

LAKE PLEASANT MILLERS FALLS MONTAGUE CENTER MONTAGUE CITY TURNERS FALLS

The Montague Reporter

YEAR 14 – NO. 11

also serving Erving, Gill, Leverett and Wendell

\$1

EDITOR@MONTAGUEREPORTER.ORG

THE VOICE OF THE VILLAGES

DECEMBER 30, 2015

*Happy New Year to all our readers!
This issue contains an official
Year-End Reader Survey (page B4).
Your feedback is requested!*

State Grants Erving \$400,000 Match For Park Project at Usher Mill Site

By MARK HUDYMA

ERVING – The grounds of a long-abandoned furniture factory on the Millers River will one day become a public park and recreation area, thanks to a state grant awarded this month.

On December 18, Erving was awarded a \$400,000 matching grant to begin development of a new park at the site of the former Usher Mill, a seven-acre rehabilitated brown-field site wedged between the railroad and river in the town center.

The funding comes through the Parkland Acquisitions and Renovations for Communities (PARC) program, a state initiative that helps cities and towns develop land for parks and outdoor recreation. As the project progresses beyond its first phase, the town can apply for addition rounds of funding through the program. According to select-board chair Bill Bembury, the plan is to apply for two more rounds of matching funds.

Originally built in 1900, the facility's last industrial owner was Erving Paper, who used it as a storage facility before transferring it to



A number of barriers have stalled any redevelopment of the town-owned property on Arch Street, but its Reuse Committee now has a budget to manage.

members of the Housen family. In 2007 the complex was burned by looters believed to be looking for scrap copper. At the time of the fire the property had been in and out of tax title over the course of several years.

It was then sold to a firm called Patriots Environmental for a nominal sum, in addition to approximate-

ly \$200,000 in back taxes. Patriots demolished the damaged structures and did some of their own looting, salvaging the buildings before abandoning the property to the unpaid tax rolls.

The lot became town property again in September 2010, and since that time its future has been debated.

see **USHER** page A4

New Year Brings a New Fire Chief for Montague Center



David Hansen has been with the department for nearly 30 years.

By JEFF SINGLETON

On Sunday, January 3, the Montague Center Fire District will host an induction ceremony for its new Fire Chief, David Hansen. The event will be at 1 in the afternoon at the station, and the public is invited.

Hansen has been with the department since 1987, a year after he moved to Montague, most recently serving as an assistant chief. His father served as a volunteer firefighter in the town of Wilbraham. The new chief currently works as a consultant at Bay State Medical Center in Springfield.

Hansen will have big shoes to fill, replacing John Greene who has led the department for over thirty-five years. Greene is credited with playing a key role in creating a regional training capacity for firefighters in Franklin County, and

for building public support for a new Montague Center fire station, completed in 2003.

Hansen says he has seen many changes in the volunteer department over the past decades, including improvements in the level of training and the quality of equipment.

He told the *Reporter* he is particularly impressed by the number of young volunteers who have joined the department recently, and by the close relationship between the department and the community it serves.

The Montague Center Fire District is one of two fire departments in the town, along with the Turners Falls Fire Department. The volunteer department covers the southern half of the town, including the village of Lake Pleasant, serving about a quarter of Montague's residents.

WANNA BUY A POWER COMPANY?

By JEFF SINGLETON

NORTHFIELD – Local policy and environmental advocacy circles are abuzz this month with rumors that the French company named Engie, formerly GDF Suez, is seeking to sell the assets of FirstLight Power Resources Incorporated.

Although the details of such a potential sale are not known, FirstLight assets include the pumped-storage electric generating facility at Northfield Mountain, the Turners Falls dam and power canal, and two hydroelectric plants in Montague including the 62-megawatt Cabot Station.

The Northfield and Turners Falls projects are currently in the midst of a federal relicensing process before the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC).

The company is reported to have been taking potential buyers on tours of its properties in the region and a sale is said to be on a "fast track."

The officially unconfirmed, possible sale of FirstLight is be-

ing widely discussed among local officials in the region, particularly among stakeholders taking part in the relicensing process, and among town assessors involved in challenges before the state appellate tax board. The utility has appealed assessments of its property made by the towns of Montague, Gill, Erving and Northfield.

Contacted by this newspaper, Carol Churchill, media contact for GDF Suez in the Northeast, would neither confirm nor deny the reports. "We evaluate potential acquisitions and divestures on an on-going basis. There is not much more to say," Churchill stated.

GDF Suez purchased FirstLight at the end of 2008. At the time of the acquisition, FirstLight owned 16 power generation plants, most of which were traditional hydroelectric plants or pumped-storage facilities like Northfield Mountain. The GDF Suez portfolio also included one gas-fired power plant.

Last April, the Paris-headquartered company, now the second-largest utility on the planet,

see **POWER** page A3

GILL-MONTAGUE SCHOOL COMMITTEE

Assistant Principal Kevin Cousineau Resigns; Technology, Capital Improvements Discussed

By ELLEN BLANCHETTE

GILL-MONTAGUE – At the school committee meeting on December 15, Gill-Montague superintendent Michael Sullivan announced that Kevin Cousineau, Sheffield Elementary assistant principal has resigned, effective January 8. Sullivan said Cousineau has accepted a position as elementary assistant principal at Norris

Elementary in Southampton, which is closer to where he lives.

The superintendent thanked Cousineau for his years of service in the district at both Hillcrest and Sheffield Elementary. "Cousineau is a dedicated and hard-working administrator who cared deeply about the welfare of his students," he said, "and we wish him well." Sullivan said that the search for assistant principal has begun.



BLANCHETTE PHOTO

Gill-Montague district superintendent Michael Sullivan and school committee chair Sandra Brown listen to a discussion among the committee's members at its December 15 meeting.

Shelter Discussion

The high school gymnasium might be designated as an emergency shelter for the town, Sullivan announced. At a November 24 meeting that included the fire chief, building inspector, board of health agent and area Red Cross and emergency management officials, there was a general consensus that the school could serve as a shelter if the gymnasium and three classrooms across the hall from the gym were used.

The school had not been considered as a viable shelter in the past, because it had been the cafeteria that was under consideration, which raised concerns about protecting children if classes were in session at the time residents were being sheltered there.

The group agreed to meet again and continue the conversation.

Technology Priorities

William St. Cyr, network manager for the Gill-Montague regional school district, presented a status report on the schools' technology

see **GMRSD** page A6

The Montague Reporter

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August, 2002

2015: The Fastest Year In Recorded History

When the *Montague Reporter* editorial team scheduled the edition you are presently reading, we figured that “bumping” its production a day early in the week – sending it to the printer on a Tuesday night, in order for it to hit newsstands on a Wednesday instead of a Thursday – would be a fine idea, and would keep our delivery drivers safe and off the roads on New Year’s Eve.

The newspaper does have a history of Wednesday publication. In the course of our first eleven years, we went to press early nine times, always during the week of Thanksgiving.

The ninth and last Wednesday *Reporter* came out on November 21, 2012, and that issue is significant for another reason: it was also the final issue produced under the watchful, tired eye of founding editor David Detmold.

All this means the new guard has never attempted this trick, of running a little too quickly through the revolving door. Naturally, there was a snowstorm, the first of the season, which cast our already shaky plan into disarray.

We hope you will enjoy this issue in any case, and we call your attention to the B section, where we muse about our focus, share some things about our budget, and provide a survey for you to fill out about the newspaper itself.

If all this seems a little *meta*, forgive us. The turning over of the new calendar year is a popular time for reflection, and our organization is determined to build on what we have learned in 2015 about putting out a little newspaper in the post-newspaper era.

Glancing back over our shoulder, we can measure the year by the topics of this editorial column.

January: Black history in the North; the Charlie Hebdo attacks; Montague’s Boston Post Cane; and federal funding for meteorology.

February: The Trans-Pacific

Partnership (TPP); snow; oil train disasters; and the Millers Falls Arts Bridge.

March: The Shea Theater, maple syrup; Ferguson, Missouri; representative town meeting; and our capital campaign.

April: Montague’s selectboard race; Mexico’s farmworker strike; public spaces and websites; a proposed graffiti ordinance; and discarding syringes.

May: The gender imbalance of local selectboards; intellectual property and the TPP; ticks; military service and community belonging.

June: Diaper drive politics; police, race and trust; the passing of a pillar of the community; and the Confederate flag.

July and August: Local noise ordinances; indigenous opposition to a pipeline in the Pacific Northwest; Syria, Turkey, and Kurdish politics; and our amazing writers and volunteers.

September: Refugees spilling into Europe; the burden of student debt; Montague’s town administrator position; and Volkswagen’s diesel emissions.

October: Trash, the river, and FirstLight; the TPP again; 1885 and 2015 in Turners Falls; strife on the Gill-Montague school committee; ExxonMobil and climate change.

November: Composting leaves; meteor showers; the Montague Center water district; and politicians’ fear of refugees.

December: The meaning of local crafts; WiredWest; climate change and personal choice.

It’s been a full and interesting year, in the world, the nation, and in our own towns. And boy, it went by fast. It’s hard to imagine just what the next year will bring, but we feel ready for it.

So, we wish a very happy New Year to all our readers. We hope you enjoy our tenth Wednesday issue. Next week, next year, we will return to our normal schedule – on our six hundredth Thursday.



GUEST EDITORIAL

MBI Concerns Not New to Towns: Ideas for Moving Broadband Forward

By RAY DIDONATO

WENDELL – The Massachusetts Broadband Institute (MBI) recently released a statement categorically denying state funding to the proposed WiredWest cooperative unless substantive changes are made to WiredWest’s operating plan.

The concerns MBI raised – including shared ownership of fiber assets and the ten year requirement for towns to remain in WiredWest – were not surprising, and have certainly been expressed by the finance committee and selectboard in Wendell.

While the late determination of WiredWest eligibility for MBI funding could be viewed as a setback, the MBI statement did set the framework for a discussion between MBI and WiredWest on key issues such as fiber ownership, accuracy of subscription rates in financial modeling, and accuracy of estimated business costs.

These are concerns which towns such as Wendell conveyed to WiredWest during the months leading up to annual town meeting, through review of the financial model. The MBI statement may provide the necessary impetus for WiredWest to consider these details with renewed vigor.

It was refreshing to attend a recent WiredWest board meeting in Charlemont where delegate-driven motions expanded the group of individuals negotiating with MBI. Discussion about a possible delay in the next negotiation meeting reflected a sincere effort by delegates to make sure the organization resolves differences of opinion among its own member towns.

The board created a communications committee, which seems geared at streamlining communications coming out of WiredWest, which had recently included a controversial email to subscribers call-

ing for them to picket the MBI municipal meeting in Greenfield.

While perhaps towns should have pushed harder for guidance from MBI on the fiber ownership issue, WiredWest, for its part, should have received MBI commitments in writing before assuring towns that MBI would fund a WiredWest-owned network. While there is some difference of opinion, and some finger-pointing, as to how this disconnect arose between MBI and WiredWest, these retrospective analyses seem only to serve to question the motivations of the two entities, which do have a shared goal: to bring broadband to western Massachusetts.

But can WiredWest deliver?

The present quandary for towns is how to proceed in light of the MBI statement and presentation, which in Wendell means a continued close examination of the WiredWest operating agreement.

The December 14 MBI meeting in Greenfield allowed the agency to lay out legal and financial concerns with the WiredWest model, with a major underlying issue being ownership of the fiber network by WiredWest, rather than member towns themselves. Steve Nelson of WiredWest, in time allotted for rebuttal, indicated that ownership was a key issue of difference between the two organizations.

But ownership is also a key issue among WiredWest towns themselves. Upon the suggestion, at the December 19 WiredWest board meeting, that most towns were comfortable with the operating agreement and delegates were only hearing from disaffected towns, a straw poll was taken. Of the towns present, it turned out that only twelve were comfortable with the ownership model in the current WiredWest plan, eight were on the fence, and four were opposed to the plan as drafted.

At the same WiredWest meet-

ing, Steve Nelson mentioned that there are only a few minor sticking points remaining in town counsel review of the WiredWest agreement.

However, while this review may determine whether the agreement is legal, it is up to towns to determine whether the agreement is good policy or whether issues such as ownership or withdrawal terms require additional changes.

An early January signing deadline was likely always optimistic and unrealistic, and it was unsurprising to hear, pending the negotiations with MBI, that towns may not be asked to sign until late January, or as late as March.

One very real concern within our town is how WiredWest’s ownership of the network might place the assets at risk – for example, if a lien were placed on the network as collateral for borrowing. Given that otherwise, if in need of additional funds, WiredWest would need to go to all of its member towns and secure 2/3 votes for additional funding, borrowing by the entity is not a forgone conclusion.

Jim Drawe of WiredWest has indicated that for sums exceeding \$100,000 a super-majority vote of WiredWest would be required. If faced with a significant shortfall, with no ability to secure funding via town meeting votes, is it not reasonable that such a super-majority might have no other practical choice than to borrow, if faced with a situation which would otherwise result in insolvency?

This concern was reinforced at the most recent WiredWest meeting, when it was observed that most votes of the body are unanimous on most topics after detailed discussion.

Towns such as Wendell have expressed a desire to own fiber assets within our town borders. However, there is a flipside to be considered,

see GUEST ED next page



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LOCAL BRIEFS

Compiled by **DON CLEGG**

The Orange Revitalization Partnership presents the **20th Annual Starry Starry Night** New Year's Eve Celebration on Thursday, December 31, in the heart of downtown Orange, starting at 6 p.m.

The celebration features: Lux-Deluxe; The Hartford Hot Several; comedian Mike Whitman; Rich Graiko and Groove Pavement; The Slik Pickers; The Falltown String Band; The Richard Chase Band; The Pumpnickel Puppets; Free Range; Ed the Wizard; Medicine Mammals; The Inside/Out Dance Company; fire dancers Laura Tor-raco & Jesse Q; ice sculpture with Mike Bosworth, Sue O'Sullivan and Brandon Kellner.

The Parade of Stars starts at 10

p.m., followed by "fabulous, friendly town fireworks" at 10:15 p.m.

The Sawmill River 10K is scheduled for Friday, January 1, in Montague Center. This road race will begin promptly at 10 a.m. near the Village Common on Main Street.

Race day registration begins at 9 a.m. at the Montague Common Hall at 34 Main Street. Divisions include Youth (18 and under), Open (19 to 39), Master (40 to 49), Senior (50 to 59), and Senior+ (60 and up).

Entry fees are \$25 paid by noon on December 31, or \$30 thereafter. Hot and cold refreshments provided.

This event benefits MPRD's Sponsor-A-Child Scholarship Program. The Sawmill 10k River Run is a USA Track & Field sanctioned event. On-line registration is avail-

able at RunReg.com, or log onto www.montague.net, or call MPRD at (413) 863-3216 to receive a registration form and additional information.

Just a reminder: the **First Day Hike** returns to the Great Falls Discovery Center on Friday, January 1, New Years Day.

Enjoy a leisurely two-mile stroll down the Canalside Rail Trail, and get the New Year started off on a Great Falls note. This family-friendly hike follows a gentle route and provides an opportunity to discover the abundant natural, historical, and cultural features that make the GFDC and rail trail such an amazing State Park.

Be prepared for cold weather: dress in layers and wear winter boots. Dogs are welcome on leash. Afterward, enjoy a cup of hot chocolate in the Discovery Center's Great Hall. Sign in at the Great Hall at 1 p.m. Hike will begin at 1:15 p.m.

First Day hikes are being organized by the Massachusetts DCR at eleven State Parks throughout the Commonwealth. The GFDC is one of only two in western Mass having a hike, the other being the Mt. Greylock Reservation. Participation in the hikes includes all 50 states, and involved more than 28,000 hikers on New Years Day 2015.

There will be a **Greenfield Farmers' Market Winter Market** on Saturday, January 2, from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the Greenfield Middle School, 195 Federal Street, Greenfield.

Our Lady of Peace Church will celebrate its **10th anniversary** on Sunday, January 3 at a 10 a.m. Mass with Mitchell Rozanski, Bishop of the Diocese of Springfield, as celebrant.

Our Lady of Peace Church was established in 2006 with the closing of St. Anne and St. Mary of the

Assumption Churches of Turners Falls, and Sacred Heart Church of Greenfield.

The Mass will include youth of the parish, a Spanish Choir, Traditional Choir, and Modern Ensemble. A reception will follow in the Fr. Casey Hall. All are welcome. For information, call 863-2585.

Dr. Carol Coan will present "**An Introduction to Green Burial**," Wednesday, January 6, at 6 p.m. as part of the Greenfield Public Library's First Wednesday Speaker Series. This talk addresses what green burial is, how it differs from conventional burial, and where and how it may be carried out. It will be followed by a question-and-answer period.

Coan is an anthropologist with a special interest in what we do with our bodies after death. She is a former president of Funeral Consumers Alliance of Western Massachusetts, and she regularly teaches classes on end-of-life planning.

The talk will be held in the LeVan-way Room of the library, located at 402 Main Street, and is sponsored by the Friends of the Library in conjunction with World Eye Books.

All boys and girls ages 9 to 14 are invited to participate in the local level of competition for the **2016 Knights of Columbus Free Throw Shooting Championship**. The local competition will be held on Saturday, January 9, at 2 p.m. at the Sheffield School Gym on Crocker Ave. in Turners Falls.

All contestants on the local level will be recognized for their participation in the event. Participants are required to furnish proof of age and written parental consent.

For entry forms or additional information, please contact Stephan Smith at (413) 863-4373 or 863-9042.

Send your local briefs to editor@montaguereporter.org.

PUBLIC NOTICE OF MEETING: NORTH LEVERETT CEMETERY ASSOCIATION

Notice is hereby given that a meeting of individuals with an interest in the North Leverett Cemetery Association will be held on Monday the 11th January, 2016 at 7:00 P.M. at the Moores Corner Church, Church Hill Road, Leverett, MA..

The purpose of the meeting will be to vote on a motion to dissolve the North Leverett Cemetery Association and transfer all records, real property, financial assets, and any other assets of said Association to the Leverett Cemetery Association.

**Ad Hoc Committee
North Leverett Cemetery Association**

POWER from page A1

announced that it was changing its name to Engie. According to an executive of the company, the change was designed to reflect the fact that "the world of energy is changing, we're moving toward a less centralized, less carbon-intensive energy world."

According to the British news service Reuters, the new name marks the end of the Gaz de France (GDF) initials, known by French people since the utility was created in 1946 with sister company Electricité de France by a Communist minister during the country's post-war reconstruction effort.

"GDF brought back memories of nationalizations. They're clear-

ly turning the page; the notion of public service is over," said Marcel Botton, president of branding company Nomen, at the time. "The change also drops the Suez name, inherited from the 2008 merger of GDF with Suez SA – the company that built the Suez Canal in the 19th century."

The impact of a potential ownership change on the ongoing federal relicensing process for Northfield Mountain and Cabot Station is a matter of speculation among local officials.

Montague town planner Walter Ramsey told the *Reporter* that the company is well along in the federal process, and on track to complete a variety of required studies.

These include the impact of the pumped-storage project, dam and canal on fish species, and on recreational and historical resources as well as soil.

Ramsey states that a key concern for Montague is "access" to the river. As a successor to the Turners Falls Power Company, FirstLight not only owns the power canal that runs parallel to the Connecticut River but also the bridges across it, some of which are in a state of disrepair.

A key source of tension between the town and company involves a currently closed bridge that provided access to the former Strathmore Mill, which the town owns and is hoping to redevelop.

The parent company is also a key importer of liquefied natural gas (LNG) to New England. It has publicly opposed the construction of a pipeline by Kinder Morgan's Tennessee Gas unit which would bring gas from the shale fields of Pennsylvania into the region through Franklin County.

Last August GDF Suez released a technical report arguing that the region's peak winter demand for natural gas, cited by proponents of new pipelines, could be met instead by importing more LNG.

The company has also refused to allow Kinder Morgan to survey its properties in Northfield and Erving for the proposed pipeline.



GUEST ED from previous page

which is whether towns the size of Wendell have the capacity to maintain fiber infrastructure over the long term. Perhaps we can look toward the Leverett model for some guidance, but we have not studied the issue locally in enough detail to know what this would look like, whether maintenance could be outsourced or part of an IRU agreement, or what risks are present. So the jury is still out in this regard.

While the cooperative model aligns philosophically with many of our towns, is it a necessary model, given MBI requirements? Or at least, should private partners be

sought? Logical partners might include local players such as Crocker Communications, a business with local roots which would certainly not fit the negative stereotype often associated with "outsourcing," a term which often involves a far-off, overseas component.

Is there space for WiredWest to consider local entities? This remains to be seen, but may pose less risk than building a startup from scratch.

Why not make this Plan A?

In Wendell, we decided to take a two-pronged approach: engaging WiredWest in review of its operating agreement, and vetting other

possible network providers. At the same time, we are engaging MBI on make-ready and design, in an attempt to move forward on multiple, simultaneous fronts toward pole surveys, make-ready, network design, while vetting network and ISP providers.

Wendell is doing much needed due diligence.

I am hopeful that MBI will provide further guidance on its preferred network operating model in the coming weeks and months, as Wendell, one of four towns which has committed to pole survey and other preparation toward network design with MBI, will need to de-

termine by July what a design will look like and how it might fit into a regional model.

Municipal broadband is a high priority to businesses and property owners within western Massachusetts, and all stakeholders engaged, I am optimistic broadband will come to our region.

Mr. DiDonato is a member of the finance and broadband committees of the town of Wendell. The views expressed are his own, and do not reflect those of either committee.



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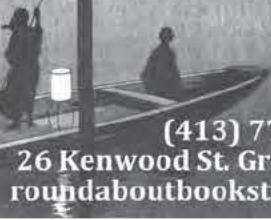
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USHER from page A1

The site has since undergone extensive environmental remediation in most areas, but lacks a safe source of water. Only one building of the complex is still standing, boarded up behind a chain-link fence.

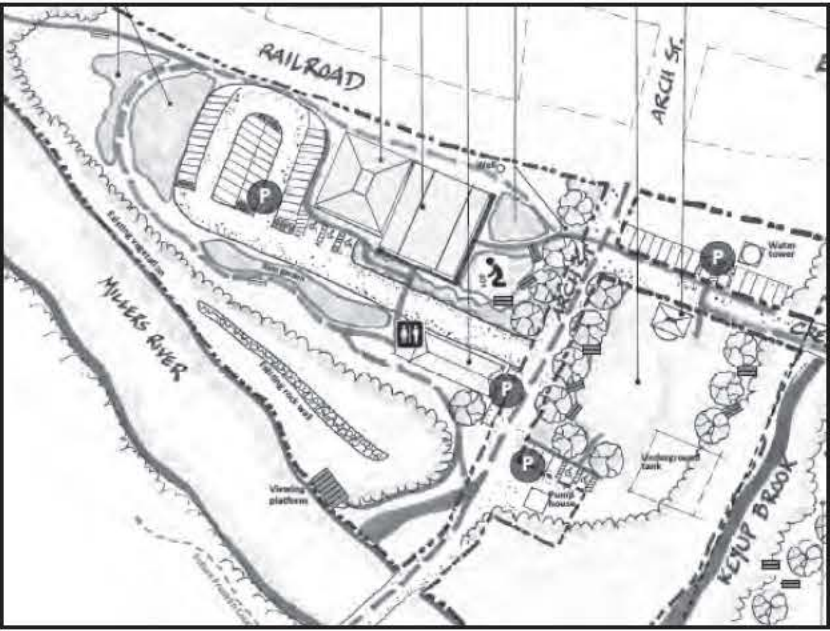
A community group, the Usher Mill Reuse Committee, formed from a group of citizens trying to find creative solutions to the problem that an abandoned mill building can pose for a town. The select-board-appointed group researched several options for possible uses of the land and has advised the select-board throughout the grant process.

Erving's Own Sensory Trail

Phase one of the project does not address the property's remaining structure, a former boiler building with a deteriorating smokestack.

The request for proposals (RFP) for the project's design, which the Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG) issued in February on behalf of the town, envisions a riverfront park featuring a pavilion, "a great lawn," benches, lighting, composting toilets, and "a sensory trail".

Eventually, river access for whitewater boaters, farmers mar-



Detail from a "conceptual design" in the request for proposals issued earlier this year by the Franklin Regional Council of Governments.

kets, and outdoor concerts are all planned for the location. New buildings, such as a shell for an open-air farmers market and a kayak and canoe rental, are also under discussion for the park.

The "conceptual design" included in the RFP incorporates low impact design like rain gardens to reduce runoff into the sensitive rivers nearby. A second phase would move beyond Keyup Brook, and add more

picnic area and community gardens.

During the town's December 21 selectboard meeting, three days after Matthew Beaton, secretary of the state Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, handed town officials a "giant-sized check" representing the matching funds, selectboard member Art Johnson stated that he was "really excited, and proud."

More Work Ahead

The Reuse Committee, which has so far been pursuing the project without a budget, currently has four members on paper: Jeannie Schermesser, Jeff Dubay, Debbie Lapinski and Gary Burnett.

According to Bembury, now that there is money on the table, the town would like to see that group grow to seven, and the selectboard is calling for interested Erving residents to contact them.

The town and FRCOG will be working with Springfield-based civil engineering firm Milone & Macbroom, Inc. on the next steps.

Bembury said that one of the Reuse Committee's immediate priorities at this stage is to hire a project manager, and that they will work with FRCOG to issue a request for one.

They may also request a grant manager, he said, since each grant phase entails the preparation of another thick application.

New STM Vote Needed

Though challenges to developing public recreational land on the site are many – including limited access along Arch Street by trucks, due to a 12-foot rail bridge; potential groundwater contamination; and a lack of running water – an additional procedural hitch emerged this week.

At the selectboard's December 28 meeting, board member Jacob Smith announced that the version of the PARC funding article that was read on the floor of the June 29 special town meeting may have been an outdated draft, and the language needed to be changed to reflect the current funding situation.

At that town meeting, Erving residents approved "borrowing" \$775,000 for the development of the site pending the PARC match.

"You can't write in monies you don't have," explained Smith.

The selectboard agreed that another special town meeting vote will be required to dedicate the town's free cash to the project. "We go to town meeting and vote again, with 'transfer, raise and appropriate,'" Jacquelyn Boyden said, specifying the wording that should have been used instead of "borrow."

The revised article is expected to go on the warrant for the February special town meeting.

Additional reporting was contributed by Mike Jackson.



NOTES FROM THE LEVERETT SELECTBOARD

School Budget Process;
Winter Plow Plan Weighed

By ANN TWEEDY

The Leverett selectboard held a brief meeting on December 22.

Leverett school committee member Kip Fonsh reported on the ongoing District Regionalization Committee discussions, regarding Shutesbury's request for a change in the method the district uses to determine town assessments.

Fonsh expressed that the assessment issue is becoming more difficult than the regionalization issue, but said he felt he made a compelling case at the last meeting for the importance of voting "yes" on Question 1, so that regionalization may at least be considered an option down the road, regardless of present support for the idea.

He also argued the importance of the "Yes on 1" vote to about 60 parents at the Leverett Elementary School at a recent information session on the potential elementary school regionalization.

Fonsh said that the Regionalization Committee would likely arrive at a vote on the district budget, and have something ready to share with Leverett, by March 1.

The date for Annual Town Meeting was bumped forward to the first Saturday in May, and the meeting reconfigured so the budget approval occurs during the second half of the meeting. Shutesbury is having their Town Meeting on the same day, and it is hoped that this change will allow time for information that would affect the regional school budget to come in before Leverett's own budget vote.

Two budgets will be presented to Town Meeting, including one that reconfigures the Leverett numbers should Shutesbury vote in favor of returning to the state statutory assessment method.

Fonsh also shared his concerns

over state funding for school transportation as an item in Governor Baker's legislative package may weaken aid. He agreed to forward to the selectboard letters he wrote to state senator Stan Rosenberg and representative Steve Kulik, so they could add their support in criticizing the legislative decision.

A strategy to brainstorm ways to reach out to people to fill open seats on the Zoning Board of Appeals was discussed.

The board also discussed another unfunded state mandate requiring that all town and municipal animal control officers receive additional training. It was decided that the town's dog officer, Roberta Bryant, would be consulted about the mandate, and given assistance in the process of obtaining the training.

Town administrator Margie McGinnis pointed out that the dog officer has an expense line item in the annual budget.

The issue of snow plowing policy for the town was addressed. The town has not yet hired a new superintendent for the highway department.

McGinnis discussed a suggested policy sent to her by the recently retired superintendent, Will Stratford. Peter d'Errico suggested Stratford's plan be forwarded to Richard Roberts, a Leverett resident and business owner familiar with town road maintenance, who will serve as a "point person" this winter in the process of evaluating road conditions.

It was further clarified that plowing will still be conducted by highway department personnel, but that Roberts will evaluate whether additional work needs to be contracted out, and when plows should be dispatched. He will receive input from Silas Ball, a town resident and employee of the department.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE ERVING POLICE LOG

Spilt Milk Bottles;
Caller Followed Home

Monday, 12/14 3:15 p.m. Report of traffic hazard on Route 2. Found to be hundreds of empty milk bottles all over the road. MA DOT cleaned up same.	9:20 p.m. Assisted with a medical emergency on Lillian's Way.	and Route 2. Assisted on scene.
Tuesday, 12/15 12:37 p.m. Assisted with a medical emergency on Cross Street.	10:15 p.m. Criminal complaint issued to [redacted] for operating a motor vehicle with a revoked registration and failure of a passenger to wear a seatbelt.	Thursday, 12/24 11:15 a.m. A caller reported property damage at French King Storage. Report taken.
Wednesday, 12/16 8:40 a.m. Report of a phone scam on Old State Road.	Monday, 12/21 2:50 p.m. Assisted with a disabled motor vehicle on Route 2 near Farley Flats.	12:45 p.m. Assisted with a medical emergency on Old State Road.
8:30 p.m. Assisted with one-car motor vehicle crash on Gulf and Mountain Road.	Tuesday, 12/22 9:45 a.m. Suspicious vehicle at Route 2 parking area. Found to be a hunter.	7:30 p.m. Owner of Weatherhead's Convenience store tripped own alarm, cancelled.
Thursday, 12/17 6:20 a.m. Assisted Northfield police with medical emergency on Old Turnpike Road.	10:40 a.m. Welfare check on Lillian's Way. Found to be fine.	Friday, 12/25 3:28 a.m. Two 911 hang up calls, which "may have been cordless phone off receiver".
12:28 p.m. Motor vehicle crash on Route 2. Assisted on scene.	12:15 p.m. Assisted with a medical emergency on Old State Road.	6:15 a.m. Assisted with a medical emergency on French King Highway.
Friday, 12/18 7:05 a.m. Animal control officer responded to a cat struck on Moore Street.	5:30 p.m. Motor vehicle crash on Prospect Street and Route 2. Assisted on scene.	Sunday, 12/27 1:15 a.m. Report of suspicious vehicle following the caller home. Investigated and took report.
	Wednesday, 12/23 5:20 p.m. Vehicle crash on Prospect Street	1:20 p.m. Report of vandalized vehicle at Weatherhead's. Report taken.

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NOTES FROM THE ERVING SELECTBOARD

Erving Slashes Taxes, and Residential Taxes the Furthest

By MIKE JACKSON
and MARK HUDYMA

Though the Erving selectboard’s December 21 meeting featured a dangerous dog hearing, the opening of bids for work on a pump station, and the announcement of a state matching grant to get started on the reuse of the Usher Mill property, by far the biggest event of the night was a tax classification hearing.

An increased assessment of the value of the Northfield Mountain Project meant that tax rates would be slashed in 2016, but it was the selectboard’s job to determine how savings would be divided between residential owners and commercial and industrial ones.

At the end of that hearing the board, disregarding a more conservative recommendation of the town’s board of assessors that would set the rates at \$7.07 and \$10.94 respectively, voted to set the Minimum Residential Factor (MRF) as far in residents’ favor as they could.

The corresponding rates in 2015 were \$8.62 and \$14.32.

Board of assessors member Daniel Hammock accompanied assistant assessor Jacquelyn Boyden to the hearing to express his dissenting, and ultimately triumphant, view that the power company should bear the maximum possible burden.

“I don’t know what’s going to happen four or five years from now,” Hammock argued. “For me, the difference is about \$38,000, roughly, that would get shifted on to the Mountain Project and the paper mill, the bowling alley, the bigger businesses. I just don’t see a reason why homeowners – people on fixed incomes, people losing their jobs – why they should split that \$38,000.”

He added that he didn’t have anything against the power company, but that he couldn’t remember the last time they cared much about him.

“I feel like people have been beat up really bad the last seven, eight years,” said selectboard member Art Johnson. “I’m feeling like any relief we can give them, I think we should give them.” The board voted unanimously for an MRF of 65%.

The resulting 2016 rates will be \$6.76 for residents and \$10.99 for commercial entities, including the power company, which will be billed 86.2% of the town’s total tax levy in the coming year.

Selectboard chair Bill Bem-bury stated afterward that he was “thrilled with the assessors’ office,” and commended their work.

Enclosure Ordered

The board held a dangerous dog hearing for Hudson, a mixed pit bull-labrador owned by Alan Gordon of High Street. On November 16, Hudson and another dog ran loose and attacked chickens, the animal control officer, and ultimately police chief Chris Blair, who used his Taser on the animal.

“His ears laid right back on his head, and he came right up on his haunches,” said Blair. “After reading his body language, I knew it was definitely an aggressive dog. I reached

for my Taser, and when I did, he bolted and ran right at me....

“It was probably the most terrifying thing I have experienced in 22 years as a police officer.”

Gordon asked him if the incident was recorded on Blair’s body camera. Blair said it was not, as he had not thought to push the device’s “record” button until after the attack happened.

“If a person had been there, I would have instinctively turned the camera on,” he said. “Unfortunately, I didn’t catch it – it would have been a great opportunity to use the body camera.”

Gordon described the dog as gentle. “We would take the dog to Sunday school,” he said, describing the experience as “nerve-wracking.” He and another household member said they felt the dog was being protective of the puppy he was with, and that the puppy no longer lived with the family.

Neither Blair nor Johnson, acting in his role as the town’s animal control officer, recommended the dog be euthanized. Bem-bury and board member Jacob Smith, who identified himself as an abuser but evoked the rule of necessity as Johnson had recused himself, moved to rule the dog “dangerous,” and ordered that he be kept in an enclosure when outside, and muzzled and on a leash when off the premises.

Other Business – Dec. 21

The board opened bids for electrical work and painting at the pump station on River Street. Bids were awarded to John W. Egan Painting, for \$33,032, and Elm Electric for \$41,521.

It also approved \$2,818 in upgrades to the security camera system at the wastewater treatment plant, and directed Glenn McCrory to use his department’s building maintenance fund.

Police chief Blair announced the recent resignation of Pat Mer-rigan, who was leaving to join the Greenfield police department. “We traditionally have been a stepping-stone town,” Blair said, and said he intended to contact the police academy in the hopes of hiring two full-time, academy-trained officers in the coming months.

Town treasurer Margaret Sullivan did not attend the meeting, though the selectboard had invited her to discuss a recent altercation involving Sullivan in town offices. Bem-bury said she had used “clearly objectionable language” during business hours.

Sullivan is an elected official and not subject to reprimand or discipline by the selectboard, but board members discussed the importance of professional conduct, and agreed to review existing policies guiding behavior.

Shaken Dump Fear

David Brule, representing the Millers River Watershed Council and the town’s conservation commission, spoke to the board on December 28 to open a line of communication about the proposed Kinder Morgan gas pipeline, and to inquire as to the “viability of the

Erving landfill.... The question is, what effect blasting might have on the cap.”

Brule expressed concerns the area of the landfill nearest the Mill-ers may slide and cause blockage and contamination of the water. “We can’t find records of what’s in there,” he said, “and horizontal drilling or blasting may disrupt that.”

Bem-bury replied that the landfill is monitored regularly by the DEP and the selectboard “can request from Erving Paper [records of] what they put in the landfill.”

Brule read a Kinder Morgan document about horizontal drilling, the method proposed to insert the pipeline below the beds of local rivers, which states it “will cause disruption to surface water,” including a film and significant turbidity. The drill bit is “cooled by a variety of proprietary chemicals” to allow it to cut through bedrock, which they add “may be released into the groundwater.”

“As a commissioner, I’m not asking you to file for intervenor status, but as a citizen I think it’s a good idea,” said Brule. “My sources tell me if the town does not, they no longer have a right to protest down the line.”

Kinder Morgan received limited liability corporation status in Massachusetts, which can alleviate the company’s shareholders of responsibility in the event of accidents and damage resulting from construction to chemical spills. “Because you filed with Franklin

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Regional Council of Governments, you still do have a right to file for intervenor status,” he added.

The board took no action.

Other Business – Dec. 28

The board also reviewed an updated version of the drug testing policy for town employees, adding a “just cause clause” and maintaining the drug-free workplace statement. It will apply to all town employees except the school district employees, who have an existing policy in place.

Updates to the hiring and cell phone policies for town employees are still under review by committee.

The board sent a certified vote regarding the retirement of Bob Miner to state senator Stan Rosenberg’s office regarding retirement legislation in Erving. The bill is currently being discussed in committee.

“Let’s do it now, so somebody else doesn’t have to deal with it in ten years,” said selectboard member Jacob Smith.

Smith stated the certified warrant for a town meeting vote in June regarding matching funds for the Usher Mill site PARC grant mistakenly used an early draft of the article. The selectboard decided

to use free cash instead of a loan to pay for the project.

The new version will be voted on at the February special town meeting.

Johnson said a Great Horned Owl was struck on Route 2 last week, and made a swift recovery. He will be picking it up soon, and releasing it in Erving.



NINA ROSSI ILLUSTRATION

LOOKING BACK: 10 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Here’s the way it was December 22, 2005: News from the Montague Reporter’s archive.

Selectboard Inks MCCI Contract

The Montague selectboard reached a key milestone in the local cable access saga on Monday evening, signing a contract with Montague Community Cable Inc. to regain its role as the town’s provider starting January 2006.

With only a few stipulations, the board unanimously endorsed a recent move by town meeting to terminate the services of Greenfield Community Television as Montague’s cable access provider, after four years of service, and to grant that responsibility to MCCI instead. MCCI will now work with GCTV on a transition process that is expected to take more than a month to fully complete.

“This is an excellent contract. Thank you to the cable advisory committee,” said Michael Muller, president of the MCCI board, who came before the selectboard to sign the contract. “We are grateful for the opportunity,” he added.

Charges Against Women Arrested at VY Dismissed

The Vermont state’s attorney, Dan Davis, has filed notices of dismissal of trespassing charges for the seven women arrested November 7 at the

Entergy Nuclear / Vermont Yankee headquarters in Brattleboro.

The women were arrested while trying to deliver a letter to Entergy executives detailing their concerns about an impending uprate at the Vernon nuclear reactor. The state’s attorney cited Vermont’s Rule 48, which permits “dismissal in the interests of justice.”

The women, five from Massachusetts and two from Vermont, calling themselves “Reasonable Women,” stated at the November action they had lost patience with the uprate process. “The NRC has limited the public’s opportunity for intervention and comment while working behind the scenes with Entergy to reduce safety margins, change license specifications and get exemption from testing and monitoring. The process is rigged,” said Sally Shaw, of Gill, one of the organizers of the protest. “We demand an independent safety assessment.”

“I’m grateful the charges were dropped, but that’s really small potatoes,” according to Sunny Miller, of Deerfield, one of three grandmothers arrested that day. “We’re facing the possibility of a meltdown. We know we can’t trust FEMA, the NRC, or the federal government to watch out for us.

“The advisory committee ignored their own risk assessment analyst and Vermont’s Nuclear Engineer. I went to Entergy headquarters to ask for radiation monitors

for all of our schools and health-care facilities in a 50-mile radius.

“Entergy has the money to provide those, but is instead funding cultural programs and the Boy Scouts, and hoping to charge full-steam ahead, gathering risky profits at the Vernon reactor.”

Wendell: Water Solutions in Sight

The Wendell selector’s December 14 meeting brought out two interesting possibilities for the public water supply for the town center municipal construction projects.

Andy Hamilton, operator for the Wendell Country Store water system, called and asked to have time on the agenda so he could offer that system to the town. The store has a shallow well which provides 120 cubic feet of water per day (more than 800 gallons). It is treated with ultraviolet light, tested before and after treatment, and conforms to drinking water standards. The system has been operating since June with few problems, and the well has not run dry, even on the day of stuck toilets.

Meanwhile, the town-owned 4.3-acre property on Cooleyville Road is looking better as a site for a public water supply well, but selectman Dan Keller said the conservation commission has ruled that reaching the site through Stephen Broll’s land would impact wetlands and require a notice of intent.

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ADVICE WITH PURPOSE

GMRSD from page A1

needs. Sullivan said the district needs a long-term plan, which the report begins to address.

St. Cyr said they began by doing a total inventory of all computers used by teachers, students, and administrative staff, and then set priorities for technology needs, recommending specific steps to improve services.

Sullivan said the cost of the recommended changes on the FY'17 budget is on a level with the FY'16 technology expenses. The report's "high priority" recommendations for the coming fiscal year include:

- Changing internet providers from Comcast to the state's fiber network through the Massachusetts Broadband Institute (MBI). According to St. Cyr, a one-time \$5,000 cost of connecting the Sheffield/Hillcrest/central office site to the town's fiber backbone would increase connectivity speeds threefold while reducing monthly fees.
- A project to upgrade the Wi-Fi system at the Gill, Hillcrest and Sheffield elementary schools, to allow mobile devices to connect wirelessly in the schools. This would be partially funded with a federal grant, with district costs not to exceed \$30,000.
- Replacing battery backups for network systems at Hillcrest, Sheffield and the central office, at a cost of \$18,000.
- Replacing data backup system, currently hard drives stored in a server room, with an off-site one. At an annual cost of \$12,000, this would protect current data and improve the ease of its retrieval.
- Replacing aging teacher laptops, and providing docking systems. This would make it easier to apply new technology in the classroom with less wear and tear on the computers. Cost for 40 laptops, at \$1,200 each, would be \$48,000. The old teacher laptops could then be used by students.
- Creating a new telecommunications system managed by the district through its own server, replacing the current Voice-Over IP phone system. Requires initial investment of \$25,000.

The wide-ranging report, available on the district website, recommends many other improvements. These include new technology supported with federal grants, such as 100 new Chromebooks for the high school/middle school; software upgrades; and improvements to systems for food services.

All of this will be sorted out dur-

ing the budget process for the next fiscal year. No vote by the school committee was asked for or required, but their general approval of the overall concepts presented in the report was given.

Capital Improvement

Joanne Blier asked the committee for a vote on the district's planned capital improvements, so that she may present them to the towns for their approval. She said the Sheffield boiler has been repaired, and that the school was waiting delivery of new burners. Having the boiler repaired is, according to Blier, to get the system up and running until an energy audit can be done, which the towns have requested.

Blier will be requesting approval from the towns for roof replacement for Gill Elementary at a cost of \$600,000, which will involve a long process with work projected for the summer of 2018. The project would qualify for reimbursement under the MSBA's accelerated repair program. Blier said a "statement of interest" application window opens in January, which is why she was seeking the committee's approval. The members voted unanimously to approve her request.

Blier said a water system upgrade project is in process at Gill Elementary. The town has hired an engineering firm to design the system.

Blier's capital planning summary for FY'17 for Hillcrest Elementary included driveway and parking upgrades (\$15,000), a restructuring of the stage to add office space, with a ramp or lift needed for access (\$60,000) and repairs to fix leaking pipes (\$10,000). She presented a list of maintenance projects needed for the FY'17 budget.

New Meeting Room Proposed

Sullivan informed the school committee of a conversation he has been having with MCTV station manager Dean Garvin, the business, technology and facilities managers, and Turners Falls High School principal Anne Leonard about the possibility of changing the location of the school committee meetings. The committee currently meets in the high school video production classroom, which requires several hours of work in rearranging the room and setting up equipment for live broadcast. The group recommends moving into an unused classroom on the third floor.

School committee member Valeria Smith raised concerns over the need for using the elevator for those unable to use the stairs, and other members expressed their concern over the lack of security this would create, as visitors would have additional access to the school at a time when there is less security available. No decision was made.

The next regular school committee meeting will be held on January 12, 2016 at Turners Falls High School TV studio at 6:30 p.m.



NINA ROSSI ILLUSTRATIONS

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE GILL SELECTBOARD

Assessors: Tax Planned NMH Solar Array By The Megawatt

By AIDAN BELANGER

On December 28, the Gill selectboard discussed the recommended tax agreement for Borrego Solar's proposed installation at Northfield Mount Hermon. The solar farm is proposed for 14 acres of land owned by the school, located across Main Road from the campus, and just north of the lower athletic fields. The installation would generate 2.0 megawatts (MW) of AC power, and 2.8 of DC.

The agreements under discussion covered solely the solar fixture taxes, not the real estate taxes. The board of assessors looked at three commonly used approaches to agreements: an asset depreciation method; a percentage of electricity revenue; and a set dollar amount per MW per year.

Administrative assistant Ray Purington and Lynda Hodsdon Mayo, town clerk and assessors' assistant, called local towns to find out how they evaluated taxes on solar projects. The main recommendation they received was to enter a twenty-year agreement based on a fixed cost per MW, the third method considered by the assessors.

The asset depreciation method would front-load the expense to the agreement's first six years, and while the assessors believe it could generate new growth, they feel it would spread the tax burden for that new growth further and further among Gill taxpayers. The estimated total payment to the town would be \$184,839.

The percentage-of-electricity-revenue method would estimate electricity revenues from the project over its 20 years, and assign 5% of the revenue as payment to the town. This would produce a total of \$333,359.

The recommended agreement would include a first-year payment to the town of \$7,500 per AC MW, and then increase annually by 2%. This figure corresponds to a 2% inflation clause built into the proposed lease between Borrego and NMH.

The total estimated cost of this proposal is \$364,460. The assessors believe this option will yield the greatest benefit to the town, be

the fairest to all parties involved, and be the easiest to calculate.

The school will retain ownership of the property, and lease the land to Borrego. While the real estate taxes will be assessed by the school's owner, the selectboard's current understanding is that Borrego would ultimately be paying those taxes.

Due to the tax agreement being a twenty-year contract, a town meeting vote is required, and the selectboard would need to initiate that motion. Jared Connell from Borrego Solar was on hand to answer any questions the selectboard had.

The selectboard decided that no motion for a town meeting was needed immediately, but that they would do so in the future.

Gill Elementary: Quintus Allen

The board approved Gill Elementary principal Conor Driscoll's request for money from the Quintus Allen Fund to repair the school's rock climbing wall. The project will cost \$1,570.

Selectboard members displayed their affections for this project, with Randy Crochier stating, "It's the perfect thing for Quintus Allen – it benefits the whole school."

Animal Control Officer

The town of Bernardston entered an agreement with the town of Erving over the shared use of Erving's animal control officer. Gill is still without a trained animal control officer, and the two towns are willing to take on a third member to the agreement.

The selectboard debated whether they should enter the agreement. All agreed that the idea itself was good, but concerns were raised about the person who would be filling the role.

The selectboard agreed to table it until a future meeting, after one member's concerns had been discussed with the town administrative assistant.

Gas Pipelines

There is an opportunity for Gill to gain intervenor status in hearings concerning Berkshire Gas's contracts for capacity on the proposed Kinder Morgan transmis-

sion pipeline.

Greg Snedeker held reservations over getting the town involved, predicting there would be costs which he would not be willing to incur without direction from town meeting. The rest of the selectboard agreed.

Though Gill filed for intervenor status on the Kinder Morgan pipeline application a few days earlier, the town is neither a Berkshire Gas ratepayer nor a property-affected town; there would be no digging or pipeline work in Gill.

John Ward voiced that he wanted more feedback from the people in town, and that he wanted to hold off on any decision making until after a town meeting.

The selectboard decided that they cannot appropriate any money until a town meeting.

Other News

Auto dealers' licenses were renewed.

The board approved the Fire Department's \$639.04 purchase of new tires for their brush fire vehicle.

The FRCOG is considering granting the Franklin County Food Council technical assistance funding, and asked Gill's input. The Council aims to broker agreements between food service institutions and local producers. The selectboard agreed that they liked the message of the organization, but would like clarification as to how it defined "local" before they could recommend it.

Valeria "Timmie" Smith came to the selectboard to inform them of an aspect of the Governor's legislative reform package which would affect the regional school transportation statute. The state has always fallen short of its goal of funding regional school transportation at 100%, and the administration now wants to add the phrase "subject to appropriation" to the statute.

Firefighter Mark Levasseur was appointed through June 2016.

The MA Fire Service Commission informed the town that chief Gene Beaubien has been awarded accreditation as a fire chief, through their voluntary credentialing process.

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NOTES FROM THE WENDELL SELECTBOARD

January 5 Special Town Meeting Will Weigh Solar Array Tax Agreement

By JOSH HEINEMANN

Although it was not on the agenda at the Wendell selectboard's December 16 meeting, the Massachusetts Broadband Institute (MBI)'s recent rejection of the WiredWest draft agreement rose as a topic of discussion.

The previous day, selectboard member Dan Keller had written an email to the town's former state representative, Steve Kulik, and its state senator, Stan Rosenberg, expressing reservations about the draft agreement similar to those the MBI would raise: that it asks towns to borrow money for assets that they would then not own, and that the complications of withdrawing from WiredWest make that borrowing more of a risk.

Both Keller and selectboard member Geoffrey Pooser said they appreciated the idea that MBI has chosen Wendell as one of four towns to begin the pole survey and make-ready operations on the ground, work that can be done while the creation of the legal and operational agreements is still in progress.

One advantage of a regional network is that homes near town borders may be served more directly from a neighboring town. Pooser said that a condition that MBI has placed on its contribution to the project is that each town run their "last mile" to its houses through the "middle mile" connections MBI built to the town centers.

That middle mile was slow in

its construction, and connecting the last mile to the middle mile in each town may not be the most efficient way to build the extending network. Pooser suggested a possible four-town regional approach would best serve Wendell.

WiredWest was attempting to get towns to sign up in early January 2016.

STM Set for Solar

The selectboard set Tuesday, January 5 as the date for a special town meeting. The warrant has one article, which is to approve a tax agreement between the town and an approximately 2-megawatt solar farm proposed for property owned by Dave Arsenault.

There are wetlands near and inside the site, and conservation commission was scheduled to review the plans. According to Melinda Godfrey, an associate member of the conservation commission, "no decision was reached" at their December 21 meeting.

"It was just a review and discussion," she said, adding that the conversation would be continuing at their December 29 meeting, and that the commission planned to seek an outside opinion.

The planning board is continuing its hearing on Tuesday, January 19.

The selectboard supports the proposed tax agreement, which would bring the town \$25,000 a year in payment in lieu of taxes (PILOT) revenue, probably a more consistent source of revenue than

the PILOT money the state pays for the land it owns in Wendell.

The board has not taken a position on the project as a whole.

Tax Hike

The town's assessors came in for a tax classification hearing, in which they recommended a single tax rate of \$19.38 per thousand dollars of property value, up from \$18.96. The board approved this recommended rate.

The town's excess levy capacity for the next fiscal year is \$463,704.80, and the average household's residential tax bill will increase by \$47.89 over last year.

Assessor Chris Wings mentioned that Governor Baker has recommended increasing the revaluation schedule from every three years to every five years.

Firewood Bank

Ray DiDonato met the selectboard with a proposal to create a town wood bank.

DiDonato said he modeled the idea, with room for adjustment, on a wood bank created in Petersham with input from the Department of Conservation and Recreation.

Trees cut on town property may be split and cut to stove length, and made available in small quantities – about a week's worth of heating fuel – to households in need.

Details that need to be filled out include how to determine eligibility, and how to store the wood.

Keller suggested that DiDonato



Not every selectboard meeting has two plates of treats, but this one did. Town coordinator Nancy Aldrich provided cookies and plastic bags to take them home in.

talk with the highway commissioners. Firewood is often offered at auctions of town property.

Other Business

Town coordinator Nancy Aldrich reported that the town's insurance provider, the Massachusetts Interlocal Insurance Association (MIIA), changed its appraised value of town buildings, with the result that the annual insurance bill is up \$715.

The appraised values of the town hall, fire station, and police station went up, while those of the library, salt shed and senior center went down. If MIIA gave an explanation for those changes Aldrich did not report that.

Good Neighbors was dissatisfied with the cleanup that followed the holiday craft fair at the town hall earlier in the month, and there was an email exchange on the town's listserv. Holiday fair organizers said they left the hall as they thought Good Neighbors wanted it.

The board mentioned that this

was at least the second time postings on the listserv have created bad feelings among the public.

Selectboard chair Christine Heard suggested that people with complaints should refrain from sending public emails while still upset, and first try speaking with the person or group that has offended them face to face and out of public view.

Efforts to reach households with more than two unregistered vehicles have not been successful. No one has responded to the certified letters that were sent, and police chief Ed Chase is reluctant to enforce the town bylaw. If the owners do not pay the town can bring them to court.

Heard said that in the past what has worked is contacting the people involved in person. Board members divided the list, giving each member a number of individuals to contact.

Mike Jackson provided additional reporting concerning the conservation commission.

FACES & PLACES



COURTESY JAMES LENGIEZA

Turners Falls Postmaster Shane Emerson presents the "Charlie Brown Christmas Tree" to raffle winner Dawn Bete on December 22. Raffle entries came with every two books of Peanuts stamps purchased.

Discover Your Ancestors at the Library

TURNERS FALLS – Halloween may be long gone, but there is a group of local residents who gather at the Carnegie Library to talk about dead people every month. These historians are researching their ancestors, making family trees and looking for clues that will help them understand past events in the region.

On the first Thursday of each month from 6 to 8 p.m. the library is closed to patrons, but open to genealogists who wish to explore the resources in the local history room, use the library's computers and share their research tips and success stories as they study the past.

The group welcomes beginners and experienced researchers alike. It is an opportunity to set aside an evening to focus on history and meet with like-minded people.

"The fastest way to clear a room on a holiday is to start a conversation with, 'Guess what I found at the cemetery the other day,'" says Sara Campbell, one of the group's founders. "It is rare to find others in your immediate family who share the obsession with family history."

Sara teaches non-credit genealogy classes at Greenfield Community College, as does Shari Strahan, another active participant at the monthly gatherings. Shari has extensive experience in French

Canadian research, a background that many local people share.

The group has undertaken efforts to share and preserve local records several times during the years they have been meeting at the library. They worked together to post photographs of all of the graves in the Town of Montague's municipal cemeteries on the popular web site FindAGrave.com. They digitized a group of records from the Societe' St. Jean Baptiste that were found in the attic of the Rendezvous on Third Street, the former home of a French Canadian mutual aid society.

Participants may have subscriptions to the various paid genealogy web sites, and are willing to help others navigate those sites, as well as the many free sites. A question is raised, the laptops snap open, and the hunt is on.

At this time of year when families often gather, it is a good time to ask questions and look for family documents that may have been tucked away. If you have been wondering how to start a family tree, or want to kick-start research that was set aside, you may want to come to the Carnegie Library in Turners Falls on Thursday, January 7 at 6 p.m. or subsequent first Thursdays. Your ancestors are waiting.

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TURNERS BOYS BASKETBALL: A DEEPER BENCH

By MATT ROBINSON

Mohawk 62 – TFHS 46

One of the differences between last year’s basketball team and this year’s is bench depth.

Last season, Coach Gary Mullins had five superstars who played most of the minutes in most of the games. Three of these players – Liam Ellis,

Nick York and Tyler Charbonneau – graduated last year, leaving Mullins a huge deficit to overcome.

So far this season, Mullins has gone from a 5-man-heavy offense to a full squad attack. In the team’s December 18 game against Mohawk alone, ten different players saw playing time, and the bench scored 24 points. This strategy should de-

crease injuries, make fouling-out less significant, and keep legs fresh late into the game.

Mohawk is a big team. Very big. All of their starters are north of six feet, and according to the announcer, two of the players are 6’6” and 6’7”.

Mullins combated this height disparity by instituting a full-court press, aggressive defensive play, and attempting to box out under the boards.

And with a minute left in the first half, Turners was within 1 point, 21-20. But then Mohawk went on a 9-3 run and the half ended with Mohawk leading 30-23.

Turners clawed their way back into the game, and with 3:08 left in the third, they again pulled to within 1 point – but again, Mohawk went on a late-period run, and when the whistle blew to end the third quarter, Turners was down by 12, 46-34.

Mohawk stretched their lead in the fourth with accurate shooting from the line and from the floor. When the final buzzer rang, they took the game, 62-46.

James Vaughn led the tribe with 14 points. Nick Croteau got 9. Josh Obochowski and Jalen Sanders each scored 5, and Tionne Brown and Rick Craver both had 4 points.

Tyler Murray-Lavin, Jeremy Wolfram and Javonni Williams also scored for Turners.

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Going up!
Jalen Sanders
(24) takes it
to the hoop for
the Indians
as Turners
Falls High
School beats
Franklin
County Tech
School 64
to 49 in the
December
21 “Coaches
vs. Cancer”
benefit game.



DAVID HOITT PHOTO

the score was 24-15.

In the third period, Turners began hitting their marks and increased their lead to 47-25 after 3. Franklin outscored Turners 24-17 in the fourth, but the Indians were too far ahead to catch, and the final score was 64-49.

Jalen Sanders had 26 points, 13 rebounds and 2 assists. Nick Croteau scored 12 points with an assist and 3 rebounds. Tionne Brown finished with 11 points, 5 rebounds and 5 assists. James Vaughn had 5 points, a rebound and an assist.

Kyle Bergman had 4 points, 2 rebounds and 2 assists. Javonni Williams, Jeremy Wolfram, Colby Dobias and Josh Obochowski also put up points for the Tribe.



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YEAR 14 – NO. 11

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OF THE MONTAGUE REPORTER

DECEMBER 30, 2015

B1

FACES & PLACES: BEHIND THE NEWS



From left to right: Montague Reporter board member and volunteer Lyn Clark, editorial assistant and delivery route driver Gloria Kegeles, and board member and writer Ellen Blanchette convene at an art reception at Turners Falls' Great Falls Discovery Center in October. Kegeles and Blanchette both had photography featured in "The Nature of Life," an exhibit in the Center's Great Hall.



Old school reunion! From left to right: Reporter board member David Brule, former editor Chris Sawyer-Laucanno, reporter Jonathan von Ranson, former editor David Detmold, and erstwhile reporter and board member Wes Blixt came out in early December to the French King Restaurant in Erving. The circumstance was our holiday gala, held this year in honor of Sawyer-Laucanno and Patricia Pruitt, for their years of service to our organization.



On the Road: One year ago, Turners Falls artist and shopkeeper Nina Rossi stepped up to fill a new role at the Reporter, the Features Editor. Nina is responsible for much of the content in this "MoRe" section, as well as features that turn up on the front page. As an added bonus, she turned out to be a fantastic writer, and just the editorial cartoonist we had been looking for! Here she is on a recent Los Angeles vacation, hopefully just pretending to read the paper.

At Year's End: Checking In With Your Community Newspaper!

By MIKE JACKSON, Managing Editor

Ever wonder what goes on behind the scenes, and how we make ends meet? Here are three of the biggest stories about this newspaper in 2015.

1

We're finally building a proper website!

This spring, the Montague Reporter's Board of Directors invited readers and community members to contribute to a Capital Campaign that would help us build for the future. This campaign was a success, netting us \$9,243.67, the majority of which is earmarked for website development and technology upgrades.

We have been much slower to spend this money, as the endless roundabout involved in publishing

a weekly newspaper is everyone's highest priority. As this year draws to a close, most of it is still sitting in a bank account. But we're chipping away at the projects slowly.

Check out the front end of montaguereporter.org – for the last three months, we've been making our A1 and B1 pages available for browsing. Back issues of all these are still available for purchase at the newspaper office.

The next step is more difficult:



newspapers older than 3 months will become available in full, for free, in digital form, with advanced search functionality. We think that our organization, and the communities we serve, will both best benefit from our sharing our archives as public wealth (609 issues and counting!).

Thanks to all who contributed funds. We are spending them wisely. Watch the website grow in 2016!

2

Why do we focus so much on town selectboards?

The very first issue of the Montague Reporter, in October 2002, featured writeups of the decisions made by the Montague and Gill selectboards (or rather, Selectmen). Two weeks later, the paper began its coverage of the Erving board.

In late January 2003, Wendell appeared on our masthead, and the editors wrote then that they

"anticipate[d] shortly including Shutesbury and Leverett in the newspaper's coverage area." Two weeks later, Marianne Sundell filed the first Wendell selectboard notes – under the headline "Too Many Volvos".

But it wasn't until October 2009 that the paper formally expanded its reach to include Leverett. Longtime

editor David Detmold began attending meetings of the Leverett selectboard that month – a beat he would continue until this past April.

When I began to get involved with the Reporter, first as a proof-reader and later as a business manager and editor, I remember David explaining to me the importance of the paper's work in provoking more transparent and accountable

see FOCUS page B3

3

Advertising revenue has yet to recover to its pre-2013 levels.

Typically speaking, somewhere between sixty and seventy percent of the Montague Reporter's total revenue comes from the sale of ad space.

The final checks from 2015 are still being tallied and deposited, but we've made some rough calculations for the sake of discussion in

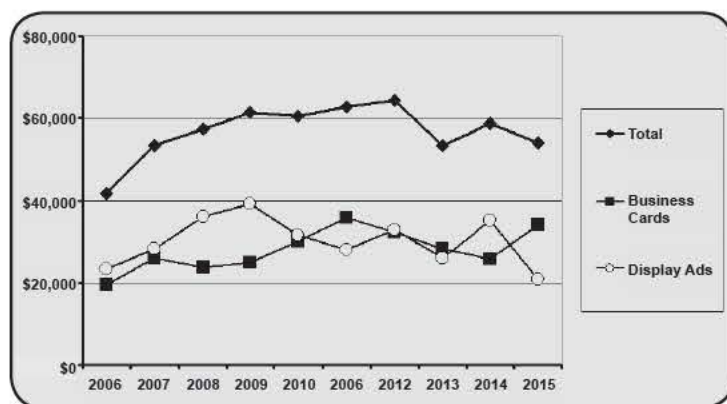
this year-end issue.

A year ago, we set a priority to focus on selling our discount business card spots, which had been declining (see above). This was

largely successful, but was more than offset by a decline in our regular display ad sales.

Overall, we have yet to rebuild

see REVENUE page B4



Love us? Hate us? Not sure? Take our survey on page B4!



POLLY FRENCH ILLUSTRATION

WEST ALONG THE RIVER

November, All December

By DAVID BRULE

ERVINGSIDE – 20 December: It has felt like November all the month of December. Those of us New Englanders who spend much of the time outdoors have felt like the wild geese lost in the fog. No landmarks, no familiar December landscapes to guide us.

Our sense of snow betrayed, the lack of the white stuff has got us disoriented. Many are pleased with the concurrent lack of fuel oil consumption, and the open window in the

bedrooms and parlors in early winter has its advantages.

Looking for Christmas, however, this year is quite a bit more challenging than in other years. November weather prevails, spring bulbs are piercing the soil, and winds blow leaves back onto the grass that was raked clean back in October, after the maple and birch dropped all.

Once the other morning, a rare thin skim of ice formed on the frog pond and the new pup, full of puppy enthusiasm, bounded confidently out onto what seemed a continuous carpet of

leaves – only to find himself suddenly up to his little chest in icy frog pond water.

He seemed to leap straight upward with all four paws in the air, legs spinning like Wily Coyote in the cartoons, to race back to the grassy shore, where the leaf carpet covered a more *terra firma*.

At my writing desk in the north bedroom, I can see that the sun has begun warming the highest reaches of yonder Mineral Mountain. It's not really much of a mountain actually, but its high ridge looms several hundred feet over this end of the Millers River valley and over our little settlement of a neighborhood on the Flat.

An eagle has taken up the osprey's summertime perch on a dead branch halfway up the mountain, and is warming himself in the pale December sun. The calm eagle's eyes pay little heed to the slow-moving figure of Cousine Annabelle and her dog Daisy far below, making their way through the landscape of the

see WEST ALONG page B6

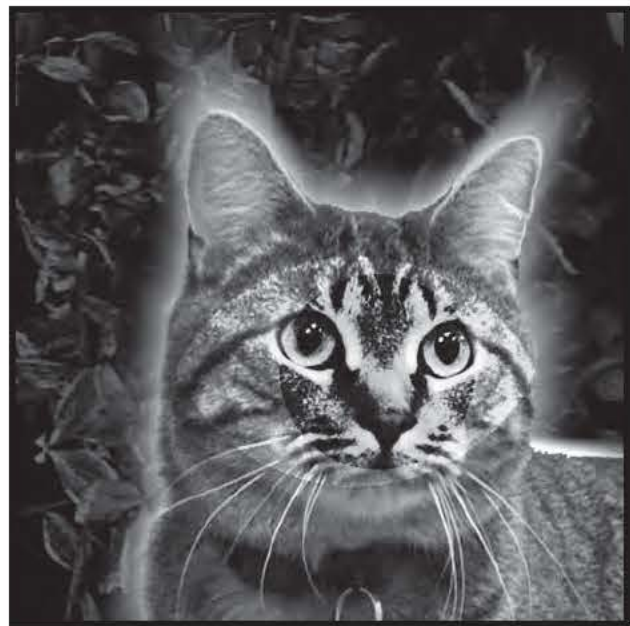


Milkweed (*asclepias syriaca*) and winterberries (*Ilex verticillata*).

MONIQUE BRULE PHOTO

Pet of the Week

Hi, I'm Violet Victor! I know that's a funny name but sometimes a nice person finds you as a stray, names you and brings you to Da-



“VIOLETVICTOR”

kin, where they discover she is a he. Anyway, enough on names. The person who brought me here said I was a bit skittish but friendly, and got along well with her five-year old grandson. I would most likely do okay in a home that had a cat with a spunky personality like mine, and who would like to rough house a little. Come down and visit!

Contact the Dakin Pioneer Valley Humane Society at (413) 548-9898 or at info@dppvhs.org.

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Overture is based in Shelburne Falls. Check out overture.org.

MONTAGUE COMMUNITY TELEVISION NEWS

Shanties, Churches and Committees

By ABIGAIL TATARIAN

As we prepare to welcome the new year, enjoy the following programs – “now available on a TV or computer near you.”

• **Welcome Yule, December 12:** Relive the festivities: sea shanties and the traditional passing of the yule log! Brought to you by local producer Mik Muller. *1 hr, 46 min.*

• **Carlos W. Anderson, “More Than Enough”:** Presented by New Genesis Films. “Every time we give, especially when we give, when it

looks like lack or limitation is presenting itself, we announce to the universe, I am more than enough, and whatever we announce to the universe becomes our identity...” Filmed at Hope Community Church in Amherst on December 13. *44 min.*

• **Montague Congregational Church service, December 20:** Special service, Christmas Music Cantata. *1 hr, 9 min.*

• **Carlos W. Anderson, “Fear Not”:** Presented by New Genesis Films. Filmed at Unity in the City in Brookline on December 20. *28 min.*

• **Cable Advisory Committee, December 21:** Learn more about the decisions impacting your local public access station! *57 mins.*

Something going on you think others would like to see? Get in touch and learn how easy it is to use a camera and capture the moment!

Contact (413) 863-9200, info-montaguetv@gmail.com, or stop by 34 2nd Street in Turners between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m., Monday through Friday.

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THE HEALTHY GEEZER

Kickstart My Heart



By FRED CICETTI

In the last column, we discussed pacemakers. This week we'll continue on the topic of heart regulation with information about implantable cardioverter-defibrillators.

An implantable cardioverter-defibrillator (ICD) is like a pacemaker. Both a pacemaker and an ICD are battery-powered devices installed in the chest to deliver electrical impulses to the heart. In general, a pacemaker is used when the heart beats too slowly; an ICD is used when the heart beats too quickly.

Pacemakers jog the heart with mild reminders that patients usually can't feel. Pacemakers are small; some are only as big as a quarter.

The electrical impulses from an ICD can feel like being whacked in the chest. These devices are about the size of a stack of three silver dollars.

However, ICD devices today function as both an ICD and a

pacemaker.

ICDs monitor for abnormal rhythms and try to correct them. An ICD can reduce your risk of dying of cardiac arrest by stopping these arrhythmias. ICDs have become standard treatment for anyone who has survived cardiac arrest.

An ICD is considered effective in fighting cardiac arrest more than 9 times out of 10. Only 20 years ago, few survived this condition.

Cardiac arrest, or sudden cardiac death (SCD), is not a heart attack. However, if you had a heart attack, you can be at risk for SCD.

A heart attack happens where there's a blocked vessel carrying blood to the heart. This condition leads to the damage of heart muscle. The damage may lead to abnormal electrical signals that sometimes cause deadly heart rhythms. An ICD cannot prevent a heart attack.

If you've watched shows like “Grey's Anatomy” or “ER,” you've probably seen a cliché scene in which a doctor demands electrified paddles to shock a troubled heart. An ICD works inside the chest like these paddles.

ICDs are installed under the skin either under your collarbone or in your abdomen. They're about the size of a pocket watch. One or two flex-

ible, insulated wires run from the ICD through your veins to your heart.

The surgery to implant an ICD can be performed with local anesthesia and a sedative. Then you stay in the hospital for a day or two.

Modern ICD devices have an electronic memory that records the electrical patterns of the heart whenever an abnormal heart beat, or arrhythmia occurs. With this information, the electrophysiologist, a specialist in arrhythmias, can study the heart's activity and ask about other symptoms that may have occurred. This record is available for review during regular checkups by the physician, who can monitor the frequency and severity of problems in the heart's electrical conduction system that may lead to cardiac arrest or other serious heart disorders.

Like pacemakers, ICDs aren't affected by normal household appliances, but, if you have one, you should avoid strong magnetic fields. For example, stay away from magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) machines. Power machines are dangerous. Don't go near arc-welding equipment, high-voltage transformers and motor-generator systems.

If you want to ask a question, write to fred@healthygeezer.com

Senior Center Activities JANUARY 4 to 8

GILL and MONTAGUE

Gill / Montague Senior Center, 62 Fifth Street, Turners Falls, is open Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Congregate meals are served Tuesday through Thursday at noon. Meal reservations must be made one day in advance by 11 a.m.

All fitness classes are supported by a grant from the Executive Office of Elder Affairs. Voluntary donations are accepted. Council on Aging Director is Roberta Potter. Kitchen Manager is Jeff Suprenant. For more information, to make meal reservations, or to sign up for programs call 863-9357. Messages can be left on our machine when the Center is closed.

Tues, Wed & Thurs Noon Lunch
M, W, F 10:10 a.m. Aerobics,
10:50 a.m. Chair Exercise

Monday 1/4

1 p.m. Knitting Circle

Tuesday 1/5

9:30 a.m. Chair Yoga
12:45 p.m. COA Meeting

Wednesday 1/6

10:30 a.m. Monthly Health Scng
12:45 p.m. Bingo

Thursday 1/7

9 a.m. Veterans Otutreach
10:30 a.m. Brow Bag
1 p.m. Cards & Games

Friday 1/8

Refluxology Appointments
1 p.m. Writing Group

WENDELL

Wendell Senior Center is at 2 Lockes Village Road. Call Nancy Spittle, (978) 544-6760, for hours and upcoming programs. Call the Center for a ride.

ERVING

Erving Senior Center, 1 Care Drive, Erving, is open Monday

through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. for activities and congregational meals.

Lunch is at 11:30 a.m., with reservations required 24 hours in advance. Call the Mealsite Manager at 423-3308 for meal information and reservations.

For information, call Paula Betters, Senior Center Director, at (413) 423-3649. Transportation can be provided for meals, shopping, or medical necessity.

Call to confirm activities, schedule a ride, or find out about the next blood pressure clinic.

Monday 1/4

9 a.m. Tai Chi

10 a.m. Osteo Exercise

Tuesday 1/5

8:45 a.m. Chair Aerobics

10 a.m. Stretching & Balance

Wednesday 1/6

8:45 a.m. Line Dancing

9:30 a.m. Blood Pressure

10 a.m. Chair Yoga

Noon Bingo, Snacks

1 to 3 p.m. Veteran Meet

Thursday 1/7

8:15 a.m. Foot Clinic

8:45 Aerobics

10 a.m. Healthy Bones

12:30 p.m. Card Games

Friday 1/8

9 a.m. Quilting

9:30 a.m. Bowling

11:30 a.m. Pizza & Movie

12:30 p.m. Painting Class

LEVERETT

For information, contact the Leverett COA at (413) 548-1022, ext. 5, or coa@leverett.ma.us.

Flexibility and Balance Chair Yoga – Wednesdays at 10 a.m. at the Town Hall. Drop-in \$6 (first class free). Senior Lunch – Fridays at noon. Call (413) 367-2694 by Wednesday for a reservation.

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FOCUS from page B1

town government. Not everything important comes before the selectboard, he said, but sooner or later a lot of it does – and it’s a good, public place to meet fellow citizens and get leads on stories.

Fast forward another six years. Times change, and so does technology. Montague Community Television has been filming nearly every Montague selectboard and finance committee meeting, and the last four years’ worth of these are posted online on MCTV’s Vimeo channel, along with Gill selectboard meetings filmed by a volunteer from that town’s cable advisory committee.

There is serious talk of getting Erving’s cable committee up and running. The town has the money set aside to do it, and in November, Moonlight Davis and MCTV’s Dean Garvin filmed a planning board meeting and put it online as a test run.

Simply televising the meetings at certain times does not necessarily make them accessible to everyone, but posting the video online might, especially now that the gap in internet access is also closing. Leverett has a brand new municipally owned broadband network, and Wendell-ites are working hard on getting a last-mile fiberoptic network.

It is not inconceivable to think that, a few years from now, our efforts to record the doings of these towns’ highest elected officials at work will be entirely surpassed by online video, accessible to all concerned citizens, and shorn of the mediation provided by fallible and biased human scribes.

Is It Worth It?

As the paper’s managing editor, I am not yet proposing we phase out our regular and relentless selectboard coverage, but I do ask our readers to help us weigh its value.

We continue to send reporters out to sit through, scribble notes throughout, and write reports on about 150 town selectboard meetings a year. These reports regularly pass the 1,000-word mark, and we reward these tireless foot soldiers of democracy with an extremely meager stipend for their efforts.

The majority of reader feedback on these pieces I see is in occasional requests for corrections.

Fourteen of us took turns covering various selectboard meetings in 2015, and of those fourteen, only four covered the towns we lived in.

It’s difficult for us to recruit reporters for this work. It might be preferable to have out-of-towners come in to cover – a sort of journalistic exchange program – or it might be a symptom of a lack of civic engagement.

Or, all this could also simply be evidence that we are on the wrong track in assuming these meetings are the best use of our reporters’ time. The selectboard of Montague, a town with a larger population than the other four combined, holds weekly meetings, which are sometimes rancorous, and generally well-attended by the press, town employees, and a peanut gallery of sharp-eyed taxpayers. It makes sense to have a reporter in the room.

But are the limited weekly resources we have available to cover Leverett, Wendell, Erving and Gill best served from atop the tips of their town hall glaciers?

Are we helping spread power more broadly, or just scratching at bureaucratic inflammation?

We need reader feedback – either via the survey on the next

page, or in letters to the editors – to help us decide, over the next year, whether to continue on the present course. Do you rely on our detailed coverage of your town selectboard to stay informed in your community? Do you read, skip or skim it? Do you read about your neighboring towns’ governments to make informed comparisons? Or is this a misplaced emphasis?

In the meantime, let’s stop to appreciate all the time and energy these community journalists, essentially volunteers, have been putting in for our newspaper, and for everyone who lives and works in our coverage towns.

In Their Own Words

Ann Tweedy is one of three reporters who have covered Leverett’s selectboard in a rotation since David Detmold’s retirement in the spring. She says the meetings there have ranged from a half hour to two hours, and notes that there are “a lot of decisions on the shoulders of the three volunteer Selectboard members.... The tone can be a mixed bag. Sometimes cranky and snippy, sometimes polite and engaged, sometimes funny.”

Ann, a Leverett resident herself, says the biweekly meetings aren’t generally well attended by community members, which is “too bad, in [her] opinion,” and wonders if recording the meetings, more outreach, or publishing past minutes and upcoming agendas on the town website with quicker turnaround would help engage her fellow citizens.

She describes the meetings as orderly but fast-moving, and sometimes hard for her to follow while taking notes, though she also notes that the board members “have been excellent in responding to follow up questions.”

Ann says it takes her about an hour when she can write a report entirely from her notes, but that sometimes additional follow-up work is necessary for her to understand the issues discussed.

“I did get some ribbing at the last meeting for providing too many details in the published notes,” she adds. “You know we’re not getting paid by the word, so my attempt to give as much detail as possible was more based in wanting to share as much as possible to residents unable or unwilling to attend.”

Katie Nolan of Wendell handles the Erving selectboard – meetings that take place every Monday, and often run on and on. “10:30 p.m. is not unknown,” she says, to get out of a meeting that started at 6:30.

She describes the meetings as “somewhat formal,” and says there “are always citizens in attendance.”

“They are helpful to me,” Katie writes, “especially Bill Bembury and [municipal clerk] Betsy Sicard.”

She say the present board brings different things to the table: “Jake Smith has a good handle on tech and quantitative issues, Art Johnson expresses opinions for the people who are skeptical of town and other governments, and Bill Bembury has experience and knowledge of tradition – and is putting in a lot of hours volunteering for the admin coordinator duties.”

David also covered the Gill selectboard until about this time last year, and since then, no fewer than six of us have filled the seat. Our features writer **Edite Cunha**, who used to cover the Hawley selectboard for the West County News, went to one meeting when no one else could.

see FOCUS page B4

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE MONTAGUE POLICE LOG

Female In Dumpster Seems Her Normal Self; Guy Threatens To Pour Beer; Kid Climbs Fence

Monday, 12/14

10:30 a.m. Caller requesting to speak with an officer regarding someone stealing her cats. Officer spoke with caller, who met a man at Food City and invited him back to her apartment; she believes that the man “disposed of” her cats. Advised of options.

4:10 p.m. Officer issued a verbal warning to a bunch of kids using the new benches and planters at Avenue A and Third Street for skateboarding.

10:49 p.m. Caller from I Street reports that someone threw a bottle at her kitchen window, smashing it.

Tuesday, 12/15

6 a.m. Caller from Fourth Street reports that a male party in a blue van comes by every morning and peels out; the driver of the van also harasses the neighbor across the street. Officers advised.

8:25 a.m. Caller requesting a wellbeing check on her dentist, whom she contacted this morning regarding a broken tooth sustained in a fall. Caller stated the dentist sounded “out of it” and insisted that she call back after 8 a.m., stating it was only 5 a.m. Caller advised to contact Northampton PD and speak to them regarding her concerns.

9:20 a.m. [redacted] was arrested on two default warrants.

7:04 p.m. Caller reports that at approximately 5:30 p.m. his girlfriend was walking across the bridge going into the Patch over the canal and was struck from behind by a bat by someone on a bike. Victim refused medical attention. Report taken.

Wednesday, 12/16

2:08 p.m. Caller reports that someone appears to be working on a vehicle in the Fourth Street parking lot and possibly dumping antifreeze on the ground. Officer located a vehicle that is being worked on; there is a minor leak and the parties are attempting to correct the problem, looking for speedy dry or kitty litter to clean up the spot.

Thursday, 12/17

7:32 a.m. Caller from Main Street reports that a female just knocked at her door and advised that she had witnessed a male party attempting to steal the caller’s porch furniture. Caller is not missing any furniture and perceived the female as “being off, possibly on something.” Caller called back to report that female is now in the dumpster of the house next to the Montague Mini Mart. Officer spoke to female party, who was located in a construction dumpster. He advised she seemed her normal self. Caller advised to contact MPD if there is any other trouble with this female.

11:29 a.m. Officer spoke to

a male party on Fairway Avenue regarding his vehicle that is registered in Vermont; per officer, party has resided in MA for at least 3 years. Party advised to re-register vehicle.

11:51 a.m. Caller from South Prospect Street reports that a male party was banging on her door and then looking into her windows; male seemed to go to every window. Stayed on line with caller until MPD arrived. K9 Artie tracking into the wooded area behind the house. Officer advises party located on bike headed towards Millers Falls. Report taken.

11:53 a.m. Caller reports that a male party is on video taking quarters from underneath the machines at the Third Street Laundry. Caller states that this is the same male he has on previous video trying to break into the back room. Referred to an officer.

12:04 p.m. Caller from Central Street reports that a yellow truck with an expired inspection sticker that is normally parked in the driveway is not there; she believes that her upstairs neighbor is driving it and that he does not have a valid license. Caller then called back to advise that this party in this vehicle returned to this location. Caller requested that this be documented.

1:05 p.m. Caller from Turners Falls Road requesting to know if it is legal for a parent to open a birthday card that is addressed to their child and take out the check that was put in the card. Advised of options.

11:34 p.m. Caller from Third Street reports that her third floor neighbor has a visitor who is very loud, yelling and singing at top of lungs. Caller requests officer to quiet male as she has a small child sleeping. Units clear; involved male parties advised of complaint and are going to sleep for the night.

Friday, 12/18

8:17 a.m. Caller from Third Street advises that there is a man sleeping on his porch; he does not know who the man is. Officer advised; subject moved along.

9:46 p.m. Officer advises that there were 5-6 youths in skate park area that have now been moved along.

Saturday, 12/19

3:18 a.m. Caller from Grove Street reports loud party at neighbor’s house; ongoing issue. Officer spoke to male who resides at house where party is and advised him of the complaint. Officer also spoke with partygoers in the back of the house.

10:04 a.m. Caller from Bulkley Street reports that her Christmas lights were cut sometime overnight.

Officer advised.

11:55 a.m. Caller from Bulkley Street reports that her unlocked vehicle was entered overnight and that someone poured coffee on her seats. Advised of options.

12:49 p.m. Caller from Seventh Street reports that a woman came to her door claiming to be homeless and asked for money and a ride to Greenfield. Caller allowed female to get into her vehicle but is having second thoughts about giving her a ride; calling from a neighbor’s house. Officer spoke with both parties; female moved along.

7:51 p.m. Report of ongoing threatening/harassment on Fourth Street. Advised of options.

Sunday, 12/20

12:54 a.m. Request for K9 unit to respond to Northfield for a traffic stop. Services rendered.

9:59 a.m. Caller from Avenue A reports that while she was walking her friend’s dog, another dog lunged and bit her friend’s dog. Both dogs were leashed at the time. Officer advised caller of options and will leave copy of call for animal control officer.

9:26 p.m. 911 call from Between The Uprights; male party inside bar threatening to go behind bar and pour his own beer. Caller stated he is screaming and yelling profanities at employees. Just after officers were dispatched, male party left the bar; unknown direction of travel. Unable to locate.

Monday, 12/21

3:13 p.m. Caller from Scalpers Lodge reports that the lodge was broken into and the video camera system was “destroyed.” Officers on scene to investigate. Report taken.

5:47 p.m. Caller, a personal care attendant, reports that her client in Powertown Apartments is missing 5 Fentanyl pills. No signs of forced entry. Report taken.

6:18 p.m. Vehicle vs. pole accident at Thomas Golf Course; airbag deployed. TFFD and MedCare en route. Eversource notified and en route. Road temporarily closed. Report taken.

Tuesday, 12/22

9:16 a.m. Caller from Thirteenth Street reports that her vehicle was broken into and a phone charger and a Garmin are missing. Report taken.

9:35 a.m. Second caller from Thirteenth Street reports that her vehicle was broken into and a GPS is missing. Report taken.

2:42 p.m. Report of dog behaving aggressively towards a pedestrian on Unity Street. Copy of call left for animal control officer.

2:55 p.m. Caller from the Five Eyed Fox requesting assistance as a member of

the Board of Health is in her establishment serving her an order to shut down. Officer spoke to caller, who wanted to make a complaint about the Board of Health members, who she felt were rude and unprofessional. Advised of options.

5:55 p.m. Caller requesting to speak to an officer about incident at Five Eyed Fox this afternoon. Caller, acting as Board of Health member/health inspector, was closing a part of the kitchen. Caller states that female owner became upset and came at her but was stopped by a male party involved with the restaurant. Caller states that female party then kicked her out of the establishment, swearing at her and calling her unprofessional. Officer spoke to involved parties.

Thursday, 12/24

9:25 a.m. Report from Fifth Street of kids throwing items out of a third floor window and yelling “Dad” while doing so. Items being thrown include papers, clothing, and shoes. Referred to an officer.

12:26 p.m. Report of breaking and entering into a garage on G Street. Report taken.

7:54 p.m. [redacted] was arrested and charged with operating under the influence of liquor; leaving the scene of property damage; operating to endanger; and failing to drive in the right lane.

Friday, 12/25

1:30 p.m. Report of youths skateboarding in the skate park, which is still under construction and not yet open to the public. Officers responded and moved youths along.

2:20 p.m. Second report of youths skateboarding in the still-under-construction skate park. Officer moved youths along and zip-tied the open areas in the fencing.

Saturday, 12/26

8:49 a.m. Caller from Federal Street reporting that overnight someone stole all of the Christmas decorations from her front yard. Caller called back a few minutes later advising to disregard; she spoke to her husband, who had taken the decorations inside the garage this morning.

10:05 a.m. Report of a female going around asking for money in the area of Fifth Street/T Street. Area checked; unable to locate.


2:45 p.m. Report of a dozen skateboarders in the skate park that is not yet open to the public. Officers spoke to skaters.

Sunday, 12/27

2:01 p.m. Officer spoke with a youth who was observed climbing over the fence to get into the skate park.

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The Montague Reporter

Official Year-End Reader Survey!

- Do you subscribe to the paper?
☐ Yes ☐ No
... If so, does it arrive when expected?
☐ Often ☐ Seldom ☐ Never
- Do you buy the paper at any of these?
☐ Supermarket ☐ Restaurant
☐ Other _____
... If so, how convenient is that?
☐ Very ☐ Somewhat ☐ It isn't
- How long do you keep a typical issue?
☐ I don't ☐ Days ☐ Weeks ☐ Longer
- After you've read the paper, what do you typically do with it? (Check all that apply)
☐ Keep it for political/voting reference
☐ Keep it for business/shopping reference
☐ Keep it for entertainment reference
☐ Pass it along ☐ Discard it
- How often do you visit our website?
☐ Weekly ☐ Sometimes ☐ Never
- How often do visit our Facebook page?
☐ Weekly ☐ Sometimes ☐ Never
- How often do you find yourself discussing something you read in our newspaper?
☐ Frequently ☐ Sometimes ☐ Never
- How likely are you to continue to read or subscribe to the *Montague Reporter*?
☐ Very ☐ Somewhat ☐ Not Very
- How likely are you to recommend the *Reporter* to your friends or neighbors?
☐ Very ☐ Somewhat ☐ Not Very
- How likely are you to advertise your business, service, or event in the *Reporter*?
☐ Very ☐ Somewhat ☐ Not Very
- What do you think of our price?
☐ Insanely cheap ☐ A good value
☐ Too expensive ☐ No opinion
- What do you think of our ad rates?
☐ Insanely cheap ☐ A good value
☐ Too expensive ☐ No opinion
- How accurate, and fair, do you feel our coverage of local events is?
☐ Very ☐ Somewhat ☐ Not Very
- Is there any content you'd like to see that isn't in the paper now? _____
- How might we improve our news coverage? _____
- Are there other areas we can improve in? _____

17. How likely are you to read each of these?

	Always	Sometimes	Never
Headline news	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lead editorials	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Guest editorials	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Letters to the editors	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Local Briefs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Selectboard notes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
School board notes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sports articles	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Profiles of people	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Arts coverage	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Historical articles	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Book reviews	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>West Along the River</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Gardener's Companion</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Oystergirl's Guide</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>The Healthy Geezer</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cartoons	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Senior center schedule	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>MCTV News</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Police Logs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Ten Years Ago</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Poetry Page	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Spanish Page	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Children's Page	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Entertainment listings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>M.R. On the Road</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
PSAs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other: _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other: _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

18. Are you interested in volunteering?
☐ Yes ☐ No

19. Would you like us to contact you for any other reason?
☐ Yes ☐ No

If so, please list your name and contact info: _____

20. Optional – Demographic Information:

- 20a. What is your age?
☐ 0-10 ☐ 11-20 ☐ 21-30 ☐ 31-40 ☐ 41-50
☐ 51-60 ☐ 61-70 ☐ 71-80 ☐ 81-90 ☐ 91+
- 20b. What is your gender? _____
- 20c. How do you describe your race and/or ethnicity? _____
- 20d. Do you own your home? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Please return completed surveys to:

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(Feel free to drop it in our mailbox!)

Online version available at: www.surveymonkey.com/r/GS592C6

FOCUS from page B3

"I got a sense of people who respect each other and enjoy working together," Edite says of that meeting. "They were efficient, cooperative, and funny. It was cool." She said the hour-and-a-half meeting was very orderly, and that the tone was "polite, casual, friendly, and humorous."

No Gill residents who weren't on the agenda attended it, she said, but "[o]fficials and town employees were attentive and helpful to [her] as a first time reporter."

Our newest Gill selectboard reporter is **Aidan Belanger**, currently in his senior year at Four Rivers Charter School in Greenfield.

"The meetings at Gill have felt friendly and open to my presence whenever I have gone," he writes, saying that they "give an open, collaborative and attentive sense to town government."

Aidan is facing a steep learning curve, as none of the arcane workings of governments in small Massachusetts towns are intuitive.

He says the meetings run "about an hour and a half to two hours," and that his reports take "about three hours to write," leaving gaps and questions that our editorial staff

is happy to help fill.

Josh Heinemann has been covering his own town, Wendell, for us for over a decade now. Selectboard meetings there can end in under an hour, or stretch on for three.

"They talk faster than I write," he says. "I have many half-ideas in my notes, and I have to try to reconstruct the whole idea when I am writing.... Writing takes me a long time."

Josh describes his town's board as "friendly, businesslike, and cooperative," and, echoing most other towns, notes that citizens don't attend without specific business. He says that sometimes he stops in town coordinator Nancy Aldrich's office for clarification after meetings – "she tolerates me" – and that he doesn't enjoy making follow-up calls.

"I like writing about Wendell because board members all have the best interests of the town in mind," Josh writes, "even when their idea of the best for Wendell varies...."

"Democracy can only work if people know what is going on, and how decisions have been made. Where I see dysfunction and pigheadedness in Washington, in Wendell I see human beings trying to make things work as well as they can."



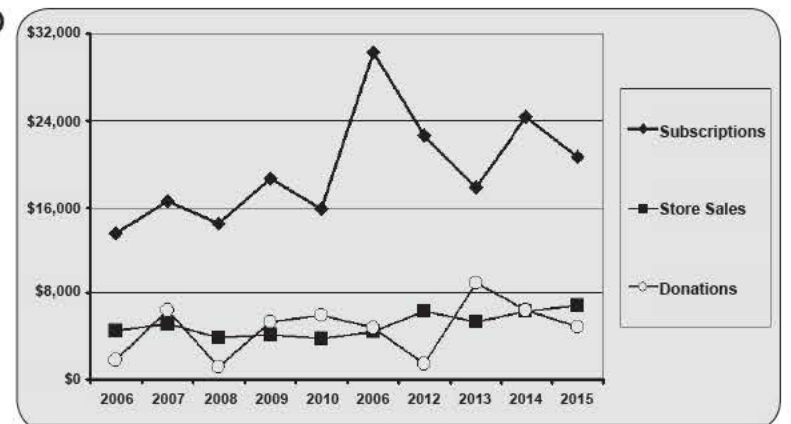
REVENUE from page B1

our advertising business to the levels it reached from 2009 to 2012.

One change we made this year was to take on a part-time ad manager, who will specialize in reaching out to advertisers and helping them get the most out of their business

with our paper. This has the added benefit of making clearer the existing separation of our ad business from our editorial content.

We have high hopes for a strong business year in 2016. Here's the rest of the past year's revenue, put in historical comparison:

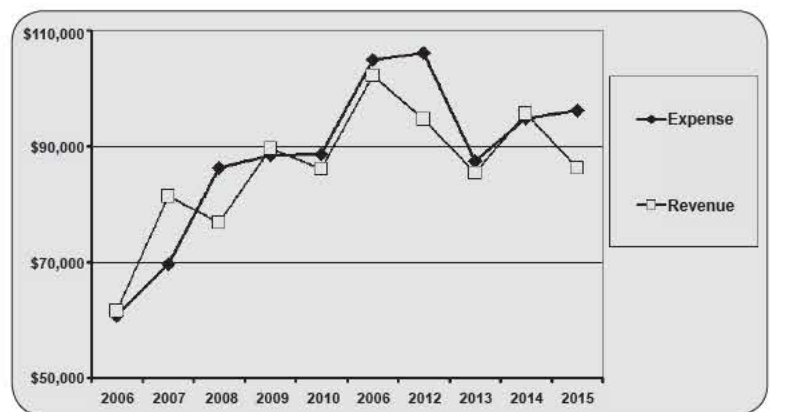


The category of "donations" includes direct donations (such as extra money added to renewal payments) and fundraising, but does not include funds raised during special capital campaigns.

Now may be a good time to mention that we have fallen behind, since

Thanksgiving, in sending renewal notices out to our subscribers. The drop in subscription revenue from last year partly reflects this.

On a good note, we're proud to say 2015 has been our strongest year for store-located sales. (These figures are based on cash received.)



When you add these all up, you'll see that we ran a deficit in 2015. We are making a significant effort to keep our expenses down in every category, but if the *Reporter*

is to be sustainable, we will have to improve our revenues in 2016.

Get in touch with us to volunteer, or brainstorm business ideas!



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ONGOING EVENTS:

EVERY SUNDAY

Mocha Maya's, Shelburne Falls: *Celtic Sessions*. Musicians of all levels welcome to play traditional Irish music, 10:30 a.m.

ONE MONDAY EACH MONTH

Wagonwheel, Gill: *Wagon Wheel Word*. First week of each month. Monthly poetry reading, often with special guest poets. 6 p.m.

Montague Center Library: *Outside the Lines!* Last Monday of each month. Adult Coloring Group. Supplies provided. 6:30 p.m.

EVERY TUESDAY

Millers Falls Library, Millers Falls: Crafts and activities for children of all ages. 3:30 - 4:45 p.m.

The Erving Public Library will be open from 3-6 p.m. for extra patron hours and children's activities for the months of November and December.

EVERY WEDNESDAY

Carnegie Library, Turners Falls: *Story Time*: Thematic stories, projects, and snacks for young children with Mez, 10:15 to 11:30 a.m.

Leverett Library, Leverett: *Tales and Tunes Story Hour*. For ages 0 to 5 and their caregivers. 10:30 a.m. to noon.

EVERY THURSDAY

Carnegie Library: *Music and Movement with Tom Carroll & Laurie Davidson*. Children and their caregivers invited. 10 a.m.

The People's Pint, Greenfield:

Derek Bridges. Live acoustic guitar. 7 p.m.

Pioneer Tavern, Millers Falls: *Watchdog Open Mic*. All musicians, comedians, and magicians are welcome! 8 p.m.

EVERY FRIDAY



Where Do We Go From Here?, 2009, Lesley Coben, charcoal and chalk pastel. From the exhibit "Leaving Our Mark: In Celebration of the Pencil," showing November 24 through March 27 at the D'Amour Museum of Fine Arts in Springfield. Organized by Western Massachusetts artist Steve Wilda, this exhibition explores the diverse medium of graphite, a versatile art material that is easily accessible to a broad range of audiences.

Slate Memorial Library, Gill: *Story Hour*. Stories and hands-on arts & crafts. 10 a.m. to noon.

CeCe's Chinese Restaurant, Turners Falls: Traditional Native American and improvised Asian flute music featuring *Eric Wolf Song*. 6 to 6:30 p.m. Free.

The Pioneer Tavern, Millers Falls: *TNT Karaoke*, 8:30 p.m.

EXHIBITS:

Deerfield Arts Bank, S. Deerfield: *Portraits: Revealing & Concealing*. 36 local artists explore the puzzle of the portrait. Exhibit through 1/14.

Great Falls Discovery Center, Turners Falls: *Junior Duck Stamp Exhibit*. 12/6 through 1/31. Hours for Discovery Center have been expanded (yay!) to Wednesday-Sunday for the winter, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Salmon Falls Artisans Gallery, Shelburne Falls: *Life After Life* by Ken Kipen. Images selected from Kipen's lifetime of camera-work, depicts the forces in nature. January 10 to February 15.

Shelburne Falls Arts Co-op, Shelburne Falls: *Mystery and Magic*. Winter sale of Special

Items by member artists. Group show through 1/25.

CALLS FOR SUBMISSIONS:

Dickinson Memorial Library, Northfield: Seeking artwork for their Doug and Marty Jones Art Space. Artists of any age from Franklin County can submit application found at bit.ly/1SfZh78 or contact library.

Sawmill River Arts, Montague Center: All artists, all ages are invited to provide art for the 3rd Annual Community "6X6" Show. Flyers with details available at the gallery, at www.sawmillriverarts.com, or call: (413) 367-2885. \$5 fee per person for 1 or 2 pieces. Name your own "for

started off on a Great Falls note. This family friendly hike follows a gentle route. Be prepared for cold weather: dress in layers and wear winter boots. Afterward, enjoy a cup of hot chocolate in the Discovery Center's Great Hall. Sign in at the Great Hall at 1:00 p.m. Hike begins at 1:15 p.m.

Deja Brew, Wendell: *The Equalites*. Reggae, 9:30 p.m.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 2

Mocha Maya's, Shelburne Falls: *Glenn Roth*, fingerstyle guitar. 8 p.m.

Pioneer Tavern, Millers Falls: *Community Smokes & Making Eyes*, 9:15 p.m.

SUNDAY, JANUARY 3

Laughing Dog Farm, Gill: *Low-Tech Winter Gardening: Tools, Tactics and Principles* This hands-on, Sunday morning class, presented by Laughing Dog Farm manager Danny Botkin, will focus on the practical details of cold weather horticulture, including (high and low) hoophouse construction, management, winter crop selection, radical compost/soil building, cold weather harvesting and processing tips, plus a demonstration of "guerrilla" cookery (and a shared, vegetarian farm lunch!) \$ 10 a.m.

Deja Brew, Wendell: *Lazy Bones*. Old time jazz, blues and more. 8 p.m.

MONDAY, JANUARY 4

Wagon Wheel, Gill: *Wagon Wheel Word*, open mic poetry reading, 6 p.m.

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 6

Deja Brew, Wendell: *Knitting & Crafts Night*, 7 to 9 p.m.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 7

Mocha Maya's, Shelburne Falls: *The Collected Poets Series*, poetry reading. 7 p.m.

Deja Brew, Wendell: *Eric Love*, 60's and 70's gold, 8 p.m.

Rendezvous, Turners Falls: *Falltown String Band*, 8 p.m.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 8

Rendezvous, Turners Falls: *Drew Paton's Hit Parade*, 7 p.m.

Deja Brew, Wendell: *Barrett Anderson*, hypno-boogie blues. 9 to 11:30 p.m.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 9

Brattleboro Museum & Art Center, Brattleboro VT: Exhibit Openings, *Open Call NNE 2016* and *Recovering the Body: Craig Stockwell and Jon McAulliffe*. *Open Call* is a juried art show of works by 12 selected artists from the North-Northeast region. In *Recovering The Body*, Craig Stockwell and Jon L. McAulliffe join their disparate artistic styles and techniques to explore themes of agency and artistic impulse. Reaching back to the end

of the Heroic Age, this collection of paintings seeks to trace those impulses through the "war to end all wars," through the life and tragic death of the explorer, George Mallory, and to the present moment. 11 a.m.

Wendell Free Library, Wendell: *Twelve Monkeys* Film. An unknown and lethal virus has wiped out five billion people in 1996. Only 1% of the population has survived by the year 2035, and is forced to live underground. Sci-Fi thriller. 7 p.m.


Mocha Maya's, Shelburne Falls: *Village Hill Trio*, jazz fusion. 8 p.m.



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WEST ALONG from page B1
dun-colored woods.

There are always Sunday chores to do around here, so I should get started on splitting wood for the ever-hungry Glenwood C cookstove.

There are still the chunky old blocks left over from the tall century-and-a-half maple that had reigned over this end of the street since great-grandfather Judah's time. We took it down regretfully a while back, knowing that sooner or later it would fall of its own accord in a windstorm, hitting the house, or the car, or the transformer pole across the way. It has fed the Glenwood, offered to the firebox with no small amount of reverence for that aged wood, for two seasons now.

We spared some of the more eccentric burls and knotholes that had served as homes for squirrels,

screech owls, and wood ducks over the years. Those relics are stowed in a special place in the wood shed. The next generation will probably have less respect for these whimsical curiosities I've saved, but I can't bring myself to toss them into the fire, at least not this December.

21 December: The sun rose, just barely, behind a veiled sky, clearing the rim of our valley just after 8 a.m. This is a classic December sky that should foretell snow in the offing, except for the fact that the thermometer is hovering at fifty degrees.

A few winter birds, juncos and an occasional tree sparrow visit the yard, and the blue jay clan is beginning to grow as in the past years. Their numbers will reach thirty or more before much longer, but the open winter has kept the stress level

on all the creatures here quite low.

Even the chipmunk, who should be tucked away and sound asleep by now, is out this late in December, and the opossum makes his nightly rounds from suet post to compost pile, free from worrying about frost-bit tail and ears.

This afternoon was spent in a timeless landscape on the edge of the Montague Plains. Our Wampanoag friend Elizabeth came out from the Vineyard on business, and on a mission to gather milkweed stalks on Mineral Mountain. Without any snowfall, the stalks are still standing, not flattened by snow or wind; even the seed pods are still intact, although open, and most seeds with their downy parachutes have been scattered to the four winds as nature intended.

We roamed the dune and dun-colored grasses, piling up stocks to be shucked of their shell case stems, with their inner strands of soft fibers to be spun as would be done with the flax plant. Elizabeth will then blend the strands into her weaving over the winter.

A mild breeze, pale sun, and bleached grasses created a feeling of early winter peace, and of place out of time. The soft talk and the irresistible teasing play of the new pup added to the atmosphere that seemed only possible on this one day, on a day like this leading up to Christmas.

December 24-25. Christmas Eve feels more like an eve in mid-April than late December. Stars are out in the early dusk, the sun setting in the west sends a bright red glow over the

yard. The river is swollen with days of rain and it rushes loudly by, with no leaves on branches to muffle the sound. Try as we may, it's difficult to summon up that Christmas feeling, it's more like a December 25 in the Carolinas or Virginia rather than in northern Massachusetts.

Yet we can still participate in the old rituals, since for some of us this holiday is a state of mind. In this old homestead, we greet members of our extended family as well as those who have come down to us through the centuries, who are no longer in this physical world, but rather in the world of the spirits. Because of them we are still drawn to ceremony at this time of year, to early memory, and we conjure up their presence. They are the ones who have gone before us, and on whose shoulders we stand.

For many, this is the season of parties, of over-indulgence, and of the deep pleasure of giving and receiving gifts. But Christmas is also the season of remembrance.

In an old house like this one, where so many generations of our family have lived under a simple rough-hewn roof, the bark still clinging to the rafters after a century and a half, we are closer to our ancestors than in most times of the year.

In my solitary walk at dusk on this Eve, the benign shadows of the Old People begin emerging, pleased to be remembered. All those hearty, tragic, hard-working and hard-living men and women, fighters, drinkers, and gentle souls, they all come from the shadows of the trees and woods, and we'll set the table for them too. At this time of year more so than any other, I will be reminded of the traces

of the Celt, the Indian, the African, and the Yankee that I carry within.

The old rancors, arguments, and tragedies will be forgotten this evening, as those spirits are pleased to be remembered, and pleased to take their places at the table, if only in the active memory of my imaginings. Christmas Eve can do that to you.

December 28-29. Now the winter is back, to signal the end of the old year. With the temperature at the freezing point for the first time in weeks, the air we inhale is sharp and gives a boost to our flagging year-end energy. Across the skies, row after row of hump-backed clouds, looking more like buffalo than fleecy sheep, charge into the east.

These last days of December will change from golden mild mornings to gray, with icy wind driving the snow before it. The New Year will be upon us, and our woodstove and hearth will draw to us once again the closest members of our far-flung family for a few hours, to welcome in the first day of January.

I'm looking forward with particular anticipation to this year's first-footing. It's an old custom that bestows a particular honor on the first person to come in the door on the first day of the New Year. Our grand-niece, Miss Ada, will be the seventh generation of family to cross the threshold of this homestead.

We can take comfort that we have endured over the generations in spite of all, and confirm our great expectations for the New Year of 2016.



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