec. 18, at 6 p.m., the Chabad Jewish Center will host its free annual Community Chanukah Celebration on the

Colchester Town Green. One of the highlights of the evening is the lighting of a nine-foot-tall menorah. Yes, you read that right: nine feet!

There will also be a fire show – featuring fire juggling, spinning and swirling – and the “Grand Gelt Drop” for kids, which will see chocolate coins rain down from the sky. Speaking of food, the night will also feature hot cider and one of my very favorite Jewish delicacies: latkes, or potato pancakes. If you’ve never had one, they are absolutely scrumptious. The latkes alone are worth the price of admission – especially since, again, admission is free!

For more information, call 860-659-2422, email Rabbi@ChabadER.com, or visit www.ChabadER.com/celebrate.

Also coming up this month, in nearby Glastonbury, Hops on the Hill Brewery will offer the chance for folks to have their pets’ pictures taken with Santa and Mrs. Claus – for free! The photo opportunities will take place Sunday, Dec. 21, from 1-4 p.m., at the brewery, located at 275 Dug Rd. in South Glastonbury.

There will be no need to eat before heading to the brewery that day, as the Get Stuffed food truck will be on site, serving up burgers, chowder, and more. Guests can also enjoy the spirit of the season with live music by Jeremy Haddad from 2-5 p.m.

This festive celebration also marks the final day of Hops on the Hill’s annual Pet Drive benefiting Protectors of Animals. Guests are encouraged to bring a dog or cat item to support the shelter. As a token of appreciation, Hops on the Hill will offer a beer for just \$1 with any donation made that day. The shelter’s full wish list is at linktr.ee/protectorsof-animals.

Editor’s Desk continued on page 5



Christmas Crafts... Members of Marlborough Junior Girl Scout Troop 61097 take a quick break from selling their crafts at the 31st annual RHAM Girl Scouts Holiday Craft Fair. The fair was held last weekend at Marlborough Elementary School. Nearly 75 Girl Scouts from the RHAM (Regional Hebron-Andover-Marlborough) Service Unit hosted the event.

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Early Letters Deadline

From now through the end of the year, the deadline for all letters to the editor will be noon Mondays. No exceptions will be made.

Letters can be emailed to bulletin@glcitizen.com.

Powderpuff Frustration

To the Editor:

I’m writing to express my frustration with the recent story about the East Hampton High School Powderpuff game. The article highlighted two hardworking young women, Sophia Snyder and Alivia Baier, who spent months coordinating with school administration and their peers to make the event possible.

Powderpuff has long been a celebration of female empowerment, yet the cover photo chosen for the story prominently features the boys on the sideline. What message does this send to these young women? That no matter how hard they work, they will still be overshadowed by men?

I do not believe this choice was made intentionally. Rather, it reflects a pattern ingrained in our society that too often minimizes women’s contributions. In the future, I hope that when a story highlights the efforts of young women, they receive the recognition they truly deserve.

Congratulations to Sophia and Alivia on organizing such a successful event and raising money for the East Hampton Food Bank.

Micaela D’Antonio – Amston

Blue Bottle Bandit

To the Editor:

For over a year, someone has been tossing partially empty 12-packs of Bud Light Platinum onto the westbound shoulder of Old Hartford Road near Gallery Cinemas — roughly every two weeks, rain or shine. The cartons still hold a few bottles when discarded.

Bud Light Platinum (6% ABV) is marketed to 25–39-year-old working-class men who lean outdoorsman/patriot - the same demographic that overwhelmingly drives pickup trucks (often lifted, with toolboxes or contractor stickers). The habitual pattern and location tell us almost everything else: the litterer is driving eastbound (likely just exiting Route 2 Exit 22), tossing the carton out the driver’s window across traffic. The cartons aren’t empty, so the drinking happens on the drive home, not on the way to work.

That makes our guy someone who lives in the Colchester/Lebanon area and commutes west on Route 2 every day — probably to Glastonbury, Manchester, East Hartford, or Hartford itself.

Someone out there knows exactly who this is — maybe a spouse, parent, girlfriend, or co-worker who’s watched that blue 12-pack live on the passenger floorboard all week. For his safety, for the safety of everyone else on the road, and for the basic cleanliness of our town, please call Colchester Police (860-537-7270) or submit an anonymous tip online. You don’t need hard proof – just a strong hunch and a license plate is enough.

Let’s end the reign of the Blue Bottle Bandit.
Phillip Alexander – Colchester

Bulletin Board

I suppose now that the Christmas holidays are fast approaching, we’ll all be forced to suffer through that annual TV commercial with the damn car.

You know the one. It opens with a coy-looking husband leading his wife outside on a snowy Christmas morning. And there it is, parked in the driveway: her very own brand-new luxury car—all done up in a huge red bow. The husband smiles triumphantly as his elated wife shrieks with joy and their little daughter clings to them both, looking on in adoration, blissfully unaware that Daddy has emptied her college trust fund in order to impress Mommy and the neighbors.

Okay, I made up the part about the trust fund. But it could happen.

Call me a Christmas Grinch, but I can’t help but view these happy little American consumerism vignettes with just a touch of skepticism. Honestly, friends, who surprises his wife with a bow-decorated luxury car in the driveway on Christmas morning? A wheelbarrow maybe. An ergonomically designed snow shovel, if you’re a husband with a death wish. But an \$80,000 car?

This whole idea of a sensitive, romantic guy who buys his wife an expensive car, wraps it in a big bow and surprises her on Christmas morning just flies in the face of gender reality (even if he were that rare husband actually allowed free access to the family finances). It’s the sort of sentimental clap-trap, quite honestly, that sets impossible expectations for your typical male (meaning thoughtless, self-centered guys such as myself, as opposed to those shirtless pretty boys adorning the covers of paperback romance novels).

In my opinion, a more realistic commercial would go something like this:

The husband ushers his wife and young daughter outside on Christmas morning to look in the driveway. The wife shrieks in excitement at the sight of a vehicle sporting a huge red bow. “Oh my Gawwwwd!!! It’s a...It’s a...a...a...”

“A pick-up truck,” he announces triumphantly.

“A pick-up truck?! What the #*\$%@!”

“Yep,” he continues proudly. “Ain’t she a beaut? I got the one with the extended cab so you can fit the groceries in the back with the dog and the kids and my mother if it’s raining.”

“Did the car dealership run out of BMWs or something? What in hell do I want with a @*\$%& pick-up truck?”

“It’s got four-wheel drive.”

“Good, then I won’t lose traction when I’m driving back and forth over your mangled body.”

“Gee, I thought a truck would come in handy when I buy you a fishing boat for your birthday and we want to tow it down to the lake. And the color matches your eyes.”

“Baby poop brown?”

“It’s burnt sienna,” he replies in an injured tone.

At this point the little daughter pitches in. “Daddy, Daddy, where’s my Christmas present?”

“You got your present, sweetie. It’s that scratch-off lottery ticket Santa brought you. You mustn’t be greedy.”

“But I wanted a dollie.”

“I’m sorry, sweetie, but Santa spent all his money on Mommy’s pick-up truck.”

“Stupid old pick-up truck.”

“Where did Mommy go?”

“She’s in the garage looking for a baseball bat.”

“Gee, it’s a little cold for baseball, don’t you think? Oh well, Merry Christmas, sweetie. Want to go for a ride in the truck?”

“Go to hell, Daddy.”

Jim Hallas

Rivereast Hours of Operation

The offices of the *Rivereast News Bulletin* and *Glastonbury Citizen*, located at 87 Nutmeg Lane, Glastonbury, are open Monday through Thursday from 9 a.m.-4 p.m. The *Rivereast* can be reached any time via email at bulletin@glcitizen.com.

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Kevin and Pat Rarey, Publishers

Josh Howard—Office Manager, Sports Editor

Mike Thompson, Editor

Staff Reporter:

Anne Lilburn - Portland and East Hampton

Toriana Williams – Colchester, Hebron, Marlborough & Andover

Advertising Representatives:

Jason Baran, ext. 104 • jason@glcitizen.com

Lisa Sniетка, ext. 103 • lisa@glcitizen.com

Art Department

Jeanne Giovann and Julie Misuraca

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Shack Wrapping Up
To the Editor:
To all the wonderful citizens of Hebron who use the Swap Shack down at the Transfer Station, please be aware that the last day for the Shack this season is Sunday, Dec. 14. Thanks to everyone for using the Shack and helping to keep a whole bunch of stuff out of the waste stream. See you next year!

Mike Harder
Hebron Green Committee

Deepest Appreciation
To the Editor:
To the Andover Volunteer Fire Department and the Emergency First Responders: We would like to extend our deepest appreciation for your help and rapid, professional response when we called you on Sunday, November 9th. Thank you to all of the volunteers who responded to the call. A special thanks to Karen Madore, Chris Mike, Jake Colli, and John Colli for arranging my transportation to Hartford Hospital. It is clear how much you love the people of Andover. We want you to know how much we value your volunteer service to our residents.

With gratitude and love,
Gerry and Anne Cremé, Andover

Green Gathering Thanks
To the Editor:
Marlborough Parks and Recreation would like to thank the following volunteers and organizations for their help with this year's Gathering on the Green: Joe Asklar, Kyle Szemrelyo, Louise Concodello, Barbara Lazzari, Brandon Montstream, Holiday Lights by J & M , Marlborough Volunteer Fire Department, Marlborough Police Department, Richmond Memorial Library, AHM youth services, Knights of Columbus, Marlborough Women's Auxiliary Club, Marlborough Bakery, Starbucks, Marlborough Junior Fife and Drum, RHAM choral group, Marlborough C.E.R.T., Santa and Mrs. Claus, and all of the fire departments that participated in the parade.

Thank you all for donating your time to help bring this amazing event to the community.

Marlborough Parks and Recreation Department

Thank You, Hebron!
To the Editor:
Thank you, Hebron, for coming out to the Douglas Library for the opening reception of my art show, "Unearthly Florals." I spent most of 2025 in my studio painting, and while the state of the nation had me depressed and scared, what came off my brush was...flowers, all sorts of flowers! Go figure!

Thanks especially to Mary Rose, chair of the Hebron Creative Collective (HCC), and Shannon McGrogan-Ellis for helping make this show happen; I mean that literally, as they hung all the work. Thanks to the Douglas Library for hosting, and to TTCP for its sponsorship, and to chair Holly Habicht, who did the schlepping, carrying my paintings there (and hopefully bringing them back when the show ends). They'll be on display through December if anyone wants to catch a breath of spring in these darkening days.

Judith Podell – Hebron

Dementia Talks No. 40
To the Editor:
Who is that person in the window?
A couple of weeks ago, Mom and I were in her room as I have been trying to have her brush her teeth after lunch when I am there. I do this for two reasons, first to see how her dexterity is and second to see if she has the muscle memory to do it. She needs to keep our teeth as long as she can – it is a must for her health. Especially for those that can't graduate to dentures or have implants installed.

She does just fine with the brushing. Needs some help with rinsing, but that is incidental! Yeah – check the box!

Back to the person in the window. No there wasn't a 'peeping Tom'. Mom was looking at herself in the mirror and asked, "who is in the window?" Instinctively, I turned around, and no one was in the window that faces the courtyard. Then it dawned on me that she was asking about the reflection in the mirror.

Outside my normal mode of operation, I asked "who is that" – while pointing at her reflection. She looked at herself, then after a bit of time, responded with "me," and preceded to

give me "that look" of annoyance. I took the hint and didn't ask her about my reflection.

I'm not sure if her initial question was about me or her in that moment. Although, I do tend to think it was her reflection that she was asking about, because just the other day I took a selfie and when I showed her the picture she pointed to her picture and said "who is that?" In the moment I didn't react, I just said that it was a lady I knew really well; then we went on to other things.

Trying to convince her that the picture was her really isn't worth the energy; it could generate concern because she may think, in her mind, that she is younger or older or that the wort under her eye is a big issue. In every interaction we need to try to rein in the desire, and instinct, to "correct" a person with dementia; let go of "making" them understand what we see as "reality"; or convince them a situation exists when in their mind it doesn't.

Meet them where they are, and know you are not alone.

With much love and peace,
Tonya Maurer – Amston
Alzheimer's Hot Line 1-800-272-3900

DPWAC Update
To the Editor:

Since I last wrote, we have a new Town Council! Our committee has been tasked with making a presentation to the Town Council every other meeting. At the Dec. 4th meeting we shared with the council that there has been extensive progress. Included in our presentation was that the proposed septic system will handle both the dog kennel and the new garage and administration building. The 27-test hole coring's showed that the underlying soils will be suitable to build on. One of the most significant developments is that not only is the existing well at the current site clean drinking water, it also produces an abundance of water!

The Town Council was also asked by the committee to make a motion to move forward on the RFP (request for proposal) for the town to receive bids on town-wide trash and recycling pickup for the expected duration of the com-

plete rebuilding of our current facilities at Old Colchester Road. This is expected to be a 12- to 15-month time period. The new Town Council made the motion, and we expect to have bids in the January.

We also discussed with the council to arrange a series of meetings with town organizations and community groups working with the DP-WAC to bring greater knowledge and understanding to our residents regarding the need for the new facilities, as well as answer all of the questions that many people tend to ask.

Also discussed was that the architects are already moving forward with plans to get construction bids and put an actual price on the complete project. We expect numbers early in the new year! After 15 years of talking about taking care of our town employees we hopefully are nearing the finish line to make it a reality!!!

Finally, I hope that everyone attends a presentation regarding the new DPW facility. When this gets to a referendum, we as residents, when being asked to fund one of the largest projects in many years, will ALL know what we are be asked to pay for and more importantly WHY! The time to ask questions is now, come to a DP-WAC meeting, come to a Town Council meeting, email me at thabicht@hebronct.gov or speak to any your Town Council members.

Our next DPWAC meeting is Monday, Dec. 15, at the Town Hall, lower level, at 6:30 p.m. I'd love to see you there.

Sincerely,
Todd Habicht
DPWAC Vice Chairman

Lead By Example
To the Editor:
Some of the most important qualities in an elected official are honesty and transparency. The most important quality in any leader is the willingness to use those values to lead by example. Unfortunately for Colchester residents, these values have drifted far from where they should be.

For more than two years we heard from Bernie Dennler and Colchester Democrats that his

See Letters, page 6

Editor's Desk continued from page 4

As you may have noticed on the cover of last week's paper, we have a new early deadline for letters to the editor. For the rest of December, all letters to the editor must be submitted by **noon on Mondays**. So, for example, letters for the Dec. 19 Rivereast need to be emailed to bulletin@glcitizen.com by noon Monday, Dec. 15.

No exceptions will be made – so if you don't want to miss out, be sure to get those letters in early!

See you next week.

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★ *Letters cont. from page 5*

administration was the most transparent in the history of the town. Yet Bernie has already spent nearly a quarter of the town's legal budget fighting to block my access to public records he has twice been ordered to release. And if I were a betting man, I would bet the bank he is getting ready to spend tens of thousands more in tax dollars to keep fighting a battle he keeps losing.

For more than two years we heard that Dennler's administration cares about every resident. Yet taxes go up every budget season. Worse, when residents ask for less spending, the reaction from Colchester DTC orbiters is not empathy or care. It is to tell people that if they cannot afford to live here, they can leave.

For more than two years we heard that the administration cares deeply about our farmers, our agricultural roots, and the environmental health of the town. Yet the turf field project is proposed on wetlands with no environmental impact study at all. Wanting to understand and mitigate risks does not mean opposition to the project. It means responsible governing.

For more than two years we heard that this administration does not care about party politics. Yet Colchester Democrats never seem to disagree with each other. Every vote is unanimous. Every meeting is a string of nods. They are so averse to disagreement that they weaponize disagreement between other people as a political tool. Their party and their platform always seem to come before even the most basic element of honest thought, which is the ability to challenge each other.

With Bernie's recent win at the polls, my hope is that this is the year the Dennler administra-

tion and Colchester Democrats finally stand behind their words and lead by example. Imagine what our town could become with leaders who care as much about doing the right thing as they do about saying the right thing.

Jason LaChapelle – Colchester

Bingo at Senior Center

To the Editor:

There's something truly special about the way bingo brings people together. At the Portland Senior Center, our monthly bingo has quickly become one of our most popular gatherings, and it's easy to see why.

Beyond the laughter, friendly competition, and (let's be honest) the much-loved candy prizes, bingo offers real benefits for healthy aging. The game encourages mental stimulation, focus, and memory; it boosts hand-eye coordination; and most importantly, it fosters social connection, one of the most powerful contributors to overall well-being as we age.

We are also incredibly fortunate to have our amazing bingo leader, Sean, whose kindness, energy, and sense of fun create a warm and welcoming atmosphere every single time. His leadership has truly helped make bingo a bright spot in our monthly programming.

If you haven't joined us yet, consider this your invitation! Stop by for bingo at the Portland Senior Center; you'll find community, joy, and maybe even a sweet treat or two. We'd love to have you.

Sarah Elliott-Caratasios, LMSW
Director and Municipal Agent, Portland Senior Center

2026 Registration is Open

To the Editor:

As the year comes to a close, Colchester Baseball & Softball League would like to extend heartfelt thanks to everyone who helped make the 2025 season such a success. Our generous sponsors, committed parents and caregivers, and dedicated volunteers all played a vital role in creating a positive experience for our players. Your support, time, and enthusiasm continue to strengthen youth sports in our community.

And of course, we thank the kids – the athletes who bring energy, excitement, and a smile to every swing. They are the reason we do what we do, and their love for the game continues to inspire us.

Planning for the 2026 season is already underway, and we're looking forward to another great year ahead. Registration is now open, and families can find details or sign up at www.cbsl.org.

Thank you again to everyone who supports youth baseball and softball in Colchester. We can't wait to see our players back on the fields next season.

Sincerely,
Arnold Ewings
Director of Communications & Social Media
Colchester Baseball & Softball League

Holiday Influence Peddling

To the Editor:

On Wednesday, Dec. 10, Colchester's Board of Finance began interviewing candidates to fill a Republican vacancy. My name is Michael Dubreuil, and as the Republican Town Committee's recommended candidate, I was genuinely excited to participate in that process. Unfortunately, recent events compel me to make a public statement instead.

During the election, the *Rivereast* reported that Republicans were engaged in "in-fighting" because two registered Republicans – Donna Antonacci and Margo Gignac – ran as petitioning candidates for the Board of Education. That was inaccurate. Colchester's Republicans made it clear that their conduct did not align with our values. They were rebuked and encouraged to step away.

I understand that Donna Antonucci has now applied for the open Board of Finance seat—a position many believe she is not qualified for. Where her résumé may fall short, however, her enthusiasm for currying favor is truly Olympic-level.

I have learned that just two days before her interview, all of Colchester's elected officials were invited to a "holiday party" at her business, Lotus Games. This event – reportedly taking place on Monday, Dec 8th – appears similar to other themed gatherings previously hosted by her political ally, Margo Gignac, such as the "Feeling Lucky" St. Patrick's Day party. The guest list for these events is always the same: exclusively elected officials, paired with a tongue-in-cheek promise not to "talk shop." It is worth noting that most of Colchester's elected Republicans choose not to attend.

So, two days before being interviewed for the open Board of Finance seat, Ms. Antonacci, hosted the very people responsible for filling that seat at a "holiday party" at her place of business. Somehow, this did not strike her as inappropriate. It certainly does to me.

Colchester should never support any candidate who even appears to use improper influence to shape a public decision. The appearance alone is enough to undermine public confidence in our government. Invitations of this nature may raise concerns under C.G.S. § 53a-147 (Bribery of a Public Servant) and could conflict with Colchester's ethics policy.

During the election, Ms. Antonacci often reflected on her past service on the Board of Education and claimed she acted with integrity. In my view, she might think she talks the talk but does not walk the walk. Colchester deserves better.

Michael Dubreuil – Colchester

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Holiday Gift Tree, Sign-Up

Andover families can sign up for gifts with Tess Grous, social services director, at the Community and Senior Center or by emailing tgrous@andoverct.org. Please include the following information: your name, telephone number, ages of children, whether boy or girl, items the children are requesting and sizes if asking for clothing.

Vacancies on Community Fund

The Andover Greater Together Community Fund at the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving is accepting applications to fill vacancies on its Greater Together Community Fund committee. In 2019, the Hartford Foundation established the Greater Together Community Funds in each of the 29 towns it serves, including Andover, with an initial investment of \$100,000. In 2021, the Foundation awarded an additional \$50,000 to each of the community funds. In January, as part of the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving's Centennial year in 2025 and the Fifth anniversary of the Greater Together Community Fund program, the Foundation has recently unveiled a new \$100,000 investment in each of its 29 town-specific Community Funds. This includes \$50,000 immediately available for grant-making and \$50,000 allocated to endowment. The Hartford Foundation established all-volunteer Selection Committees in 2019 which comprised of local residents who would form a nine-member committee of volunteer town residents to administer the grant process and consider applications for grant funding from local nonprofits for projects that serve and benefit each town's residents. The purpose of the community funds is to support residents in taking ownership around the needs in their towns, encourage broad and inclusive civic engagement and anchor the Hartford Foundation in each

Anonymous tags will then be placed on the Holiday Giving Tree at the Community and Senior Center, for items that are requested. Gifts will be distributed the week of Dec. 22. Anyone interested in purchasing a special request item for an Andover child can come select a tag from the giving tree. See Grous before leaving with the tag.

town. The Andover Greater Together Community Fund Committee is responsible for selecting and distributing funds awarded by the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving to local nonprofits to assist in projects that will help enhance and benefit the residents of Andover. In June, the Hartford Foundation awarded over \$40,000 to seven local nonprofit organizations recommended for funding by the Andover Greater Together Community Fund Committee. For more information on the Andover Greater Together Community Fund, go to www.hfpg.org/andovercf. The Andover Greater Together Community Fund committee meets monthly via Zoom. Application forms can be found on the interested volunteer page of the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving website, www.hfpg.org/gtcfvolunteer, or by emailing the committee at andover@hfpgcommunityfunds.org. Please note: elected officials, individuals campaigning for office, or their immediate family members are not eligible to serve on this committee. Volunteers must be at least 14 years of age to serve. Interested community members should apply by Jan. 2 to be considered.

Residents Sought for Search Committee

The Andover Board of Selectmen seek two registered voters of Andover that are interested in serving on the Town Administrator Search Committee (TASC). Pursuant to Section 701B of the Andover town charter, the TASC is charged with the recruitment, screening, and presentment of candidates for the position of town adminis-

trator to the Board of Selectmen. Interested voters cannot hold any public office or serve on any other board or commission. Please submit statements of interest no later than Dec. 19 to adminassistant@andoverct.org or by mail to administrative assistant, 17 School Rd., Andover, CT 06232.

Congregational Church News

Andover Congregational Church, UCC, located at 359 Route 6, invites all to worship, held Sundays at 10 a.m. All are welcome. The service also streams live on the church's Facebook page (First Congregational Church, Andover, CT). For more information, call the church office at 860-742-7696, email andoverctchurch@gmail.com or visit www.andoverctchurch.org. **Children's Church:** Is provided. **Choir:** At 9 a.m. Sundays in the sanctuary.

Food Pantry: Mondays from 5-7 p.m. Bring your own bags. The **Foodshare Van** comes to the church every other Wednesday from 8:30-10 a.m.; **Senior Pantry** is on the opposite Wednesdays. **AA Meetings:** Saturdays and Mondays, 7 p.m. **Sonshine Stampers:** Tuesdays, 9:30 a.m. **Christmas Eve Candlelight Service:** Dec. 24 at 6:30 p.m.

‘Christmas in New England’

“Christmas in New England” will perform for the first time at Andover Congregational Church, 359 Route 6, on Friday, Dec. 19, at 7 p.m. All are invited to this night of traditional and contemporary Christmas music with a touch of bluegrass, old time, and country music styles. Amy Gallatin, Roger Williams, JD Williams, Dave Orlomoski, Karen Wilber, and Krissy & Bob Dick will perform on acoustic instruments and vocals. There will be songs you know, and some new ones as well. This event is presented in the spirit of good-

will by the Andover Friends of the Library, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, so while there is no admission charge, you are still welcome to make a donation to the Friends group. Parking is available at the Andover Congregational Church parking lot, or across the street at the Andover Public Library. At intermission, you will be able to purchase tickets for the Friends of the Library's Basketpalooza event, as all 46 baskets will be moved to the church for display. For more information, contact the library at 860-742-7428.

Homework Club

A Homework Club for students in grades 6-10 will be offered Tuesdays, 3-4:30 p.m., through Dec. 30, at the Andover Community and Senior Center, 25 School Rd. Students are invited to a free space to complete assignments, study and build strong habits. Staff and volunteers will be on hand. Consent forms are required. Call the center for more information, at 860-798-6862.

Basketpalooza is Here!

All are invited to support the Andover Friends of the Library and the Andover Public Library this season in the fifth annual fundraiser Basketpalooza. Between now and Dec. 22, you can purchase tickets for a chance at winning any one of the 46 theme baskets, which are filled with toys, homemade jams, baking supplies and more. Tickets are \$1 each, \$5 for 6 tickets and \$10 for 13 tickets. Credit cards will be accepted using Square (\$5 minimum) for ticket purchases. One winning ticket for each basket will be drawn Monday, Dec. 22, at 5 p.m.; winners will be notified that evening.

Holiday Food Drive

The Andover Volunteer Fire Department, located at 11 School Rd., will host a Holiday Food Drive Saturday, Dec. 13, from 9 a.m.-1 p.m., to benefit the Andover Food Pantry. The pantry is in need of the following holiday meal items: hams, turkeys, instant potatoes, gravy, stuffing, apple and cranberry sauce, canned pie filling and baking mixes (cookies, cakes, brownies). Monetary contributions will also be welcomed. Make checks payable to Andover Food Pantry.

Amston Artists in Local Show

From now through Dec. 28, Amston artists Elizabeth Dougherty and John Ros will have an exhibition of mixed media works entitled “Over Here” at Over Andover Barntique, 415 Route 6, Andover, as part of Artist Open Studios of Northeast CT. Artist open studio hours will be 11 a.m.-4 p.m. Saturday and Sunday, Dec. 6 and 7. There will be an artist reception Saturday, Dec. 6, from noon-3 p.m. For more information, visit aosct.org.

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Community & Senior Center Happenings

The Andover Community and Senior Center, located at 25 School Rd., is open daily from 9 a.m.-2 p.m. The lounge is open for cards, games and puzzles anytime, and coffee is always on. All are welcome. For all senior-related events, call Director Tess Grous at 860-798-6862. The center’s monthly newsletter is available on the Town of Andover website, www.andoverconnecticut.org. Copies are also available at the center, Town Hall, and Andover Public Library. To receive the newsletter by email each month, ask for Haley at the center, at 860-742-7305 x4510.

Volunteer Opportunities Available: The center is looking for Cards & Games helpers, kitchen servers, appointment confirmation phone calls, art teachers, cooking/baking instructors and other volunteers with special talents willing to share with the community. Evening hours are available. Please call or stop by the center if interested.

Transportation: Call Linda at 860-498-2326 to schedule transportation. Provide one week’s notice for all requests. All seniors, veterans, and disabled are welcome.

Weekly Programs: The senior center offers a variety of weekly programs, including: Yoga, Food Pantry Trips, Movie Mondays, Knitting, Wednesday Lunches (with bingo every other Wednesday), Sewing, Various Exercise Programs, and more. For a full schedule of all weekly offerings, contact the center.

Upcoming Special Events: Transportation available for all programs. For full event descriptions, call the senior center or see the online newsletter.

Need Holiday Assistance?

Does your family need help with gifts this holiday season? Do you know an Andover family who could use a little help?

Please reach out to either Roberta Dougherty, Town Clerk, at 860-742-7305 ext. 4218 or townclerk@andoverct.org, or Tess Grous, Social Services Director and Municipal Agent, at 860-742-7305 ext. 4510 or tgrous@andoverct.org.

Scholarship Announced

The East Hartford Garden Club has announced the availability of one \$1,000 scholarship to any full- or part-time student who is a resident of Andover and is majoring in horticulture, floriculture, landscape design, conservation, forestry, environmental concerns, botany and other allied subjects.

Students from Bolton, Bloomfield, Coventry, East Hartford, East Windsor,

Glastonbury, Manchester, Middletown, Vernon, Storrs and Windsor Locks are also eligible for the scholarship.

Applications with the submittal instructions are available at the guidance department of the attending school. All completed applications must be received by April 1, 2026 to be considered.

Shopping Trips: Tuesdays, 8:30 a.m. – to Willimantic on Dec. 16 and 30, and Manchester on Dec. 23. Contact Linda to reserve your ride.

Art Class with Kim – Watercolor & Sea Glass: Thursday, Dec. 18, 6-8 p.m. Cost is \$35. Explore watercolor painting and create mixed-media pieces using sea glass and shells. All skill levels welcome. Space is limited. Supplies are provided; feel free to bring your own special pieces. To sign-up, call 860-742-7305 ext. 451.

Magic of Lights: Thursday, Dec. 18, 5 p.m. Free. This is a drive-through holiday lights experience at Rentschler Field in East Hartford. The bus will leave from the senior center; to reserve a seat on the bus, call 860-498-2326.

Travel In Time Club: Friday, Dec. 19. This free field trip – an intergenerational partnership with Andover Elementary School – is based on *Travel in Time in Connecticut*, by local author and teacher Dan Blanchard. Contact Grous to participate or for more information.

Christmas Carols with RHAM High School: Monday, Dec. 22, 11:30 a.m. Enjoy classic carols, as well as a few surprises. Hot cocoa and sweet treats will be served.

Hair Care with Helen: Monday, Dec. 29, 10 a.m.-2 p.m. Cost is \$20. Need a trim? Sign up for a dry haircut. Hair must be clean and dry before your appointment. Transportation is available if needed. Space is limited; call the center at 860-798-6862 to reserve your spot.

New Year’s Eve Brunch: Monday, Dec. 31, 11 a.m. Join the celebration with food, friends and fun, and a countdown to noon toast. Call the center to sign up.

Help Light Christmas Tree

Andover Congregational Church, located at 359 Route 6, invites all to help light the church Christmas tree on Sunday, Dec. 14, at 6 p.m. There will be a carol sing followed by hot chocolate, cookies and fire pits to roast s’mores.

Holiday Giving Tree

The third annual Holiday Giving Tree is set up at the Andover Community & Senior Center. Each tag on the tree represents a gift wish from a local family in need this holiday season.

To participate, select a tag from the Holiday Giving Tree, purchase the requested gift item, and return it to Community & Senior Center Director Tess Grous by 4 p.m. Friday, Dec. 19.

For more information, contact Grous at 860-742-7305 ext. 4510 or Tgrous@AndoverCT.org.

Gift-Wrapping Available

Need some gift-wrapping done? On Wednesday, Dec. 17, you can bring your presents to Andover Public Library, 355 Route 6. The library will supply the paper, tape, tags, bows – even the person to wrap the gifts, if you’d like.

The gift-wrapping is free, though small donations are asked for the Andover Friends of the Library, to cover the expenses. The downstairs door will be unlocked, and the wrapping will be done at the Friends’ meeting table.

For more information, contact the library at 860-742-7428.

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Another Successful RHAM Girl Scouts Craft Fair

On Dec. 6, nearly 75 Girl Scouts from the RHAM (Regional Hebron-Andover-Marlborough) Service Unit hosted the 31st annual RHAM Girl Scouts Holiday Craft Fair at Marlborough Elementary School.

At the craft fair, which is held the first Saturday of every December, the girls sold their own homemade crafts to the public. Children were encouraged to buy presents independently for their loved ones with the help of older Girl Scout elves who assisted younger kids with their

shopping and budgets. Free gift-wrapping was also provided. The craft fair also included a bake sale with free hot drinks that was overseen by the littlest Girl Scouts in kindergarten and first grade.

In participating in the craft fair, the Girl Scouts learned multiple lessons in entrepreneurship. These included identifying their audience, selecting and creating crafts that meet the audience’s needs, and learning how to effectively sell their products to customers.

AHM News & Notes

AHM Youth and Family Services has announced the following items of interest. For more information or to register, visit ahmyouth.recdesk.com/Community/Program.

Gingerbread House Making: Wednesday, Dec. 17, 6-7 p.m., for kids ages 4 and up; registration due by Dec. 6. This class will include hot cocoa, and all the supplies needed to build your own gingerbread house. Participants select DIY projects of their choice. Cost is \$10/person.

Kids Polar Express Yoga: Thursday, Dec. 11, 5:15-6 p.m. Hop aboard the Polar Express for a special yoga adventure, centered around movement, play and mindfulness. Kids will practice hot chocolate breathing, learn a variety of winter-themed yoga poses, enjoy a few mindful

games/activities, then wind down with a relaxing savasana. Pajamas are welcome. This class is geared toward children 4-10. All levels are welcome. Register online.

Open Arts & Crafts Studio: Wednesday, Dec. 17, 6 p.m. This workshop will include a variety of projects and supplies, including seasonal and holiday-themed crafts. Participants select DIY projects of their choice. All materials will be provided. All ages are welcome. Register online.

Winter/Early Spring Program: Registration opens soon for AHM’s winter programs. There will be classes for all ages, including Yoga, Macrame, and Art with Audrey. Stay tuned on our socials and ahmyouth.org for updates and registration info.

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Standout Athletes of the Week

By Josh Howard

Jake Thompson – Portland/ECSU (Cross-Country): Thompson, a 2022 graduate of Portland High School, closed out his time on the collegiate trails by competing in the NCAA Division III Mideast Regional Championships in New York. Thompson, now a senior at Eastern Connecticut State University, ran a 27:56 (5:37 per mile) in the 8,000 meters finals. Prior to competing for the Warriors in Willimantic, Thompson was an all-conference cross-country and track athlete at PHS where he also played basketball for three seasons. He will now turn his attention to the indoor and outdoor track and field seasons at ECSU.

Abby Simao – RHAM High School (Volleyball): Simao was named Connecticut High School Coaches Association (CHSCA) Class M All-State following a season in which she was a force all over the court for a Raptors team that captured a state championship for the fourth time in five years. Simao, a senior, also earned her second straight All-Central Connecticut Conference (CCC) honor after finishing second on the team in kills and aces, along with third in digs and fifth in blocks.

Jenna Murphy – East Hampton/University of Hartford (Volleyball): Murphy, a 2023 graduate of East Hampton High School, led the University of Hartford Hawks in blocks and sets played this fall. Murphy, now a junior at UHart, was also second on the team in kills and points, behind only her twin sister Jordan Murphy. The Murphy twins, along with younger sister Amber Murphy, helped Bellringers volleyball capture the program’s first state championship in 2022.



2022 PHS graduate Jake Thompson has continued to run at a rapid pace at Eastern Connecticut State University.

Valerie Luizzi – Colchester/Keene State (Basketball): Luizzi, a senior at Keene State, was named as an Owls’ Athlete of the Week after scoring 17 points and racking up six steals in a 78-70 victory over Worcester State University on Nov. 25. Luizzi, a 2022 graduate of Bacon Academy, also moved up the record books in the contest as she is now 23rd in program history with 941 points and also tied for 11th in program history after knocking down her 150th three-pointer.

To nominate an athlete as a Standout of the Week, email joshhowardsports@gmail.com. Please include as many details about the athlete or performance as possible.

Former State Rep to Challenge for Senate

Former state Rep. Charles Ferraro has filed papers to run as the Republican candidate for the 33rd Senate District.

The 33rd District includes the *Rivereast* municipalities of Colchester, East Hampton and Portland, as well as Chester, Clinton, Deep River, East Haddam, Essex, Haddam, Lyme, Old Saybrook and Westbrook. The state senate seat is currently held by Democrat Norm Needleman.

“From electricity bills to property taxes, we must do more to lower the cost of living in Connecticut,” Ferraro, a Clinton resident, said. “In Hartford, I’ve proven I can work across the aisle to deliver a balanced, no-tax-increase budget while establishing strong fiscal guardrails on state spending and borrowing.”

A longtime small business owner, Ferraro served from 2015 to 2025 as state representative for the 117th House District, which includes parts of Milford, Orange and West Haven. Ferraro was the ranking member of the Energy and Technology Committee and also served on the Human Services and Veterans committees.

“I am looking forward to meeting with and listening to residents and small business owners across the 33rd District,” Ferraro said. “As your voice in Hartford, I will work to make Connecticut a place where businesses can grow, and families can stay. That means adopting an all-of-the-above energy strategy to reduce your energy bills, improving public safety and health care, supporting our veterans and seniors, and cracking down on wasteful spending.”

Ferraro owned and operated the West Haven Academy of Karate for 48 years and has participated in and conducted hundreds of fundraising events to help people in need. He is cur-



Charles Ferraro

rently the titular head of the Worldwide Tang Soo Do Family, an international martial art umbrella organization that oversees Tang Soo Do organizations on six of the seven continents. He is a 10th-degree black belt, the highest level of recognition given in the martial arts community. Ferraro was inducted into the Martial Arts Hall of Fame in 1996.

Ferraro and his high school sweetheart, the former GERALYN ANN DeMaio, have been married for 47 years. They have two sons, Christopher and Brandon Ferraro, and two grandsons, Roman and Leo.

Top Sports Moments of 2025 Nominations

We are once again approaching “The Most Wonderful Time of the Year” and will soon be reflecting on the best sports moments from the area for 2025.

Nominations are being accepted through Friday, Dec. 19 for any team or individual athletic accomplishment from any level (youth, high school, or adult). The performance did not have to take place locally, but must in-

clude a local team, player, or resident that accomplished the feat.

Submissions can be sent to joshhowardsports@gmail.com for consideration. Please include as many details (names, dates, statistics, scores, etc.) as possible.

The Top 25 Moments will be revealed in the Jan. 2, 2026 edition of the *Rivereast News Bulletin*.



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Anniversary in Aruba... Judy and Rich Klotzbier of East Hampton went back to Aruba for their 40th wedding anniversary, after having their honeymoon there in 1985. So much has changed but it's still beautiful, Judy tells us. This photo was taken in front of Aruba's oldest church, the Alta Vista Chapel.



At the Cape... Michelle Larson, owner of Paws-n-Heel Dog Training in East Hampton, took a mini-vacation from training dogs to Cape Cod to visit her sister. They stopped at White Crest Beach in Wellfleet to walk along the beach and enjoy the view.

Where in the World is the *Rivereast*?

Taking a vacation or a day trip soon? Or simply going out to dinner? Bring the *Rivereast* with you! Whether it's across the globe or across town, we want to see where you've been! Simply snap a photo with the *Rivereast*, send it to bulletin@glcitizen.com and, if printed, you'll receive a gift card to Campagna Restaurant in Portland! Further details are listed below. Happy travels!



Wonderful Ireland... Kathy Palmer of Hebron and longtime friends from the Rocky Hill class of 1970 recently spent two wonderful weeks in Ireland. This is just one of their stops at the Cliffs of Moher, County Clare.



Awesome Aruba... Paul and Lori Lechowicz of East Hampton brought along the *Rivereast* on a recent trip to Aruba!

Where in the World?

Going on a trip? Bring along the *Bulletin*!

Submit your travel photo holding the *Rivereast News Bulletin*, and you will win a \$25 Gift Card to Campagna Restaurant if your photo is one the four entries selected!

To enter, email your photo and address to: bulletin@glcitizen.com

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Children’s Holiday Christmas Party

American Legion Post 197 in Marlborough, located at 128 East Hampton Rd. (Route 66), will hold its annual Children’s Holiday Party and lunch with Santa Sunday, Dec. 14, from noon-2 p.m.

Children up to 10 years old are invited to come for cookie decorating, face-painting, pizza, and a gift from Santa. Come and have

a free photo taken with Santa.

All attendees are asked to bring a non-perishable food item to be donated to Marlborough food Bank.

If you plan to attend, call the post at 860-295-7810 with the age and number of children no later than Dec. 13.

Richmond Memorial Library News & Notes

Richmond Memorial Library, located at 15 School Drive, has announced the following items of interest. **Registration required for all programs unless noted.** For more information, full program descriptions or to register, call 860-295-6210 or visit richmondlibrary.info.

Yule Celebration: Yule is almost here and Rachel, the Replanted Witch, will help celebrate the season Saturday, Dec. 13 at 11 a.m. Hear the story of the Ivy King and the Holly King, make your own Yule log to take home, and create pine cone bird seed offerings to hang outside to honor nature. This program is for teens and adults.

Babytime: There will be a baby-centered storytime with songs, rhymes, lap bounces, and a story on Fridays at 10:30 a.m. through Dec. 19. For children up to 24 months, with their caregivers. Held in the Storytime Room.

Pajama Storytime with Yoga: Thursday, Dec. 18, at 6 p.m., for children of all ages. Enjoy a couple stories and then practice some calm-

ing yoga. Wear comfy pajamas and bring your favorite stuffed animal or blankie.

Crafty Kids: Wednesdays at 4 p.m. through Dec. 17, for kids ages 4 and up. There will be two projects on hand each week to choose from, or kids are welcome to use our supplies to create their own projects. Registration is not required.

Read to the Dogs: Monday, Dec. 15, 6-7 p.m. Young readers are invited to come in and read to a certified Reading Education Assistance Dog. Register for a 15-minute time slot to secure your child’s spot. Limit two children per time window (one per dog).

Dungeons and Dragons Fungeon: Tweens and teens (ages 10-16) are invited to enjoy a single-session *Dungeons & Dragons* game on Monday, Dec. 22, at 5 p.m. All supplies provided but you will need a Level 4 character (made using 2014 rules). If you do not have one, the library will have some prepared for you to choose from.

Congregational Church News & Notes

Sunday Worship at Marlborough Congregational Church, located at 35 South Main St., is held at 10 a.m. The service is also broadcast live every Sunday at mcc.marlconchurch.org and recorded for later viewing. Church pastor is the Rev. Valerie Seaver.

Childcare for infants and toddlers is provided downstairs in the nursery but children are always welcome at the worship service. Sunday school is open to all children in the community for children ages 3 through grade 8. Contact Elizabeth Kukich at ekukich@marlconchurch.org for more information.

Dec. 14 is the third Sunday in Advent with an Advent reading and the lighting of the Advent candles. The service will feature the Chancel Choir’s Christmas cantata, “The Promise of a King.” After worship tables in the Thienes Lounge will be set up and filled with homemade treats for the annual Cookie Walk where cookies can be purchased for \$8 a pound. Church youth have made crafts for their annual sale to be held after worship in the pastor’s office. Many items will be offered for sale by donation with proceeds from the sale going to Make-A-Wish.

AA: The church sponsors three weekly meetings: Wednesdays at noon and Thursdays at 5:30 p.m. in the Youth Room and Wednesdays at 7:30 p.m. in the Community Fellowship Hall. **ACA** meets Tuesdays at 7 p.m. in the Youth Room.

Outreach: The church collects non-perishable food items year-round for Marlborough Food Bank with a basket located in the narthex for Sunday worshippers to bring donations. A luncheon for Florence Lord Housing residents is

held monthly. The next church-sponsored Drive Thru Café, for Marlborough Food Bank clients and their families with tickets, will be Dec. 28. Operation Christmas Stocking, for youth ages 13 to 17 at Albert J. Solnit Children’s Center in Middletown, has begun. Handmade Christmas stockings with giving suggestions are available at the church. Filled stockings will be delivered the week of Dec. 15.

Stretch and Strengthen for seniors, led by certified instructor Barbara LaBlanc, is held Fridays at 9:45 a.m. upstairs in the lounge. The community is welcome. The weekly drop-in fee is \$25.

Second Blessings Thrift Shop is open for selling and donations Fridays from noon to 3 pm and Saturday from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. The thrift shop rooms are filled with many new arrivals for the holiday season. Follow the shop through Facebook at Second Blessings Thrift Shop, Marlborough CT. The shop sells year-round through eBay at bit.ly/MCCebay.

General Information: Marlborough Congregational Church is an Open and Affirming faith community and all are welcome. The church does not pass a collection plate, but free-will giving boxes are found by the doors in the sanctuary. Donations can also be made through the church website, or mailed to the church at P.O. Box 57, Marlborough, CT 06447. For more information on the church or its programs, call Seaver’s direct line at 860-295-0432, email her at pastorval@marlconchurch.org, or contact the church office at office@marlconchurch.org.

St. John Fisher Church News & Notes

St. John Fisher Roman Catholic Church is located at 30 Jones Hollow Rd. Pastor is the Rev. George S. Mukuka, Bill Gilles is deacon John McKaig is senior deacon retired. Heather Mancini is church secretary and can be reached at 860-295-0001; hours are Monday-Wednesday and Friday, 8:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m. People are asked to call before heading over or connect via email at stjohnfisher30@yahoo.com. The church website is www.stjfcchurch.org.

Christmas Mass Schedule: Wednesday, Dec. 24, Vigil Masses at 4 p.m. and 9 p.m., and Thursday, Dec. 25, at 9:30 a.m.

Advent Extended Reconciliation Schedule: Saturday, Dec. 20, 2-3:30 p.m. and Monday, Dec. 22, 5-7 p.m.

Advent Events Schedule: There will be a Christmas Pageant on Friday, Dec. 12, at 7 p.m. A Christmas Giving Program supporting six organizations will accept requested unwrapped gifts by Dec. 14, and there will be Caroling at the Marlborough Healthcare Center on Sunday, Dec. 14, at 2 p.m.

Regular Liturgical Celebrations: Weekend Masses: 4 p.m. Saturday and 8:30 and 10:30 a.m. Sunday. **Weekday Masses:** Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday, 8:30 a.m. Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament: Mondays at 9 a.m. **Weekly Sacrament of Reconciliation:** Saturdays, 3-3:30 p.m., or by appointment.

Faith Formation Programs: Classes are underway for this season. Cindy Bryan, Eileen Gilles and Helena Thomas lead the programs for grades K-10, to include a high school youth group. For more information, access the church website.

Ministry, Social and Parish Community Events: An adult choir practices weekly; men’s and women’s prayer groups, Knights of Columbus, Christian Outreach and Prayer Shawl ministry meet monthly; and an active book club meets quarterly. Social activities are planned throughout the year to provide additional parish fellowship.

Community Outreach and Service: Food drives are held weekly for the Marlborough Food Bank. Bags with specific shopping lists are available at the Masses. Sandwich-making and collection continues the last Thursday of the month for St. Vincent de Paul in Middletown. Other scheduled service opportunities can be found in the weekly bulletin.

Additional Programs and Offerings: For information on other programs, seasonal offerings, adult faith formation, youth group, OCIA, Knights of Columbus or other ministries, call the office, visit www.stjfcchurch.org, or look for the church on Facebook (Saint John Fisher Roman Catholic Church).

Parks and Rec. Programs

Marlborough Parks & Recreation has announced the following. For full program descriptions or to register, visit www.marlboroughct.gov. For more information, call 860-295-6203.

Adult Programs: Adult Volleyball: Thursdays, 8-10 p.m., at Marlborough Elementary School. Registration fee is \$5 per week.

Adult Drop-In Basketball: Sundays, 8-10 a.m., at MES. Registration fee is \$5 per week.

Driveway Reflective Number Signs Available: The cost of the sign is \$50. Help emergency services personnel find your home without delay. Vertical sign is double sided 8” x 24” with 4” numbers on blue highway reflective metal. Order forms are online and at Town Hall.

Watercolor Workshop at Arts Center

Marlborough Arts Center, located at 231 N. Main St., is offering a 6 weeks series of watercolor classes on Thursdays, 10:30 a.m.-1 p.m., from Jan. 15-Feb. 19.

Entitled “Capturing the Essence,” this workshop is designed to help you express yourself in an impressionistic way. Topics include the fundamentals of composition, values, edges, shapes, color, perspective, proportions and more. A demonstration will be given each day where instructor Alan James will explain the composition and techniques he uses for each painting. Students will then create the same painting with hands-on instruction and guidance.

James is an award-winning watercolor artist

and teacher. His art graces the walls of many private and corporate collectors worldwide. James is the East Coast America host of the internet TV show *Colour in Your Life*. As of spring 2025, his work is literally on the moon, having been selected for a lunar module library featuring artists from around the world. More information about James and his art can be found at alanjamesart.com.

The series is \$360 for all six classes. To register and see class make-up policies, go to www.marlborougharts.org. Online registration is preferred but mail-in is also possible. For more information, call 860-467-6353.

Senior Center News and Notes

Marlborough Senior Center, 17 School Drive, is open for activities. For more information about any senior center program, call 860-295-6209 or email socialservices@marlboroughct.gov.

Senior Center Hours: Monday-Thursday, 8 a.m.-4:30 p.m.; Friday, 8 a.m.-3 p.m. **Holiday Closings:** On Dec. 24, the center is open from 8 a.m.-noon; the center will then be closed all of Dec. 25, but reopen for its usual schedule on Dec. 26. On Dec. 31, the center will be open from 8 a.m.-noon, and it will be closed Jan. 1.

Note: As of Jan. 1, all events not regularly scheduled will require a RSVP.

Events: Shopping Trips: Monday, Dec. 15, to Ocean State Job Lot or Ollie’s for holiday shopping. Depart senior center at 1:30 p.m. and return at 4 p.m. You will have 90 minutes to shop. Call to reserve.

Ugly Sweater Party: Wednesday, Dec. 17, noon-2 p.m.

Free Holiday Gift-Wrapping: Thursday, Dec. 18, 2-3 p.m., and Friday, Dec. 19, 9-11 a.m. Bring your gifts; they’ll be wrapped for free. Call if interested.

ClearCaptions Free Phone: Tuesday, Jan. 6, 11 a.m.-noon. Made possible by the Americans with Disabilities Act, ClearCaptions provides caption telephones and the captioning service nationwide at no cost to those with hearing loss. Internet service is required. There are also apps for iPhones and iPads, and soon for Android phones.

Elementary School. No musical experience required. Must call the senior center to register.

Regularly Scheduled Programs: For full descriptions, call the senior center. **Billiards:** Mondays and Fridays, 10:30 a.m.-noon; **Bingo:** Mondays, 1-2 p.m. Each card costs \$1 and additional cards after are 50 cents; **Cards:** Monday, 2-3:30 p.m.; Wednesdays and Fridays, 1-3:30 p.m.; **Chair Massage:** No appointments in December.

Blood Pressure Checks and Chatham Health Education Presentation: Second Monday of each month. BP checks from 11:30 a.m.-12:15 p.m., and presentation from 12:15-12:45 p.m.

Coffee & Conversations: Meets the third Thursday of each month at 11 a.m. Each session includes a discussion on a particular topic of interest, activity and coffee.

Birthday Club: Tuesday, Dec. 23, 1-2 p.m., with cake. Open to all friends and family. It does not have to be your birthday month to celebrate. However, if it is, please RSVP.

Not Just Quilters: Wednesday and Friday from 9:30 a.m.-2 p.m.

Parkinson’s Exercise: Visit www.beatpdtoday.com/class-schedule or call 860-918-9594 to register and for more information.

Mahjong: Wednesdays, 1:30-3:30 p.m., at Fire Station No. 2, 200 West Rd., and the second Friday of every month from 12:30-2:30 p.m. at Marlborough Bakery, 8 Independence Drive.

Sweet Picks – Free Bakery Items: Monday and Tuesday mornings, local grocery stores donate bakery items (breads, desserts, etc.); delivery is between 8:30 and 9 a.m., Come take a look and take, in moderation, what you need. For senior center members only

Tap: Wednesdays, 5-6:30 p.m.

Social Services: Food Bank: Located at 3 Willhenger Drive, and can be reached at 860-295-6008. There is an open house Tuesdays from 10 a.m.-noon and 4-6 p.m. The food bank is in need of: canned vegetables (corn, green beans, peas, carrots), jam/jelly, fruit cocktail, and canned fruit. The food bank is open to qualified residents in need.

Meals on Wheels: Provides meals and daily visits for people 60 years of age and over, and their spouses or caregivers. Apply directly with CRT by calling 860-560-5848, or call the senior center for a referral.

Energy Assistance and Eversource Discounts: Income-based. Contact the center for an appointment.

Transportation: Rides to medical appointments, employment, essential services, the Senior Center and recreation activities are available to seniors and people with disabilities. Transportation is available on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays. Rides must be reserved two business days in advance. Call 860-295-6209 for more information. Visit www.marlboroughct.gov for the complete transportation policy. There will be no transportation Dec. 22 and 23.

Celebrate the Arts on New Year’s Eve

Marlborough Arts Center, located at 231 N. Main St., invites all art lovers to attend a New Year’s Eve party on Wednesday, Dec. 31, from 6-9 p.m.

This is the last opportunity to view the arts center’s latest exhibition of six local artists in the main gallery while also celebrating the coming of the new year. Feel free to BYOB and a sweet or savory finger food snack to share if you wish.

Visit www.marlborougharts.org, email info@marlborougharts.org or call 860-467-6353 for more information.

Longest Night Service

All are invited to attend a Longest Night Service in the sanctuary of Marlborough Congregational Church, 35 South Main St., on Wednesday, Dec. 17, at 7 p.m.

It will be a quiet service with time to reflect and recognize that Christ’s birth and the longest night (Winter Solstice) come around the same time of the year. The church said it hopes the longest night service will be a reminder of the light that is to come, the light from Christ’s birth, and the light from the lengthening of the days.

The service will be led by the church’s Care Team and the Rev. Valerie Seaver.

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Twinkle Town: Marlborough Lights Up the Season

By Toriana Williams

Excited chatter could be heard across the Marlborough town green as the community gathered for one of its most beloved traditions – the annual Gathering on the Green. Children clustered with mittened hands wrapped cups of cocoa, families greeted each other under strings of lights and the hum of anticipation grew as the night’s events unfolded.

Every year the celebration feels magical, but this year the atmosphere shimmered with something extra – more people, more lights and a renewed sense of what a small-town community feels like.

Longtime resident Katelyn Stevens, who has lived in Marlborough for a decade, captured the mood perfectly. “We come every year,” she said, her daughter Madison hugging her tightly. “There’s free popcorn; you see all your friends.” Stevens described the night as one where “it’s very homey in town.” The event, she added, has helped Marlborough stay connected every through harder years, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Madison, at just 6 years old, had simpler priorities. When asked her favorite part, she grinned and declared she was most excited about “meeting Santa” and “eating popcorn,” which the popcorn was indeed delicious.

Madison’s sister, 10-year-old Riley, echoed a sentiment by many kids wandering the green. Riley’s favorite moment? “Seeing my friends.”

As dusk deepened, the unmistakable harmonies of the RHAM choir drifted through the cold air. Students stood in an arc before the towering Christmas tree, their voices rising and weaving through carols familiar enough to warm even the iciest night. The Marlborough Jr. Ancient Fife & Drum corps also performed, who stamped a bright historical rhythm onto the evening. Their fifes sliced a sharp, cheerful note through the quiet as the drums kept time. The old-world sound mixed with modern festivities gave the celebration a signature Marlborough blend of tradition and community pride.

But perhaps no group bustled about with more energy – or responsibility – than Marlborough’s firefighters. Fire trucks lined the road in glowing rows of red and gold, each decorated with holiday zeal. For the first time, the department introduced a new tradition: the Marlborough Cup, awarded to the best decorated fire truck.

Marlborough Fire Marshal Joe Asklar held the gleaming trophy proudly. “It’s not exactly the Stanley Cup,” he laughed,

“but [the winning] department will have the option to keep it for one year and then they have to bring it back.”

This year’s winners were newcomers to the parade: the Columbia Volunteer Fire Department.

Columbia Fire Chief Jeff Lewis thanked Marlborough for the invitation to join the parade. “It’s our first time here, so first time and you win the trophy? Take that,” he laughed. He explained that firefighter Joel Duffy was the mind behind their now-famous chimney perched atop the truck. Lewis said simply. “We’ve been decorating the truck for probably about five years now. ... It feels great” to take home the Marlborough Cup.

Duffy, proudly clutching the remote for the chimney’s smoke machine, added, “It’s a cardboard box... a smoke machine... everybody loved it.”

Back in the heart of the green, Fire Lieutenant Kyle Szemrelylo paused to watch families. He has spent nine years with the department and oversees the full lineup of fire trucks at the event and described the evening in one familiar word: “Magical.” Szemrelylo added that this year drew “a lot of people ... more than usual” thanks to strong community promotion.

For Szemrelylo, the value of the night goes far beyond decorations and lights and noted that events like Gathering on the Green create memories “not a lot of towns can pull off.”

Even with the logistical and seasonal challenges his crew faces – chief among them, he noted, “inclement weather and cold” – Szemrelylo emphasized how proud he was of the volunteers who make the night possible. “This is what we do,” he added with a smile, already glancing toward the field where the night’s pyrotechnic display would soon begin.

As the clock neared 6 p.m., volunteers began preparing the event’s dazzling finale. Asklar nodded toward the darkened field ahead. The fireworks, he explained, were “very expensive,” entirely put on through volunteer effort – but always worth it.

Moments later, the sky answered with a sharp crack and then bloomed in color. Reds, greens and gold rippled like northern lights across the winter horizon. Parents lifted their children to get a better view; teenagers craned their necks; elders held hands and tilted their heads skyward. The fireworks mirrored the spirit of the night – bright, communal and unifying.

As people began drifting back toward their cars, cheeks flushed and hands cold, a final re-



Columbia firefighter Joel Duffy, Columbia Fire Chief Jeff Lewis, Marlborough Fire Lt. Kyle Szemrelylo and Marlborough Fire Marshal Joe Asklar (pictured from left) had some fun with the newly created “Marlborough Cup” – a trophy for the winner of the best decorated fire truck.

minder echoed through the speakers: the volunteers who make the Gathering on the Green possible rely heavily on community support. A GoFundMe remains open for anyone wishing to help keep the event – and its stunning pyrotechnic display – alive for years to come. To donate, visit: www.gofundme.com/f/help-support-marlboroughs-gathering-on-the-green.

This year’s Gathering on the Green wasn’t just a holiday event. It was a portrait of Marlborough itself: a town where traditions deepen, friendships stretch across generations, and, as Szemrelylo put it, “Strong community builds bonds.”

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Banner Year for Hawks Football & Cheer



East Hampton Football Youth Football and Cheer posted the programs best year to date this fall.



Hawks B Squad became the first football team to make the championship game in program history.

By Josh Howard

East Hampton Youth Football and Cheer (EHYFC) recently wrapped up a season to remember.

Hawks football made their first ever championship appearance, while the Hawks cheerleading squads posted multiple first place finishes and brought home various awards as the local programs celebrated their most successful season to date.

“As big as this season was, I believe we’re just getting started,” stated Dave Johnson, the president of EHYFC. “The future of Hawks football and cheer is bright.”

The football teams, which included kids from East Hampton and East Haddam, compete in the Connecticut Youth Football League (CTYFL), which is made up of 11 towns around Connecticut.

Practices for both the football and cheerleading squads took place at East Hampton Middle School, starting in the first week in August and extending into November.

Here’s a look at some of the highlights on the field and beyond.

Football’s B Squad Makes History

The Hawks B squad (consisting of 21 players from grades 5-7) made the championship game, marking the first time in program history that a team has made it to the big dance.

After finishing the season with a record of 4-3, the Hawks defeated Coginchaug, 13-6, in the quarterfinals and Vernon, 26-7, in the semifinals to reach the championship game at Veterans Memorial Stadium in New Britain. The sea-

son didn’t have a fairytale ending as the Hawks lost to North Branford in the title tilt on Nov. 16, yet a new benchmark was set.

The team was led by head coach Sean Paddock, who was assisted by coaches Ryan Gorra, Brian Pinney, Mike Christensen, Dave Johnson, Eric Ludwig, and Kelly Ellis.

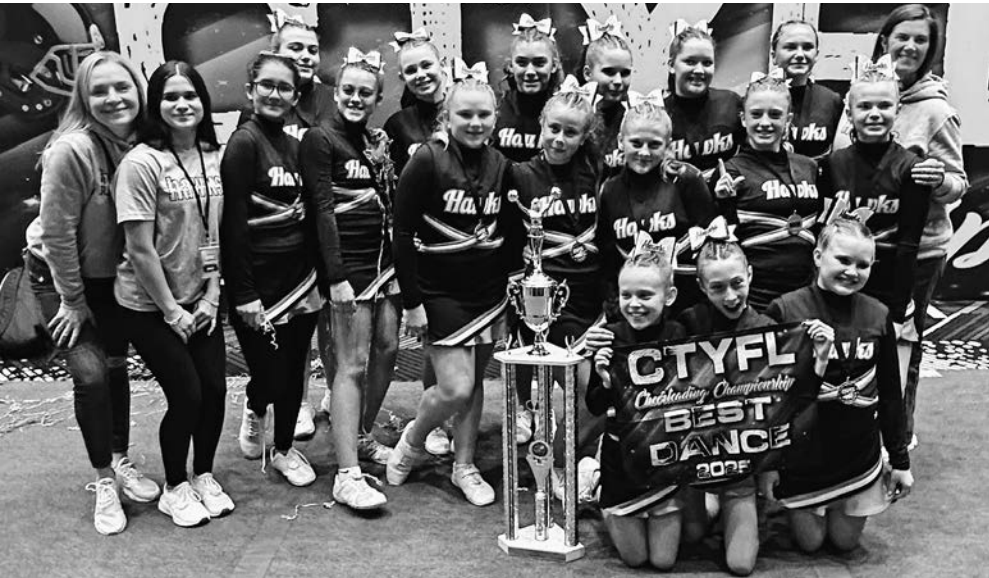
“This team believed in each other in a way I’ve never seen before,” Paddock said of his history-making group, who posted an undefeated record (4-0) at home this fall. “They earned every bit of success they had this year. When you consider where the program was two years ago, what they did is incredible.”

Prior to this year, the team had posted consecutive losing seasons, including going winless (0-8) a year ago.

Helping turn the tide was a trio of all-stars in Bryson Paddock, Hunter Ellis, and Troy Butler, who all shined on the field for a Hawks team that got contributions from a variety of sources.

The team used a balanced attack offensively, racking up 1,000 rushing yards and another 800 yards through the air. Defensively, the Hawks forced 12 turnovers and had eight different players tallied 20+ tackles. In five of the team’s six victories, the defense surrendered seven or fewer points.

Along with being the first squad to make the championship game, the team also became the first to win a playoff game when they eliminated Coginchaug, 13-6, in the quarterfinals, avenging a 36-13 loss to the same team in the last game of the regular season.



Hawks A placed first at the CTYFL Cheer Competition.

D Squad Finishes Strong

Following a 1-3 start, the Hawks D football team (featuring 17 players from grades 1-3) won their last three games of the season to finish with a record of 4-3

Head coach Brian Pinney and his staff of assistant coaches Shawn Spagnulo, Joe Eller, Eddie Dessureault, Arron McLaughlin, and John Kovach guided a team that outscored their opponents 139-83 by using a punishing ground game on offense and a stout defense that surrendered a total of 12 points over the final three games.

Leading the way on the field was all-star performers Camden Kinsey, Troy Hubeny, and EJ Dessureault.

Pinney noted that seeing the entire growth of the Hawks programs has been rewarding on many levels.

“It is not easy to navigate the complexities of a youth football and cheer program in a small town when you are competing against towns that are larger and have a greater football presence,” explained Pinney.

“We are extremely proud of all the players and cheerleaders in the program and what they accomplished this year,” he added. “Ten wins between the two football teams, making it to the program’s first ever championship game and winning first place with all three cheer teams is a testament to the hard work of the players, coaches, board, volunteers, and parents. Can’t wait to see what the future brings.”

Flag Football Flawless

For a second straight season, the flag football team (consisting of a dozen Pre-K to 1st graders) didn’t lose a game, posting a record of 2-0

Head Coach Kristen Russenberger, along with assistant coaches Ashley Johnson, Shawn Spagnulo, and Arron McLaughlin led a group that outscored the pair of opponents by a combined score of 72-42.

Cheer A Takes Top Spot

The Hawks A squad (consisting of 16 cheerleaders from grades 7-8) placed first at the CTYFL Cheer Competition and were awarded the ‘Best Dance’ routine at Foxwoods Casino on Nov. 8.

Head Coach Maggie Phillips was assisted by Becky Hawes and Emma Egan (an East Hampton High School junior coach) as the team brought hardware back to Belltown.

Following the championship season, eighth grade athletes Mila Chipman, Brooke Hawes, Isabella Kiernan and Mackenzie Rapple will be graduating out of the program.

B Squad Finishes First

Cheerleading B team (consisting of eight competitors from grades 5-6) also earned the top spot at the CTYFL Cheer Competition.

Additionally, head coach Jenn Marzi with as-

sistant coaches Michelle Johnson and Braelyn Paddock (EHHS Junior Coach) guided the team to a ‘Best Dance’ routine award.

The coaching staff noted that the squad was “small, but mighty,” adding, “We all worked together as a team to push through practices together. The camaraderie amongst the team came together day by day – each athlete helping each other with stunting, flying and what turned out to be our first-place winning routine.”

Grand Champion for C Squad

Head Coach Brianna Gasiewski, along with assistant coaches Lindsay Addazio, Shawn Jarzabek, and Mikah Levenduski (an EHHS junior coach), led the way as the Hawks C cheerleading squad was awarded ‘Grand Champion Award’ for the highest overall score.

The team, featuring 25 cheerleaders from grades 3-4, also took home a 1st place finish at the CTYFL Cheer Competition.

D Squad Puts on Show

Performing at the CTYFL Cheer Competition, the Hawks D Squad put on a flawless performance.

The team, consisting of six cheerleaders from grade 1-2, was led by head coach Andrea Landry and assistant coach/EHHS junior coach Gianna Jarzabek.

Flag Squad Takes Flight

The Hawks flag cheerleading team (consisting of nine cheerleaders ranging from Pre K-K) learned the ropes this year under head coach Rebecca Dotson and assistant coach Leanne Abbott

Cheer Directors Lauren Reis and Heather Sayers credited all the competitors, saying in a statement, “We knew this was a special group. The work, the passion, the commitment — it all showed on that stage.”

Setting a New Standard

EHYFC vice president Dave Marzi thanked the administration staff from all East Hampton schools and the program’s sponsors for their support throughout the entire season, adding that the 2025 season across all levels was a banner year, yet there is “much more to come.”

On Saturday, Jan. 10, the program will recognize all the athletes before the EHYFC turns its attention to spring’s flag football season. Registration opens in February, with the season running from April through June.

The flag football program is co-ed and consists of players from kindergarten to grade 8, yet the program is considering expanding to high school level.

Spring’s flag football season is coordinated with the town’s Parks and Recreation Department, so for more information on the all the programs visit ehyouthfootball.org or to register visit easthamptonct.myrec.com.

Gingerbread House Decorating Contest

The Village Center merchants present the fourth annual Village Center Gingerbread House Decorating Contest. East Hampton Public Library is proud to once again support the effort by serving as the display location and helping to promote the contest to the community.

Community voting runs through Dec. 19, with winners announced Dec. 20. Prizes will be

awarded in two age groups – under 15 and 16+.

The contest is made possible through local businesses, who contribute prizes ranging from restaurant and activity gift certificates to retail merchandise and more. The collaboration between the merchants and the library helps spotlight these businesses during a key shopping season.

The VFW Auxiliary said it wishes to thank each wreath sponsor, as their donation assists the VFW in placing wreaths at various soldiers’ gravesites in all 12 town cemeteries. As volunteers place a wreath on a soldier’s grave, they repeat the soldier’s name aloud.

To learn more about Wreaths Across America, visit www.wreathscrossamerica.org.

Wreaths Across America

The public is cordially invited to attend Fowler-Dix-Park VFW Post & Auxiliary 5095’s 18th Wreaths Across America wreath-laying event Saturday, Dec. 13, at noon.

Wreaths Across America is a worldwide event honoring veterans with the laying of a wreath on their headstone or marker. East Hampton’s Wreath Across America ceremony starts with a short ceremony in the VFW Post Hall, located at 20 North Maple Street, and concludes across the street at the Book of Names Memorial.

Seventeen wreaths are placed during the East Hampton ceremony; one for each branch of the

service, a Prisoner of War/Missing in Action, one in memory of former Gov. William O’Neill, and one for each of the auxiliary’s “adopted” eight forgotten soldiers who are buried in the Middletown State Veterans’ Cemetery.

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Taxes Due Jan. 1

The second installment of real estate, personal property, motor vehicle taxes over \$500, and supplemental motor vehicle taxes on the Grand List of Oct. 1, 2024 is due and payable on Jan. 1. Payments made or USPS-postmarked by Feb. 2 will be considered on time.

Real estate and personal property taxes are billed at 39.71 mills; motor vehicle and supplemental motor vehicle taxes are billed at the state-capped rate of 32.46 mills. Supplemental motor vehicle bills will be mailed on or about Dec. 12.

Late payments accrue 1.5% interest per month (18% annually) with a \$2 minimum, as

required by state law. A \$20 returned-check fee applies. Failure to receive a bill does not exempt taxpayers from payment or interest.

Checks should be made payable to Town of East Hampton. Payments may be mailed to: Collector of Revenue, 1 Community Drive, East Hampton, CT 06424. Payments may also be made online at www.easthamptonct.gov.

If dropping off in person, hours of collection are: Monday, Wednesday and Thursday, 8 a.m.-4 p.m.; Tuesday, 8 a.m.-6:30 p.m.; and Friday, 8 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

Email taxcollector@easthamptonct.gov with any questions or concerns.

Haddam Neck Covenant Church News

Haddam Neck Covenant Church, located at 17 Haddam Neck Rd. in East Hampton, invites all to in-person and online worship Sundays at 9 a.m. Pastor is the Rev. Tom Cowger. Refreshments are served after the service.

Message Series: The message each Sunday will focus on the Advent topics of Hope, Peace, Joy and Love.

Christmas Pageant: The Children's Christmas Pageant, telling the story of the birth of Jesus, will be held Sunday, Dec. 14, at 9 a.m.

Christmas Concert: The Christmas Concert, with Vocal Choir and musicians, will be held Sunday, Dec. 21, at 9 a.m.

Foster Child Gifts: The collection of gifts for foster children must be done by Dec. 7. The gifts must be new in its original packing and not wrapped.

Christmas Eve: All are invited Dec. 24 at 5 p.m. for the family candlelight service with tra-

ditional Christmas carols and music by the Bell Choir

Children's Ministry: Children's Ministry, for children in kindergarten through fifth grade, is held in Fellowship Hall during worship. The theme is "Friends with God" and is taught through Bible stories where the characters are friends with God. A toddler nursery is also available. All are welcome.

Choir: Vocal Choir rehearses Wednesdays at 6:30 p.m. Bell Choir rehearses Wednesdays at 5 p.m. New members are always welcome.

Adult Bible Study: Sundays at 10:30 a.m. in the Music Room. The study is the Book of Psalms.

Office Info: The office can be reached at 860-267-2336; hours are Tuesday and Thursday, 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. The church website is www.hn-covenantchurch.org.

EHVFD 'Santa Runs' Return

The members of the East Hampton Volunteer Fire Department have announced the schedule for this year's annual "Santa Run" visits to various neighborhoods in town.

Santa's visits to East Hampton begin on Friday, Dec. 5, with the East Hampton Recreation Department's Jingle Bell Parade in the Village Center. Santa's tours with the Fire Department begin Sunday, Dec. 7, with weekend routes starting at approximately 4 p.m. on weekends and at 5 p.m. during the week. The routes will be conducted in accordance with the schedule shown below and will follow the approximate order in which the streets are listed. A GPS tracker will enable children of all ages to locate Santa at any point along that evening's route.

Important Note: For safety reasons, Santa will not be able to stop and greet people along the state-controlled roads in town. If you live along routes 16, 66 or 196, please consult the schedule below and arrange to meet Santa at a convenient nearby location.

Inclement weather or emergency calls could potentially result in curtailment or cancellation of a particular evening's activities and cannot be rescheduled. Any changes or updates to the established schedule will be posted on the EHVFD Facebook page as soon as practicable.

These Santa Run events are sponsored, staffed and funded by the members of the fire department, which remains a 100% volunteer organization. No taxpayer or department budgetary funds are utilized to defray expenses; donations offered along the routes are accepted. The schedule is:

Dec. 12: Edgemere Condos, Clark Hill, Wa-

terview, Mountainview, Sunrise, Skyline, Highland Terrace, Starview, Midwood Farm, Grayson, Stonegate, North Cone, Tiffany Court.

Dec. 13: Smith, Dogwood, Royal Oaks area, Arch, Viola, Flanders, Quinn's Way, Daly, Pe-causett, Portage, Bear Swamp, Peach Farm, Whispering Woods, Town Line Drive, Orchard View.

Dec. 14: Old Marlborough Road, Poets area, Lake Vista Drive, Edgewater Circle, Laurel Ridge, Indigenous Peoples' area (Wangonk, etc.)

Dec. 15: Old Skinner, Old Chestnut Hill (lower), Carriage, Emily, Lena, Old Young, Taylor, Wildwood, Daniel Street, Wopowog, Brook Hill, South Main, Main Street to finish at Village Center.

Dec. 16: Old Coach, Old Middletown, Chestnut Hill, Michael, Hog Hill, William, Charles Mary, Terp, Hog Hill, Alden's Crossing, Long Crossing.

Dec. 17: Hills Avenue, Fairlawn, Melburn, Laurel Glen, North Maple, Maplewood, Beech-crest, Sherry Drive, Spice Hill, Tarragon (upper), Nutmeg, Tarragon (lower), Curry, Saffron, Arden, Champion Hill.

Dec. 18: Lake Drive, Staeth, Aaron's Way, White Birch, Ridgeview, Country Lane, Tam-mie Ann Drive, Berkshire, Chapman, Elm-wood, Birchwood, Crestwood, Fernwood, Mott Hill, Brack Farm, Mott Hill to Lake Drive.

Dec. 19: Main Street (between Barton Hill and Route 66), North Main, Christopher, West Dr., Bellwood Court, Lake Drive, Lakewood, Candlewood, Raymond, Pocotopaug Drive, Au-burn Knoll, Island View, Blue Heron, Eastham Bridge, Seven Hills Crossing.

Christ Episcopal Church News

Christ Episcopal Church, 66 Middle Had-dam Rd., Middle Haddam, holds in-person and Zoom services at 10 a.m. on Sundays. All are welcome. To connect electronically, go to www.christchurchmiddlehaddam.com for directions. The Holy Eucharist will be celebrated with the Rev. Diana Rogers, priest-in-charge.

Donations: Food items for the East Hampton Food Bank may be placed in the black totes at the rear of the church.

Returnable Bottles and Cans: Are collected in cans by the shed.

Bible Study: Contact Bobette Reed Kahn at bobette@khan.com if you are interested in participating.

Cards for Holiday Giving: A wide variety of gift cards are available. For each card sold, the church receives a percentage of the sale. Email Bobette at bobette@khan.com to place your order.

East Hampton Library News & Notes

East Hampton Public Library, 105 Main St, has announced the following. For full program descriptions or to register for a program, call 860-267-6621 or visit easthamptonpublicli-brary.org.

Hours: Monday-Wednesday, 10 a.m.-8 p.m.; Thursday-Saturday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.

Adult Programs: Music in the Library: Foundry Saxophone Quartet: Tuesday, Dec. 16, 6 p.m. All are invited to this evening of seasonal music. Refreshments provided by the Friends of the Library.

Tech Help: Thursday, Dec. 18, 2-4 p.m. Basic technology help for phones, laptops, tablets, and e-readers. No registration required; just bring your device with you.

Belltown Book Brunch: Friday, Dec. 19, 11 a.m. Meet to talk about what you are currently reading while enjoying coffee, tea, and a break-fast treat. Register or drop in.

Teen Programs: Magic: The Gathering (Grades 7-12): Saturday, Dec. 13, 1-3 p.m. All skill levels welcome. Bring your own decks or use one of the library's.

Storm in a Teacup: A Taylor Swift-Inspired Craft Night for Grades 6+ and Adults: Mon-day, Dec. 22, 6 p.m. Create a "storm in a tea-cup" diorama inspired by Taylor Swift's lyrics and aesthetics using teacups and miniatures. All supplies provided. Swifties and crafters alike are welcome.

Parks and Rec News & Notes

East Hampton Parks and Recreation has an-nounced the following items of interest. For full program descriptions or more information, or to register, call 860-267-7300 or www.east-hamptonrec.com.

Wolf Pack Tickets Now Available: At Peo-plesBank Arena in Hartford (formerly XL Cen-ter) on Saturday, Jan. 10, from 6-8 p.m. Tickets are \$25 each and are in the lower level, Section 109. Register online.

Decorate the Christmas Tree

The East Hampton Lions, together with the East Hampton Rotary, will place a Christmas tree in the lobby of Town Hall, and invite all residents to stop by Monday, Dec. 15, from 6-7:30 p.m., to place a mean-ingful ornament of their own on the tree.

Whether it's a handmade creation, a trea-sured family ornament, or something that reflects your holiday spirit, all contributions are welcome.

Belltown Motors will be supplying coffee, hot chocolate and donuts while residents may listen to – or sing – holiday songs pro-vided by "Karaoke Bill."

Clothing Donations: The church is collect-ing clothing for the area unhoused in conjunc-tion with FOOD4LIVES. Please check your closet for surplus warm clothing in good condi-tion; adult sizes only. A box will be placed in the Parish Hall for donations.

Christmas Pageant: Sunday, Dec. 21, at the 10 a.m. service. The Sunday School children will enact the story of the Holy Family's journey to Bethlehem for the birth of Jesus.

Christmas Gifts for Children in Need: The Missions Team is coordinating with the church's Covenant to Care-matched DCF social worker to provide gifts for ten children on their casel-oad this Christmas. See the sign-up sheet in the Parish Hall to sign up to help a local child.

Information/Assistance: Contact Senior Warden Donna Hryb at 860-633-0472 or donn-adubehryb@gmail.com for more information.

Children's Programs: Read to a Therapy Dog: Grades K-3: Tuesday, Dec. 16, 4:30 p.m. Readers will be assigned a 15-minute time slot between 4:30-5:30 to read to Jovie, a certified therapy dog. This is an opportunity to read aloud in a comfortable environment.

DIY Days for Grades K-8: Saturday, Dec. 20, 11 a.m.-4 p.m. Children and families in grades K-8 are invited to create a different toy, game, or treat together. No registration required; just drop in.

Holiday Storytime Presented by the Vil-lage Center Merchants: Saturday, Dec. 20, 2 p.m.; best for grades Pre-K through 3. Volun-teers (including Memorial School teacher Lily Cordeiro) will share festive holiday stories at the library. Winners of the annual Gingerbread House Competition will be announced follow-ing the storytime. Register or drop in.

Pokémon Party!: Grades K-6: Saturday, Dec. 27, 2-3:30 p.m. {lay games, create crafts, and en-joy Pokémon-themed snacks.

Republicans Holiday Gathering

On Tuesday, Dec. 16 at 6:30 p.m., the East Hampton Republican Town Committee will host a holiday gathering at The Dublin, 42 E. High St.

Appetizers and desserts will be provided. All are welcome to attend. The GOP will col-lect non-perishable food items to donate to the East Hampton Food Bank.

Ugly Sweater Party

Epoch Arts, located at 27 Skinner St., will hold an Ugly Sweater Party Friday, Dec. 12, from 7-9 p.m.

Teens in grades 6-12 are invited to come in their most festive outfit and play games, deco-rate gingerbread houses, watch movies and hang out friends.

Cost is \$10, and no registration is needed. For more information, visit www.epocharts.org.

Christmas Tree Pick-Up

Christmas Tree Pick-Up by East Hampton Boy Scout Troop 8 will conduct a Christmas tree pick-up on Saturday, Jan. 10. Reserve a pick-up at: www.troop8.net.

After registering online, place the tree at the end of your driveway by 7 a.m. on Jan 10. Sug-gested donation is \$15 per tree. Check or cash can be left in an envelope and taped to your door. Checks should be made out to Boy Scout Troop 8.

If not able to register online please send an email message with name, address and phone number to trees@troop8.net

No wreaths or garland will be accepted. Also, this pick-up is available to East Hampton, Mid-dle Haddam and Cobalt addresses only. Regis-trations are due Jan. 5.

St. Patrick Church News & Notes

St. Patrick Church, 47 West High St., is a member of St. John Paul II Parish, along with St. Bridget Church in Moodus.

Masses are celebrated Saturdays at 4 p.m. at St. Patrick and 5:30 p.m. at St. Bridget, and on Sundays at 7 and 11:30 a.m. at St. Bridget and 8:30 a.m., 10 a.m. and 7 p.m. at St. Patrick.

During the week, Masses are celebrated at 8 a.m. on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays at St. Patrick, and on Wednesdays and Fridays at St. Bridget.

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Town Talks Demographics with New Development Plan

By Anne Lilburn

On Dec. 4, East Hampton’s Plan of Conservation and Development Steering Committee met to hear a data presentation by consultant Don Poland, PhD, a planning consultant who works for the firm Goman and York.

In the public meeting, Poland presented data that the steering committee could use to inform decisions about the town’s future planning, zoning and development, including housing plans and zoning decisions related to commercial development. In his presentation, which is available online at the town’s website, Poland provided some demographic and geographic data, along with context and analysis. Though he left future planning decisions open to the town, he did conclude that if East Hampton wanted to thrive into the future, it needed to diversify its housing stock by adding multifamily units tailored to today’s smaller household sizes.

Much of the presentation focused on the town’s shifting demographics and its correlating changing housing needs. His presentation outlined the ways in which East Hampton’s changing population mirrors the state and national trends, including the overall aging of the population.

Overall, East Hampton has seen a decline in population, having peaked in 2000 at 13,351 and declined to 12,562 since then, and like much of the state, East Hampton has seen generational shifts, with fewer young families as residents, and more residents in their 60s and older. In addition, the state (and country) has seen a shift in household sizes, with smaller families and more adults living without children.

One notable point from Poland’s report was that, despite a population decline over the past 25 years, East Hampton has seen an increase in the overall number of households, from 4,125 to 5,279. That’s reflective of an overall decline in the average household size, he said, something that is due to numerous factors, among them an aging population with more “empty nesters” and also an increase in the number of younger people who are remaining single or without children.

That lines up with nationwide trends, Poland said. Overall, he pointed out, the nation has seen a large increase in one and two-person households, which has led to a shift in housing needs away from the larger single-family homes that dominated the housing market when boomers were starting their families. In 1940, according to Poland’s report, only 8% of U.S. households consisted of only one person; by 2022, that number had shifted to 28.5%. In East Hampton, households with only one or two people account for 54.1% of occupied housing.

“The fact is,” writes Poland in his report, “what was viewed as ‘Traditional’ households (married couples with children) in the past, are now in decline.” Indeed, as he points out in his report, “n the United States, from 1970 to 2022, the percentage of married-couple households with children declined from 40.3% to 19%.”

What that means for East Hampton, said Poland, is that if the community wants to continue to thrive and maintain a healthy population, it has to diversify its current housing stock, which is currently made up of close to 87% single-

family homes.

“East Hampton has an older, aging, and mostly single-family detached housing stock. While the single-family detached housing product dominates the housing market as the preferred form of housing, it is losing market share to other housing products, especially multi-family housing,” and therefore potential residents are choosing to reside elsewhere.

Poland emphasized that East Hampton would have to find ways to develop multi-family housing units, with one or two bedrooms, as opposed to more traditional (for the area) detached three-plus-bedroom single-family houses, if it wanted to attract new residents. He also spoke to residents’ fears that such housing growth would lead to greater taxes, pointing out that East Hampton had seen a school budget increase despite a decline in school enrollment recently, and said that a population increase and school budget growth were not synonymous.

To that point, Poland said that multi-family housing, intended to accommodate one or two person households, often did not result in new school enrollments, as many of the intended occupants seeking this type of smaller housing would not have children.

Poland also pointed out that one of East

Hampton’s challenges is that, due to its lack of commercial development and industry, its tax burden falls largely on residential taxpayers, and said it’s tough to change that.

“Unfortunately,” his report notes, “East Hampton’s location – between and distanced from two highways – is not well situated for meaningful or large scale commercial or industrial economic development. This limits opportunity for East Hampton to grow the commercial and industrial Grand List to lessen the residential tax burden.”

His report says that, “If East Hampton is to grow demand for commercial development and grow the Commercial Grand List, East Hampton will need to grow its population and households,” which is why he said it was important to focus on the current housing stock and diversify it.

“East Hampton will need to provide a modern housing product that can compete in the broader housing market,” he wrote, “providing a housing product that can attract and retain young persons. Residential development, especially multi-family housing, will grow and diversify the Grand List, while creating more disposable income to support commercial development and local businesses.”

Middle Haddam Public Library News

The Middle Haddam Public Library, 2 Knowles Road, Middle Haddam has announced the following. To register or for more information on any program, email middlehaddamlibrary@gmail.com, visit middlehaddamlibrary.com or call 860-267-9093. Mailing address: P.O. Box 123, Middle Haddam, CT 06456.

Library Hours: Mondays and Thursdays, 10 a.m.-2 p.m.; Tuesdays and Fridays, 3-6 p.m. Stop by the library during regular hours for a pop up makers market featuring locally made soaps, simmer pot kits, fire starters and woven runners, placemats and tea towels.

Featured Artist for December: Phil Barlow, a watercolor artist. There will be a reception Friday, Dec. 12, from 4-6 p.m.

Mattabeset String Collective: Sunday, Dec. 14, 2 p.m. All are invited to hear an eclectic mix of bluegrass, blues, country and rock, all in a string band style. Call the library to register, as seating may be limited.

Library Tree-Lighting and Carol Sing will be held Thursday, Dec. 18, at 6 p.m. Warm up

with cookies and holiday beverages.

Open Mic Night: Friday, Dec. 19, 6-8 p.m. Share your talent or just come and listen to some music. Performers, please call the library to register. Beverages and snacks will be available.

Mahjong: Mondays, 10:30 a.m. All levels of experience welcome.

Fiber Arts Group: Thursdays from 10 a.m.-noon. Bring your spinning wheel, knitting, weaving, embroidery, etc. All are welcome.

Saturday CommuniTea: Is on hiatus, but stop by during regular library hours and staff will put the kettle on.

Yoga with Erin Day of Ten Summit Yoga: Mondays and Saturdays at 9 a.m., and Tuesdays at 7 p.m. Cost is a \$15 drop-in fee. Register at tensummitst@gmail.com.

Chair Yoga with Kathleen: This ‘gentle yoga’ program is held Fridays at 9 a.m. Cost is \$15 per class. Register by emailing zenlotus860@yahoo.com or calling 860-638-9097.

Senior Center News & Notes

East Hampton Senior Center, 105 Main St., announces the following. **Registration is required for all programs** unless noted; register at myactivecenter.com or by contacting the center at 860-267-4426 or seniorcenter@easthamptonct.gov. Senior center hours are Monday-Thursday, 8:30 a.m.-4 p.m.; Friday, 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Visit www.easthamptonct.gov/east-hampton-senior-center for more information and a list of regular weekly and monthly activities, including games, quilting, Bible study, monthly men’s and women’s groups, and more.

Holiday Note: The senior center’s annual Holiday Party will be held Wednesday, Dec. 17, from 12:30-2:30 p.m. Regular programming will not be held that day.

Lunches: Served Monday through Friday, to ages 60 and up. Call to reserve a meal or sign up online. Reservations for the next day’s meal are due by 10:30 a.m. the day before. Meals are free; a \$3 donation is requested. A Form 5 document must be completed before registering for lunch; stop by the senior center to complete and submit the form.

Upcoming Events: **Trailblazers Walking Group:** Monday, Dec. 15, 9 a.m., at Air Line State Park, 69 Smith St. All paces welcome.

Floral Arranging with Old Bank Flowers & Greenery: Monday, Dec. 15, 10:30 a.m. Create a holiday themed arrangement with Lori Caldwell from East Hampton’s Old Bank Flowers & Greenery. Cost is \$10. Register in person.

Blood Pressure Screenings: Monday, Dec. 15, 12:30 p.m., with Chatham Health. Walk-ins

welcome.

Senior Center Holiday Party: Wednesday, Dec. 17, from 12:30-2:30 p.m. Celebrate the holiday during an afternoon of carol-singing, crafts, holiday bingo, photos with Santa, appetizers and a gift giveaway. Local East Hampton students will help to celebrate.

Design & Create: Thursday, Dec. 18, 1:30 p.m.

The Pretend Cooking Show: Thursday, Dec. 18, 2 p.m. Get ready for No Cook, No Bake micro cooking class – perfect for whipping up recipes without turning on the oven. Limited to eight participants. Gingerbread energy balls will be featured. Led by center director Holly Marreo.

Family Tree: Friday, Dec. 19, 10:30 a.m. Research your family history with assistance from genealogist Kenneth Doney. Bring a cell phone, laptop or iPad to class. Register in advance.

Drum Circle with Mark: Friday, Dec. 19, 1:15 p.m. No experience needed to participate in this hands-on session. Drums provided – or bring your own. Cost is \$5.

Volunteer Opportunities: Volunteers are needed to answer phones and grocery shop for senior center members. Stop by the center Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., to fill out the volunteer form. Call 860-267-4426 for more information.



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Christmas Bazaar

The Second Congregational Church of Middle Haddam, at 52 Middle Haddam Rd., Middle Haddam, will host its annual Christmas Bazaar on Saturday, Dec. 6, from 10 a.m.-2 p.m.

Bazaar offerings will include baked goods, peanuts, Rada cutlery, a silent auction and Christmas tag sale items.

A light lunch of sandwiches, desserts, coffee, tea and punch will also be served.

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Holiday Party Triggers Ethics Concerns

By Toriana Williams

A holiday gathering at a local business became a point of controversy after Board of Finance applicant Michael Dubreuil publicly questioned whether invitations to the event, hosted by fellow finance board applicant Donna Antonacci mere days before applicant interviews, created an appearance of impropriety.

The party was organized by former Board of Education member Margo Gignac and hosted by fellow former school board member Antonacci, at the latter's business, Lotus Games. The gathering drew scrutiny after Dubreuil raised concerns in a letter to the editor and expanded on those concerns in an interview with the *Rivereast*.

Dubreuil's Ethics Concerns

There is currently a vacancy on the Colchester Board of Finance, and Dubreuil and Antonacci have each applied to fill the seat. As per the town charter, the vacancy needs to be filled by a Republican.

Dubreuil said his concerns began after speaking with an individual who attended a recent Board of Selectmen meeting. Dubreuil said the individual told him that "after the meeting, Donna had come up to him and invited him to this holiday party," which was held this past Monday. Dubreuil emphasized that the timing of the event – days before Board of Finance candidate interviews, which were slated for Wednesday night, after press time – played a central role in why he issued a public statement rather than privately raising the concern.

When asked what made the invitation im-

proper, Dubreuil argued that situations involving possible gifts, even social ones, must be evaluated cautiously by public officials.

"That kind of stuff has to be taken very seriously by any public servant to ensure that it doesn't ... cause you some kind of bias," he said. He added that "it's a really poor choice for her to do that, just before the interviews."

Dubreuil also noted that while some officials had been invited, several were not attending. He further claimed that invitations were widespread among officials: "pretty much every elected official in Colchester" had been invited.

His statement also questioned whether the party could conflict with Connecticut ethics statutes. He described his letter as primarily "a public warning" and acknowledged that he had not yet contacted the first selectman or ethics commission.

Dubreuil anticipated that some might view his actions as politically motivated – given that he and Antonacci were, to his knowledge, the only applicants for the vacant seat – but, at the same time, he rejected that characterization. He said that "every Colchester elected official, or appointed board member [must] maintain the highest level of ethics ... regardless of party."

Antonacci's Response

In her interview, Antonacci confirmed that Gignac organized the holiday gathering at Antonacci's business, Lotus Games, on Dec. 8. She described the event as strictly social, and that attendees were "not talking about anything related to town business." She said she let Gignac

use Lotus Games to host the party, as it was a larger space than Gignac's house.

Antonacci disputed the suggestion that the gathering violated ethics rules; "I don't think it violates anything," she said. She also emphasized that both past and current officials were invited and said the event was consistent with previous gatherings held by Gignac.

"We had done that before when we were on the [school] board. We had parties at Margo's house," she explained.

Responding directly to the claim that the party might influence the Board of Finance appointment process, Antonacci denied any ulterior motive. "Sometimes a holiday party is just a holiday party," she said. She also rejected the idea that her actions were politically motivated, asserting instead that Dubreuil's allegations were influenced by politics.

Antonacci unsuccessfully ran last month for reelection to the school board as a petitioning candidate, after the Republicans voted at their July caucus to remove her and fellow Republican Alex Oliphant from the Election Day ticket. Dubreuil has stated that the Republican Town Committee had rebuked Antonacci, but she disagreed.

"I don't believe there was any formal rebuke," she stated. Rather, she said, her removal from the election slate was the result of a caucus at which "[Dubreuil] booked the room with people who voted Alex [Oliphant] and I off the ticket."

She said she was running for the Board of

Finance to remain active in town affairs, and cited her previous experience on the Board of Education. "I know what it looks like and how it works," she said.

Response From Finance Board Chair

Board of Finance Chair Karen Belding, a Democrat, characterized Monday's party as an ordinary annual gathering with no connection to the appointment process. She explained that Gignac "has done this type of holiday party for years and always invites every elected official on all the boards, town employees ... and others from her numerous activities around town."

Belding reported she was "the only current member of the Board of Finance that attended this year." She also said she was unaware of any internal concerns.

She stated there were "no complaints, communications or questions to our board about this" until the *Rivereast's* inquiry, and she affirmed that no town rules prohibit social interactions of this sort.

"There is nothing in the town charter or board bylaws that give explicit direction related to interactions," she noted, and added that members already avoid discussing board business in social settings.

Belding said she did not expect the event to affect the appointment process, and described her experience at the gathering: "I enjoyed some homemade soup in a bread bowl, had a couple Christmas cookies, chit-chatted ... and left an hour later."

Christmas Polka and Toy Drive

The St. Joseph's Polish Society of Colchester, located at 395 South Main St., has announced a pair of upcoming events. For more information, call 860-537-2550.

Christmas Polka: Sunday, Dec. 14. Hors d'oeuvres will be served from noon-1 p.m., with Christmas music by The Snowman Buddies. Dinner will be served from 1-2 p.m., with your choice of roasted pork or chicken. Dennis Polisky and The Maestro's Men will perform from

2-6 p.m. for your dancing pleasure. Tickets are \$25 per person.

Toy Drive: The club is hosting its fifth annual Army vs. Navy football game and Toys for Tots fundraiser Saturday, Dec. 13. Watch the football game in the hall on the big screen TV. Doors open at 2 p.m. and kick-off is at 3 p.m. There will be a buffet and raffle prizes. Please bring a new unwrapped toy or a \$15 donation per person to attend this event.

Lessons & Carols Christmas Concert

St. Andrew Church will hold this year's Lessons & Carols Christmas Concert Sunday, Dec. 14, at 2 p.m., at 2 p.m., at St. Andrew Church, 128 Norwich Ave.

The theme of this year's concert is "Who Would Send a Baby?" The program will feature a selection of readings and musical pieces that highlight the significance and joy of the Advent and Christmas seasons.

The concert will take place Sunday, Dec. 14, at 2 p.m., in St. Andrew Church. Monetary donations to support the Colchester Fuel Bank are welcome and appreciated. Following the performance, refreshments and an opportunity for fellowship will be available in the Parish Hall.

For additional information, contact Terry Phillips at 860-608-0130.

CLT Upcoming Hike

The Colchester Land Trust (CLT) is hosting the following upcoming hike, and all are invited. For more information on any of the events, to register, or for info on CLT in general, visit colchesterlandtrust.org.

Hike The Babcock Wildlife Management Area: Dec. 14, 10 a.m.-noon. As a wildlife management area, Babcock provides 1,500 acres of forest, swamps and ponds. It contains miles of unmarked hiking trails. The hike is approximately four miles long, mostly on a logging road and open paths. Adults, children and leashed dogs are welcome.

Directions: From Route 16/Middletown Road in Colchester, turn on Bulkeley Hill Road, follow approximately two miles to Bulkeley Hill Preserve. The wood sign post and the entrance to the gravel parking lot will be on your right. For GPS use the mailbox across the street from the lot, 243 Bulkeley Hill Road, Colchester.

From Route 2 eastbound, take Exit 16 and turn right onto Route 149 South. Go approxi-

mately one mile and take left onto Cato Corner Road. Follow Cato Corner Road to intersection of Cato Corner and Route 16. Go straight across onto Standish Road, off Route 16. Bear right at first stop sign. Turn right onto Red School House Road, and park in the cul-de-sac at the end of the road.

Route 2 westbound travelers, take Exit 16, turn left onto Route 149 South and follow directions above. Email foundersway10@gmail.com for additional information. Visit colchesterlandtrust.org for updates on the hike.

The fee for this hike is free to members of the CLT, \$5 per non-member adult, and free for all children under 18. The hike will be rain or shine, and is not stroller-friendly; trails are not groomed and have rocks and roots and wet areas. Advanced registration strongly suggested. Wear appropriate footwear and clothing for the weather and terrain. Bug and tick protection strongly suggested. Dogs are welcome on leash, but bring waste bags to dispose of off property.

Senior Center News & Notes

Colchester Senior Center, 15 Louis Lane, has announced the following. **Unless noted, registration is required for all programs.** For full program descriptions and to register, call 860-537-3911, email csc@colchesterct.gov, or for a full list of activities, visit www.colchesterct.gov.senior-center.

Mingle & Jingle Holiday Luncheon: Wednesday, Dec. 17, 11 a.m. Celebrate the holidays with the festive sounds by Judy Pancoast, along with a dinner of prime rib, garlic roasted potatoes, squash with peppers and carrots, dinner roll, assorted holiday cookies and apple juice. Tickets are \$10 per person and space is limited.

Hanukkah Celebration: Thursday, Dec. 18, 10 a.m. Celebrate the Festival of Lights with Rabbi Ken Alter from Ahavath Achim Synagogue, sing songs, learn about the traditions, play the dreidel, and enjoy some potato latkes. Open to people of all faiths. Register by Monday, Dec. 15.

Carols, Cookies & Cocoa: Friday, Dec. 19, 10:30 a.m. The senior center's choral group the "Senior Serenaders" will share the music of the season. Holiday cookies and cocoa will be served. Register by Tuesday, Dec. 16.

Middle School Chamber Choir Performance: Monday, Dec. 22, 9 a.m. Students from

the William J. Johnston Middle School Chamber Choir will walk over to perform some holiday classics. This is a free program, and holiday cookies will be served.

New Year's Eve Brunch & Bash: Wednesday, Dec. 31, 10 a.m. Colchester's own Bobby C will provide entertainment and have people dancing til the new year – or at least til the count-down to noon. Menu will include broccoli, bacon & cheese quiche, turkey sausage patties, home fries, fruit salad, orange juice, pastries and a mock-champagne toast, right as the clock strikes noon. Tickets are \$10 per person. Space is limited.

New Evening Events at Senior Center: Holiday Teacup Floral Arranging: Tuesday, Dec. 16, 6 p.m. Bring your favorite teacup and make a beautiful flower arrangement for the holidays. Cost is \$7.

Oil Painting with Brianna: Thursday, Dec. 18, 5:30 p.m. This is an opportunity for artists of all skill levels to join. Supplies will be provided and you will be walked through the process step by step, and finish an entire painting during this single class. Cost is \$20.

Pizza & A Movie: Tuesday, Dec. 23, 5:30 p.m. *Jingle Bell Heist* is a romantic comedy about two people who team up to rob a posh London department store on Christmas Eve. Cost is \$7.



Kim Talarczyk, co-founder of Colchester Cares, presents Michele Heaton, Social Services Coordinator, a check for \$1,900 for the Colchester Food Bank.

Colchester Cares Makes 4th Quarter Donations

Colchester Cares, a giving group that supports various causes in Colchester, recently made its fourth quarter donations, totaling \$5,700.

The group voted to give \$1,900 each to the Colchester Food Bank, the Colchester Schools for outstanding lunch balances, and the Colchester Senior Center for grocery cards for seniors facing food insecurity.

Colchester Cares members, who commit to donating \$100 a quarter, present current needs

in town and then vote on where to send the group's collective donations. The group was established in 2020 and since its inception has donated over \$70,000 to Colchester causes.

Colchester Cares always welcomes new members who would like to give back to the community. For more information, please visit www.colchestercares.org or follow the group on Facebook.





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Westchester Church News

Westchester Congregational Church, located at 98 Cemetery Rd., holds worship Sundays at 10 a.m. All are welcome to attend. The church choir always welcomes new members. Services are also available on Zoom; visit www.westchestercongchurch.org for login information. Sunday School for children meets during the worship service.

Twelve-Step Meetings: Al-Anon meets in Canney Hall Wednesdays at 7 p.m. AA meets in Canney Hall Fridays at 7:30 p.m.

Scouts: The church sponsors Scouting America Troop 109. During the school year, Troop 109 meets on Tuesdays at 7 p.m.

Outreach and Other Opportunities: Knitting Group meets Thursdays at 10 a.m. Many knitted, crocheted, and quilted items have been sent to Native American reservations, hospitals for babies, and other places to help those in need. The Blessings Box is at the end of the church parking lot and contains donations of non-perishable food, personal care, and other items for those in need. Take what you need; donate what you can. Also, the church sponsors the Wounded Warrior Project, a donation opportunity to help veterans.

For more information, visit westchestercongchurch.org, email westcongchurch@gmail.com or call the church at 860-267-5111. Pastor Ron Lake can be reached at 860-428-3460.



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Color House Ornament Trail

This holiday season, The Color House Art & Pottery Studio is inviting the community to join in its first-ever Color House Ornament Trail. Running through Dec. 21, 100 handcrafted ceramic ornaments created by artist Tina Parsadanov and her team at The Color House will be hidden all around Colchester, from local parks to small businesses. Each ornament is unique, and free for whoever discovers it. Participants are encouraged to visit partici-

pating Colchester businesses to collect stamps in their Ornament Trail Digital Passport. Even if an ornament has already been found at a location, visitors can still stop in to scan the business's unique stamp. For every five stamps collected, participants will earn an entry into grand prize drawings featuring gift cards, wine baskets, pottery and other prizes. Visit www.cohoct.com/ornamenttrail for more information and to register.

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Abundant Life Church News & Notes

Abundant Life Church, a Christ-follower church that believes in salvation through Jesus Christ, is located at 85 Skinner Rd. Worship is in person at 10:30 a.m. Sunday.

Adult Sunday Bible School: two classes, Sundays at 9:30 a.m.

Bible Study for Women: Every Wednesday at 10 a.m. at Sweet Aroma, Colchester.

Healing Bible Study: Every Wednesday at 6:30 p.m.

Prayer Meetings: Thursdays, 10 a.m. and Fridays, 6:30-8:30 p.m. There is also a brief meeting for pre-service prayer on Sundays at 10:15 a.m.

Men's and Women's Breakfast: Meets once per month on Saturday mornings.

Children's Church: Meets Sunday mornings after worship service.

Special Events: Children's Christmas Pageant: Sunday, Dec 21, 10:30 a.m. **Christmas Eve Candlelight Service:** Dec. 24, 6 p.m.

Advent: All are invited to come this month as the church lights the Advent candles each week and a special message is given during the lighting of each candle. The final candle, "Christ Candle," is lit on Christmas Eve.

Unless otherwise noted, all groups/gatherings are held at the church building. Call the church office at 860-537-3082 for more information, questions, or even if you just need prayer. You can also visit AbundantL.com.


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Colchester Federated Church News

Colchester Federated Church is located at 60 Main St., and pastor is the Rev. Lauren Ostrout. The church office is open Monday-Friday, 9 a.m.-1 p.m., and can be reached at 860-537-5189 or cfc06415@gmail.com.

Worship: Sundays at 9 a.m. The service is also broadcast via Facebook Live. Worship videos are at www.colchesterfederated-church.org under the Worship tab. Updated information is on the church's Facebook page.

Advent Schedule: Sunday, Dec. 14, Third Week of Advent: Joy; Sunday, Dec. 21, Fourth Week of Advent: Love & Annual Christmas Pageant.

Christmas Eve Services: Wednesday, Dec. 24: 5 p.m., Family Service; 9 p.m., Lessons & Carols.

Twelve-Step Meetings: AA meets in the church library Monday-Wednesday and Friday at noon and Thursday at 10 a.m., and at 7:30 p.m. Mondays and Wednesdays. On Saturdays at 9:30 a.m., Al-Anon meets in the Jerusalem Room and AA meets in the Stage Room.

Boy Scout Troop 72: Meetings are held in the Stage Room every Monday at 7 p.m. through June.



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Debate Intensifies Over Bacon’s Athletic Fields

By Toriana Williams

The Dec. 9 meeting of the Colchester Board of Selectmen delivered one of the most detailed and emotionally charged public dialogues of the year, centered almost entirely on the proposed Bacon Academy and RecPlex Athletic Complex Project. From deep environmental concerns to passionate defenses of long-overdue improvements, the meeting showcased both the community’s divisions and its shared investment in the future of local recreation.

Environmental Concerns Take Center Stage

Public comments began with one of the sharpest critiques of the evening. Resident Jeff Mattson, speaking about his neighborhood’s reliance on well water near the proposed turf fields, presented a visual map and warned of long-term water contamination risks.

He stated bluntly that “around six acres of artificial turf field is being proposed with drainage that will flow directly into Sherman Brook,” which feeds the wells of roughly 12 homes, including his own, according to Mattson. He emphasized the scale of potential exposure, and noted, “We get 43 inches of rain in Colchester annually which, on six acres, is 7 million gallons of water going through those fields and right into the brook that feeds my and my neighbors’ wells.”

Mattson described the infill used in synthetic turf as containing contaminants no resident would knowingly consume: “I could drain a gallon of water through some of that infill ... pour it into a cup, and I bet not one person in this room would want to drink that water.”

He stressed that stormwater studies have shown zinc is “the most prevalent contaminant” found in water that passes through the typical synthetic turf infill, and added, “In several of these studies, zinc concentrations measured in

leachate exceeded drinking water standards.” What most concerned him was the irreversible nature of the project. “Once this project is done, it can’t be undone.” His request was clear: the town should “come up with a plan on how to mitigate the leaching of toxins into the water system prior to putting it out for referendum.”

Safety, Playability, Long-Overdue Repairs

Despite the alleged warnings, the majority of speakers voiced enthusiastic support for the project, especially those connected to youth sports and the local schools.

Marguerite Gignac, a former Board of Education member, called the upgrades “long overdue,” and recalled years of inadequate conditions at Bacon Academy’s fields. She explained that past student testimony described Bacon’s fields as “embarrassing and dangerous,” including a student who said “he had sprained his ankle more times than he could count.”

Another resident, Nina Minella, spoke both as a parent and coach. “I have a stepson that plays sports at Bacon. I’d love to see him play on nicer, safer fields.” She shared concerns about the cramped and deteriorating courts at the RecPlex, and said, “They’re very crowded. ... We were trying to start an over-30 league, and it was hard.”

Residents repeatedly highlighted that deteriorated fields are not just unattractive - they cause injuries, limit practices and force teams to cancel or relocate games.

Building Committee’s Presentation

From there, the Athletic Building Committee delivered a comprehensive walkthrough of the proposed \$14.5 million project. Committee Chair Dave Emery began by recounting the committee’s formation, its charge and the years of study and public feedback that led to the final proposal. He noted that following “arduous dis-

cussions amongst the committee and the liaisons, all votes were unanimous to move forward.”

Representatives from FieldTurf, Chris Hulk and Andrew Dyjak, then summarized the infrastructure challenges faced by the existing facilities. They explained that grass fields cannot withstand the level of school and community use, noting that grass field need to be limited to 10 to 12 hours of usage a week. “If you have football, soccer, field hockey, PE classes ... you’re going to be well above that,” a representative said.

The result of the overuse of grass, they said, is chronic compaction, drainage failure, bare spots and increasingly unsafe play surfaces. Synthetic turf, a representative argued, increases playability “through the roof. You can basically use it constantly.”

The committee also addressed long-term maintenance. Emery, with decades of professional turf care experience, said, “I don’t know of any fields that, all of a sudden after 15 years, the whole thing had to be replaced.” Instead, he described targeted replacement of wear areas, and noted a budget expectation of “\$1.2 to 1.4 million” for resurfacing at around year 15.

For tennis and pickleball, post-tension concrete was selected due to its durability. “That option comes with a 50-year structural warranty,” far exceeding the lifespan of the deteriorating asphalt courts currently in place.

5K Resolution Run

The Youth First Coalition and Colchester Youth and Social Services will hold the 19th annual New Year’s Day 5K Resolution Run at Town Hall Thursday, Jan. 1, starting at 10 a.m. Registration and bib pick-up begin at 8:30 a.m.

Pre-registration is \$35 and same-day registration is \$45. All participants will receive medals. Register at raceroster.com or visit the Facebook page @ Youth and Social Services Town of Colchester.

Cost, Priorities and Fiscal Fatigue

Not everyone was convinced. Selectman Tim Vaillancourt, a Republican, sharply criticized the project as oversized and unaffordable.

“This is a giant wish list,” he said. “It’s just such a bloated, huge project.”

Vaillancourt pointed to recent bonding for the Senior Center and firetrucks and warned, “Sooner or later, we’re just pricing people out of this state ... and to say that it’s going to cost the average homeowner \$37 doesn’t mean anything” when stacked on top of other tax increases. That particular figure comes from earlier in the meeting when the impact based on the average residential assessment was discussed.

A Community at a Crossroads

The meeting ultimately underscored both the depth of need for facility upgrades and the complexity of balancing safety, environmental stewardship and fiscal responsibility. Whether citing millions of gallons of stormwater leaching through synthetic infill or describing children practicing on crumbling courts, every speaker reflected a shared commitment to the community’s wellbeing.

The referendum ahead will decide more than the future of the town’s athletic facilities – it will test how Colchester weighs long-term investment, public health and generational equity in the face of sharply competing priorities.

Senior Center Upcoming Trip

Colchester Senior Center has announced a trip coming up. Trips are available to senior center members and their adult guests over the age of 18. Membership is free for Colchester residents aged 55 and older. There is an annual fee of \$15 for seniors residing outside of Colchester. For more information or to register, call 860-537-3911 or email csc@colchesterct.gov.

Majestic Cities of Central & Eastern Europe: Oct. 4-17, 2026. Explore Berlin, Prague, Vienna, Budapest and Krakow. This 14-day, 13-night trip includes airfare, hotels, and meals

Ahavath Achim Schedule

Congregation Ahavath Achim, 84 Lebanon Ave., has announced the following schedule:

Services: Fridays at 6:30 p.m., live and on Zoom; Saturdays at 10 a.m., live and on Zoom.

Classes on Tuesdays: Folklore of the Talmud at 6 p.m., followed by Talmud at 6:30 p.m., and Kabbalah at 8 p.m.

For more information, or Zoom links, call 860-537-2809. Office hours are Wednesday, 9 a.m.-4 p.m.

Christmas Events at Westchester Church

Westchester Congregational Church, located at 98 Cemetery Rd., will celebrate Christmas with these events:

Sunday, Dec. 14: Children’s Christmas Pageant during the 10 a.m. service;

Sunday, Dec. 21: Choir Cantata, entitled “Bethlehem Joy,” during the 10 a.m. service.

Sunday, Dec. 24: Christmas Eve service at 5 p.m.

For more information, visit www.westchesterconchurch.org or email westconchurch@gmail.com.

Artist Exhibit Runs Through Holidays

ARK Distillery is hosting an exhibit by fine artist Sylvia Rollins throughout the holiday season. All are invited to come visit and view Rollins’ original oil paintings and other fine art offerings inspired by farm life, color, gardens and pets.

ARK Distillery is a woman owned establishment launched early this year. It is located at 200 Lebanon Ave. Rollins’ paintings compliment the restored historic building, which once housed a feed and grain store.

ARK stands for Acts of Random Kindness. For hour, visit arkdistillery.com, and for more on the artist, visit sylvinarollinsart.com.

(12 breakfasts, one lunch, and six dinners). Cost is \$6,499 per person for double occupancy, if booked before Feb. 26. This is a small group tour (only 24 people in total on the tour) so space is limited. For more information visit <https://gateway.gocollette.com/link/1346389>.

Christian Life Chapel News

Christian Life Chapel, located at 392 S. Main St., holds worship in person at 10 a.m. Sundays. Follow the church on Facebook for the livestream. For more information, call Pastor Don Rivers – the church’s bi-vocational pastor, who also serves as president for “Racing with Jesus, Inc.” – at 860-398-9119 or visit christianlifechapel.org.

Women’s Bible Study: Tuesdays, 10-11:30 a.m., studying the book of Revelation.

Community Bible Study: Wednesdays at 7 p.m. All are invited.

Donuts with Don: Is back Fridays at 10 a.m. It’s an open discussion on the theme: How does God fit in this thing called life?

Pyrogy Sale

St. Mary Ukrainian Church in Colchester will have a Pyrogy Sale on Saturday, Dec. 13. To place your order, call Brenda at 860-365-0281 no later than Dec. 7.



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Community Chanukah Celebration on the Town Green

The Chabad Jewish Center will host a free, open-to-all, Community Chanukah Celebration and Giant Menorah Lighting Thursday, Dec. 18, at 6 p.m., on the Colchester Town Green.

The celebration marks the fifth evening of the festival of Chanukah.

“Chanukah is meant to be celebrated together,” said Rabbi Yosef Wolvovsky, executive director of Chabad. “We invite the entire community to participate in this uplifting evening.”

The festivities will be held on the Town Green, located at the corner Main Street and Norwich Avenue. “You will come away inspired and full of joy,” said Wolvovsky.

A major highlight of this event is the Grand Gelt Drop. Children are thrilled as chocolate coins rain down from the sky. Another exciting feature of the Chanukah celebration is a fire show. Participants will witness fire juggling, spinning and swirling.

The event will also feature the kindling of a giant (9-foot-tall!) community Menorah candelabra.

Participants will get to meet the “Mr. Dreidel” Mascot, enjoy hot cider and warm potato “latkes” (pancakes), and take part in free festive raffles for some awesome prizes. Spoiler alert: Everyone goes home with a festive gift!

“The Menorah and its candles have always been a symbol of unity,” said Wolvovsky. “Chanukah celebrates the freedom of all mankind.”

For more information regarding this program, or to request your free Celebrate Chanukah! kit, call 860-659-2422, email Rabbi@ChabadER.com, or visit www.ChabadER.com/celebrate.

Ukrainian Catholic Church News

All are invited to worship each week at St. Mary Ukrainian Catholic Church, 178 Linwood Ave. The church offers Eastern Rite Divine services. Church doors are open for Divine Liturgy on Saturdays at 4 p.m. and Sundays at 9 a.m.; the Sunday service is bilingual.

For more information, call the church at 860-537-2069.



The annual Giant Menorah Lighting and Community Chanukah Celebration will take place at the Colchester Town Green on the fifth night of Chanukah – Thursday, Dec. 18. All are welcome. Pictured is a scene from a previous year’s celebration.

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The Weekly Crossword

by Margie E. Burke

ACROSS

1 Heavenly strings

5 Calcutta attire

9 Waves of grain color

14 Pitcher in a still life

15 Tree of life site

16 Anchor rope hole

17 Additionally

18 Deprive of vital parts

20 Coastal disaster

22 White weasels

23 Painter Henri, but not Matisse

25 Cut with a light beam

26 100-eyed giant of myth

28 Ill will

30 Goes in again

32 Detection device

36 Quaint lodging

37 Makes certain of

39 Org. in 2025's "The Amateur"

40 Senile sort

42 Maintain the guitar

44 Upcycles, say

46 Air-show maneuvers

47 Pirate's drink

50 Hard on the ears

52 One who proves false

54 Lathering up

57 Cuts in (on)

59 Direction at sea

60 Tractor name

61 Ran off with

62 Scot's family

63 Pick up on

64 Peppy

65 Salad green

DOWN

1 Police, slangily

2 Cobblers' tools

3 Coming back strong

4 You or me

5 Appears to be

6 Cabinet members, e.g.

7 Camping gear chain

8 Trousers measurement

9 Start of a break-in

10 Monroe of "Some Like It Hot"

11 Swahili master

12 ___ Park, Colo.

13 Baseballer Pee Wee

19 Carnival offerings

21 Like monastery life

24 Guarantor

26 Very dry

27 Gambling town

29 Proving ground

31 Software buyer, usually

33 Tiny trace

34 Sty cry

35 Threads in shreds

38 Circuit board part

41 Ones in a debate

43 Plunder

45 Walks like a rooster

47 Power networks

48 Rapp of 2024's "Mean Girls"

49 Many times

51 Somewhat dark

53 Locust or larch

55 "Hud" Best Actress Patricia

56 Trait carrier

58 Cork sound

Answers to Previous Crossword:

THIGH FLIP PLAN
ROSIE RENT LENA
ALIGNMENTS IGOR
MESA AIDE RAINY
WONDERMENT
OCCAM ARMISTICE
CRATES SILO MOB
CASTLED TORNADO
UNSEVER STATEN
REENTERED EMERY
RETROGRADE
AROSE GAIL SAGE
BOLT TALEBEARER
BIEL OTIS E KING
ELSE MEAT KEATS

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Christmas is Coming... Students at Christ Lutheran Early Childhood Center in Hebron recently participated in sending out gift-filled shoeboxes for the Samaritan's Purse project "Operation Christmas Child." Pictured here is Erin Olearnick's Pre-K class showing their gift boxes. Each class prepared boxes with different themes. Operation Christmas Child is a national program that sends shoeboxes filled with small toys, hygiene items, school supplies and other items. The CLECC daycare and preschool classes will follow the journey of the boxes they sent. A video will be posted online of the children receiving shoeboxes. This can be seen at www.samaritanspurse.org/operation-christmas-child/occ-stories.

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Town Council Discusses Reappointments, Projects

By Toriana Williams

In a wide-ranging Dec. 4 meeting marked by extended debate on legal services, detailed updates on Public Works planning and ongoing fiscal pressures, the Hebron Town Council tackled several of the most consequential issues facing the town heading into 2026.

Town Attorney Reappointment

One of the most substantial discussions of the night centered on whether to continue the town's long-standing relationship with Halloran & Sage, LLP as municipal counsel. It was, as noted during debate, the firm's "at least fifth reappointment," leading several councilors to raise concerns about cost competitiveness and the need for a fresh evaluation of options.

Councilor Keith Petit, a Republican, opened by reading the proposed two-year reappointment motion and acknowledging prior concerns. "I know we had some conversation on this at their fourth reappointment," he said, and added that the town should be sure "everything is still competitive" and asked, "at what point do we go out to RFP (Request for Proposals)?"

An RFP is a structured document that organizations – in this case, the Town of Hebron – use when they want vendors, such as Halloran & Sage, LLP, to compete for a project or service. It lays out what the organization needs, what goals the project must meet and how proposals will be judged.

Because it's designed for more complex purchases, the RFP lets vendors describe their full approach, not just the cost, so the organization can compare different solutions fairly and choose the option that best fits its requirement.

Town Manager Andrew Tierney said an RFP had not been issued for years and explained that when it was last done, "we interviewed six firms," and that Halloran & Sage had been the most cost-effective option at the time. He told the council, "We haven't gone out in a while. ... It's probably time we do."

Council Chair Tiffany Thiele, a Democrat, suggested a compromise: reappoint the firm for only one year while simultaneously requiring an RFP. "It demonstrates to the town we're doing our due diligence," she said. The one-year window, she added, would allow staff to complete the RFP properly while maintaining continuity during ongoing litigation.

Councilors broadly agreed. Councilor Claudia Riley, a Democrat, noted the potential benefit of reviewing other firms: "I think it would be good to see a fresh perspective, a new set of

eyes." After extensive discussion, Thiele offered a friendly amendment shortening the appointment to a one-year term and instructed Tierney "to conduct an RFP for the town attorney." Petit accepted the amendment, and the motion passed unanimously.

DPWAC: Major Project Updates

The Department of Public Works Action Committee (DPWAC) delivered one of its most detailed updates to date, with members reporting significant updates received within just "the last 36 hours," which included new test results and cost estimates.

Committee members Richard Steiner and Mal Leichter walked the council through changes affecting septic design, site drainage, soil conditions and well water.

Leichter explained that earlier plans for two separate septic systems were longer viable after soil testing near the kennel revealed problems. "Those soils are not good for a septic system," he said, due to the kennel's soil being at the base of the area's cap landfill.

Leichter explained that "over time ... that cap landfill has kind of leached down further into the area where the kennel will be built." Instead, engineers now propose consolidating both buildings into a single enlarged system requiring upgraded leaching fields and a pump system. While the change will bring "additional costs," Leichter emphasized that with proper maintenance, the system should remain stable long-term.

He also noted that the existing site's constraints mean the septic infrastructure will remain under paved areas – standard for a site with limited unconstrained land.

The presentation delivered some good news as well, however. The civil engineer completed stormwater calculations and concluded the single existing retention pond can handle "all the massive runoff from the site" even under worst-case conditions. Leichter called it "great news," and noted the relief among committee members who feared a second retention area might be necessary on an already tight parcel.

The committee also reported the progress from the communications subcommittee, which is preparing public information explaining the project and clarifying the boundary between education and advocacy. The council later unanimously approved a related motion empowering Steiner, through the Tierney, to is-

sue an RFP for curbside municipal waste pickup.

Generator Upgrade Advances
The Council also advanced two significant infrastructure and recreational access initiatives. Members unanimously approved awarding the first-phase bid for the RHAM Emergency Electric Generator Upgrade Project to R & C Electric, LLC of Bristol, in an amount not to exceed \$709,690.

According to Public Building Committee Secretary Steiner, this marked the third attempt to secure a bid for phase one of the multi-year project, which will ultimately replace and modernize the emergency generator system serving the RHAM campus. Steiner told the Council that the new equipment is expected to be operational by May of next year, a key milestone for ensuring the school district's facilities remain resilient during power outages and large-scale weather events.

In a pair of unanimous votes, the Council also endorsed two applications to the Connecticut Recreational Trails Program. The first, submitted by the Air Line State Park Trail Alliance, sought funding to install a comprehensive package of signage along the existing trail corridor. Town Planner Matthew Bordeaux noted that the grant requires no financial contribution from the Town, because the Alliance will satisfy the match through its own in-kind services.

A second Trails Program application – this one submitted directly by the Town of Hebron

St. Peter's News & Notes

St. Peter's Episcopal Church, located at 30 Church St. (mailing address: P.O. Box 513) in Hebron. Priest is the Rev. Ron Kolanowski. The church is located on Route 85, a quarter-mile south of the intersection with Route 66, at 30 Church St. For more information on St. Peter's, visit stpetershebron.com or search for St. Peter's Hebron on Facebook.

Sunday Worship: Sunday services are at 8 a.m. (Rite 1 without music); and at 10 a.m. (Rite 2 with hymns). A coffee hour is held following each service. Sunday School is offered at the 10 a.m. service.

Advent Services: At both the 8 a.m. and 10 a.m. service.

Weekly Virtual Coffee Hour: Wednesdays at 10 a.m. Connects parishioners and friends via Zoom for an online social gathering.

Advent Daily Meditations: Daily spiritual meditations and readings are available for reflection during the Advent Season. Sign up at stpetershebron.com.

The Worship Center News & Notes

The Worship Center, a non-denominational Christian church, holds services and programs at 99 Marjorie Circle (unless noted). For more information and full program descriptions, visit theworshipcenterct.org and click on the 'events/calendar' link, or call 860-228-4442.

Worship: Services are Sundays at 10 a.m. and are also broadcast on Facebook at www.facebook.com/TheWorshipCenterConnecticut and on YouTube at www.youtube.com/@theworshipcenter9733.

Adult Bible Study: Every Sunday at 9 a.m. The study, on the First Epistle of Peter, is led by Elder George Logan. The theme is "Standing Firm in Grace: A Call to Holiness in a Hostile World." All adults welcome to join in this study, where together they'll learn what it means to "stand firm in the true grace of God" (1 Peter 5:12).

Kingdom Women: Women's Bible Study: The study will be taking a break for the months of November and December. It will resume in

Gilead Congregational Church News

Gilead Congregational Church, an Open and Affirming Congregation located at 672 Gilead St., has announced the following. For more info, see the bulletin at gileadchurchucc.updates.church, email gcc@gileadchurch.net, or call the Parish House at 860-228-3077. The church office is open at the GCC Parish House Monday-Thursday, 10 a.m.-2 p.m.

Worship: Sunday worship is at 10 a.m., followed by coffee hour at 11 a.m. Services can also be viewed online at YouTube at www.bit.ly/GileadChurchUCC and on Facebook at tinyurl.com/GileadChurchUCC.

Next Week's Events: Sunday, 12/14 – Worship Service with Communion at 10:00 AM (in-person in the Sanctuary; Online; Livestreamed); Sunday, 12/14 –Cookie Sale at 11 a.m. (Fellowship Hall); Sunday, 12/14 – Mission Board at 11:30 a.m. (Parish House); Sunday, 12/14 – Youth Group at 6 p.m. (Fellowship Hall); Monday, 12/15 – Bible Study at 9:30 a.m. (Online via

– aimed to construct a new trail connection across the Bernstein property, linking Old Colchester Road to the Air Line State Park Trail. Bordeaux told officials he anticipated design flexibility once additional survey work is completed. If awarded, the grant would expand local trail access, enhance regional connectivity and create a safer and more accessible off-road route for walkers, runners and cyclists.

Grant Uncertainty and FOI Burden
Town Manager Tierney delivered a lengthy update that touched on grant volatility and the escalating workload tied to Freedom of Information (FOI) requests.

He reported that at the Chatham Health District, where he serves as chair, expected grant reductions may affect staffing and require the district to operate cautiously even though "we do have a good reserve."

Tierney also said health insurance costs are currently projected to rise around 16%, driven heavily by claims and prescription costs. He described one "real bad claim" that had previously strained the town's stop-loss thresholds.

The office continues to handle "all these FOI requests, constantly." One recent request required attorney review and redaction, adding cost. Tierney noted that some requests include "multiple duplications" and extremely large volumes of email data, and that while staff always attempt to work with requestors to narrow scope, "sometimes it doesn't" succeed.

St. Peter's News & Notes

Concert of "Music Moves Hartford": Saturday, Dec. 13, 2:30 p.m. This will be a concert and carol sing by a musical group formed primarily of those experiencing homelessness and food insecurity.

Children's Christmas Pageant: Sunday, Dec. 21, 10 a.m. All children are invited to be a part of the Nativity Pageant. Parishioners and non-parishioners are welcome. There are brief rehearsals held after the 10 a.m. Sunday services in Advent. Contact the parish office (860-228-3244) for more information.

Outreach: A collection basket is in the church and outside the parish hall. St. Peter's is also a supporter of Project Hope in Willimantic.

Recurring Meetings: Balance Class: Mondays, 10:30-11 a.m., \$5; **Connect:** Mondays at 2 p.m.; **Choir:** Wednesdays at 6 p.m.; **Monthly Meetings:** Building and Grounds, Community Events planning, Finance, Liturgy, Pastoral Care and Vestry.

The Worship Center News & Notes

January. **Virtual Prayer Night:** Tuesdays, 7-8 p.m., via Zoom. Contact the church office or website for a link and meeting ID.

One-to-One Confidential Christian Care: Provided by Stephen Ministry to people in difficult life situations. If in need of help, call the church office; there are several new ministers trained and wanting to help.

TWC Upward Running Club: This 12-week class starting in January is designed to improve faith, fitness and fellowship within the community through a walking and/or running program custom made for your fitness level. Finish off the program by completing a 5k. Download the app, or contact the church office for more details.

Christmas Eve Service: Wednesday, Dec. 24, 4-5 p.m. All are invited to this candlelight worship service. There will be scripture, carols, and a message of hope.

Gilead Congregational Church News

Zoom); Monday, 12/15 – Christian Education at 7 p.m. (Parish House); Tuesday, 12/16 – AA Meeting at 7:30 p.m. (Social Hall); Wednesday, 12/17 – Yoga at 9:30 a.m. (Fellowship Hall); Wednesday 12/17 – Book Group at 10:45 a.m. (Fellowship Hall); Wednesday, 12/17 – Choir Practice at 7 p.m. (Sanctuary)

Card-Making with Gayle: Saturday, Dec. 21, 11:30 a.m. Create special, one-of-a-kind seasonal cards to give to your loved ones. The cost is \$15, with a portion of proceeds going toward the CT Food Bank.

Women's Fellowship Annual Cookie Sale: This Sunday, Dec. 14, after worship at 11:30 a.m.

Children's Christmas Pageant: Sunday, Dec. 21, during worship at 10 a.m.

Quiet Christmas Service: Sunday, Dec. 21, 7 p.m., for any community members who may find the holidays difficult, or are grieving.

Christmas Eve Services: Wednesday, Dec. 24, at 5 p.m. and 10 p.m.

Help for the Holidays

With the holidays coming up, bereavement support group meetings can provide a safe place to share stories of loved ones, and learn about the process of grief with others as well as strategies that might help people through the holidays and beyond.

The Grief Journey: A Bereavement Support Group is held Wednesday evenings from 7-8:30 p.m., at the Church of the Holy Family parish house, 185 Church St. The group is

Senior Center News & Notes

Russell Mercier Senior Center has announced the following programs. For more information and full program descriptions, and to register, call the senior center at 860-228-1700. **Pre-registration is required for all programs unless noted.** For an online senior newsletter, visit hebronct.com/town-departments/senior-center.

AARP Safe Driving Class: Tuesday, Dec. 16, 9 a.m.-1 p.m. AARP members cost \$20, and non-members cost \$25 and payable to the instructor day of class. You must pre-register by Monday, Dec. 15, at 10 a.m. The course teaches proven driving techniques to help keep you and your loved ones safe on the road. Note: coffee will be available in the morning, but no food is served, so if you may need something to nosh on, please feel free to bring it with you.

Annual Holiday Party featuring Caroling with The Sunshine Singers: Wednesday, Dec. 17, 11 a.m.-1 p.m. Doors open at 11 a.m. and the Sunshine Singers will perform starting at 11:15 a.m. Lunch will be stuffed shells, meatballs, roll, dessert, coffee and tea. It will be served about 12:15 p.m. Cost is \$6 and you must sign-up and pay by Monday, Dec. 16, at noon.

Medicare Open Enrollment/Winter Fuel Assistance: The Open Enrollment period takes place annually from Oct. 15 through Dec. 7. This is your opportunity to review all of your options and decide to stay with your current plan, or switch to another plan, or change the way that you receive your Medicare benefits. To set up an appointment, call the senior center

facilitated by grief educators Michael Glazier and Stephanie Haines.

All grieving adults are welcome, whether your loss is recent or past, and you may come to one session or as many as you would like. This support group is non-denominational and brought to you by a collaborative effort of the Hebron faith communities. There is no registration.

and ask for Sharon or Dennis.

Senior Transportation: Offered to ages 60 and up and all adult disabled individuals, for medical care, personal needs care, grocery shopping, or other pre-approved needs. Transportation available Monday-Thursday, 8:30 a.m.-4 p.m., and Friday, 8:30 a.m.-3 p.m. Appointments must be scheduled a minimum of 24 hours in advance, but 48 hours is recommended – and required for new riders. For more information or to schedule an appointment, call 860-228-1700.

Recurring Daily/Weekly Happenings: Some programs have a fee, and some are no-cost; most require pre-registration. More information in the monthly newsletter or at the senior center. **Monday through Friday:** Exercise Equipment Room, 9 a.m.-3 p.m. – though from 9 a.m.-noon on Fridays.

Mondays: Enhance Fitness via Zoom, 9-10 a.m.; Massage, 9 a.m.-3:30 p.m. **Tuesdays:** Knitting/Crocheting Group, 10:15-11:45 a.m.; Hand and Foot Canasta (cards), 12:45-3:15 p.m.; Card-Making, 1-2:15 p.m. **Wednesdays:** Enhance Fitness via Zoom, 9-10 a.m. **Thursdays:** Yoga, 9-10 a.m.; Sunshine Singers, 10:15-11:45 a.m.; Tai Chi, 10:15-11:15 a.m.; Chatham Health blood pressure screening, 11:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. on the third Thursday of the month; Chatham Health Education Series, 12:15 p.m. on the third Thursday of the month; Massage, 12:30-6:30 p.m.; Mahjong, 12:45-3:15 p.m.; Bingo, 1-3 p.m.; **Fridays:** Enhance Fitness via Zoom, 9-10 a.m.

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Selectmen Consider School Renovations, Bus Contracts

By Anne Lilburn

Portland’s Board of Selectmen met Dec. 3 – and the bulk of the meeting dealt with the Board of Education’s contract for school busing and the potential renovation and reorganization of schools.

On the topic of the bus contract, Superintendent of Schools Charles Britton appeared to request a bid waiver for its contract renewal with M&J Bus, Inc., which currently provides busing services to the district.

Britton explained that the current bus deal had been tentatively drafted based on the existing contract, with some changes, and he had been advised by the town attorney that the current bus deal was a good one. He said he had been advised that pursuing alternate bids would cost more money than the proposed increase to the current costs, and therefore requested that the board approve the request to enter into that contract and waive the bidding process by which the district could entertain bids from rival companies.

Britton said that school transportation was “very complex and never perfect,” but he also said the town had been happy with M&J, and spoke about a few particulars in the contract that were of note. He said that in the last contract, cameras were added to all the buses,

which he said is an important safety feature. In this current tentative agreement, he said they are planning to add GPS tracking to the buses, so that parents would be able to follow along via an app and know, for example, when to send their kids out.

Britton also pointed out some ways that the town could reduce its overall costs. One of those was by providing a town-owned property for use in parking busses, if the town could identify a parcel that could be used rent-free. Currently, M&J is renting a parking lot off of Cobalt Road, and one version of the tentative agreement has them passing those rental costs on to the town. The other version has the town providing a parcel for use and saving on those costs.

Britton said that the town’s attorneys have advised him that finding a bus yard would have both short- and long-term benefits, particularly given that there is an upcoming state mandate that will require all school buses in Portland to be electric by 2030, when there will still be over a year left on this five-year contract. This could make finding a parking lot location even more appealing, because a private owner may be hesitant to install the necessary charging infrastructure. If the town were able to provide the lot and install charging capabilities, it could potentially

provide a savings on future contracts down the road.

Britton added that he thought the state law was problematic and expensive, and said that he hoped that the state will take action to prevent or delay its implementation. He said that most bus companies do not have electric buses and that the costs of purchasing those buses would undoubtedly be passed along to districts and their towns. He added that Portland would not be alone in struggling to deal with this challenge, and that other towns would also likely be advocating for this “unfunded mandate” to be delayed or eliminated.

Board members had questions about the total annual contract costs and percentage increases, and wanted to take a look at the agreement in more detail prior to deciding, so Britton said he would get them more information and the board agreed to consider the issue at its next meeting, which would still give the town time to pursue either option in time to potentially receive bids in time for the next school year.

The board then considered updates from

the task force that is considering the school consolidation plan and potential renovations. John Dillon, a Democrat, said that the committee had been in touch with the state’s Department of Administrative Services to try to confirm the exact reimbursement percentages that would be available for any potential “renovate to new” projects. Though he cautioned that it was pending confirmation, he said that, if the town includes a preschool in the building, he believed there was a potential to receive up to a 73.93% reimbursement from the state for Valley View’s “renovate to new” project. There was also discussion about some updated square footage numbers that might make a renovate to new project more feasible for Gildersleeve as well.

The board members all agreed that they wanted to find a way to have public presentations with accurate and up-to-date figures for both “renovate to new” and other renovation options laid out, along with potential plans, soon, hopefully as early as January, with a referendum planned on the issue likely sometime in the spring.

First Congregational Church News

The First Congregational Church of Portland, UCC, located at 554 Main St., holds worship Sundays at 10 a.m. All are welcome. Pastor is the Rev. Judith Cooke. This Sunday, Dec. 14, the church will celebrate the third Sunday of Advent.

Also at 10 a.m., elementary aged children will meet for Church School in the newly renovated classroom, and the middle school class will meet

in the youth room. Infant - Pre-K children will enjoy playtime and an age-appropriate lesson.

Christmas Pageant: This year’s pageant, entitled “A Visit from the Animals,” by Kelsey Jones, is set for Sunday, Dec. 14. The church will celebrate the birth of Jesus with the Sunday school class and the little ones.

For more information, call 860-342-3244 or visit firstchurchportlandct.org.

Portland Library News & Notes

Portland Library, 20 Freestone Ave., has announced the following events. **Registration is required for all programs unless noted.** To register and for full program descriptions, visit the calendar of events at www.portlandlibraryct.org, or call 860-342-6770. The library is also on Facebook and Instagram.

Hours: Monday through Thursday, 10 a.m.-8 p.m.; Friday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.; Saturday, 10 a.m.-3 p.m. **Holiday Closings:** For Christmas, the library will close Wednesday, Dec. 24, at 1 p.m., and will be closed all day Thursday, Dec 25. For New Year’s, the library will close Wednesday, Dec. 31, at 1 p.m., and will be closed all day Thursday, Jan. 1.

Inclement Weather Procedure: If Portland Public Schools have a delayed opening or are closed for the day due to inclement weather,

the library will not run morning storytimes. Afternoon and evening programs will be decided on an individual basis that day, and registered participants will be contacted through email as soon as possible if the program will be canceled. Call the library if you have any questions on whether programs will be held.

Children’s Programs: Winter Storytimes: Begin the week of Jan. 5; registration opens Monday, Dec. 22, at 10 a.m. **Preschool Storytimes (ages 3-5):** Tuesdays at 10:30 a.m., Jan. 6-Feb. 24; there will also be a craft each week that can be done at the library or brought home. **Toddlers and Tots Storytime (ages birth-2):** Wednesdays at 10:15 and 11:15 a.m. Jan. 7-Feb. 25; this is Mother Goose on the Loose, an interactive session for the library’s youngest patrons, which uses rhymes, a story, songs, puppets, scarves and more to stimulate the learning process.

Adult Programs: Art Exhibit Reception – Museum Seen by Dan Castelli: Saturday, Dec. 13, 1 p.m. Castelli is a lifelong Portland resident and retired technology education (a.k.a.: shop) teacher. In 1970, he bought a 35-mm SLR camera, and continues to work in 35-mm film format, with a darkroom in his basement. The “Museum Seen” exhibit is a series of black & white candid photographs of people reacting to art in museums that will run through Jan. 9, 2026.

Weekly Knifty Knitters Group: Saturdays, 10 a.m.-12:30 p.m. Adults of all experience levels are welcome. No registration required; simply drop in. Come chat with the crafters who created the flock of emotional support chickens which will be auctioned off this month to benefit the Friends of the Library.

Book Clubs: Mystery Lovers Book Club: Tuesday, Dec. 16, 1 p.m. *Vera Wong’s Unsolicited Advice for Murderers* by Jesse Q. Sutanto will be discussed. **Talk About Books:** Tuesday, Jan. 6, 1 p.m. *Hidden Figures* by Margot Lee Shetterly will be discussed. **1st Thursday Night Book Club:** Thursday, Jan. 8, 6:30 p.m. *Pineapple Street* by Jenny Jackson will be discussed.

Movie: Wednesday, Jan. 14, 1 p.m. *Downton Abbey: The Grand Finale* (2025; rated PG) will be shown. Run time is 123 minutes.

Service of Lessons and Carols

All are invited to join the parish music and lector ministries at Saint Mary Church, 45 Freestone Ave., on Sunday, Dec. 14, at 3 p.m., for a Service of Lessons and Carols.

Listen to readings from Scripture and seasonal choral music, sing beloved Christmas carols, and help neighbors in need by bringing items to be donated to the Portland Food Bank (shampoo, conditioner, body wash, deodorant, small size dish soap/laundry detergent and men’s and women’s warm socks).

Enjoy a reception and fellowship following the service.

Garden Club Seed Swap Event

Celebrate National Seed Swap Day with the Portland River Valley Garden Club on Saturday, Jan. 31, from 10 a.m.-2 p.m., at the Waverly Center, 7 Waverly Ave.

Bring labeled seeds saved from your garden – or unopened packets from last year – and exchange them for new varieties to grow this season.

Enjoy free demonstrations on making seed

bombs, winter sowing and growing microgreens. Visit River Bend Bookshop’s vendor table and learn about the Portland Library’s Seed Library.

Admission is free; food bank donations are encouraged.

For more details, visit portland-river-valley-garden-club.blogspot.com.




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Hours: Monday through Thursday, 10 a.m.-8 p.m.; Friday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.; Saturday, 10 a.m.-3 p.m. **Holiday Closings:** For Christmas, the library will close Wednesday, Dec. 24, at 1 p.m., and will be closed all day Thursday, Dec 25. For New Year’s, the library will close Wednesday, Dec. 31, at 1 p.m., and will be closed all day Thursday, Jan. 1.

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Library Friends Holiday Store

The Friends of the Portland Library has opened its 2025 Holiday Store. When you visit the library, located at 20 Freestone Ave., stop by and browse the selection of gift-quality and like-new books and puzzles for all your reader and puzzler friends and family. Also, a select number of handcrafted book-art ornaments are available to help you deck

your halls with literary décor. The Holiday Store is in the corridor to the Mary Flood Room at the library. All proceeds support the Friends in continuing to bring programs for all ages to the library, fund the museum pass program, and enhance the media collections enjoyed by many.

Senior Center News & Notes

The Waverly Senior Center, 7 Waverly Ave., is open Monday-Thursday, 9 a.m.-4 p.m., and Friday, 9 a.m.-noon. For more information or to register, call 860-342-6761.

Food Share Mobile Pantry comes to the Food Bank every other Monday; the next pantry visit will be Dec. 15.

Weekly Programs: Unless noted, all programs are free. **Monday, 12/15: Light Aerobics,** 9:30-10:30 a.m.

Tuesday, 12/16: Bears on a Journey, 9:30-11 a.m., Help make fleece teddy bears for cancer patient – donations of light fleece (one yard or more) are sought; to donate call 860-342-0809; **Watercolor Class,** 9:30 a.m. – for more info please contact Bivenne at bivenne@yahoo.com; **Congregate Meal,** noon. Cost is \$3 suggested donation (must fill out form) Menu: turkey sloppy joe, coleslaw, chocolate chip cookie, string cheese; **Coupons for Troops,** 1-4 p.m.; **Setback,** 1 p.m.; **SyncoCize,** 5-6 p.m.

Wednesday, 12/17: Light Aerobics, 9:30-10:30 a.m.; **Chair Yoga with Gia,** 10:30-11:15 a.m., fee is a \$5 donation to instructor; **Rug Hooking Group,** noon. Whether you are a seasoned pro or looking to pick up a new skill, this group is for any and all. Some rug hooking kits may be available for beginners, please give at least one week's notice if you are in need of supplies or are looking for instruction on learning this craft. Call the center for more information. The group meets the first and third Wednesday of each month.

Thursday, 12/18: Tone & Stretch, 9:30 a.m.; **Knit & Stitch,** 10 a.m.; **Congregate Meal,** noon, \$3 suggested donation (must fill out form). Menu: meatballs with ziti and sauce, broccoli, milk, cup of pears; **Mahjong (FULL),** 12:30 p.m.; **Scrabble,** 1 p.m.

Friday, 12/19: Light Aerobics, 9:30-10:30 a.m.; **Mah Jongg,** 10 a.m.

Upcoming Events: Unless noted, all events are free – and registration is required. **Live Well, Age Well: A Free Diabetes Support Group:** Led by retired physician Dr. Elsamma Chacko, this group will meet the third Tuesday of each month at 1 p.m., and focuses on living well with diabetes and aging in place by bringing expert guidance and lived experience together in a supportive setting.

Travelers Chorale at the Bushnell: Wednesday, Dec. 17, departs the center at 6:15 p.m. Admission is free with the donation of a nonperishable food item. There is a \$5 ride fee.

Forest Park Lights and Dinner at Sofia's Italian Restaurant: Thursday, Dec. 18, leave the center at 3:45 p.m. \$8 fee includes transportation and admittance to event.

Holiday Flower Arrangements with Seng: Monday, Dec. 22, noon-2 p.m. Cost is \$8.

Holiday Closings: On Wednesday, Dec. 24, the center will close at noon, and it will remain closed all day Dec. 25 and 26. The center will also close at noon on Wednesday, Dec. 31, and remain closed all day Jan. 1.

Hair by Jessica: Monday, Dec. 29. Men's/women's shampoos, cuts and styling are available. Call Jessica to make an appointment, at 860-751-9215.

Town-Wide Moment of Prayer

Trinity Church invites the members of Portland houses of worship, and any others, to join in a Town-Wide Moment of Prayer at 1 p.m. on the Tuesdays in December leading up to Christmas Day.

Prayers can be offered wherever you are: at home, while shopping, at work – and as individuals or with someone. Use a favorite prayer, a simple prayer of your own words, or use this one, which is verse 7 of the Advent hymn “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”: “O come, desire of nations, bind in one the hearts of all humanity; bid that our sad divisions cease, and be thyself King of Peace.”

Trinity Episcopal News

Trinity Episcopal Church, 345 Main St., invites all to services on Sundays at 9:30 a.m. Bible Study starts at 8:30 a.m. each Sunday. The church schedule can always be located at www.trinitychurchportlandct.org.

Service Projects: This season, the community is collecting monetary donations to assemble gift bags filled with goodies and a gift card for older children in DCF care. The church is also gathering diapers in support of the Episcopal Church in Connecticut's annual diaper drive. Also, the church is partnering with Streetfire Ministries to help offset the cost of filling 100

backpacks with personal care items, which will be distributed at the Streetfire Ministry Christmas Party on Dec. 20.

The church is open for prayer and meditation, and the church office is open, from 2-4 p.m. each Friday. Anglican Prayer beading sessions are held at this time as well; all are welcome.

Check www.trinitychurchportlandct.org for more information. If you have any prayer requests to lift up, email the church office at trinitychurchportlandct@gmail.com.

Zion Lutheran News & Notes

Zion Lutheran Church is located at 183 William St. All are invited to participate in worship. Sara Stall-Ryan is pastor.

Worship Notes: Zion offers Sunday worship each week at 9 a.m.

Learning: Sunday School classes, for children ages 3 through 8th grade, meet the first and third Sunday of each month, from 10:15-11:15 a.m. For more information, call Sylvia LeShane at 860-342-0658.

The Adult Education group is continuing its review of *The Chosen* video series. Episodes are viewed on the first and third Sundays of each

month at 10:30 a.m. Discussions are held the second and fourth Sundays at 10:30 a.m. Contact the church for details.

Giving: Pull tabs are collected year-round and donated to the Ronald McDonald “House that Love Built,” supporting families with seriously ill children. Zion recycles computer ink cartridges to support office supplies for Sunny Hill Preschool and Zion.

For more information about any church activities, or if you are in need of pastoral assistance, call 860-342-2860, email zion.lutheran@snet.net, or visit zionlutheranportland.org.

St. Mary Church News & Notes

St. Mary Roman Catholic Church, located at 45 Freestone Ave., invites all to attend its services and events. For more information, visit www.stmaryportlandct.org.

Worship: Weekday Masses are Monday and Tuesday at 8 a.m., and Friday at 12:10 p.m. Weekend Masses are Saturday at 5 p.m. and Sunday at 8 a.m. and 10:30 a.m.

Reconciliation: Saturdays between 4 and 4:45 p.m. Call 860-342-2308 to make arrangements.

Bereavement Support Group: All are invited to attend. The group meets each month on the second Monday at 6:30 p.m. in the church hall and every fourth Tuesday at 2 p.m. in the rosary

room. Call Susan Bongiorno at 860-685-1966 for additional information.

Baptism: Call Sue Ferraiolo at 860-342-2308 to make arrangements.

Marriages: Contact the office at 860-342-2328 to make an appointment with the Rev. John Antonelle.

Holy Hour Benediction: First Friday of every month following the 12:10 p.m. Mass.

Blessed Mother Mass: First Saturday of every month at 9 a.m.

Hours of Operation: Church hours are 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. daily. Office hours are 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday-Friday.

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Obituaries

Colchester

Theresa Mills

Theresa “Terry” Mills, beloved wife, mother and grandmother, passed away peacefully in Norwich Monday, Dec. 8, surrounded by her devoted family. She was born in Willimantic April 16, 1941, to the late Jules and Rose Deshaies. She attended Windham schools and graduated from Windham High School in 1959.



In 1965, she married the love of her life, Thomas Mills, and they lovingly raised their family in Chelmsford, Mass., where they resided for 40 years. This past April, Terry and Tom joyfully celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary – a milestone that reflected the deep love, partnership, and devotion they shared throughout their life together.

Since 2009, Terry and Tom made their home in Colchester, where Terry formed cherished friendships within the North Woods community – a circle of support she spoke of often and fondly. Warm, gracious, and unfailingly kind, Terry brought a special light to every place she lived and every person she met. Her greatest joy, however, was her family, to whom she dedicated her heart and her days.

Terry leaves behind her loving husband, Thomas, and their three children: Karen Alsante and her husband Jim of Old Saybrook; Thomas Mills and his wife Lynn of Sturbridge; and Julie Gagliardi and her husband Paul of Branford. She is also survived by her seven adored grandchildren – JT, Tyler, Katelyn, Matthew, Kristina, Lily, and Luke – each of whom filled her life with immense pride and happiness. She was predeceased by her brothers, Ronald and Raymond.

An avid gardener, Terry could often be found outdoors surrounded by the beauty she cultivated. She had a natural creativity and a passion for sewing, woodworking, and decorating. During their retirement, she and Tom traveled the world hand in hand, collecting memories and stories they delighted in sharing with family and friends. Yet it was the simple, joyful moments that meant the most to her – especially the annual family trip to Cape Cod. Summers at “Grammy’s Beach House,” collecting shells, floating in the ocean, and spending uninterrupted time with her children and grandchildren were among her most treasured traditions.

Terry’s family extends their heartfelt gratitude to the doctors, nurses, and staff at Backus Hospital, the compassionate team at Eastern Connecticut Hematology and Oncology Center, and at Dana-Farber in Boston. Their dedication, warmth, and attentive care brought Terry comfort and many smiles during her treatments, and her family will be forever grateful.

Terry will be remembered for her boundless love, her gentle heart, her gift for making every person feel special and her strength. Her kindness, joy, and spirit will continue to bloom in the hearts of all who knew and loved her.

Care of arrangements has been entrusted to Aurora McCarthy Funeral Home. A funeral Mass will be held Monday, Dec. 15, at St. Andrew Catholic Church in Colchester, at 11 a.m. A burial will follow at New St. Andrew Cemetery.

To write a condolence or share a memory of Terry with the family, please visit www.auroramccarthyfuneralhome.com

Andover

Gordon Russell MacDonald

Gordon was born March 31, 1934, in Hartford, to Donald Walton MacDonald and Ethel (Seidel) MacDonald. He died in his home in Willimantic on Oct. 26 of heart failure with his family by his side.



His parents moved to Connecticut when his father was transferred from the Atlantic Refining Company in Kettle Point, R.I., to East Hartford. In 1937, the family moved to Manchester, where Gordon’s brother Bruce was born. In 1941 they moved to Bunker Hill Road in Andover, where the boys attended the local three-room red schoolhouse. Gordon expanded his interest in drawing and painting at Windham High School, achieving awards in the *Hartford Courant’s* annual Scholastic Art Contest. He also met and courted his future wife, Bette LeBaron. Upon graduation Gordon was accepted into the graphic arts and illustration program at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, N.Y.

After an interruption of two years in the U.S. Army, he married his high school sweetheart and returned to Pratt Institute to finish his Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree (BFA). After graduating, Bette and their new daughter, Heather, moved into a house on Andover Lake. Gordon set up a studio in their home and began freelancing, designing murals for Friendly’s Ice Cream, other restaurants, and eventually banks and insurance companies. He also produced full-color renderings for architects and interior decorators. Gordon’s artwork can be seen today in the Andover Town Hall’s lobby, where he painted the mural depicting the French Revolutionary War General Comte de Rochambeau’s march through Andover to assist General George Washington in the Yorktown Campaign of 1781.

Gordon and Bette became active in community organizations, which included the local Congregational Church, county and state youth art conferences at Silver Lake, Haiti, and Puerto Rico, community club plays, and the Andover Historical Society. As their family increased, Bette, Gordon, Heather, Lauren, Allison, and Bridget formed the MacDonald Family Singers, playing and singing Scottish and traditional music for fairs, churches, the Norwich Rose Festival, and 13 elementary schools in Manchester. In 1970, Gordon bid on and acquired a four-room Canadian National Railroad Station, which was moved to a hill on Bette’s grandfather’s farm to become the family’s summer home in Quebec, Canada. Railroad songs were soon added to the MacDonald family’s repertoire.

When the girls eventually attended high school and colleges, Gordon designed sets and appeared in musical theatre productions for Hebron Podium Players, Windsor Jesters, Gilbert and Sullivan of Manchester, and Windham Theatre Guild. When Lauren married, Gordon and Lauren’s bagpiper husband formed a Scottish folk trio called “Cairngorm.” Later, they added a soprano, performing for the British American Club of Manchester, 13 years for the Scotland CT annual Highland Festival, Burton Levitt Theatre, etc.

In 1977, Gordon joined the graphic arts department of Pratt & Whitney Aircraft, designing posters, brochures, slide presentations, and art directing the 65th Pratt & Whitney anniversary book, as well as art directing the *Eagle* magazine.

In 1986, Gordon and Bette fell in love with and moved to a three-story 1890 Victorian home in Willimantic. They began traveling when Bette retired from her job as administrator at Juniper Hill Village, Storrs. Saint Peters-

burg, Russia, Kenya, Africa, Scotland, England and Wales, central Europe, Ireland, Iceland, and the Caribbean were visited.

After many grandchildren and several great-grandchildren and a full and interesting life, Bette passed away on Jan. 14, 2017. The family felt this loss very deeply, but with the care and consideration of his daughters, Gordon carried on. Over the years, Gordon has survived a carotid artery operation, triple bypass surgery, and prostate cancer.

Burial services were held privately. The MacDonald family invites all to a Celebration of Life honoring Gordon on Sunday, Dec. 21, from 2-5 p.m., at the Windham Theater Guild, 779 Main St., Willimantic.

In lieu of flowers, donations in Gordon’s memory may be made to the Windham Theatre Guild at windhamtheatreguild.org.

Columbia

Daria M. Doll

With full hearts and deep sadness, we announce the passing of Daria M. Doll (née Strafach), 78, of Columbia, on Wednesday, Dec. 3. A devoted mother, grandmother, sister and friend, Daria’s life was defined by love – steadfast, generous and unwavering.



Born on July 8, 1947, in Westerly, R.I., to Tanya (Ziruk) and James Strafach, Daria grew up surrounded by strong family bonds that shaped her nurturing spirit. She was predeceased by her husband and soulmate, Andrew Doll, with whom she shared a remarkable 43-year marriage. Their love story began, fittingly, with a knock on the wrong door – an accident that became destiny. Together, they built a life rich in devotion, humor, and unwavering partnership.

Daria is survived by her two beloved children, Eva Doll (Jonathan Weinbaum) and Walter Doll (Lauren), who were the center of her world; her grandchildren, Andrew Doll-Wright, James Weinbaum and Violet Doll, were her heart’s greatest joy. Daria also leaves her cherished sisters, Gina Epstein and Tanya Strafach, as well as many nieces, nephews and in-laws whom she held dear.

Daria dedicated her life to caring for children. As a mother, her nurturing spirit was unmatched. Professionally, she spent many years enriching the lives of countless young people through her work in childcare programs at the YMCA of Vernon, eventually directing the beloved baby room there. After retiring from the Y, she continued her calling at St. James School in Manchester where she flourished as a classroom aide. Her patience, warmth, and humor endeared her to students, colleagues, and parents alike.

Her second retirement was her happiest – stepping fully into her most treasured role: Babu. Her devotion to her grandchildren was boundless; they were the lights of her life.

Daria delighted in the sweet things of life – both literally and figuratively. She loved sugary treats, shoes, sparkly clothes and jewelry, and a good shopping trip. She was captivated by the beauty of Florida, collecting Highwaymen paintings to bring Florida into her Connecticut home. She fulfilled a lifelong dream when she witnessed a space shuttle launch there on her 64th birthday – a moment she spoke of with awe forever after. Another of her life’s great joys was seeing and meeting her favorite band, Il Volo, the young Italian three tenors.

To know Daria was to feel uplifted. She offered comfort with gentleness, strength with steadiness, and joy with her spirited presence.

Her legacy lives on in the children she raised, the grandchildren she adored, the students she guided, and the countless people whose lives she brightened simply by being herself.

She is profoundly missed and forever cherished. May her memory be an eternal blessing to all who love her.

Viewing hours will be from 1-2 p.m. on Saturday, Dec. 13, at Mulryan Funeral Home, 725 Hebron Ave. in Glastonbury, with services immediately following. Donations can be made in Daria’s memory to the Connecticut Children’s Foundation.

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

East Hampton

Sandra Lee Vezina

Sandra Lee (Wanchik) Vezina, 72, of East Hampton, beloved wife of Steven Vezina, passed away peacefully at her home Friday evening, Dec. 5. Born July 5, 1953, in Swickley, Pa., she was the daughter of the late John and Norma Wanchik. Sandra had worked as an administrator in the medical field until her retirement. Sandra was a member of the East Hampton Lions Club and a member of the East Hampton Garden Club.



Besides her loving husband she is survived by her son, Steven Vezina Jr. of East Hampton; her daughter, Stacey Vezina and her husband Colt Cormier of Tolland; her brother, Mark Wanchik and his wife Denise of Baden, Pa.; and several nieces, nephews and cousins.

Friends called at Spencer Funeral Home, 112 Main St., East Hampton, on Wednesday, Dec. 10, with a service being held that evening.

In lieu of flowers, memorial donations may be made to the East Hampton Lions Club, P.O. Box 153, East Hampton, CT 06424.

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

Colchester

Frank Scopino

It is with profound sadness that the family of Frank Scopino, 76, of Lebanon, announces his passing at home on Dec. 1. Born in Hartford and raised in Colchester, Frank was a 1967 graduate of Bacon Academy. He lived in Lebanon for more than 25 years.



Frank was predeceased by his parents, Anthony Angelo Scopino and Angelina (Cinamella) Scopino, and by his brother Tony Scopino. He is survived by his children, Daniel and his wife Allison Scopino and his beloved granddaughter Romy, of Bristol, as well as Kristen Scopino and her partner, Alex Sadkin, of Reading, Pa. He is also survived by his brother, John Scopino of Pennsylvania.

A gifted athlete, Frank excelled in soccer, baseball, and basketball in his youth and was widely regarded as having the potential for a professional career. After high school, he enlisted in the U.S. Army and served in Vietnam, where he was wounded in combat. Following his recovery, he completed his military service stateside, achieving the rank of sergeant. He was awarded two Purple Hearts, a National Defense Service Medal, a Vietnam Service Medal, and a Vietnam Campaign Medal.

Frank acquired his CDL and began driving trucks commercially after the war. He then began his career with the Teamsters union through a connection from his uncle Tom and joined the union in 1980. He went on to serve as president of Teamsters Local 493 until 1992. After leaving his position at the Teamsters, he continued working as a commercial truck driver until retiring early in 2008 to care for his mother.

Known for his love of cars, Frank collected many vehicles over the years, including Corvettes, a GTO, a Porsche, and several BMWs. His prized possession was his 1967 Corvette and he also had a lifelong love of Harley-Davidson motorcycles. When his health allowed, he enjoyed golfing with friends, and he always appreciated time spent over a good meal with those he cared about. His famous coffee steak on the grill was a favorite among family and friends.

Frank was exceptionally funny, with a sharp sense of humor that could ease even the hard-

See More Obituaries, page 30

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1TB 12/12

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