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The Montague Reporter

YEAR 13 – NO. 10

also serving Irving, Gill, Leverett and Wendell

\$1

EDITOR@MONTAGUEREPORTER.ORG

THE VOICE OF THE VILLAGES

DECEMBER 18, 2014

NEWS ANALYSIS

Progress – and Many Question Marks – on Town-Owned Buildings

By JEFF SINGLETON

MONTAGUE – “When are we going to stop putting money into that building?”

This complaint frequently heard at town meetings in small former industrial towns in Western Massachusetts. It is a question voiced at nearly every Montague town meeting.

The answer is usually that a feasibility study is being conducted, a request for proposals is soon being issued, and that the building would cost more to tear down than renovate.

Some people really like old buildings, believing that with a little investment and good attitudes, Montague could become something like downtown Northampton. Others think old factories are just money pits that should be turned into parking lots.

A majority in the middle of this cultural divide is not sure what to do, but is reluctant to spend public money on these buildings.

The situation is complicated by practical realities. Town ownership



St. Anne's Rectory, on J Street, has no internal plumbing, HVAC, or elevator.

may look a bit socialistic, but bad things can happen when the free market takes control. A huge and appealing factory selling for well under \$100,000 might be bought for speculative purposes. The owner, wearing old green clothes and illegally living in the building, may fill it up with recycled paper, creating a major fire hazard.

He may also allow the roof leaks to multiply, let the pipes freeze, and even strip the structure of its copper conduit. A man employed to strip the copper may be nearly electrocuted, and could perhaps try to burn the building down for revenge.

see BUILDINGS page A5

A Degree of Precision

By TIA FATTARUSO

TURNERS FALLS – Students, families and friends gathered at the Franklin County Technical School (FCTS) Friday to honor graduates of the Franklin-Hampshire Middle Skills Manufacturing Initiative, or MSMI, training. It was the third graduation for this twelve-week program in advanced manufacturing, designed to help develop a workforce with the skills employers are looking for and open new doors for under-employed and unemployed adults in the region.

“You’ve learned a skill nobody can take away from you, and you’ve learned how to learn and nobody can take that away from you,” Robert Pura, president of Greenfield Community College,

told the graduates.

That skill, entry-level Computer Numerical Control (CNC) machine operating, is in high demand. According to Alyce Styles, who serves as GCC’s director of workforce development, there are over 250 manufacturing facilities in the two counties, with growth projected over the next five years.

At the ceremony, Patricia Crosby, from the Franklin Hampshire Regional Employment Board (FHREB), attributed the program’s strength to community partnership: funding from a Workforce Competitiveness Trust Fund grant in collaboration with local schools, FHREB and industry partners allowed for a cutting edge training classroom at FCTS.

see PRECISION page A7



Recent graduates from the Middle Skills Manufacturing adult-training program work on CNC lathes at the Franklin County Technical School.

Input Sought On Tobacco Regulations

By ELLEN BLANCHETTE

MONTAGUE – The board of health held a public hearing on Wednesday at town hall to discuss proposals regarding the sale of tobacco products. The town’s director of public health, Gina McNeely, has recommended raising the purchasing age for cigarettes and other tobacco products from 18 to 21.

After much discussion, the board decided to hold a 30-day open period for comments, and take up the question at its January 21 meeting.

The hearing gave members of the general public and others who wanted to speak in support of the changes being proposed time to address the board on this issue.

Cheryl Sbarra, senior staff attorney for the Massachusetts Association of Health Boards, recommended the town bar tobacco sales to under-21 customers, ban flavored tobacco products, and regulate cigar packaging. Delaying teens from beginning to smoke, she said, increases the odds they won’t start.

Kara McLaughlin, project director of the Gill-Montague Community School Partnership, spoke in favor of the proposals, which she said would improve the health of the community. She advocated taxation as a strategy for reducing use.

Ken Farbstein of Needham spoke see SMOKING page A8

It’s True: The Train Is Coming!

By ELLEN BLANCHETTE

GREENFIELD – It’s official! Amtrak trains will begin arriving at the John W. Olver Transit Center in Greenfield, Massachusetts on Monday, December 29.

The Vermonter will leave the Greenfield station at 1:07 p.m. daily, with a stop at the newly renovated Northampton station at 1:31 p.m., then go on to Springfield and points south, including stops in Hartford, Connecticut, New York City, Princeton Junction, Trenton, and Newark, New Jersey; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Wilmington, Delaware; Baltimore, Maryland and Washington D.C.

The Amherst station will no longer be included in station stops, avoiding the time-consuming turn-around in Palmer. The Vermonter will arrive at New York City’s Penn Station at 6:25 p.m., approximately the same time it has always arrived, but with the convenience of leaving directly from Greenfield.

For return trips, a northbound train will

arrive at and depart from the Greenfield station at 4:27 p.m. daily, as it stops on its way to points north in Vermont.

On the Amtrak website, www.amtrak.com, travelers can now make reservations for trips on or after December 29. The website is still a little clunky, so if you have trouble bringing up the Greenfield station, use the alphabetical station listing to find it.

Tickets will not be sold at the Transit Center, so passengers will need to purchase them in advance either by phone or online. Amtrak has new technology that can read a reservation saved on a cell phone or tablet. Or you can print out an e-ticket at home and bring it with you. These have an imprint that can be read by the conductor’s hand held scanner.

If you lack all of these technologies, you can make a reservation by calling 800-US-RAIL (800-872-7245). Bring a copy of the reservation number with you, and the train conductor can use it to verify your reservation. Traditionally, conductors have been able to sell tickets on the train, but it is frequently more expensive and Amtrak prefers passengers have a reservation.

The cost of tickets is in line with recent costs: a trip from Greenfield to New York City will cost between \$61 and \$89, depending on availability. The earlier you can make a reservation, the better the price will be as there are only so many discounted tickets available for any trip.

see TRAIN page A8

In Wendell, Earth Day Comes At Last

By DAVID DETMOLD

It has taken a while to move in, but a big new part of the environmental movement has finally arrived in Wendell.

This is a huge, Earth-changing story, thanks entirely to the dogged determination of a seemingly unassuming couple: Jonathan and Susan von Ranson.

If the rest of us were to move into the house they built for themselves after overcoming every obstacle the bureaucracy of local and state government could throw at them to protect the status quo, climate change would be halted in its tracks, species destruction could be mitigated, foreign wars would lose their *raison d’être*, and a host of societal evils could be addressed with renewed vigor and a plenitude of resources.

On November 22, Jonathan and Susan von Ranson finally received legal permission to move into their non-electric, wood-stove-heated, compost-toilet-trained, root-celled, water-table-friendly home.

It’s too exciting to waste a quotidian detail, so I will just let Jonathan von Ranson, a grey bearded, stoical upright man, tell it like it is.



Since this 2008 barn raising, the von Ransons have sought approval to live without electricity or standard plumbing in their apartment.

“Three weeks ago we were granted our occupancy permit [Wendell building inspector] Phil Delorey,” he began. He was seated at the dining table in the glow of two oil lamps, whose wicks left his face in the soft glow of semi-shadow.

“We first spoke to him about applying for a building permit in September, 2007.

“Because of the unusual nature of our proposal, a 760-square-foot, two-story apartment in our barn that, contrary to Massachusetts state building code, would have no hot and cold running water, no electric wiring, no hard-wired fire alarm, and no toilet plumbing, Phil said to hold off until we’d been before the town boards.”

That process began with

the planning board, which ultimately approved the von Ransons’ plan. However, the local health board also had a role to play. The board of health oversees things like hot and cold running water, and septic systems and their impact on the town’s water supply – important in a town that has such a high water table as Wendell, perched with the town on its ridge.

Board of health chair Harry Williston stood up to say the admittedly non-code apartment they wanted to build in the barn would never happen.

At an official board of health meeting a few weeks later, Williston raised his voice for more emphasis. “It’s a barn!” he roared,

see SIMPLE page A6



Inside the large waiting room at the John W. Olver Transit Center in Greenfield, riders wait for the bus. Outside, workers finish the canopy for the platform in preparation for the Amtrak train, which will begin making station stops at the end of December.

BLANCHETTE PHOTO

The Montague Reporter

"The Voice of the Villages"

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Founded by
Arthur Evans Harry Brandt David Detmold
August, 2002

CORRECTION

Last week's Montague selectboard notes (December 11, *New Solar Facility on the Landfill?*, page A5) asserted that the strategy session concerning negotiations with Comcast featured participation by cable advisory committee members Jason Burbank and John McNamara. Mr. McNamara was not there; the second committee member present was selectboard member Mark Fairbrother. We regret the error.

How To Pitch In: Our Wish List

Hello, dear readers! This will be the last issue of the *Reporter* this year. We will not publish Christmas week, and will return on New Year's Day with a very special issue.

If you are just joining us, we are an independent, nonprofit community newspaper, still flying by the seat of our collective pants after a whirlwind first twelve years.

Given the recent retirement of our editor-in-chief, and it being the time of the year for lending a hand, reflecting on priorities and starting fresh, many of you have asked us how you can support this project.

By way of an answer, we've organized our thoughts into a wish-list. This paper aims to improve by nurturing your participation. Please take a minute to see if one or more of these speaks to you.

1. Read. This may sound obvious, but we know busy people who let the papers pile up. This newspaper will get better the more people read it.

2. Subscribe. This is a traditional and excellent way to support a newspaper. If you live in our coverage area, the basic delivery rate is \$40 a year. You can pay for a half year at a time, or two years.

Due to the cost of postage, mailed subscriptions are \$60 a year. If you happen to live within our "walking" routes — much of Turners Falls, Montague City, Riverside and right around Montague Center — we offer a discounted rate of \$25 a year.

Send in a check, call 863-8666, or write to subscriptions@montaguereporter.org.

3. Take out a gift subscription. Looking for a way to welcome a new neighbor to the area? How about a way to help someone who's moved away feel connected to their hometown?

Contact us and we'll start them off with a subscription. We notice a lot of these come up for renewal in December, and suspect they are serving as Christmas presents.

4. Write a letter or op-ed. We think it is important for the voices of all community members to be heard, not just those who have the time to work for us as reporters. We don't get as many letters as we'd like! Most weeks, we run every one we receive.

If you think you have more to say on a topic, get in touch with us to discuss writing a guest op-ed. Never mind if you don't think you're a writer — get it on paper, and our editors will be happy to help you pol-

ish up your drafts. Email editor@montaguereporter.org.

5. Send in your photos or drawings. Do you have any good shots taken around our towns? How about older photos you've found in drawers? Or maybe you have a talent for illustration.

Our towns are beautiful and full of great people. While we can give tiny stipends to folks taking photos of events on assignment, we can't really employ photographers to roam around looking for the truly good stuff.

Luckily thousands of you have cameras right in your pockets, since they're putting them in telephones now. Put them to use — the town paper is like Instagram, except that we'll still be able to see it after the catastrophic solar storms.

If you have something interesting you want to share with our readers but can't get it to us in digital form, just stop by our office at 177 Avenue A in Turners Falls, or mail it in. We'd be more than happy to scan it ourselves.

6. Write an article. Often our readers will notify us of something they find interesting, but we find ourselves unable to recruit a willing journalist in time to cover it. We invite more of you to just give it a shot.

Many will insist, "I am not a writer!" We'll be the judge of that. Our editors, anyway, are editors, and we'll give patient feedback, workshop a piece into viable form, or help with a rewrite. Contact editor@montaguereporter.org or call the above phone number to pitch a story, tip us off to news, or just to brainstorm.

7. Place an ad. Do you have a business? Does a friend or family member? As a valued customer, do you have the ear of a local business owner?

Our best deal is in the business card ads at the bottom of each page. They cost \$9 (black and white) per issue, and run for twelve issues. If you're planning an event or running a sale, consider taking out a larger display ad. They're \$7 per column-inch, \$8.50 in color. Contact ads@montaguereporter.org for all ad-related inquiries.

8. Donate, or become a sustaining subscriber. An ardent minority of our readers go beyond the cost of subscription, and beyond donating on top of their renewal checks each year, instead pledging a certain amount per year or per month. Sus-

taining supporters get a subscription, which cuts back on renewal paperwork.

We have several ways to accept this much-needed help. The most convenient is to set up an automatic, direct monthly payment through your bank or ours. We also have a PayPal account (it's montaguereporter@gmail.com), and some people simply mail a check every month or quarter. One supporter even gave us a \$20 bill each month for the last year. Spread throughout our readership, this generosity adds up, and every cent is poured back into strengthening the paper.

If you are hoping to make year-end one-time contributions to worthy causes, we ask you to consider us this year.

9. Volunteer. Come down to 177 Avenue A to say hello, and see what you can do to pitch in. Even with all those donations, our paper simply would not exist without our small army of helpful volunteers.

We'll find a task to suit your inclinations: everything from vacuuming the office carpet, to proof-reading, to stuffing envelopes, to hawking subscriptions at events is needed. For those men and women who enjoy committee work, there are openings on our board of directors.

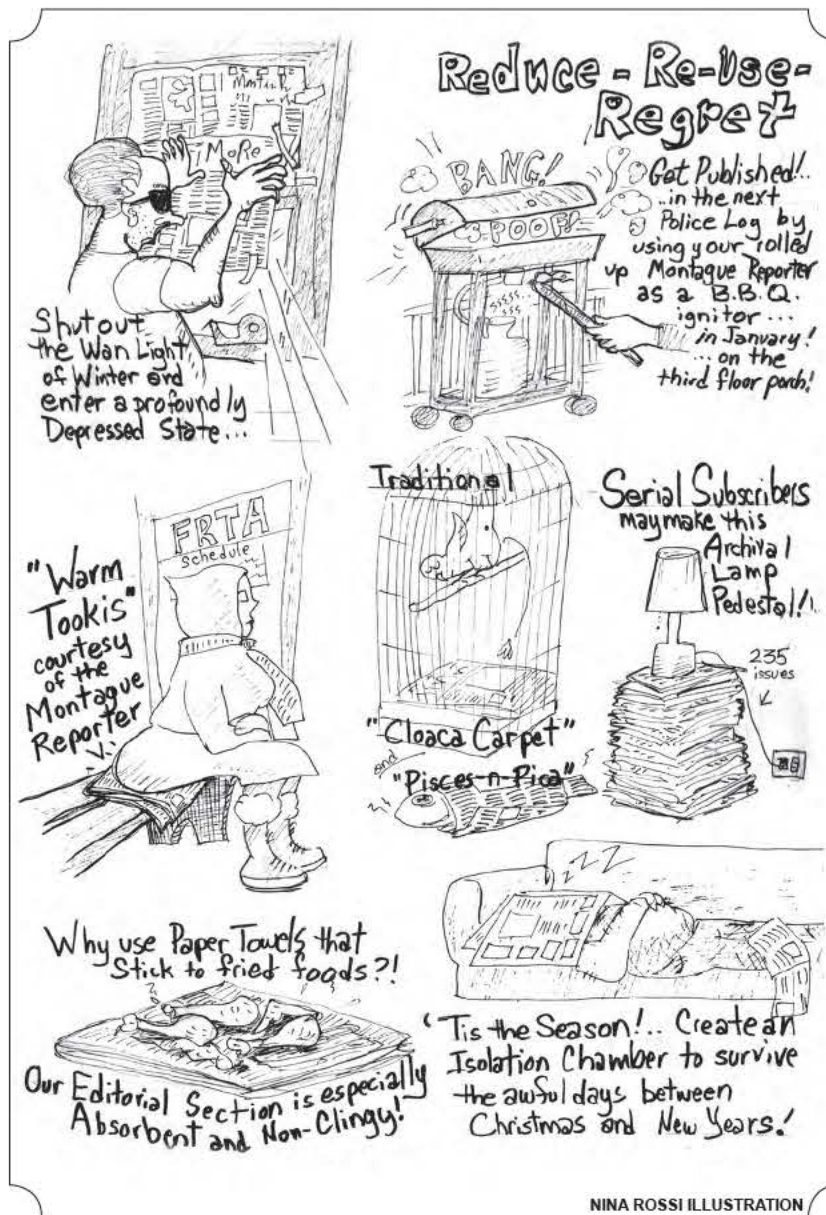
10. Cover a beat. Speaking of openings, one of our regular selectboard reporters asked this week to be relieved. If you have every other Monday free and would like to learn a new trade — rank amateurs welcome! — perhaps this year is your year!

Contact our editors and we'll start making a journalist out of you. If you know anyone who might be interested, ask them, too.

11. Spread the word. Despite all the kind words and encouragement you give us, we really feel *Montague Reporter* remains one of the area's many "best kept secrets". We tend to do pretty well among residents who concern themselves with our towns' governments, and less well among those who don't.

New readers are worth more than a dollar a week to us — if they give us feedback, they will broaden our scope, and improve our quality.

Think about the people you know in the community who are still settling in, and cautiously beginning to put down roots. Ask them if they read the *Reporter*, and lend them a copy — we'll also be happy to drop off a couple extra to any subscribers who want to proselytize!



Letters to the Editors

And Our Proofreaders!

In my last-minute revision of my farewell editorial last week I somehow managed to drop a paragraph out of the final version.

This paragraph read: "Hugh Corr and Gloria Kegeles spend each Wednesday night proofing the paper. It's impossible to say how many errors they've caught over the years, but I can certainly say that without their dedication and

exceedingly sharp sense of the English language, the paper would be far less polished."

Sorry Hugh and Gloria. And a special note to Gloria: Fermented veggies will be on my menu. Thanks.

Christopher Sawyer-Laucanno
Turners Falls

You Got It Wrong

Financial information in the December 4 issue of the *Montague Reporter* needs correction and explanation.

In the front page report on the November 25 meeting of the Leverett selectboard, your reporter stated that the preliminary estimate of Leverett's assessment to the Amherst-Pelham Regional School shows an increase of \$180,000 over the current year. The actual projected figures are an increase of \$25,972 (1.8%) for operating and \$10,928 for the capital plan.

It is true that the regional school cannot cut our portion without drastically affecting the entire budget for the regional school. It is important to note that the figure quoted in the article and the figures above are based on using the same assessment method that the region has been using for years (the "5-year rolling average method"), wherein every town in the region pays the same amount per student.

Because this method is not the state statutory method, it needs to

be voted on by all of the participating towns; if one town votes against the 5-year rolling average assessment method, the statutory method automatically kicks in; in that case, the estimated increase to Leverett would be \$122,000.

As a selectboard, we appreciate that the *Montague Reporter* covers our meetings so that residents can stay informed. It does seem imperative, however, that facts and figures presented in these reports be accurate so that our citizens are not misinformed.

Julie Shively
Leverett Selectboard

Our reporter, and editors, respond: We agree with Ms. Shively; it is imperative that we get the facts straight, and we try to do so in every instance. We are always willing to accept correction and set the record straight, when we err — and we thank the selectboard for correcting the record in this case. We apologize for getting it wrong the first time.

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JESSICA LARKIN ILLUSTRATION

LOCAL BRIEFS

Compiled by DON CLEGG

The Montague Elks Club has for numerous years been donating the fixings for a Christmas dinner to the food pantry of the Franklin Area Survival Center. This year the sixty income eligible families received a 25-lb. turkey along with stuffing, cranberry sauce, gravy, bread mix, dessert, butter, three pounds of fresh onions and five of potatoes.

The holiday season seems to bring out the best in many when donating to community meals, local food pantry and the Western MA Food Bank. When purchasing food elements or picking them up from churches, schools and other organization please remember to not leave them in your vehicle overnight. Once canned or jarred food is frozen it may become un-useable.

Calling all folks, whether youngsters or young at heart, who want to check out if they are on the naughty list or the nice one: Santa Claus is coming to town – or actually, to the Turners Falls Branch of Greenfield

Savings Bank on Friday, December 19 from 4 to 6 p.m.

Santa will be here in person to give last minute tips for those in need, or simply to accept a letter of request. Free pictures courtesy of the “man in the red suit” and Greenfield Savings Bank. Please call (413) 863-4316 to reserve a photo spot. Walk-ins will be accommodated as time permits.

Watershed Investigators at the Great Falls Discovery Center offers, “What’s Wrong in the Watershed?,” on Saturday, December 20.

Somebody has left litter along the Connecticut River. Join GFDC staff at your convenience between 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. to use your detective skills to locate items in the exhibits of the Discovery Center that don’t belong there. Can you find all of the litter?

Watershed Investigators is a kid-oriented program that focuses on hands-on discovery of local nature. Join refuge staff as we explore different ways to look at the natural

world around us. This program is geared towards grades 2-5, but everyone is welcome.

The Foundation for Educational Excellence is hosting a family-themed movie at Greenfield Garden Cinemas on Saturday, December 27, at 9:30 am.

Tickets will be \$5, and all of the money raised will go to their grant fund. Call the cinema at 774-4881 for more info on the presentation.

There will be a concert against the pipeline, benefiting the Franklin Land Trust, with Jeffrey Foucault and Kris Delmhurst at Memorial Hall in Shelburne Falls on Saturday, December 27, starting at 7:30 p.m.

The land trust is ardently opposed to the route of Kinder Morgan’s proposed natural gas pipeline, which includes scouring 35 permanently-conserved parcels of land.

The trust is a non-profit organization that works with landowners and communities to permanently conserve farmland, woodland, and other lands important to the economy and character of western Massachusetts. It’s a founding member of North East Energy Solutions (NEES), a new coalition recently established to provide sound analysis, effective advocacy, and public education related to proposed energy transport projects such as the Kinder Morgan pipeline.

Tickets are available at World Eye Books in Greenfield, Boswell’s Books in Shelburne Falls, and online: www.parlorroommusic.com

And at 8 p.m. on New Year’s Eve, come to a free concert at the Shea Theater in Turners Falls featuring the music of the Beatles.

Beatles for Sale is a five-member, Massachusetts-based tribute band committed to recreating the sounds of the Beatles live in concert. More info on the band can be found at www.beatlesforsale.net.

The annual New Year’s Day Sawmill River 10K Run sponsored by Montague Parks & Recreation Department, starts and finishes at the Village Common in Montague Center.

For registration info please visit the parks and rec website. Day-of registration starts at 9 a.m.; the race begins at 10 a.m.

And at 1 p.m. on New Year’s Day, join DCR staff for a leisurely, family- and dog-friendly First Day Hike down the Canal Side Rail Trail. Dress for cold weather and wear boots, meet at the Great Falls Discovery Center at 2 Avenue A in Turners Falls, and join them for hot chocolate in the Great Hall afterward!

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Great Falls Middle School Students of the Week

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Arron Beattie-Riddle

Grade 7
Jonathon Fritz

Grade 8
Anna Kochan

GUEST EDITORIAL

Are We Allowed to Criticize MCTV?

By JEFF SINGLETON

MONTAGUE – On Monday night, a reconfigured Cable Advisory Committee (CAC) made significant progress developing a strategy for the town’s negotiations with the cable company Comcast. The discussions about a new contract with the local access station, MCTV, were more problematic. The CAC decided to extend the contract and revisit the evaluation of the station, which they feel is flawed. I agree.

Unfortunately, there seemed to be little change in the attitudes of the MCTV folks at the meeting. They appear completely unwilling to address the problems at the station, or listen to suggestions for solving them. Instead they continue to spend their time complaining about the CAC-MCTV evaluation process.

The problems at MCTV are certainly not fatal. The station is professionally managed, with reasonable technical quality for local access, but there has been very little local programming or community involvement.

Several of us have suggested ways the situation might be improved, including changes in the organization of the station and its budget. The response has been to reject these ideas as “not what local access is,” and to go into attack mode. Most of this has been directed at the CAC.

There is certainly a good deal to criticize. Some of the CAC’s criticisms of MCTV in the evaluation do not seem well supported, and their report makes recommendations about the station’s governance structure that are highly problematic. Furthermore, the committee apparently did not keep minutes, and failed to respond to legal public records requests in a timely manner – both violations of state law.

The CAC was a hard-working group of volunteers, to be sure, but they clearly went off the track during the past year when confronted with both the Comcast negotiations and the MCTV evaluation.

However, the board has reorganized and is now acting like a normal committee: keeping minutes, responding to legal requests for documents, etc. That was clear

at last night’s meeting, where the MCTV folks were given plenty of time to speak (and were listened to!). One would think the MCTV supporters would be happy about this development. One would hope that we could now turn to addressing the problems at MCTV.

Apparently not! Recently MCTV board member Mike Langknecht and Kathy Lynch filed four new complaints against the CAC under that state Open Meeting Law (OML). These complaints, which contain multiple sub-complaints, focus on CAC actions before the committee was reorganized.

While the documents appear to contain some valid criticisms of the CAC, they contain little evidence of significant violations of state law. Not every problematic action by a local committee is an OML violation.

This is worse than overkill. A state law designed to encourage transparency is being used as a weapon in political combat. Wouldn’t it be better for MCTV to address some of its own problems, as opposed to filing complaints against another town board?

I would urge the selectboard to extend the MCTV contract until the end of the town fiscal year (June 30) and request that MCTV produce a coherent, viable plan to address the lack of local content and community involvement. That would hopefully involve public discussion and serious consideration of some of the criticisms and suggestions that have been made.

If the station and its supporters continue in attack mode, I feel we need to look for another local access provider. If, on the other hand, MCTV shows it is willing to be more open-minded, the station should be given a new contract for a short duration – at most three years – to see if the situation turns around.

I also feel the contract should go to town meeting in May for approval. Town meeting is the reason MCTV now runs local access, and the station should be accountable to it.

Mr. Singleton is a former station manager at MCTV, and currently covers the Montague Town Hall beat for the Reporter.



Another Letter to the Editors

Thanks for a Job Well Done!

As he departs from his role as editor of the *Montague Reporter*, I would like to take this opportunity to thank Chris Sawyer-Laucanno.

I was a board member of the paper at the time when Chris took on his role as editor, a time when the paper was in a state of great transition. Chris stepped into this position with professionalism and dedication, and we are lucky to have had

him at the helm.

Thanks, Chris, for not just keeping the paper afloat, but also for helping to drive it forward. The *Montague Reporter* remains an important source of news for the community and beyond (as I can attest, as a continued loyal reader now living in Maine).

Joanna Frankel
Portland, Maine

LAND TRUST INFORMATION SESSIONS



Valley Community Land Trust invites you to attend an information session to learn about their properties for sale in Colrain. These include a house for sale as well as building lots on beautiful, rural land. Application deadline for the house is Friday, January 16. See www.vclt.org for further information.

1 p.m. on Sunday, December 21
1 p.m. on Saturday, January 3
273 Shelburne Line Road, Colrain

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NOTES FROM THE GILL-MONTAGUE SCHOOL COMMITTEE

Progress at the GMRSD

By ELLEN BLANCHETTE

TURNERS FALLS – Gill-Montague Superintendent Michael Sullivan presented his report to the school committee at their meeting on Tuesday, December 9 at Hillcrest Elementary School. He seemed pleased with the way things are going in the district in general and offered several bits of good news.

He wanted everyone to know that, in spite of everyone's busy schedules, the school district administrative team meets every Wednesday for two hours, alternating every other week between on-going management issues and team learning and planning for broader and longer term work.

"Personally, I find it a pleasure to work with our team, which is made up of some very hard-working and talented leaders," he said, adding, "We're a tight-knit group."

Sullivan said he has been able to visit classrooms with principals in all five schools. Principals are completing making short mini-observations of teachers with feedback in informal discussions or short reports. They are also completing formal observations of a full period with teachers who are in their first three years of teaching practice.

Principals report to him that the vast majority of teachers are submitting weekly lesson plans on time, and that they are high-quality plans calling for clear measurable objectives and specified assessments of student learning.

Promptness

With regard to their effort to respond to all calls and emails within 48 hours, he said it seems to be going very well. Sullivan said principals report they receive almost no complaints that staff are not responding in a timely manner to requests.

He said he has received just one complaint all year that an administrator failed to get back to someone right away, which is significantly different from last year. "Given how much everyone has on their plate, I think this is pretty commendable," Sullivan said.

Pupil Services

Sandra Donah, Director of Pupil Services at Gill-Montague, offered her report to the school committee. English Language Learners department (ELL) are working to add more staff to increase literacy services for students with issues around a second language.

They have written a grant which they hope will provide funds to support this effort. Also, Gill-Montague currently has 54 students who are being home schooled. Parents of home schooled students provide an education plan to the district for approval.

Donah said there are currently 19 homeless children being educated in the district. It is the district's policy to provide transportation for homeless students attending schools in the district for as long as they are homeless, wherever they may be living temporarily.

She said it's important for the students to have consistency in

their education. The district is also helping to train paraprofessionals in methods they can use to teach students to be more independent. "As long as we have good strong programs and staff we can keep students in district," she said.

Tools of the Mind

Donah then offered a more in-depth review of the Tools of the Mind program, which committee members had requested at the previous meeting. The program is being used at Hillcrest.

She walked the committee through a PowerPoint presentation describing the theory and ideas implemented in this program, then answered questions from school committee members.

Joyce Phillips, committee chair, said it was a wonderful program in theory but wondered how it works in practice.

Donah answered that in the three pre-K classrooms you would see much attention-focusing/self-regulation in literacy, with students being "plan-ful" in learning, talking to a partner (buddy) about what they are each learning.

Each module includes several aspects: the subject matter of the story, the teacher reading the story itself, then practice of making lines and drawings that relate to the story. The lines are a step towards learning how to write letters. Each student works with a buddy to complete the exercise as they share with each other what they've learned.

In the three kindergarten classes, Donah explained, the students and teacher work together to generate facts, taking the subject matter of the storybook and looking at the facts behind it. The teacher reads one or two chapters to the class and the students create their own chapter book (a student-generated chapter is one sentence).

The kindergarten students also work on what is called "voice to line" match, taking the sound of the word and matching it to a symbol which represents the sound, a process that would lead the children to learn letters and recognize words by sight. All of this is done with fun in mind. Donah said right now the students are building pirate ships.

Structure and Freedom

Sandra Brown voiced her concern that children are too directed and asked how much unstructured play time students have.

Donah said children get 30 to 40 minutes each day of free play, which she calls "choice time," meaning they are given a choice of what to spend their play time doing within the classroom. She said they also have unstructured recess time.

Brown also expressed her concern that the program may suppress teachers' creativity.

Jane Oakes said this reminded her of just how much young children are capable of learning.

Resignation and Replacement

Announcing the need to hire a new Pupil Services Director, Sullivan reminded the committee that Sandra Donah has resigned her

NOTES FROM THE GILL SELECTBOARD

Last Call in Gill

By DAVID DETMOLD

The air was splendid with the coming of Christmas. Ice crystals were drifting down in the hollow at the Center of town where the facades of the library, the Congregational Church, and town hall were bedecked with evergreens and sugarplums – at least in the imagination of one reporter who would no longer have to make the weary trip up Main Road from Montague every other Monday night, as I have done for these last dozen years.

Selectboard member John Ward called in from somewhere cold and frosty out in Boston; MCTV videographer Janet Maccucci put him on speaker phone for the pleasure of the gathered listeners seated around the table in the warm and toasty second-story town hall meeting room for the second-to-last selectboard gathering of calendar year 2014. I might phone the last one in.

The room was toasty because the \$13,623 town hall insulation project paid for from the town's Green Community Grant is now, except for a stray vent soffit or two, complete. Town administrative assistant Ray Purington said the work crew from Energia, a Holyoke insulating company, was great to work with, neat and competent, bringing the project in on time and on budget.

Highway superintendent Mick LaClaire was up first, with a request for the town's three highway department workers to take Christmas Eve off, along with December 29, 30, and New Year's Eve.

"You wouldn't get much work done anyways," said board chair Randy Crochier.

LaClaire looked a little like Bob Cratchit asking for time to spend with his wife and family on the holidays, bless us everyone, but the selectboard was more than happy to oblige.

"We're always available for emergencies," said LaClaire, heading toward the door.

Some information was exchanged regarding a missed opportunity

to exchange yet more paperwork with some overworked bureaucrat in Boston regarding the performance of the Riverside pump station, which experienced the failure of an impeller pump recently. That forced Gill to cough up more than \$5,000 for repairs, just four years after the pump was originally installed.

You may be interested to know that Gill pumps its sewage under the Connecticut River – under Barton Cove – to the town of Montague for processing. The piping system and pumps that carry the waste flow from the 114 sewer users in the Riverside district has been the source of some concern since it was discovered the district routinely pumps roughly twice as much sewage, on average, over to Montague as the amount of fresh water the neighborhood water district imports from Greenfield each day.

How is that possible? And how much higher will the sewer rates have to rise before the source of the leak is plugged, or the faulty meter fixed?

These are mysteries which will now await the turning of the calendar year for unraveling.

LaClaire popped his head back in the room to say the highway department has been kept busy clearing downed limbs since the recent storm. Anyone who needs fresh pine boughs to deck the halls for the holiday might just be in luck – call the department at 863-2324.

Don Kruger resigned from the cable advisory committee, citing a lack of personal bandwidth space.

Town hall will be closing early on December 24. Thank goodness for small favors.

The Montague Reporter is seeking a new Gill correspondent. Core duties are attending a bi-weekly selectboard meeting, Monday evenings, and filing a report Tuesdays. Training and a small per-article fee will be provided.

If you or someone you know may be interested, please contact editor@montaguereporter.org.

The members voted unanimously to approve his request.

Location Rotation

This was the second of three meetings to be held in the elementary schools, a practice that was once traditional for the school committee. The last meeting was held at Gill Elementary.

There will be a meeting held at Sheffield Elementary, but Phillips announced they will take a break and have the next meeting at the high school so the meeting can be seen live on television.

The next school committee meeting will be held on Tuesday, January 13, 2015 at 6:30 p.m. in the Turners Falls High School television studio. The meeting at Sheffield will take place February 24.

position as of January 16, 2015. "I am sorry to see her go and want to thank her for her tireless work ethic and drive to establish strong systems and practices in special education," he said.

He then reported having found an excellent candidate for the position. He asked the committee's approval to hire Nancy Parakulas, who has been special education department coordinator at Hampshire Regional High School for ten years.

Sullivan described Parakulas' education and experience saying he felt after several meetings with her that she is a good fit for the district. He told the committee, "She possesses a strong work ethic and collaborative style, and she is driven by a passion to serve those students in greatest need of our support."

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GOOD USED USABLES

BUILDINGS from page A1

On the other side of the coin, public ownership, although expensive and labor-intensive, can produce positive results. The Shea Theatre and Colle Building on Avenue A, both owned by the town of Montague and central to the revival of Turners Falls, are a case in point.

Other buildings can be acquired by the town, then sold to private developers for \$1, under the so-called urban homesteading program, which gives the town a good deal of control over the development process.

The town of Montague currently owns four major properties it would like to sell to private developers: the former Strathmore Mill, the rectory to St Anne's Church, the former Montague Center School, and a complex of four buildings in downtown Millers Falls often called, perhaps inaccurately, the "Powers Block."

Then there is the so-called Cumberland Farms building on Avenue A, not technically a town building but one owned by an independent entity with very close connections to the town. That decaying structure has been maintained with town funds.

The town may also soon acquire other key properties including the former Turners Falls Athletic club on Fourth Street, the former Railroad Salvage building next to the power canal, and the former St Anne's church itself on Fifth Street.

As 2014 draws to a close, we felt it would be a good time to give our readers an update on the state of Montague's town-owned properties.

The Strathmore Mill

The former Strathmore mill, built by the Keith Paper company in the early days of industrial Turners Falls, is today's poster child for the "when are we going to stop putting money into that building?" question.

The Strathmore is a huge, multi-building complex between the power canal and the Connecticut River. The town inherited it through tax title. As a result of neglect and abuse by a former owner, many of the buildings were filled with paper, the electric wiring has been compromised, roof leaks have proliferated, and, until recently, there was no sewer connection or running water.

A key obstacle to development is a lack of good access. A footbridge across the canal is closed because the power company that owns it, FirstLight, has been unwilling to repair it.

And yet the Strathmore remains structurally and visually impressive. It is the kind of former factory that is often central to local development efforts. Town officials have argued that it will cost three million dollars or more just to tear the structures down.

The Strathmore is also not completely empty. A portion of the former factory is occupied by Swift River Hydro which does, as the name suggests, generate hydroelectric power.

Last spring, the Turners Falls Fire

Department cited the building for numerous fire code violations. This forced the town to remove a good deal of the remaining scrap paper, create a water supply, fix the sprinkler system, begin to fix the sewer system, and repair some of the roof leaks. Town Administrator Frank Abbondanzio has called the fire order a "blessing in disguise," making various structures that comprise the factory more marketable.

Abbondanzio, in a report to the selectboard last summer, argued that marketing of the property has been hindered by a "Great Recession" between 2008 and 2013. He suggested that when the real estate market improves, so will prospects for finding a buyer.

The town's discussions with the electric company FirstLight about the pedestrian bridge may well be influenced by the fact that the company is currently seeking a new federal license agreement. The town is also considering applying for grants to repair the footbridge if downtown Turners Falls is designated a "slum and blight" area.

This would presumably require the town to acquire the bridge from First Light. A hazardous materials removal feasibility study is currently underway.

Abbondanzio and Town Planner Walter Ramsey recommend a strategy that focuses on marketing individual buildings in the complex, perhaps under the urban homesteading program. Initial efforts may focus on Building 11, a free-standing structure on the west side of the complex.

St. Anne's Rectory

This building, next to St. Anne's church, is located on 47 J Street in Turners Falls. It was acquired as a gift from a mortgage company by an unusual town meeting vote in 2012, and was burdened with several zoning problems. Boundary lines had been drawn right down the middle of the building which had been, perhaps illegally, separated from the church next door.

Although these zoning issues seem to have been resolved, the structure is currently "a shell," in the words of town planner Walter Ramsey, with no HVAC system and no internal plumbing. It was originally proposed as one of the options for a new senior center, but a preliminary feasibility study concluded that it would not be appropriate for that use.

According to town planner Walter Ramsey, development is "complicated by the fact that this is a three-story building." Certain uses would require the construction of an elevator. The feasibility study found that appropriate uses would be offices, artist studios, and multi-family housing.



Town officials hope to complete negotiations for the Powers Block redevelopment within the next month.

The Powers Block

This complex of four buildings in downtown Millers Falls is considered by many to be an eyesore, and has been a source of litigation over the last decade. The town's 2008 tax taking of one building was contested, but ultimately upheld in July 2013.

A request for proposals in the fall of 2013 produced a developer, a corporation owned by local entrepreneur and contractor Robert Obear. Obear has proposed a mixed-use project that includes a restaurant, office space and apartments. Montague town meeting approved a new liquor license for the property, but this will require state approval and a local hearing process.

Obear has stated that he already has some commitments for occupancy, and proposes to move the offices of his company into one of the buildings. Town officials hope to complete negotiations for a purchase and sale agreement within a month, and construction is slated to start in early 2015.

Montague Center School

The proposed project to turn the former Montague Center School into a rental apartment building of up to twenty-two units has been controversial. The closing of the school in 2008 was strongly opposed by the neighborhood, and there has been significant opposition to an apartment complex much larger than any in the area.

This opposition, however, has failed to resonate elsewhere in the town. The proposed buyer, Mark Zaccheo has been a successful developer whose projects feature innovative energy savings. The project is consistent with the overall comprehensive plan. "The town," as it is called in these discussions, feels it is saddled with too many buildings, and finally has a viable developer for one of them.

In 2013 the Zoning Board of Appeals, after nearly seven hours of public hearings, voted to grant the project a controversial variance for smaller apartment units. Later, Montague town meeting voted to change the zoning laws to accommodate the developer, garnering charges of so-called "spot zoning."

Yet the project, first slated to begin in early 2014, has been consistently delayed. Last spring Zaccheo, complaining that "the numbers don't work," asked that the sale price be reduced to \$1, and that he

be allowed to install a residential, as opposed to a commercial, sprinkler system. There have also been extended discussions about the timing of the removal of an underground oil tank.

Last spring it appeared that the parties were ready to walk away from the project, but now negotiations appear to be back on track. The town did adjust the

asking price to \$1 and Zaccheo has received approval from the state to install residential sprinklers.

Town officials say they hope to conclude a purchase and sale agreement in January.

Railroad Salvage

Advocates of public involvement in the redevelopment of all these empty properties might point to the former "Railroad Salvage" buildings, located between the power canal and the Connecticut River, as a cautionary tale of the pitfalls of private speculation.

Long before being the site of a Railroad Salvage discount store, the building was the Griswold cotton mill, and had the reputation of being the most dangerous workplace in the village.

A decade ago, the building was sold to a developer who claimed to have big plans, but was in fact prone to selling components of decaying buildings for scrap. Now the main building is not only so much an eyesore that local artists are treating it as an iconic ruin, but it is also a public hazard, remaining fenced off lest its remaining walls collapse on trespassers.

Actually Railroad Salvage is two buildings – the decaying factory and a smaller, more viable annex, formerly a cotton warehouse – with two separate owners on paper. Both are currently in tax title, listed together, so they may fall into the town's hands.

What exactly the town would do with them is a bit unclear at this point. The larger factory building would probably be torn down, a process which, taking into account hazardous materials remediation, would hardly be cheap.

Town Planner Walter Ramsey has suggested that the much-anticipated "Slum and Blight" designation for Turners Falls could make the town eligible for federal grants for the cleanup process.

St Anne's Church

This is a formidable building on Sixth Street that the town does not own, and at the moment is not planning to acquire. The private ownership is currently being contested.

Originally there was talk of the structure being renovated for a new library and this talk occasionally continues. But right now the word on the street – and at town hall – is "that's not our building."

The Senior Center/Athletic Club

This building on Fifth Street, the former Turners Falls Athletic Club, is currently owned by HallKeen Management, which also owns many in the PowerTown apartment complex. The company is divesting itself of these rental properties in Turners – though it plans to continue as their management – and has proposed to sell the building to the town for \$1.

On December 8, the Montague selectboard voted to send this proposal on to Montague Town Meeting for a vote, with the provision that the sale include the building's parking lot.

That parking lot is something of an issue. It currently provides parking for residents of another PowerTown building on Avenue A. Montague building inspector David Jensen is optimistic this problem can be resolved by the time of the town meeting vote.

It is not clear what use the town would have for the structure, since there is currently a feasibility study being done to create a new Senior Center at another location.

"Cumby's"

This aesthetically challenging, decaying structure sits at the gateway to Turners Falls on Avenue A, one block from the bridge across the Connecticut River to Route 2. Formerly the location of a Cumberland Farms franchise, it is now owned by the Montague Economic and Industrial Corporation (MED-IC), a volunteer board composed of Montague residents that receives support from staff at Montague town hall.

The roof of the building has had major leaks, creating a good deal of water damage and mold inside.

The structure has been the subject of a good deal of debate by Montague town meeting. In May 2012, town meeting voted \$32,000 for roof improvements and mold remediation, but rejected giving the town the ability to tear the structure down with the funds. The next year, town meeting rejected yet another attempt to allocate funds for demolition.

The local access television station has argued against demolition because it claims to want to purchase the structure for new studio and office space. Their proposal also included transforming the building into a "cultural center."

However, MCTV failed to find funding for their proposal, and disagreement developed between the station and MEDIC over the development proposal. The property, which is associated with the area that includes the Great Falls Discovery Center, faces significant constraints over potential uses.

MEDIC put out a request for proposals this past spring but there were no applicants. The mold has reportedly been remediated but the roof, although patched, continues to leak.



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SIMPLE from page A1

adding, "If there's going to be an apartment there, it's going to have full electricity, full plumbing and full septic, and we're going to inspect the house you want to rent."

Harry spoke too soon.

A Direct Challenge

The board of health subsequently voted to reject the von Ransons' permit application. But Williston hadn't reckoned with the citizens of Wendell, and the imperatives of the Earth herself in her current crisis of systemic, worldwide nest poisoning and resource theft, in large part for corporate profit.

The von Ransons' radical concept is to revive the dying planet through self empowerment – the power of economic discernment, providing for the necessities of daily living more directly with the community and the Earth – simplifying their lives, rather than by subjugating and destroying her. With empowerment comes responsibility, and the von Ransons admit that, over the years, they have invited themselves in for a lot of work – but it is a specific kind of work.

Susan von Ranson, some shorter than her husband, but by no means less indomitable, puts it this way: "It feels like the right way to live. I think it's second-hand living if you go out and get a job for the money to pay other people to produce your heat, your food, your lighting, your waste stream.

"Instead, my living is chopping and carrying the wood for the heat, helping to build the masonry cook stove that we cook and heat with, growing the food we eat. In that way we don't have to work nearly as much."

A lively discussion ensued as to whether chopping wood, pumping water by hand, and growing rutabagas is actually more work than driving to work for a soul-sucking jerk so you can drive to another soulless chain store to buy food that has been stripped of all prana by the hand of Mammon. But those are the kinds of lively discussions encouraged by the play of light and shadow that kerosene lighting provides a home. (They project a yearly use of 12 gallons.)

Susan moved in the shadows of her kitchen – she has a flashlight, but seldom needs it – to make a pot of tea and serve a bowl of steaming fresh vegetable soup. Helen Keller learned how to speak and communicate with the entire world, and advised a president, although her eyes were blind, her ears deaf, and her tongue halt. It is the plain, clear-minded and loving determination of a woman like Susan that can cause the Earth to rotate on its axis and usher in new ways of being for our world.

The von Ransons are challenging, with the "totally key, indispensable" support of much of their community, the established economic world order by challenging the State of Massachusetts' codes around building, health and fire. Consider that one third – 230 – of the registered voters

of Wendell signed a petition between April 25 (Earth Day) and July 11 (Wendell Old Home Day) in 2009, supporting the von Ransons' bid to live simply, in a petition to the officials of the Town of Wendell.

The selectboard wrote a letter, "to whom it may concern" on September 17, 2009, endorsing the work of the Wendell Rural Simple Living Committee on behalf of the von Ransons' application "to establish conservation-minded, low-carbon building practices."

Many town citizens did the same, addressing the despoliation of the only planet the human race would ever care to call home, the beautiful and fragile planet who has nurtured our ungrateful species at her breast since Eden, at least, and generously provided us with everything we need to support a wholesome life.

Through the Institutions

And it is, indeed, a barn in which the von Ransons seek to live their wholesome life. Harry Williston was correct in that assertion. Dating from around the Civil War, it was dismantled, then re-erected by 95 local citizens in a community barn-raising on September 20, 2008.

A beautifully mortised chestnut post-and-beam structure, the barn needed a total dismantle and rebuild, since the bottom end of many posts had rotted and several beams had broken or rolled. The dismantling involved numbering the timbers, tipping "bents" – post-and-beam assemblages – away from each other to remove connecting timbers, then lowering the bents as gently as possible and dismantling them.

It went back up with blocks and tackles, and people pushing the bents upright with spiked poles.

Neighbors Geoff Richardson and Bob Shulman contributed old chestnut beams from their old barns, and with those and other, new timbers, von Ranson scarfed in new wood to lengthen the posts and replaced other elements.

It is important to realize that just plain folks are the ones who have given careful thought, searched their values, and shaped each and every decision that has led to this remarkable and enduring structure being re-fashioned to fit the exigencies of the modern world. And just plain folks were the ones who elected them to serve on their local boards.

In 2009, the Wendell board of health included Lonny Ricketts and Martha Senn, who went along with Harry Williston in rejecting the von Ransons' proposal to live in a simple apartment. Williston, a dedicated man who has served the town of Wendell for many years and in many ways, was roundly defeated by Jenny Fowler in 2010.

In 2011, Amy Simmons beat Martha Senn. (At this point, you can almost hear the Koch Heads shouting, "I know what you're up to! You're trying to use the democratic process to save the planet!") After a few more retirements and elections, by 2012 the board of health had been

completely transformed into a bastion of support for the von Ransons' plan.

Nina Keller was one of those who stepped up to serve the board of health, when a seat opened up by mid-term retirement. Nina played a central role in this incredible victory of the common person against the juggernaut of corporate power and the commodification of Nature.

Nina – oh, for those who don't know Nina, the Recycling Queen of Montague Farm, *doyenne* of Jimmy's Popcorn Farm, wife to the selectboard's Daniel, is the one who almost single-handedly stood up against the Northeast Utility herbicide spray program in the early 1980s to prevent the poisoning of her own farm, and the poisoning of neighbors' land, by the power line proprietors, who gave up their effort to spray pesticides and their endless battle keep the high-tension wires that cut across Wendell free from the threat of sumac, and barberry, not to mention wild blueberries.

Nina midwived the board of health's singular contribution to the von Ranson's struggle to live simply: the "Conservation Oriented Housing" regulations.

Massachusetts, rare among the original British colonies, has retained elements of home rule in its state constitution down to the modern era. As currently practiced, home rule grants municipalities in the Commonwealth the power to issue their own regulations in any area not specifically prohibited by the state, with the proviso that they not weaken – only strengthen – state code.

Wendell, in turn, is the town in western Massachusetts which first attempted to decriminalize marijuana use in the late 1970s. This trailblazing path toward a more natural way of living was quickly overturned by saner heads when a hastily called town meeting voted to void the transgressive measure. All the pot heads woke up later the next day and wondered what, if anything, had happened.

So while "regulations" may be kind of a dirty word in Wendell, the state's home rule provisions allowed the town's board of health to create regulations, known as the Conservation Oriented Housing program, in order to allow the von Ransons to occupy their home.

Conservation Oriented Housing

The board of health, under Keller's guidance, developed the new program following a public hearing and a review of documents by town attorneys from Kopelman & Paige.

It works by examining conservation-oriented building proposals from conservation-minded applicants. If the board feels the plan before them, in its variation from state code, is feasible, they approve it, with the proviso of annual reapplication and inspection to ascertain that the representations made by the applicant are being met.

Building owners applying for

consideration under the board's conservation oriented program must agree to keep their property owner occupied, through a deed restriction.

It was this blockbuster set of locally crafted, locally controlled "regulations" that finally allowed the von Ransons to build their home without electric wiring or much in the way of plumbing, and to meaningfully reduce the required size of their septic system to match their home's meager water use, given that they don't use a flush toilet. The height of their leach field mound must only be three feet above the water table rather than the four feet required by users of standard plumbing, which allows better drainage on their sloped, shallow plot of land.

The current members of the board of health – Keller, Jim Thornley and Shay Cooper – have been by to inspect the von Ransons' new apartment, and have determined them to be honest in the representations they made about how the home would function.

The board finally approved the von Ransons' conservation proposals, perhaps secretly feeling that any set of variances that binds a couple in their 70s to their land, requiring them to chop their own wood, grow their own food, and pump their own water, must *ipso facto* be stricter than relevant state codes.

(Sometimes the simple life is not so simple: Susan, who slipped and fell hanging out the laundry on a wet day last November, was laid up for 9 months recovering.)

But they also required the von Ransons to install a hand wash sink separate from their kitchen, and file a deed restriction enumerating the ways their home systems depart from code.

And they assured the couple that they will visit them annually for inspections, to see if the wood stove is keeping the little two-story apartment warm, and if the oil lamps are still casting their soft effulgent glow on one of the happiest eco-warrior couples this side of Woolman Hill.

Final Approval

The state Board of Examiners of Plumbers and Gasfitters surprised local officials, including the town's plumbing inspector, Herb Hohengasser, when they approved the couple's request to live without most commonly required residential plumbing.

The last stamp of state approval came from the state Board of Building Regulations and Standards in late August, for battery-operated smoke, carbon monoxide and heat detectors. The von Ransons were required to install not only a detector that measures smoke and carbon dioxide, but also one to measure heat, since their apartment takes up one half of a structure which also includes a barn and workshop.

Finding a battery-powered heat detector was a challenge in its own right. A cousin in Munich, Karl Ludwig, delivered one from Irish manufacturer Ei Electronics, which does

not ship to the United States for obscure regulatory reasons. Some \$400 worth of alarms later, the von Ransons were able to comply with Massachusetts building code last month.

Then came the final inspection, and on November 22 Phil Delorey issued the von Ransons their historic certificate of occupancy for their secondary dwelling.

To head off charges of utter political correctness, the von Ransons use a drop line from the garage to charge the batteries for their computer, and also an electric toothbrush.

"I'm having trouble letting go of my electric toothbrush," Susan admitted.

"I'm having trouble letting go of word processing," added Jonathan.

But the von Ransons are not likely to install a solar panel any time soon to allow them to sever their last few connections to the corporate power lines.

"The creation of new industries is not my cup of tea," said Jonathan, explaining why a solar panel is not the option the couple has chosen to charge their tooth brush. "Industry is built on ideas that do not match Nature's plans. The commodification of energy – putting the very essence of life on sale – does not function well in Nature's system."

Occupy Simply

One reason the von Ransons had to work so hard to prove the validity of their plan for simple living is because their home is less than 600 feet from an electric line. If they were still living back in the woods on Bear Mountain, where they lived for nearly 20 years, state code would already allow them to live simply.

But look out city dwellers! The woods are coming closer.

In 2011, the state Department of Public Health stepped in to divert a Wendell-specific home rule petition that was heading for approval in the state legislature with the strong backing of the von Ranson's legislators, representative Steve Kulik (D-Worthington), and senator Stan Rosenberg (D-Amherst), which promised to promulgate statewide regulations allowing for "Alternative Housing."

Though held up temporarily in a broader code revision, a Department of Public Health Alternative Housing "program" – Wendellites are shy of "regulation" – should allow more and more innovative green buildings, like the one now occupied by the von Ransons in their Civil War-era barn, to find official approval at the state level. Soon, conservation-oriented dwellings like theirs should be allowed in any municipality in the state with a board of health as willing and committed as Wendell's.

For now, their home will be cozier than most, with a huge masonry cookstove to keep them warm throughout the winter night.

At that thought, Susan smiled her warm and knowing smile, in the soft darkness of their living room, and Jonathan looked able to take a bow, at last!



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PRECISION from page A1

According to Michael Baines, Project Coordinator, FHREB, the CNC classroom at the tech school is one of the best in the state, an over \$1 million investment in manufacturing education, a permanent resource that Baines feels elevates the whole town.

Caitlin Sheridan, a math teacher at FCTS, added that it is nice to see new production technology being brought into buildings that have historically been used for production purposes, and is happy the new equipment is being used extensively, both by the high school students during the day and the MSMI crew during their 4-hour-long night classes.

Sheridan works with the MSMI students in the beginning of the program to familiarize them with the basic math skills they will need to get started. She said it is surprising to see the amount of work that they complete, and that "this is a huge accomplishment."

Some of the curriculum has been influenced by that of Springfield Technical Community College, but Stiles, along with all involved in the program, repeatedly gave thanks to the recruitment of the course's mul-

iple instructors. "Otherwise, this would not be possible," she said.

Robert Barba, Dean for Community Education, GCC, similarly lauded everyone's efforts in the program's creation, saying that as an administrator it has been astonishing to see such a successful curriculum come together from scratch. "Three or four graduates have already been offered jobs," Barba said, speaking of the current class.

**"You want to better your future, and that's what this is for."
- Dana Graves, 2013 MSMI graduate**

Fresh from manufacturing to teaching, Les Pomainville, one of the CNC machine instructors and a teacher at FCTS, has years of experience in the field and agrees that the sector is ready for more workers to be trained, and that the MSMI program is an excellent start. He reached out to local employers to

find out what they wanted students to know, so that he could better direct his classes. "Give yourself five or six years to get skills, then go out and market yourself," said Pomainville.

"You want to better your future, and that's what this is for," Dana Graves, an MSMI program graduate from the first course held in the fall of 2013, said to the current grads.

Graves championed his family as most influential and motivational in his decision to apply to the program. He had recently had twin daughters, and wanted to move from Worcester back to where he had grown up, but saw that it was hard to make a decent earning here. His interest in machining led him to the MSMI program, and he's now employed at Valley Steel in Greenfield, which affords him more time with his family, opportunities for workplace advancement, and an engaging career.

According to Stiles, there is a lot of opportunity for growth in advanced manufacturing in this region where manufacturing has long played a large economic role. That growth "has ripple effects across the whole community," she said.

Graduating from MSMI involves

first applying for one of the training slots and being accepted. It's then an intensive program designed to generally match area manufacturers' needs through night courses supplemented by Tooling U-SME online classes.

With new funding, a Foundational Manufacturing Initiative has also been added, to potentially help candidates prepare for MSMI, or to acquire skills for light manufacturing.

This week the FHREB heard that a fresh round of workforce development grants, totaling \$276,705, would be coming from the state.

"Monday's news allows funding to continue for three additional cycles," said Stiles, extending the MSMI program from spring 2015 until fall 2016, as well as supporting foundational manufacturing training, job placements and career support.

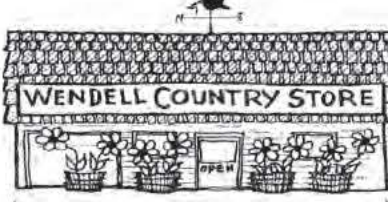
Starting wages, she said, average \$15.50 per hour, and graduates often see raises within the first year.

The next training information session will be at GCC's downtown center, 270 Main Street in Greenfield, on Monday, January 12 from 3 to 5 p.m.



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NOTES FROM THE ERVING SELECTBOARD

Re-use of Grade School, Paper Mill Buildings

By **KATIE NOLAN**

The board accepted a bid of \$1,730 to refinish the floor in one first floor room at the Union 28 building, also known as the Pleasant Street Grade School building. Once the floor is refinished, the recreation commission will be able to use the room for administrative activities.

Highway foreman Glenn McCrory told the board that highway workers cleaned out five old air conditioning units and a pool table in poor shape. The board declared these items surplus so they could be disposed of.

According to selectboard chair William Bembury, the commission would like to host programs at the building in future.

However, if the building use changes from administrative use to having public events, upgrades, including making the building compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act, will be needed.

One ADA requirement would be a wheelchair lift. Associated Elevator provided the town with an estimate of \$23,000 to install a wheelchair lift at the building.

The board will invite the recreation commission to attend a joint meeting to discuss their plans for the use of the building.

IP Mill Reuse

The board approved a draft request for proposals for a market feasibility and architecture/infrastructure study for the former International Paper property at 8 Papermill Road.

The RFP will be published by the

Franklin Regional Council of Governments to solicit bids from consulting firms. The November 24 special town meeting voted \$65,000 to fund the study.

According to the RFP, the consultant will provide a market feasibility study for two to three development options, an architectural, structural and mechanical evaluation of the building systems and an access and parking study. The FRCOG will oversee publication of the RFP and awarding of the contract.

Native American Affairs

The board appointed conservation commissioners David Brule and Cyd Scott as Erving's Native American affairs officers.

Brule and Scott suggested that the town establish the positions to establish "some legitimacy in their continuing efforts to study and document the influence of Native American culture in the earlier days of Erving."

In an email to administrative coordinator Tom Sharp, Scott listed a number of duties for the officers, including: planning and implementing programs of cultural significance, maintaining records and lists of artists, organizations, community groups and funders to promote cultural affairs programs, and acting as the liaison with federal state and regional agencies in coordinating archeological digs and excavations.

Scott told administrative coordinator Tom Sharp that the designation would help them in seeking grant funding similar to the battlefield grant that Montague recently received.

Kiely to Retire

Senior center director Polly Kiely notified the selectboard that she plans to retire in 2015, with February 27 as her last day. As part of the search for a new director, the board expects to complete a job description for senior center director at its December 22 meeting, after consulting with the council on aging.

Bembury recommended that the job description include a focus on community in general as well as seniors, because the center is a senior and community center.

Selectboard member Arthur Johnson suggested that nursing background would be a plus for the director, in case of medical crises at the center.

Information Technology

Selectboard member Margaret Sullivan recommended that a computer dedicated for use by the selectboard be installed in the selectboard office/meeting room and other selectboard members agreed that it was a good idea.

After the board meeting was adjourned, assistant assessor Jacqueline Boyden and Sullivan told the board members that a spare computer already in the building could be moved to the selectboard office.

Boyden and IT consultant Jacob Smith reported that they are continuing negotiations with Comcast about internet service to pumping stations and the highway and water departments.

**TOWN OF ERVING
FY 2015 CDBG PUBLIC HEARING**

The Town of Erving will hold a public hearing on **Monday, January 5, 2015 at 7 p.m.** in the Selectmen's Meeting Room at the Erving Town Hall, 12 East Main Street, Erving, to solicit public response to the submission of an FY 2015 Massachusetts **Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)** application to the Department of Housing and Community Development on behalf of Erving, New Salem, Northfield, Wendell and Warwick. The snow date is January 12, 2015 at 7 p.m.

This meeting's purpose is to discuss the application which may include: a Housing Rehabilitation Program, Planning Activity and a Social Service Program. Representatives from Franklin County Regional Housing & Redevelopment Authority (HRA) will be present at the hearing to discuss the application and programs. The Town of Erving will serve as the lead community for this grant application and will contract with HRA to administer the CDBG Program. The Town encourages residents to attend the meeting where any person or organization can be heard.

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SMOKING from page A1

on behalf of pediatricians Jonathan Winickoff, MD and Lester Hartman, MD, who he said have seen the effects of tobacco on children's health. Needham raised the purchasing age to 21 five years ago, and he said, in response to concerns of business owners, "it has not put any stores out of business."

Connecticut River Liquors owner Melissa Winters said she doesn't sell flavored tobacco products, and doesn't want underage youth in her store at all. She expressed concern, however, over being put in the position of having to enforce a local law inconsistent with the law elsewhere in the state, which could make customers angry or confrontational.

She also wondered if she would be held responsible if someone of legal age bought cigarettes at her store, but then gave them to a teenager in her presence.

Sbarra told her that, unlike in the case of liquor sales, she would not be held responsible in such a scenario.

Ray Cross, manager of F.L. Roberts, came to say he was a strong supporter of keeping cigarettes out of the hands of youth, and makes sure everyone at his shop follows the law - saying he had "zero tolerance" for employees selling to minors - but that he had concerns about creating more regulations and changes that he would have to enforce. Most



Board of health member Al Cummings and director of public health Gina McNeely listen to public comments Wednesday night.

of the dozen or so attendees who spoke had positive views of the changes being suggested. Some offered concerns as to what would be expected of retailers if the new regulations were in place. Four letters of support for the changes had been received by the board as well.

Board of health member Christopher Boutwell said he wasn't ready to decide, and that he felt there should be a 30-day waiting period for further comments. After some discussion, the board agreed the public would be given until January 15 to send comments to the Board of Health at Town Hall.

The question will be discussed further at the next meeting on January 21, 2015.

TRAIN from page A1

This is the culmination of an effort that's been in process for many years, beginning with the building of the John T. Oliver Transit Center in Greenfield with funds from the federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. The restoration of train service to what is being called the Knowledge Corridor was a project supported by Governor Deval Patrick.

Once the Transit Center was completed, Governor Patrick's administration, in conjunction with state Department of Transportation, led the effort to see restoration of the tracks owned by Pan Am Southern, allowing improved travel between Vermont and Massachusetts with upgraded tracks all along the way improving speed and safety.

There are plans in place to build onto this first step in opening up Western Massachusetts to better transportation by providing local commuter rail service.

The Transit Center does not have long-term parking. There

may be some overnight parking elsewhere in town for travelers, but be aware that drop-off service is what the planners had in mind.

Also, at this time there is no certainty that the waiting room will be available for travelers on weekends, as the Transit Center is closed. There is an effort to arrange for the Center to be opened on weekends, but there was no information available from the Franklin Regional Transit Authority (FRTA) when inquiries were made this week.


There is also no bus service from FRTA on weekends, so for the time being residents in Greenfield and surrounding towns will have to make their own travel arrangements to return home.

While it is not recommended by this reporter, it is now possible to go to New York City for New Year's Eve this year from Greenfield and be there in time for the festivities. Once there, you will have to fight your way uptown from Penn Station ten blocks to Times Square.



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YEAR 13 – NO. 10

B1

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DECEMBER 18, 2014

Magic Wings: An Oasis of Pleasantness on 5 & 10

By PETE WACKERNAGEL

SOUTH DEERFIELD – Magic Wings Butterfly Conservatory and Gardens stands out as a warmly welcoming oasis, even among a wide variety of competing roadside attractions that beckon travelers heading south from Montague on Greenfield Road (Routes 5 and 10).

Coming from Montague you pass fields long in production, antique stores and chocolatiers, several academies of learning, a bridal store, eateries, and a Tibetan bed and breakfast.

Luckily, we aren't cursed with the typical heaving interstate off-ramp scene of enterprises purveying the lowest forms of combust-

tible energy and human nutrition.

Instead we are graced with a measured landscape of field, barn, river – and a butterfly conservatory that is busy furthering science and insect husbandry on the world stage.

Magic Wings was initially started by Alan Rulewich, after he visited a butterfly conservatory in Denver and returned with a burning conviction to construct one like it in western Massachusetts. Ground was broken in 1998, and the conservatory opened in 2000.

Current owner George Miller started as general contractor and partner with Rulewich, and has been owner since 2004. Daughter Kathy Miller is the general manager, and George, Jr. is the business



Magic Wings employee Amber Strickland is joined by Jordan, a peach-faced lovebird, inside the facility.

manager.

Magic Wings has the entomological facilities to propagate 75% of the butterflies themselves. The technical process is overseen by Fred Gagnon, a lepidopterist and butterfly surgeon who now holds the title Curator of Butterflies.

Staff spend the day combing plants in the conservatory for eggs, which are then removed to a separate greenhouse behind the building.

Since each species of butterfly, in its caterpillar stage, will eat only one species of plant, the eggs are placed on the correct companion plant where they will hatch. These companion plants and other tropical flora, including fruit trees such as banana and papaya, are raised in the horticulture greenhouse.

After feasting for weeks, the caterpillar goes into its metamorphic stage and staff remove the chrysalises to a separate greenhouse. They will hatch in this greenhouse or in a special glass-enclosed observation wall in the conservatory.

Finally, the adult butterflies are released into the conservatory



One of Magic Wings' residents counterpoints a poinsettia.

TFHS Club Fosters Art Passion

By MAGGIE SROKA

TURNERS FALLS – If you walk through the halls of Turners Falls High School, you see that art is not just a hobby – it's a passion for many students. The walls are filled with paintings, pottery, and drawings done by students who, by their work, demonstrate that they use their art as an expression and, from what I can tell, a beautiful expression at that.

Art Club members are a driven and motivated group of students who use their artistic talents to better themselves as well as the school community.

Just walk into the foyer of TFHS, and you'll see ceramics made by students of all ages in Art Club, and self-portraits that make you look twice because they look so similar to the students. Or stroll into the cafeteria, and you'll see murals all over the walls, all painted by Art Club students, and all beautiful.

Senior Rachel Savinski tells me more about her experiences in the club, and only has good things to say: "I love Art Club because it gives me a chance to spend time with peers who care about art as much as I do. It feels good to work with people who can give me advice on how to improve my work!"

Rachel goes on to tell me that having an art club at TFHS shows the school community that art is important, and she hopes by having art in the halls, that an appreciation for the craft will increase. And when other students and I walk down the halls and see the paintings and the drawings, I believe that this has been accomplished.

Art Club hasn't just helped those currently in high school. Just ask recent Turners Falls alumni and art major at the University of Hartford, Erin Simmons. Erin tells me that the club helped her form her port-

folio, because the group of other passionate art students help her decide what she should and shouldn't include.

"I also think Art Club helped prepare me for college by having to work together with a team on big projects," she says. "And none of it would have been possible without the help of Ms. [Heidi] Schmidt."

The students in the club cannot say enough good things about Ms. Schmidt, the talented art teacher and club coordinator, whose positive energy inspires her students.

Talking to Rachel, Erin, and other art students, I find a deeper appreciation for the art hanging in the hallways. Instead of it being something beautiful, I see new meaning behind their work, which is a drive that motivates the students involved to become the best artists they can be.

Judging by the quality of their work that I have been lucky to see, I believe that the art students of TFHS and its past graduates could give some of the most famous artists a run for their money.

I know they will continue to paint, draw, and bring life to the blank, bleak spaces in the school, and in their lives beyond high school, through their artwork.



The club painted this mural, a replica of van Gogh's The Starry Night (1889), in the high school cafeteria.

WEST ALONG THE RIVER: THE DECEMBER JOURNALS

By DAVID BRULE

MILLERS FALLS – 12 December. Old Deerfield. 9:30 AM in the 1799 House.

This Friday morning drive, along the edge of the Montague Plains on the way to Deerfield, was like driving through a snowglobe.

Two days ago, rain had drenched the landscape, and then a quick freeze with a blast of snow coated every single branch, pine needle and pine cone with white frosting like the ornaments from an old Woolworth's.

All became a truly magical vision that could have been contrived in some Hollywood studio in the 1950s, with Bing Crosby crooning in the background.

Down Turnpike Road through Cheapside, I motored on the way to my Friday job.

My house for the day – not really *my* house in the strict sense of ownership, since this home is the property of Historic Deerfield, Inc. – is the Asa Stebbins 1799 House, a cozy brick structure on what is known in Old Deerfield as The Street. A huge evergreen wreath is draped on the door, festooned with wintery berries, pine cones and peafowl feathers, encircling the brass knocker.

Once inside, I go through the routine before opening the house to visitors, although on a cold December morning like this, they may be few and far between. The lights on, and alarms taken care of, I inspect each of the rooms where the Stebbins family lived for generations.

For one like myself who loves old houses, these first moments of morning solitude in the historic house are the source of a very quiet pleasure. It's silent upstairs and down, occasionally the furnace in the back of the house rumbles to a start, and then warm, dry air wafts through the old rooms where eleven Stebbins children once romped.

The Hubbard family portraits, painted by

Leverett artist Erastus Field, peer down from the walls.

The elder Hubbards, keepers of a tavern that still stands in the Plumtrees neighborhood of Sunderland, look like true old Yankees from the 1830s, stern and joyless, pretty grim for inn keepers.

Perhaps they only put on that formal face wishing to appear dignified for the painter, who would preserve their image for all time. However, in the dining room, I often catch two of the Hubbard granddaughters glancing and smirking at me, seeming to be scheming some adolescent tease.

Hours pass in muffled silence. A distant clock ticks faintly from a back room. I make my rounds between visitors, who are few, and the tourist season is winding down and the days outside are less inviting.

They do appear at my door however from time to time today, perhaps, like some of us,

see WEST ALONG page B4



The Asa Stebbins House of Historic Deerfield, Inc.

Trips to South Asia

By LEE WICKS

MONTAGUE CENTER – What if you had a list of places you longed to visit – a list that had been put together when you were just a child growing up in a family of nine children in a small New York State town surrounded by farm fields where the silence and freedom fed your dreams?

What if you were also an artist, an activist committed to humanitarian work, and an environmentalist dedicated to sustainability? How

might these passions be combined?

You might want to speak with Mary Averill of Montague Center to learn how she has nurtured those interests while investing herself in both motherhood – she has two daughters, one in college and the other a high school senior – and her career as a social worker in Northampton, where she runs Integrated Behavioral Health for the Commonwealth Care Alliance.

I found her at home on a Sunday afternoon weeks after she completed

see NEPAL page B5



A woman in Nepal knits nettle fibers.

Pet of the Week

Hi, My name is Hoppity. I am a young active female bunny. I love to hop around like my name says and explore my surroundings. I am pretty laid back and friendly. Wouldn't you just love a kind, quiet bunny to keep you company on those long winter nights? I think once you meet me you will fall in love. I am not only pretty but also social.



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Meet the Mammoths!

By REPORTER STAFF

TURNERS FALLS – A very special presentation is happening this Saturday, December 20 from 10 a.m. to noon at the Turners Falls branch of Greenfield Savings Bank, 282 Avenue A.

Bill Gasperini, a longtime journalist with extensive travels to the Arctic and plains of Siberia in Russia, reached out to the Bank recently and offered to make a presentation. He will bring his incredible collection of artifacts to share, and will screen a documentary on the life of nomadic reindeer herders who live year round in northwestern Siberia.

The 47-minute film which he helped produce for *National Geographic* is called "The Journey of the Nenets". This is Bill's description of the film:

"It tells the dramatic story of a people who live completely out on the vast Siberian tundra on one of the last intact nomadic journeys in the world. They travel close to 2,000 miles in an annual cycle, herding thousands of deer while carrying all of their provisions on wooden sleds, everything from the teepee-like deerskin tents or 'chooms', deerskin clothing, tools and eating utensils.

"They pass near settled villages only several times a year, including one where their children attend a boarding school. But most of the time they live completely alone out in a vast wilderness which to our eyes seems an endless expanse of white in a brutal climate where the temperatures can plummet to 40 degrees below zero.

"But to them this is all very normal, and they find it hard to understand how we mostly live inside, 'cut off from nature'. Many find it hard to believe people can



GASPERINI PHOTO

live in this manner in the 21st century, but they do."

The Nenets also face several serious challenges to their way of life. There is the impact of global warming as well as the existence of the largest natural gas reserves in the world underneath the Yamal peninsula, a land of permafrost and taiga forests, where they roam with 700,000 reindeer.

Bill will present an incredible collection of woolly mammoth and walrus ivory artifacts related to the Nenets peoples, and discuss the thrilling discovery of a fully intact, month old, baby mammoth found in this region. Nicknamed "Baby Lubyta", the 42,000 year old carcass was "pickled" by lactic acid produced by microbes in the ancient arctic pond she died in. She is the most fully intact of any mammoth ever discovered.

This is a truly unique opportunity for our community to enjoy. Come as a family! Light refreshments provided by GSB.

THE HEALTHY GEEZER

Basic Gastronomy



JESSICA LARKIN ILLUSTRATION

By FRED CICETTI

Q. I get a lot of stomach aches. Do you have any tips to prevent them?

If you are having recurring abdominal pain, you should see a doctor immediately. This kind of discomfort can be a symptom of a serious ailment. However, if you're talking about the kind of stomach aches we all get occasionally, there are some things you can do to prevent them.

- Eat small meals more frequently.
- Make sure that your meals are well-balanced and high in fiber.
- Drink plenty of water each day.
- Exercise regularly.
- Limit foods that produce gas.

The following are gas-generating foods:

- Legumes, especially dried beans and peas, baked beans, soy beans, lima beans;
- Dairy products such as milk, ice

cream, cheese;

Vegetables such as cabbage, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cauliflower, cucumbers, sauerkraut, kohlrabi, asparagus, potatoes, rutabaga, turnips, radishes, onions;

Fruits such as prunes, apricots, apples, raisins, bananas;

Foods containing wheat such as cereals, breads and pastries;

Fatty foods such as fried chicken and anything in cream sauces and gravies;

Any carbonated beverage.

Abdominal pain is often caused by overeating. Sometimes an infection is responsible. But pain may be a symptom of something that requires emergency treatment; there are quite a few organs in your abdominal area. The location of the pain is informative to your doctor.

Pain near your navel can be a sign of appendicitis or something wrong in your small intestine.

Stomach problems are found in the upper middle section of the abdomen. Persistent pain in this area may also signal a problem with your gallbladder, pancreas or the upper part of your small intestine.

It's unusual to feel pain in the upper left abdomen. Pain in this area may be caused by a problem in the colon, stomach, spleen or pancreas.

Intense pain in the upper right abdomen is often related to inflammation of the gallbladder.

Pain in the lower middle abdo-

men may be caused by the colon. Women with pelvic inflammatory disease or a urinary tract infection may experience pain in this area.

The lower right abdomen is where inflammation of the colon may cause pain. Appendicitis pain may also spread to this region.

If you feel pain in the lower left abdomen, you usually have a problem at the end of the colon.

Don't rely on self-diagnosis based upon these pain guidelines. Abdominal pain has a way of moving around. For example, gallbladder pain can move to your right shoulder.

And, abdominal pain can be caused by the lungs and heart. Or, it may be caused by muscle strain.

The following are some of the danger signs associated with abdominal pain. If you experience any of the following, get immediate medical attention:

- Sudden and sharp pain
- Pain that radiates to your chest, neck or shoulder
- Severe, recurrent or persistent pain
- Pain that worsens
- Vomiting blood
- Blood in your stool
- A swollen and tender abdomen
- Shortness of breath
- Dizziness
- High fever

If you would like to ask a question, write to fred@healthygeez.com.

Senior Center Activities

December 22 to 26

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.

Monday 12/22

10:10 a.m. Aerobics
10:50 a.m. Chair Exercise
1 p.m. Knitting Circle

Tuesday: 12/23

9:30 a.m. Chair Yoga
Noon Lunch

Wednesday 12/24

10:10 a.m. Aerobics
10:50 a.m. Chair Exercise
Noon Lunch

Thursday: 12/25

9 a.m. NO Tai Chi
Closed

Friday: 12/26

10:10 a.m. Aerobics
10:50 a.m. Chair Exercise
1 p.m. Writing Group

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 Mealsite Manager Rebecca Meuse at (413) 423-3308, for meal information and reservations.

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

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

Typical weekly schedule:

Monday 12/22

9 a.m. Tai Chi
10 a.m. Osteo Exercise
12:30 Movie

Tuesday 12/23

8:45 a.m. Chair Aerobics
10 a.m. Dance Fitness
12:30 p.m. Painting

Wednesday 12/24

8:45 a.m. Dancing
10 a.m. Chair Yoga
Noon Bingo

Thursday 12/25

Closed?

Friday 12/26

9 a.m. Bowling

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.

LEVERETT

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

Take-It-Easy Chair Yoga – Wednesdays at 10 a.m. at the Town Hall. Drop-in \$5 (first class free). Senior Lunch – Fridays at noon. Call (413) 367-2694 by Wednesday for a reservation.

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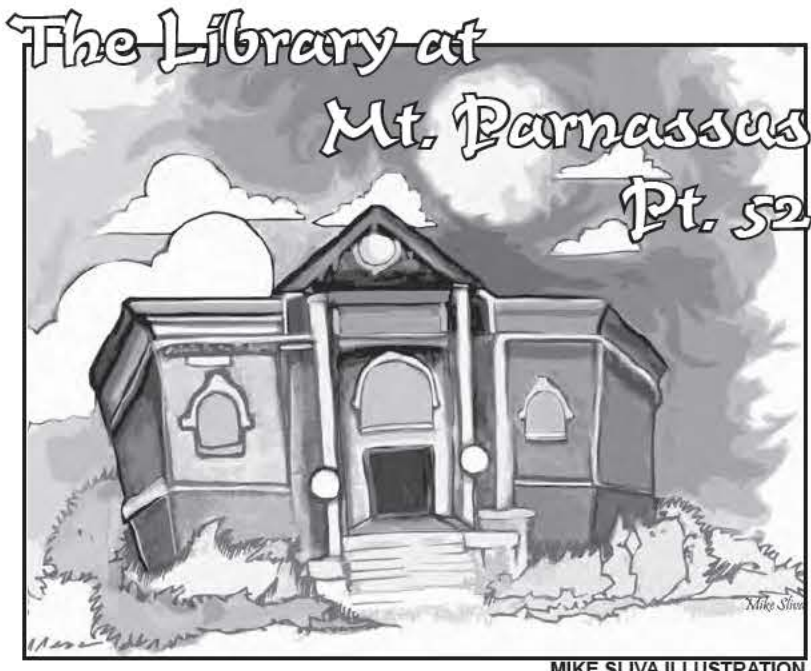
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The next day finds Otis, sadder but no wiser after his abortive visit to the Spotted Pig, bellying up to a more familiar bar at the Golden Mean.



By DAVID DETMOLD

On Monday, back in Mt Parnassus, when I stopped by the Golden Mean hoping to resume my fumbling effort to court a barmaid at close quarters, Zero told me Iona didn't work there anymore.

"She got a better job. Down at the university," he told me. He saw the look on my face. "What's the matter, ain't I pretty enough for you?"

Panic was rising in my stomach as I digested his news.

"But... her brother's still here," I said, pointing over to the booth by the window where Phillip sat sadly nursing a beer.

"He can drink here same as anybody," said Zero, "and less trouble than most. He never yells for me to turn down the music so he can hear the sports scores." He glared at me.

Just before dark I had been out back of my garage, standing at the top of a ladder, removing ice from a clogged gutter. I was chipping away at it, using a mason's trowel, not the best tool for the job, when I saw Neon coming toward me down the alley.

He appeared to be moving under the influence of some primitive internal combustion engine, occasionally misfiring, like a Stanley Steamer with blown piston rings.

As he came along, every so often he would pump both of his muscular forearms in the air and emit a chugging sound, like puffs of hot air escaping from a high pressure gasket.

He made high pitched guttural noises as he chugged along. They weren't words exactly, unless they were in some barbarous tongue long lost to modern philology. They were like expostulations from the bed of seething lava rolling in his brainpan, strange eruptions of unbearable anxiety mixed with outrage at his own condition.

The air was frigid. Puffs of air hung above his head as he came down the alley, and the noises he was making seemed to burst from these vapor clouds as they melted in midair in the heat of his passage

rather than from his throat.

I dislodged a long frozen spear of ice from the gutter just as he passed close by beneath me. He did not notice me perched there on my ladder. Indeed, he seemed blind to his surroundings. My fingers, in their ragged gloves, froze against the ice, and as I watched him pass I thought sadly, "Perhaps I should just let it go."

It was barely three hours later when Donald Mays walked into the Mean, ordered a shot of whiskey, and announced in a loud voice that Neon had just died of a heroin overdose at a woman named Cheryl's house. She lived somewhere up on the Hill, but I did not know her personally. The news hit the bar like a hammer.

I looked at Donald. He was a bald black man with magnificent shoulders and a cracked smile. He knocked back the shot, looked over at me, and said, "Heroin. It's cheap. It fucks you up, and it kills you."

"Amen to that, my brother," said Zero, looking down and polishing a glass.

The wind picks up at night, blowing off the river. Sheets of newsprint, old leaves, candy wrappers, like bedding for tiny baby possums, lie in scattered windrows in the worn granite doorsteps of the empty storefronts that line the Avenue, waiting for tenants who never show.

People hustle by in the darkness. Half the street lights are out. The ones that still work give off a muted glow through the dirty moth encrusted glass. How much would it take to clean them or repair them? But no one ever does.

Coming around the corner onto Fifth Street I almost ran into a man pushing a shopping cart. Of course, I thought it was Neon. But it was another man, a stranger. He stared at me, wide-eyed, in terror.

"Sure is cold," I said, and passed him by.

Continued next week.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE MONTAGUE POLICE LOG

Beeping, Cooking, Whining, Yelling, Barking, Selling, Sitting, Pooping

Monday, 12/8

12:45 a.m. Second call regarding odor in Avenue A apartment. Caller advised that the fire department and gas companies both used their meters and all readings were zero. Caller states that the odor could be "cooking drugs." Investigated.

11:53 a.m. Same caller from Avenue A complaining of loud music coming from neighbor's apartment as well as odor that is still filling one of her rooms. Officer spoke with neighbor about the music; gas company was able to find a burner problem on a stove in one of the apartments.

4:33 p.m. Neighbor/parking dispute on Central Street. Advised of options.

5:02 p.m. Report of a large amount of sand obstructing Main Street south of the Mini Mart. DPW advised.

7:23 p.m. Laptop and charging cords reported stolen from a Fourth Street apartment. Report taken.

Tuesday, 12/9

7:14 a.m. Caller from J Street reports finding a condom full of "something" in front of her door and requests an officer to pick it up for DNA evidence; she feels this is sexual harassment. Responding officer reports that condom was taped off and filled with something that appeared to be thousand island salad dressing. Received call from housing authority about situation. Caller advised of disposition.

5:32 p.m. Complaint regarding lack of lighting in crosswalk and area in front of Farren Care Center. Caller and a co-worker were attempting to cross tonight and a vehicle nearly struck them both; operator stated she could not see them. DPW and Chief Dodge informed of call; caller also advised to contact selectboard office.

Wednesday, 12/10

5:28 a.m. Caller from Bridge Street reports that dogs in upstairs apartment are barking viciously after whining for hours. Caller concerned about well-being of parties in apartment. Investigated.

8:12 a.m. Caller reports that a white male in his 20s is hanging around a G Street address looking in downstairs windows and possibly trying to get into the front door. Caller is wearing a dark jacket and wrapped in a red blanket; has been there for 30-40 minutes. Officer made contact with party and advised that it is the party's residence.

4:59 p.m. Caller states that

she was visiting a party on East Main Street; the party asked her to check his mail, and when she went back to the apartment, the door was locked and no one was home. Caller left her handbag containing all her medication inside the apartment. Advised of options.

9:42 p.m. Caller states that his girlfriend's mother is threatening to kill him over an issue with money and the girlfriend's bank account, which the girlfriend gave him permission to use. Caller reports that his own mother is also now threatening him. Advised of options.

Thursday, 12/11

9:07 a.m. Report of a male walking/running on the Turners Falls-Gill Bridge on the side opposite the sidewalk. Subject was acting as though he was running from someone (as opposed to out jogging). Call received from state police regarding this subject. Subject stopped on Avenue A.

█ was arrested on a probation warrant.

9:53 a.m. Request from Great Falls Middle School for assistance with a student who is blocking the hallway, refusing to move, and threatening to leave school early and walk home. Services rendered.

11:48 a.m. Caller from Millers Falls Road reports that a few nights ago someone tried to gain entry into his residence at around 3:00 a.m. Officers will conduct extra patrols in area.

1:11 p.m. Flooding reported in the cellar of a vacant house on Millers Falls Road; some of the copper pipes have been cut and possibly stolen. Responding officer advises that this appears to be malicious destruction rather than copper theft - all pipes appear to be accounted for. Report taken; under investigation.

5:16 p.m. Report of suspected drug transactions on Fifth Street. Unable to locate.

Friday, 12/12

1:30 a.m. Request to assist Sunderland PD by blocking road north of the 300 block of their North Main Street due to an accident with wires in the road. Services rendered.

6:54 a.m. Caller and another passerby are on the side of Main Street near the crossover with a large German shepherd who appears to have been hit by a car. Officer and animal control en route. Dog did not survive; owner notified.

7:10 a.m. Report of an injured owl on N Street. Caller referred to Envi-

ronmental Police, who, in turn, referred her to a wildlife specialist.

9:07 a.m. Caller from J Street reports a brief verbal altercation that just took place between herself and the building maintenance person. Advised of options.

12:54 p.m. State police received a call from a party reporting that a car had passed her turning from Gill over the bridge into Turners. Caller did not like the manner in which she was passed. Officer in area advised. Unable to locate.

9:29 p.m. Caller from Davis Street advises that her male neighbor is yelling, screaming, and banging on her door; she believes he is intoxicated. Officers spoke to both parties and advised them of their options.

Saturday, 12/13

9:31 a.m. Officer spoke with someone from "Anderson Logging" who is doing some work in the Old Northfield Road area. They report that someone was playing around with their equipment last night and request extra checks of the area after dark.

10:34 a.m. Caller, one of two surveyors working in the Greenfield Road area, reports being approached by a male party who questioned them about what they were surveying for, became upset, and snapped off some of the survey markers that the caller had placed. Party was reportedly making comments about "the pipeline" and threatening the caller. Caller and co-worker left area in their vehicle and were followed by the male party. Officers located and spoke to party and advised him regarding his actions. Surveyors advised to contact MPD when they will be in town.

10:59 a.m. Caller complaining of a male party known to her who regularly walks his dogs on Fifth Street and does not clean up after them; a section of the street is covered in dog poop. Officer attempted to contact person suspected to be dogs' owner; left message.

11:43 a.m. Caller from East Chestnut Hill Road reports that there is a deer sitting under a tree in her backyard. She thinks it may be injured; it hasn't moved much. Environmental Police contacted; they will have an officer respond to this location when one is in the area.

2:16 p.m. Caller from J Street reports that a small sum of money (\$6.00) is missing from her apartment; it was reportedly under a mat on her table.

Advised of options.

3:51 p.m. Caller is baby-sitting on Central Street and reports that the upstairs neighbors have been pounding on the floor for about 10 minutes. She doesn't think they are fighting. Investigated.

4:55 p.m. Report of structure fire on East Mineral Road. TFFD and MPD on scene; FD states it appears to be a damper issue. Clear.

7:04 p.m. Caller states that he was hit on the back of the head by a male known to him. Summons issued on charges of assault and battery and disorderly conduct, subsequent offense.

9:17 p.m. Caller from East Main Street reports that a subject threatened to forcefully take a phone charger that is in her possession. Services rendered.

11:22 p.m. Caller reports that a vehicle is parked across Third Street beeping its horn. This has happened several times before; caller suspects that a subject at the house is selling drugs to vehicles that come there and alert him by beeping the horn. Unable to locate.

Sunday, 12/14

8:10 a.m. Caller from J Street reports that an object described as possibly a tampon with "red or orange stuff on it" was left in front of her door. Officer and housing staff advised; transfer of item to police arranged. Caller inquired how to file a police report for sexual harassment; advised of options.

10:32 a.m. Caller advises that there are two white males fighting in the F.L. Roberts parking lot: one shirtless; one with a dark shirt. One male left scene as officers arrived. Officers spoke to remaining male; he admitted to an exchange with the other male, who "ran his mouth" to him. There was a scuffle; the other male was reportedly the aggressor. This party later called back to say he has found out the name of the male party who assaulted him, who is possibly from the Patch. Investigated.

8:03 p.m. █ was arrested on a default warrant.

9:56 p.m. Caller from Between The Uprights advises that they have kicked out a male party several times. He has just left again, heading towards Subway on the Avenue. Officer checked Rendezvous; party had been there approximately 45 minutes ago, highly intoxicated. Will continue to check area.

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LOOKING BACK: 10 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Here's the way it was on December 16, 2004: News from the Montague Reporter's archive.

Committee Backs Zukowski

The Montague police chief search committee voted 5 to 2 to recommend Detective Ray Zukowski for the post of Montague's chief of police on December 14. The selectboard will meet in special session on December 16 to select the chief from among three candidates: Sergeant Chris Williams, Acting Chief Gary Billings, and Zukowski.

The committee's recommendation will be weighed with the results of the Civil Service chief exam, assessment center exercises, a review of personnel files, and interviews conducted with the three candidates.

Committee members did not

have an easy time arriving at their decision, which many described as a difficult choice among three well-qualified candidates.

Mending Fences in Gill

A new cedar fence has been installed between the highway garage and the neighboring property, owned by the Rinaldis. Only 10 sections of fencing were needed to complete the run from the highway shed to the tree line, said highway superintendent Mickey LaClaire, bringing the total cost of the project to less than \$600, well under the \$1,000 the selectboard had allocated to replace the old fence.

Prime Farmland Protected

The Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources, the

Montague Conservation Commission, and Valley Land Fund announced the protection of 10 acres of prime farmland in the town of Montague.

The Commonwealth, the town, and the land trust all contributed toward purchase of an agricultural preservation restriction (APR) on the land, which is located along the Sawmill River on Meadow Road.

Landowners Melanie Gaier and Anthony Reiber purchased the property in May 2003. They restored the old farm house and rented the land to a young organic farmer. Gaier and Reiber worked with the Commonwealth, the town, and several land trusts to permanently protect the property for agricultural use.

"This points to the importance of partnerships in land conservation," said town planner Robin Sherman.

WEST ALONG from page B1

desirous of time-traveling back to where the old things dwell and hold their own against this maddening century.

Outside, the day turns quickly in the frosty air. These shortest days of the year, it seems that on a gray day like this, we are in a day-long dusk or early twilight.

Around four p.m., the last visitors appear at the door. We chat about the former occupants of this house, then about the Pocumtucks,

for whom Deerfield was a spiritual homeland and meeting place. I recount that disastrous day of February 29, 1704 as if it were just last year. I explain the Hubbard portraits on the wall, and the exotic Captain Cook wallpaper, and then they drift off to view the rooms, upstairs and down, on their own.

The lights come on out on The Street, it is already dark, and I close up the old house for the dark December eve, bidding the Stebbins ghosts goodnight and leaving

them to their own devices.

14 December. Along the Millers River.

This Sunday morning, the river is slowly returning within its usual banks. The rains of last week sent flooding waters up through the woods, reclaiming rivulets usually only running in April's high water.

Along the river, the otters have been out and about. Bounding tracks and long belly-slide traces in the snow show what they have been up to during the night. Getting the wildness back into our thoughts, the idea of these playful river creatures cavorting along our river banks brings a smile of satisfaction. Some things are still right with the world. In spite of all, we live side by side with truly wild things, who live as they have since the dawn of time before man walked the shores of this ancient river.

More signs under the lone wolf tree in the woods: an even larger predator has been moving through here. The tracks of big paw pads and claw marks identify the coyote who trotted along my path recently. Direct register of tracks in a straight line, he passed through here with clear purpose.

No crazy house-dog aimless tracks, our coyote lopes with clear economies of energy. Neighbors saw him move from the woods out onto the street and into the back yards the other morning, with murder on his mind. Maybe he was looking for some tasty over-fed pest of a squirrel or some plump housecat that really should be kept indoors. We keep rooting for the coyote or the fisher cat to help cut down the exploding populations of both cat and squirrel.

Just beyond my own private postcard of a hemlock stand, a lilted band of winter birds moves through poplars and oaks. Titmice, chickadees, kinglets, nuthatches, and woodpeckers often form groups together during the winter season. They turn up in their merry bands keeping the winter woods animated and cheery.

One lone call, however, has me scouring the tree trunks for a dun-colored bird making its modest way up the trunk of an oak. Sure enough, a pointy-looking creature, all mottled and looking like a longish tree lichen, moves. A brown



AGASSIZ FUERTES ILLUSTRATION

Certhia Americana — the Brown Creeper.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE GILL POLICE LOG

Trees Fall

Sunday, 11/23

1 p.m. Suspicious motor vehicle in the area of a Route 2 business. Located subject down by the river, picking up driftwood.

2:20 p.m. Suspicious motor vehicle on Franklin Road. Located hunter scouting area.

Monday, 11/24

10:30 a.m. Pastbreaking & entering reported on Grove Street. Under investigation.

11:45 a.m. Motor vehicle accident on Route 2 at Highland Road. No injuries; vehicle towed.

12:10 p.m. Complaint of vehicle operated erratically on Mountain Road.

5:35 p.m. Harassment order issued to Center Road resident.

Wednesday, 11/26

9:30 a.m. Parking complaint on Main Road.

10:20 a.m. Assisted Deerfield PD with arrest warrant of French King Highway resident.

12:30 p.m. Tree reported in roadway on West Gill Road. Removed same.

2:15 p.m. Transformer

arcng on Main Road. Assisted WMECO.

2:20 p.m. Motor vehicle accident at French King and Main roads. No injuries.

2:40 p.m. Assisted three vehicles stuck on Main Road due to snow and ice.

3 p.m. Trees down on Main Road. Officer moved what they could.

3:30 p.m. Wires down on Center Road. Roadway to be closed.

4:10 p.m. Trees down on South Cross Road.

7:05 p.m. Tree fallen onto a motor vehicle on South Cross Road.

8:07 p.m. Tree fallen onto a motor vehicle on West Gill Road.

9:30 p.m. Second motor vehicle ran into the fallen tree on West Gill Road.

11:30 p.m. Cows reported loose on West Gill Road.

Thursday, 11/27

7:45 a.m. Alarm sounding at French King Highway business.

Friday, 11/28

11:53 a.m. Power lines down in roadway, Bascom Road. Road to be closed.

12:30 p.m. Medical assistance at French King Highway business.

Saturday, 11/29

12:15 p.m. Wires down across French King Highway.

1 p.m. Larceny of over \$250 reported at French King Highway business.

Sunday, 11/30

9:30 a.m. Trees removed from roadway on Dole Road.

Monday, 12/1

7:30 a.m. Restraining order issued to Center Road resident.

10:25 a.m. Firearms issue with French King Highway resident.

4:20 p.m. Larceny under \$250 reported from Main Road business.

5:15 p.m. Court process issued to Dole Road resident.

Tuesday, 12/2

3 p.m. Restraining order issued to Riverview Drive subject.

Wednesday, 12/3

4:20 a.m. Trees removed from roadway on River Road.

11:10 p.m. Phone scam reported by Franklin Road resident.

Local Christmas Services

Sunday, 12/21

9 a.m. St Andrew's Episcopal Church, 2 Prospect Street, Turners Falls

Tuesday, 12/23

7 p.m. Leverett Congregational Church, 4 Montague Road, Leverett

Wednesday, 12/24

4 p.m. Our Lady of Czestochowa Church, 84 K Street, Turners Falls

4 p.m. Our Lady of Peace Church, 90 Seventh Street, Turners Falls

5:30 p.m. First Congregational Church of Gill, 6 Center Road, Gill

6:30 p.m. Congregation of Grace Church, 148 L Street, Turners Falls

7 p.m. First Congregational Church of Montague,

4 North Street, Montague Center

Midnight: Lady of Czestochowa Church, 84 K Street, Turners Falls

Midnight: Our Lady of Peace Church, 90 Seventh Street, Turners Falls

Thursday, 12/25

10 a.m. Our Lady of Peace Church, 90 Seventh Street, Turners Falls

10:30 a.m. Lady of Czestochowa Church, 84 K Street, Turners Falls

creeper goes about his business in his very special niche, prying under the bark, camouflaged in plain sight and bringing up the rear guard of the winter band of foragers.

This is the fourth or fifth time I've seen this guy, or someone like him in our woods, and it's reassuring that he's likely living as a permanent resident here. It's good to have evidence that the biodiversity is maintaining itself, from the smallest varied band of winter birds to the bigger fur-bearing creatures who call our woods their home.

A bit further on, the familiar "Bonjour Cousin!" of Cousin Annabelle rings out from back along the path in the woods. Looking in the direction of the greetings, all I can see is a three-foot tall gnome-like creature holding a walking stick and wearing a bright yellow pointy woolen hat. This little *tomten* is standing under the wolf tree oak, accompanied by a cocker and

an aged Brittany spaniel.

Just behind the elf, emerging along the trail, comes Annabelle. The little one in the yellow hat turns out to be her great-grandson Reese. He hasn't yet learned any French words from his great-grandmother, so we exchange pleasantries in English, of course. So here I am, face to face with a new cousin, two times removed, and just three years old, in my own woods in this old neighborhood.

Back home, the woodstove holds simmering leek soup and the Sunday chicken. Then, it's off we go, down to the lively and crowded pub in 'Hamp for an afternoon of music, song and seasonal cheer.

This brings an end to the stories from the West-flowing river for another year.

Joyeux Noël, and a Merry Christmas to all. See you in 2015!



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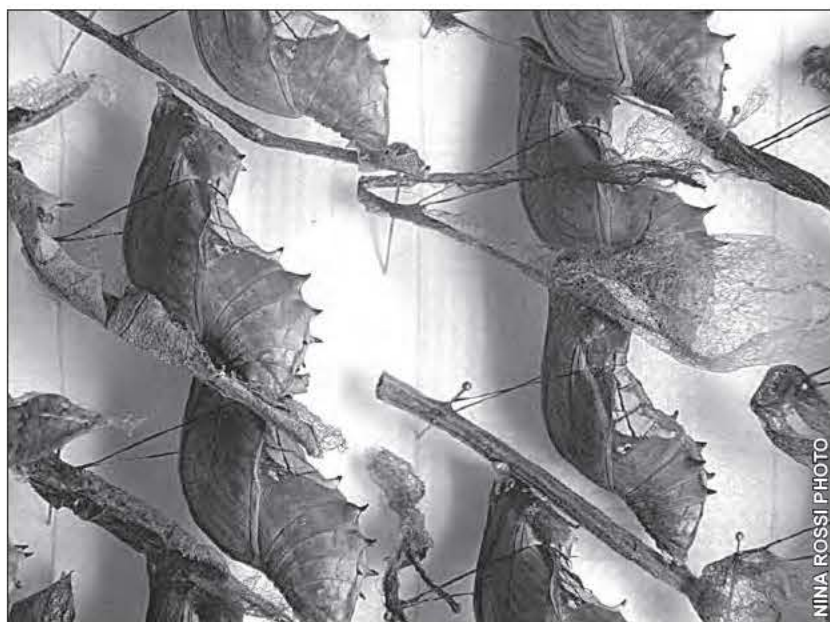
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NINA ROSSI PHOTO

Many chrysalises work hard behind the scenes.

WINGS from page B1

where they will join 4,000 others of their order. There they will live out their two-month lifespan in a unique ecosystem that exists nowhere else on earth, a diverse system of about 35 species of butterflies, 35 species of companion plants, and also birds, satanic leaf-tailed geckos, stick bugs, spiny devils, and so on.

Following their demise, the butterflies, birds, satanic leaf-tailed geckos, stick bugs, spiny devils, and so on are taken to a large, stand-up restaurant-style freezer in the back room, with a sign hanging on it declaring it "The Doctor." Eventually they will be cremated.

Magic Wings affects people in profound ways, beyond the scale of a zoo or park. Some visitors are overtaken by a flood of emotion. Nearly all develop a growing warmth and feeling of well-being that could only be described as healing. Kathy Miller described how one regular visitor decided to replace her \$75/hour therapist with an hour inside the conservatory every week.

Some of the reactions are due to the fact that our culture bestows a heavy load of symbolism on butterflies. Some people simply believe that a butterfly landing on them is a blessing, as if butterflies were syringes of good luck.

Many visitors walk in a slow, glazed-eye fashion because they believe it makes them more attractive landing pads. What they don't realize is that if they were to simply wear one of many, many body products that contain methyl paraben (which could cause breast tumors), the butterflies would be on them like accumulators at the Hadley Flea Market. A Magic Wings record was set when approximately 70 Rice Paper butterflies landed on one surprised user of body-firming lotion, hair-growth inhibitor, or some other product.

Many people feel connected to butterflies because of the transformative nature of the butterfly life cycle. People who go through an intense renaissance or born-again event in their lives often relate strongly to butterflies.

While butterflies inhabit human altitudes, they manage to maintain an ethereal apartness from our dimension. The Greek goddess

Psyche, whose name means "soul," is represented as a butterfly. In Japanese culture, butterflies are thought to be an embodiment of people's souls, whether they are living or dead.

In this spirit, many people have donated a placarded bench in memory of their deceased loved ones. Kathy, the General Manager, related a story about a woman who witnessed a butterfly land on her loved-one's casket at his funeral and then, weeks later, walked into Magic Wings to view the bench she'd had commissioned only to find a butterfly sitting meaningfully on the gold-embazoned name of her beloved.

On the other hand, most people would be surprised to learn that large numbers of butterflies, when seen together, are reputed to be a bad omen and a portent of coming evil. Is the management aware of this? Unlikely, because despite this superstitious death-sentence, Magic Wings has the highest concentration of butterflies per square foot of any conservatory in the world.

"Pleasant" only begins to describe Magic Wings. It's pleasant like the Wailio Valley of Hawai'i, or Dinotopia. The titillatingly addictive atmosphere is probably the best-designed and -engineered pan-flute-playing "pleasantness" in all of western Massachusetts.

When you leave the conservatory, you must walk through a short hallway lined with mirrors, and then through a 20 mile-an-hour wall of steadily blowing wind. One is not allowed to carry "travelers" from inside the conservatory back to the real world.

You see yourself in the mirror, remind yourself of who you are, and push on through the rushing air barrier until suddenly you're deposited back in the more drab world of fluorescent lighting and gift-shop accoutrements. It was at this moment that I experienced an instantaneous day-after-Christmas type depression, and knew that I'd be back to visit our Little Dárien on 5 and 10.

Magic Wings Conservatory and Gardens is open seven days a week from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. It is closed two days a year on Thanksgiving and Christmas day. For more information, call (413) 665-2805 or visit www.magicwings.com.



NINA ROSSI PHOTO

An "eyed" butterfly alights on a visitor's denim.

NEPAL from page B1

a three-week trip to Burma and Nepal. It's not easy to find her standing still with extra time. Even though she was recovering from a bad cold, she was dressed in running clothes.

Two nights before, she'd welcomed friends and neighbors to her home where she was – and is – selling objects she has brought back from her travels. She was excited that the Friday night event had yielded \$500 for Ama Ghar, an orphanage in Nepal that she's been visiting since 2008.

Mary has been to Asia 11 times since 1989. She always makes sure to work with an organization that allows her to take two or three weeks off in a row for extensive travel. Her latest multi-layered journey brought her to Ama Ghar (translated as "Motherly Home"), where she worked with the children and the staff.

In Nepal she also hiked for six days to find nettle, called *Aloo* in Nepali. Mary made this arduous hike with her niece Mary Wutz who is starting a business using the nettle fiber and employing local women to produce *Aloo* yarn.

I learned that nettles are a wonderful source of sustainable fiber. Once pounded, mixed with wood ash, dried, and spun, the fiber can be combined with cotton or silk and knit into scarves or hats. Unlike bamboo, nettles can be cut down and they grow right back. They literally grow like weeds with no need for pesticides or fertilizer.

In Burma she visited indigenous hill tribe cultures. Her tour was an exploration for a possible photography tour. Mary, who is a modest and talented photographer, has been leading photography tours for a number of years. It's yet another way to bring her to a part of the world she yearns to inhabit.

Of her trips to Asia she said, "People there are always smiling; they always have something to

give. I am never afraid of traveling alone there." She treasures a culture where community matters more than the individual, and she believes Westerners have a lot to learn from the way people in Asia live.

In 2008 she had a chance to travel there with her two daughters. They lived at the Ama Ghar orphanage in Nepal. It was winter and freezing in the concrete building, and it was a shock for her daughters who had been raised in comfort. Yet they made friends and felt the power of simplicity, or as Mary said, "learned that not everybody in the world has an iPod Touch."

Later, her older daughter Kate spent her junior year of high school in northern India, and her younger daughter Claire went to Peru. Because of those trips, their view of

the world and their place within it changed, a broadened perspective that Mary believes is the objective of travel.

The kind of trips she takes would be unaffordable if you want to live like a Westerner abroad, Mary said. She eats for five dollars a day, stays in modest hotels, and uses frequent flyer miles. Then she comes back to her small yellow house, trimmed in purple, to sift through hundreds of photographs, update her website, connect with her community here, and plan the next journey.

To see more of her photographs, go to www.maryaverillphoto.com. To learn more about her guided photography tours email her at mkaverill@gmail.com.



MARY AVERILL PHOTO

Mary Averill (left) with her niece, Mary Wutz.

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the
poetry
page

It is difficult
to get the news from poems
yet men die miserably every day
for lack
of what is found there.

- William Carlos Williams

edited by Patricia Pruitt
Readers are invited to send poems
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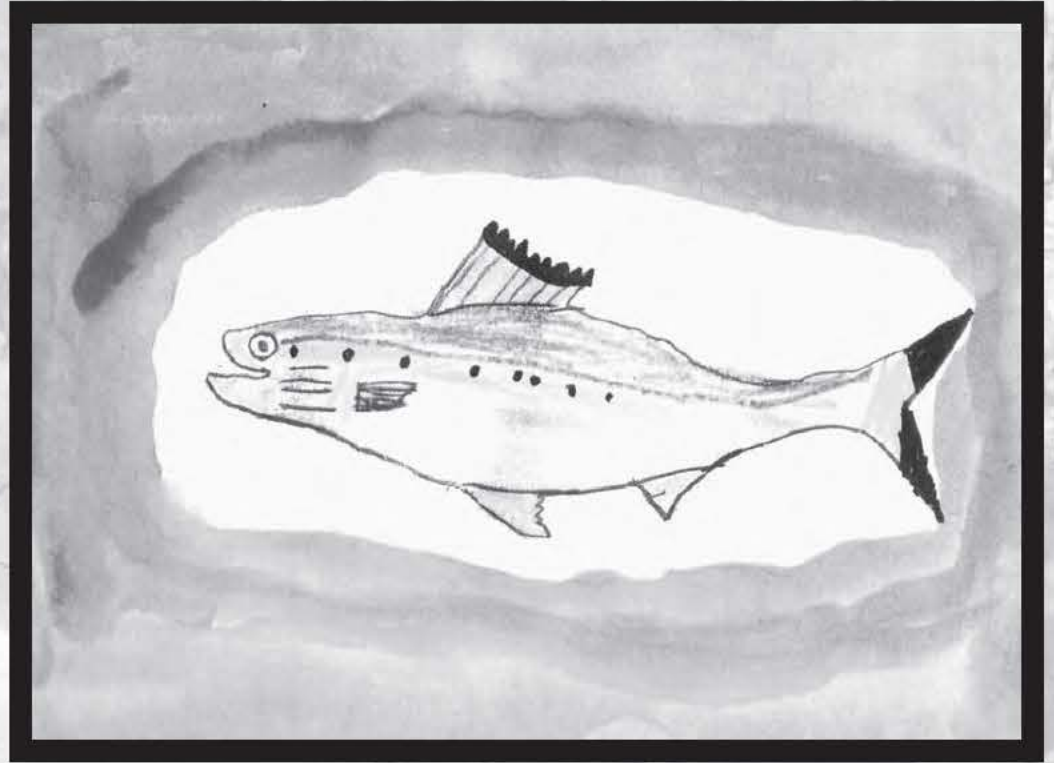
Winter Poem

Seagulls fly in vectors
through morning fog
calling to us in moaning tones
of an unflinching today
besotted with routine.
Like the gulls
we keep moving because
that's what we can do
to avoid being
immutably fixed in place.

We used to think that obstacles
existed only to be overcome
but now something else far larger
than we are takes flight.
Today is only a specific point
in our own time out of time
a midway place
in the midst of a miasma.

Under the gray sky
our lips seek tenderness.

Christopher Sawyer-Lauçanno



Poem

I am from being out in nature.

2nd Grader,
Montague Elementary School

Rallying Cry

The goal is to be right
here but I'm always divided.
Yielding and accountable.
Disclosure so clear, unoccupied.
The clouds, the crowd, the right
night, the stars crumbling, unmistakable.
All night, not enough, a pause
never ending. Disasters and
flowers mapping bees. A bitterness, a manner
of speaking, an unfolding. The
what without question. A reason, a
destiny, so you can, long enough.
Something nobody knows, reckoned
with sweat. What reason pointed to,
no other path for an opening, poured
over, carrying it from name to
name. Out of us for a life. When
people sleep at the beach
the meadow is occupying birds. Your
brilliant corners on fire. Dreamed about
in one venture. The cascade struck
in glissando and nothing besting
silence. What sticks. What nobody knows.
Where
it's all coming from, going to.
Thought up or meeting at. The beginning
of each, a lesson or position.
Leading to how I
miss you so. Shadows here.
Nothing I can say
is enough, we must each make
it our own. A corridor to uncertainties.
You and I in moonlight,
new moon.

Jess Mynes

Deftly Morning Light

My way toward footpath elegance
and wet clodded feet
whose ground anchors
my history in mixing
Slight missteps and insists
on turns to go back and look
in a better light
Night recalls intention's
progress if taken to alight in
the particular of a star
surrounded by now
a will to relinquish
or path to sight
Envisioned then in the
blossom of Sun's rise
illusion that renewal
offers progression
where perspective is a matter
of constant resistant muddy
positioning
"Return if you must" he said
(and I do)
and in the pause between
find myself again
neither back or forward
but in amber held
my breath the Tree old
and rangy sashays and
mutely fingers what I take
to be Wind
chimes
likewise answering
from beneath the eves
fugitives
from my parent's house
Rises falling to spin
and call out side my
window
where I find
each step
takes Time

Michael Franco

David

I don't remember clouds or the color of the sky,
the sound of birds.
Who his father might have been, the significant trees in his
life as a child,
the way he ran to go home at the end of a day.
The things
he passed that told him who and where he was or if he had known
the loyalties of a dog.
When I think of him I say David, though I never
heard his name.
When we found him you couldn't tell if he were Asian, Anglo, or African
not as if anything were equal.
I don't know if he had ever known the unity of a ball game. I think he might have been
Chinese American from California
I wonder if his grandfather had ever taken him fishing. We wrapped him in a poncho
because it was water proof,
we didn't carry cloth, and we tied the poncho to a bamboo pole, carried him as if we were all
going home that night,
in a pilgrimage of the bewildered. Yes, we go home together. You can see the problem
abandonment is for the dead.
I regret the way we laid him on the ground near morning,
a clear lack of intention.

W. Allen Miller

Poets Contributing to the Poetry Page include:

Michael Franco hails from Somerville, MA, and is the author of *The Book of Measure* as well as a talented collage creator. He is currently creating a new space for poetry readings in Somerville. W. Allen Miller of Montague Center lives a fast moving life on his Farm, but still finds time to send us a poem or two. Jess Mynes, former poetry organizer of ALL Small Caps,

Wendell's stellar poetry series, is a resident of Wendell, and is one of poetry's lights.

Chris Sawyer-Lauçanno has appeared in the MR most recently as editor, but also from time to time as poet. He likes to end the year with a poem when possible. A second grader from Montague Elementary School created

the wonderful one-line poem, as well as the watercolor of the beautiful fish. We regret not being able to learn his or her name. We like to share poems by our student poets as well as our grown-up ones. Poets Franco, Miller and Mynes will appear also in our January Poetry Page.

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ONGOING:

EVERY SUNDAY

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

Rendezvous, Turners Falls: *TNT Karaoke*, 9 p.m. to 1 a.m.

EVERY MONDAY

Montague Center Library: *Evening Story Time*. Young children and their families are invited to wind down at the end of the day with stories. 6:30-7 p.m.

EVERY TUESDAY

Slate Memorial Library, Gill: *Story Hour*, stories, popcorn, and a hands-on craft project. We welcome new families, 10 a.m.

Leverett Library *Spanish Conversation Group*. Brush up on or improve your Spanish in a casual and friendly environment, 4 to 5 p.m.

Route 63 Roadhouse, Millers Falls: *Free Texas Hold 'em Poker tournament*, with cash prizes.

EVERY WEDNESDAY

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

EVERY THURSDAY

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

EVERY FRIDAY

Between the Uprights, Turners Falls: *Karaoke with Dirty Johnny*. 9 p.m. to midnight. Free.

ART SHOWS & MUSEUMS:

Wendell Free Library, Wendell: New work by professional photographer *Stephen Petegorsky*, of Northampton. The ten works on display are based on stained animal skeletons from the Biology Department at UMass. Photography Exhibit in the Marion Herrick Room through January

Between The Uprights, Turners Falls: *Ugly Sweater Party!* Dress to impress in your holiday's finest! You could win one of the many gift certificates we will be giving away! Judges will be choosing the ugliest sweaters in an array of categories, 9 p.m.

Wendell Meetinghouse: *Medieval Yule Celebration* benefit. See Local Briefs, pg. A2. \$, 6 to 9 p.m.

Deja Brew, Wendell: *Josh Levangie & The Pistoleros*, outlaw country! 9 p.m.

Rendezvous, Turners Falls: *Lisa Marie Ellingsen and Lexi Weegee*, 9:30 p.m.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 20

The Roundhouse, 68 Van Nuys Road, Colrain: *33rd Annual Sol-*

at 7 p.m., film starts at 7:30 p.m.

Mocha Maya's, Shelburne Falls: *Moment's Notice*, jazz quartet with Dick Poccia-sax, Karl Rausch-guitar, 8 p.m.

Montague Bookmill, Montague Center: Jeremy Mage, With acoustic instruments and live looping electronics, he will weave a set of apocalyptic, hopeful songs, \$, 8 p.m.

Arts Block Cafe, Greenfield: *Steven Schoenberg*, composer and improvisational pianist in a special holiday concert, \$, 8 p.m.

Rendezvous, Turners Falls: *Rockett Queer* with D.J. Just Joan, \$, 9:30 p.m.

Deja Brew, Wendell: *The Relics*, 50's & 60's rock, 9 p.m.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 21

Deja Brew, Wendell: *John Sheldon*, 8 p.m.

Rendezvous, Turners Falls: *TNT Karaoke*, 9 p.m.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 22

Rendezvous, Turners Falls: *Nora's Stellar Open Mic Cabaret*, 8 p.m.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 24

Academy of Music, Northampton: *Joan Holliday's Holiday Hootenanny!* with the *Sweetback Sisters*. Lyrics sheets will be provided for audience participation. \$, 7 p.m.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 27

Memorial Hall, Shelburne Falls: *A Benefit Concert Against the Pipeline with Jeffrey Foucault and Kris Delmhors*. Also featuring *Rusty Belle* and *Abe Loomis*. All proceeds go to the Franklin Land Trust, one of many local outfits coming together to fight off the proposed Kinder-Morgan pipeline, \$, 7:30 p.m.

Arts Block Cafe, Greenfield: *The Roger Salloom 7 piece band featuring Jessica Ro Freeman* and special surprise guest on keyboards. \$, 7:30 p.m.

Guiding Star Grange, Greenfield: *TopHill Music Contradance Party*. Featuring varied bands and callers. All are welcome. \$, 8 p.m.

Deja Brew, Wendell: *The Reprobate Blues Band*, 9 p.m.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 28

Deja Brew, Wendell: *Lexi Weegee*, sassy, jazzy blues, 8 p.m.

Rendezvous, Turners Falls: *TNT Karaoke*, 9 p.m.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 31

Shea Theater, Turners Falls: *Beatles for Sale* is a five-member New England based Beatles tribute band from Massachusetts that is committed to re-creating the sounds of the Beatles live in

concert. Free concert, 8 p.m.

Arts Block Cafe, Greenfield: *New Years Eve Dance Party with John Sheldon and Blue Streak featuring Samirah Evans!* \$, 8:30 p.m.

Rendezvous, Turners Falls: *Sandy Bailey and Her Funky Friends*, playing funk/soul/r&b hits, 9 p.m. \$5 includes New Year's Eve champagne toast at midnight.

Deja Brew, Wendell: *Rhythm, Inc.* and *New Year's Eve Party!* Bonfire, snacks, hats, beads, noisemakers, free champagne at midnight, 10 p.m.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 1

Montague Center: *Annual Sawmill River 10K run*. Sponsored by Montague Parks & Recreation Department, 6:30 a.m.



The Teen Center will be closed Christmas Eve Christmas Day & New Year's Day

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Benefit Concert Against the Pipeline with Jeffrey Foucault and Kris Delmhors, Saturday December 27, 7:30 p.m. at Memorial Hall, Shelburne Falls.

3, 2015.

Leverett Library Community Room: On display through December: *Leverett Pond Art Exhibit* sponsored by the Friends of Leverett Pond. In January & February: *Photographs by Ian Hammel*.

CALL FOR ART:

Call for art submissions for the Fourth Annual *Triple S: Sensual, Sexual, Smut* show. Looking for a wide spectrum of erotic art from regional artists, previous participants encouraged. Exhibit opens February 2015 at Nina's Nook, Turners Falls. Send to naban@verizon.net before Jan 23. www.ninasnook.com

EVENTS:

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 19

Arts Block Cafe, Greenfield: Pioneer Valley Jazz Shares presents: *The Miro Sprague Trio*. Sprague on piano, Linda Oh, bass and Mark Ferber, drums, \$, 7:30 p.m.

stice Storytelling and Songfest Celebration. Performers include *Sonny Crawford with the Lithuanian Brass Quintet*, *Jay Goldspinner*, *Joe Kurland*, *Rona Leventhal*, *Rob Peck*, *John Porcino*, *Bob Reiser*, *ReBekka Tippens*, *Tim Van Egmond* and *Rochelle Wildfong*. With cellist *Rebecca Hartka*, puppeteer *Anna Sobel* and storyteller *Jackson Gillman*. Fundraiser for the Food Bank of Western Mass and Partners in Health. 6:30 p.m.

Rendezvous, Turners Falls: *Paintings by Max Armen, Julianne Jones, Cathe Janke, Paul Root, Allen Fowler, & Diana Pedrosa*, expressive in design elements and complement each other well. Opening and meet the artists! 7 p.m.

Wendell Free Library, Wendell: *Dominique is Dead*, short, 30 min. film before the movie: *Episode 12 of The Phantom Empire The End of Murania*. Part of a monthly series of Science Fiction/Fantasy and Horror/Monster movies at the library. Doors open



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DAVID HOITT PHOTOS

Chloe Ellis (#24) eyes the hoop as Turners Falls defeats Smith Vocational, 54 to 19, last Friday.

Teammates Alex Wing-LaClaire (#3) and Amanda Cooke (#1) back her up.

Turners Falls High School senior Ian MacPhail gives a thumbs up following his 500-yard freestyle win last Friday. MacPhail broke the school record and qualified for the Western Mass. Swimming and Diving Championships.



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