



FAITH AND COMMUNITY
An interview with Father Stan
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"PLEASE DON'T CLOSE OUR LIBRARY"
Letters to the Finance Committee
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YEAR 6 - NO. 27

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THE VOICE OF THE VILLAGES

APRIL 10, 2008

Wendell Selectboard Recommends Raising Pay for Fire and Police Chief, Highway Boss

JOSH HEINEMANN - On Wednesday, April 2nd, the finance committee met with the selectboard and distributed a spreadsheet showing the pay rate for various jobs in Wendell and comparing them to other Franklin County towns. Wendell fits in with the other towns in most jobs, with the exception of the road boss, the police chief, and the fire chief. The comparison is not quite even, because some of the chiefs are full time, but Keller suggested bringing both of their salaries up from \$1,500 to \$5,000 because of the amount of time they both spend on the job, and bringing the road boss salary up to the level that New Salem pays, in yearly increments of \$2,000. Other board members agreed with his recommendation, along with a 3% cost of living increase for other town workers.

The selectboard agreed to raise the recommended pay of the animal inspectors, and the constables, saying the salaries now do not cover the fuel they use on the job. Dog officer Maggie Houghton said she will continue, for now, quarantining animals suspected of being infected with rabies.

Michael Idoine of the finance committee recommended the town not use a split tax rate for commercial and residential taxpayers, saying the one commercial establishment in town is doing no better than the rest of us. The selectboard agreed, and approved unanimously a single tax rate. Assessor Paul Sullivan, who was in the room at the time, said he expected that rate to be \$17.12 per thousand, compared to \$17.93 last year, but he said residents

should not expect tax bills to go down, since values have risen.

Jim Slavas of the finance committee reported on his meeting with the Mahar school committee and the regionalization subcommittee, and said he continued with his routine pitch for the alternative method of financing the schools. Linda Overing, representing New Salem, pointed out that some items, school choice, charter tuition and medical insurance for retirees were included as debt and transportation, and did not belong in those categories, which further skewed the budget and the assessment for the four towns in the Mahar Region. The state Department of Elementary and Secondary Education agrees with Overing's view, but said there is not time to correct the problem for the budgets that will go to town meetings. Overing insisted there is enough time.

Slavas felt he was getting nowhere with the school committee, but Idoine said that three years ago there was not even a conversation about how towns were assessed, and now there is. Petersham's member on the Mahar school committee voted for the alternative method of assessment. Slavas recommended that Wendell approve only the alternative assessment for Mahar at town meeting, and he wondered how much the town should push. "Should we roll over like last year?"

If two towns reject the statutory assessment method of funding the Mahar regional school district, the budget will see **WENDELL** pg 12

MAC Director Urges Common Sense Solution to Airport Access Road Impasse



DETMOLD PHOTO

Concrete blocks act as barriers on an 'informal road' between airport property and the privately owned Pioneer Aviation on Industrial Boulevard

BY DAVID DETMOLD
TURNERS FALLS - In a light rain on Friday, April 4th, Robert Welch, executive director of the Massachusetts Aeronautics Commission, walked from the airport office across the muddy grass to view a disputed "informal road" that had once provided easy access for hangar owners to drive back and forth to the privately owned Pioneer Aviation. The road is little

more than overgrown wheel ruts now, blocked at the perimeter of the airport property with a series of low concrete blocks. The pilots group, calling themselves the Save the Airport Committee, that had taken up a petition and gathered 160 signatures from airport users last winter calling for the ouster of airport manager Michael Sweeney, for what they characterized as arbitrary enforcement

of operating procedures at the municipal airport, coupled with steep hikes in lease fees and a lack of qualified flight instructors and mechanical help for pilots, had cited the abrupt closure of the informal access road to Pioneer Aviation as yet another example of how Sweeney's tenure has made their life more difficult. "I used to use this road to get from my hangar to

Pioneer for maintenance," said pilot Chuck Meyer, of Conway, a member of the pilots group. "Now I have to go around by the taxiway," he said, pointing a short distance away, to a paved section near the main runway. Other pilots spoken to about the blocked road called it more an insult than an inconvenience, since most of the perimeter of see **AIRPORT** pg 8

Local Luminaries Line Up

FOR COFFEEHOUSE SERIES AT THE GREAT FALLS DISCOVERY CENTER

BY ANNE HARDING
GREAT FALLS - Last month, I attended the monthly coffeehouse at the Great Falls Discovery Center - featuring Joe Graveline as the opening act and the as-yet-unnamed trio of Fern Bork, Bruce Kahn and Dan Tinen. It was an uplifting, joyous evening with an incredibly diverse offering of music, culminating in a final act featuring all four musicians and the entire audience.

We have a second opportunity this Friday, April 11th at 7 p.m. to see three of those four musicians, as Fern, Bruce and Joe will be back along with Annie Chappell, performing as the

"Northfield Four". They will be joined by the "O-Towns," a subgroup of the R. C. Mahar chorus and "Friends" - a renowned female barber-shop quartet with members from several towns in Franklin County.

Annie Chappell has been a member of "The Friends of the Great Falls Discovery Center" almost since their inception about eight



Accordion virtuoso, "Fabulous Maurice," will perform on Friday, May 9th at the Great Falls Discovery Center coffeehouse.

years ago. She currently serves on the "Coffeehouse Committee," is an enthusiastic amateur singer, and is see **COFFEE** pg 14

PET OF THE WEEK
All American



Spencer

My name is Spencer, and I am a 4½-year-old male black and white domestic shorthair cat in need of a good home. I am an All-American type of cat. If you are a true Cat-Person, I look like the cartoon cats pictured on your potholders, mugs, and shower curtain, and in a framed painting by the front door. I'm a big, solid, classically gorgeous black and white cat. My friends urge me to break out of this classic role of the loveable lazy lap cat, but it's just who I am. I'm a little bit of a couch potato, and I'm okay if you are too. Some of us just like taking life easy. For more information on adopting me please contact the Dakin Pioneer Valley Humane Society at 413-548-9898 or via email leverett@dpvhs.org.

Ave A Spring Planter Get Together

BY LINDA HICKMAN

TURNERS FALLS - The Streetscape Revitalization Committee will host a spring get-together at the Carnegie Library on Sunday, April 13th at 1 p.m. Anyone interested in the Avenue A Adopt-a-Planter project, and everyone involved from past years, is welcome. Master gardener Dawn Ward of Montague will discuss plant and soil concerns. Refreshments will be served.

There are 35 large tree planters lining Avenue A. Four years ago, the Streetscape Revitalization Committee began the Adopt-a-Planter program. Area businesses, organizations, and individuals sponsor the planters. Various individuals plant and tend the planters. Several planters are available for adoption. For more information, call Linda at the Carnegie Library at 413-863-3214 or 413-774-0204.



LINDA HICKMAN PHOTO

CARNEGIE LIBRARY NEWS

Phillip Fisman, almost 3, of Turners Falls was very intrigued by the seashells at the Sea, Sand and Surf Mad Science program at the Carnegie Library on Saturday, March 30th. The program was sponsored by the Franklin County Family Network and the Montague Cultural Council.

Pioneer Valley War Tax Info April 15th

Pioneer Valley War Tax Resisters will be offering information about how at least half the 2009 national budget will go to fund war and war preparation.

PVWTR will have material available from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Tuesday, April 15th in front of Green Fields Market, 144

Main Street, Greenfield. PVWTR also invites those interested to call: 413-863-9260 or write Juanita Nelson, 127 3rd Street, Turners Falls, MA 01376 for announcements of bi-monthly meetings of the Pioneer Valley War Tax Resisters.

Tranquility Zone Theme: Compassion

You are invited to "Tranquility Zone" with the theme Compassion on Sunday, April 13th at 10:00 a.m. An hour of reflection, music, prayers, writings from the Holy Scriptures of the World, including Zoroastrian, Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, Christian, Islam, Baha'i... The readings will be followed by a period of

silent meditation. Please feel free to bring and share a writing that has touched you. Brunch will then be served. Held at the home of Shay and Charles Cooper 71 Kentfield Road, Wendell Depot, (first road on the left of Wendell Depot post office heading south). Phone 978-544-2190. Sponsored by the Baha'is of Wendell.

SENIOR CENTER ACTIVITIES -- April 14th-April 18th

GILL/MONTAGUE Senior Center, 62 Fifth Street, Turners Falls, is open Monday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. for activities and congregate meals. Council-on-Aging Director is Bunny Caldwell. For information or to make reservations, call 863-9357. Meal reservations need to be made a day in advance by 11 a.m. Messages can be left on our machine when the center is not open. Mealsite Manager is Chris Richer. The Center offers a hot noon meal weekdays to any senior. A reservation is necessary and transportation can be provided. Trips: Call the Senior Center 863-9357 or 863-4500

Monday, 14th
9-11 a.m. Foot screening Gill and Montague residents only. Advance registration needed. Fee \$5.00.

10 a.m. Senior Aerobics
11 a.m. Easy Aerobics
Tuesday, 15th
1 p.m. Spring Painting classes. David Sund will be instructing this class. This painting class is

in Acrylic painting for all levels of expertise.
Wednesday, 16th
10 a.m. Senior Aerobics
12:45 p.m. Bingo
Thursday, 17th
1 p.m. Pitch
Friday, 18th
9:00 A.M. to 12:00 P.M. Montague Health Fair at the Discovery Center Ave A Turners Falls. Over a dozen presenters, free information, cholesterol, sugar, and blood pressure screenings, refreshments, and door prizes. Bring your medications in a brown bag for druggist discussion and learn about any possible interactions. General public welcome. 10 a.m. Senior Aerobics
11 a.m. Easy Aerobics
1 p.m. Christmas Work Bee. First meeting of work group to make handicrafts for Christmas Bazaar. Both workers and materials are needed.

ERVING Senior Center, 18 Pleasant St., Ervingside (Old Center School, 1st Floor), is open Monday through Thursday

FACES & PLACES



We Have a Chick!
First eagle chick out of the egg was spotted at 5:10 p.m. on Wednesday, April 9th! Keep your fingers crossed for one more hatchling soon!

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JOE GRAVELINE

GREAT FALLS MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS OF THE WEEK
Grade 6 :
Ashley Patnode
Grade 7:
Brandon Lenois
Grade 8:
Jolina Blier
Lily Kane

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from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. for activities and congregate meals. For information and reservations call Polly Kiely, Senior Center director at 413 423-3308. Lunch daily at 11:30 a.m. with reservations a day in advance by 11:00 a.m. Transportation can be provided for meals, Thursday shopping, or medical necessity by calling Dana Moore at 413-422-2584.
Monday, 14th
9:00 a.m. Exercise
9:45 a.m. Library
12 Noon Pitch
Tuesday, 15th
9 a.m. Aerobics
12:30 p.m. Painting
Wednesday, 16th
8:45 a.m. Line Dancing
12 Noon Bingo
Thursday, 17th
9 a.m. Aerobics
10:15 a.m. Pool
WENDELL Senior Center, located in the town offices on Wendell Depot Rd. Call Kathy Swaim at 978 544-2020 for info, schedule of events or to coordinate transportation.

Faith and Community Come Together at Our Lady of Peace

BY JOE KWIECINSKI

TURNERS FALLS - When the Iraq War began back in 2003, Father Stanley Aksamit of Turners Falls stepped forward to condemn the conflict, at a peace demonstration on the Greenfield town common. The United States has now observed the fifth anniversary of the war with the death toll of American servicemen killed in action recently passing the 4,000 mark. Has Father Aksamit's stand on the deadly struggle changed?

"From a faith perspective," said Aksamit at an interview in his rectory office last week, "all human beings are members of the family of God. The horror of this war and all wars will end when we truly believe who we are, and begin actually living as brothers and sisters. John Paul II was one of the voices against the Iraq War. I was following the Holy Father's lead, but it was my gut instinct, too."

Such deeply held principles and simple eloquence are characteristic of Father Aksamit, affectionately known to his parishioners at Our Lady of Peace, along with his colleagues and friends, as "Father Stan." Some intellectuals, amateur philosophers, and even average folks can allude to their anti-war stance as if operating from rote memory. Not Father Stan.

Relaxed and informal in the interview, Father Aksamit portrays a man at peace with himself and attuned to the abiding tenets of his faith. He is warm and accepting, speaking in an uncomplicated, sincere manner. When asked about where his penchant for helping people and speaking his mind began, Father Stan pointed to his upbringing.

"The example of service began in my home and in our ties to the local community of Turners Falls," he said. "My grandparents lived with us, so I learned to have respect for the elderly and those who were 'down and out.' My grandfather had epilepsy, and my grandmother was paralyzed on one side by a stroke about six months after I was born. She was always in a chair or in bed. My grandmother had a stack of prayers written out; people would visit her and let her know who needed prayers. I guess you could say I had a natural school for compassion by watching my family members."

There was also a measure of practicality to Father Aksamit's



Father Stanley Aksamit in the rectory office at Our Lady of Peace Church on 7th Street in Turners Falls

moral and psychological development as a member of Our Lady of Czestochowa parish in Turners Falls. A part of the Polish-American community that "looked out for each other," his father would, among other things, load an extra bucket of coal and send it to a poor widow in the community. "For all of us," said Father Stan, reflectively, "helping each other was as natural as breathing."

But his early days were marked not only by duty, but also by inspiration. "I learned how to play the piano gradually, by myself," he said, "with no lessons. I taught myself how to play chords. These days I'm playing at the little organ in the rectory and in church before Mass."

The Catholic Church has always been a foundational institution for Father Stan. A product of a family with a rock solid faith, young Aksamit made his First Holy Communion while in the second grade, went on to graduate from Turners Falls High School in 1969, and served at the altar until leaving for the seminary at the Catholic University of Louvain in Belgium in 1973. "I was always attracted to the practical dimension of faith," Father Stan recalled. So it was a natural choice to specialize in moral theology while at Louvain. Some of his fondest memories are of his year at seminary, when the university celebrated its 550th anniversary.

During his summers off from university, Father Stan worked for Andy Rastallis at the Montague highway department.

Some of the wooden guardrails along Turners Falls Road were installed by Aksamit, with Rastallis keeping a careful eye on progress.

Now, Aksamit keeps his parishioners on the straight and narrow way. Among his many duties and parochial commitments is his membership on the Interfaith Council of Franklin County, which brings together clergy and laity of different faiths, creeds, and spiritual paths. "I've always enjoyed being involved with representatives of other faiths and other Christian churches," Father Stan said. "First," he noted, "our work is motivated by faith. Second, Interfaith brings people together from divergent traditions. And third, our joining gives us more ability to respond to the needs of the whole community."

One example of the efficacy of the Interfaith Council's synergy occurred about five years ago when the state reduced funding for the local emergency shelter. "They came to the Interfaith Council," Father Aksamit recalled, "to discuss the funding shortfall. Their plan was to close the shelter one night a week during the winter and then to close it altogether in the warmer months, starting in April." Aksamit chaired a committee and gathered community leaders for a "summit meeting" to brainstorm ways to respond to the crisis.

"We had people from all sectors, the newspaper world, hospitals, social service agencies, staff members from local state representatives and senators' offices, the various educational institutions, working on the

problem. We also asked for students from area schools, both public and private, to join the effort. Then we brainstormed and chose activities for members to work on in their respective spheres."

The result? "We raised close to \$88,000," Father Stan recalled. "The response of the community was fantastic." Again, Father Aksamit feels that addressing a social dilemma from a moral and practical approach carried the day. "Above all," he observed, "homelessness is a moral issue. Members of the faith community can bring that moral dimension to the problem and help motivate

people to respond from a faith perspective. Ultimately, it's faith in action."

Since last summer, Father Aksamit has been attending a leadership group to address the root causes of homelessness. Greenfield Mayor Christine Forgey asked Father Stan to be part of this committee, which consists of leaders throughout Franklin, Hampshire, and Hamden County including the mayors of Northampton and Holyoke.

"There's a new approach to homelessness," said Father Stan. "The focus today is on getting housing first while the person is getting appropriate support services. The aim is to try to end homelessness at its roots and include all levels of the community such as government, business, the churches, and social service agencies in the endeavor. For many people, economics is the cause of their homelessness. They say some people are two paychecks away from the street."

On another front, the Turners Falls native helped found the Montague Catholic Social Ministries some 14 years ago, to perform necessary outreach and support services to disenfranchised members of the village community, particularly women and children. "The Ministries actually started in Ste. Anne's Church," said Father Aksamit. "Now we're located at the corner

see STAN pg 10

Peter Cottontail's EGGstravaganza



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A Bad Year for Pay Hikes

Over the last few years, town and school officials have led Montague into a sea of red ink, and now, as a town, we are wallowing in it. After several months of staring at a deficit that exceeds \$1.5 million for the coming fiscal year, last Wednesday the finance committee and selectboard signed off on a plan that depends on the good will of cash strapped property taxpayers to rescue core services like the branch libraries, the senior center, the parks and recreation commission, curbside recycling and even the dog catcher, with a \$250,000 Proposition 2½ override. Coupled with this Hail Mary pass, town officials are planning to sink an additional \$300,000 of Montague's fast dwindling reserves (never mind the \$300,000 in free cash already put toward the '09 deficit) into meeting annual operating costs, driving up the gap between expected revenues and expenses even further next year.

That is the proposed remedy for just the town side of the '09 budget deficit. For Montague, the gap in funding the Gill-Montague schools for the fiscal year that starts July 1st will still exceed \$950,000, even if \$600,000 in town reserves are spent and a \$250,000 override passed. The town has made an effort to cut its budget to meet reality; the schools, so far, have

not.

How do town officials propose dealing with the school side of the problem? Wait for either a district meeting or the state Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to order us to give our "underperforming" school district the additional funds. And where would we find nearly a million extra dollars this summer, assuming the voters have already approved a property tax override - something the voters of Montague have never done before? And assuming we have already taken \$600,000 out of reserves, leaving only \$1.75 million in the assessors overlay account to meet future obligations and unexpected emergencies (the need to defend in court the town's expenditure of \$270,000 towards securing the Strathmore Mill, for example)?

If we are forced to take another \$950,000 out of reserves to meet the school's operating budget, we may as well declare bankruptcy - why wait another year? - and let the state come and pick up the pieces.

The finance committee and the selectboard have known for some time they are spending far in excess of Montague's means. The word unsustainable is too pale to convey the gravity of the situation. Irresponsible is more like it. And the plan the boards have come up with for dealing with the present exigency is no plan at all, but a derogation of duty.

The town has no realistic hope of raising local revenues in the short term. Local receipts are down, as the recessionary economy (which has never really improved much in our area since

the mills went south) has caused more and more of our residents to defer home improvements and new car purchases, shaving \$100,000 off Montague's take in excise taxes, building permits, and the like between last year and this. With fewer people taking a gamble on scratch tickets, state aid to the town is expected to creep up by only \$7,000 this year. With the statewide deficit pegged at \$1.3 billion, and going nowhere fast, anyone who thinks Montague's aid with significant extra Chapter 70 or Chapter 90 or lottery aid in the next few years is laboring under a delusion.

There is only one way to rein in the flood of red ink that is threatening to choke off our basic municipal services and the viability of our school system, and that is to curb the exponential growth of personnel costs on both the town and the school side of the budget. With all due respect for the excellent work our police, highway workers, teachers and other municipal and district staff perform on a daily basis, we simply cannot afford any increase in wages this year: the town is broke.

In the real world, when businesses are running in the red, they do not negotiate contracts with their workers guaranteeing them 5% annual increases, on top of generous benefit packages that include 90% contributions for the cost of their health insurance, and up to 20 paid sick days and five weeks paid vacation. Yet this is just what the town and school district have done; the GMRSD in fact increasing the share of its contribution to the health plans of its 230 workers from 85% to 90% last year, as a condition of their agreeing to join the state Group Insurance

Commission.

Each percent of step and cost of living increases for the 64 town side staff costs the taxpayers \$25,000. The five percent annual raises town hall staff have received under their current contracts (all three union contracts are up for renegotiation this June) translates to \$125,000 in extra spending per annum. At the schools, the 5% hike in wages in the current contracts costs more than \$400,000 per year.

Taken together, more than half a million dollars in wage hikes, when the town has clearly been in deficit spending for a number of years. That is truly unaffordable. The only chance for the tax levy to begin to pull even with the yawning structural budget gap in the short term is to defer all wage increases - the teachers contract is also up for negotiation this year - for fiscal '09, and then proceed with step and cost of living increases in future contract years at a pace that will allow the town to close the budget gap without a loss of vital services.

In his five year budget plan, town administrator Frank Abbondanzio correctly called for limiting operating expense budgets to 3% a year. That is the appropriate remedy, when the only reliable source of revenue growth the town can count on in the foreseeable future is the 2½% increase in property taxes allowed under Proposition 2½, plus some new growth. The only way to attain a 3% growth rate in operating budgets is to limit the growth of personnel costs (which make up at least 70% of the budget on both the town and the school side of the budget, when all factors are taken into account) to 3% a year. And since we have allowed personnel costs to rise at 5% for several years,

we need to take immediate corrective action to bring the budget back into line.

The unions will not like this, but they need to ask themselves: what is the alternative? The alternative is the loss of union jobs, clerical workers being let go so that department heads are reduced to filing forms, and the loss of essential town services that hard-pressed taxpayers have scrimped for years to continue to provide. The alternative is an erosion of positions needed at the district schools at a time when the proportion of special needs students and students coming to school from homes in poverty is likely to increase as a result of a shortsighted elementary reconfiguration plan, whose unintended effect will likely be the further loss to the district of the easiest to educate students.

A third of the taxpayers of Montague are living on fixed incomes or below the poverty line. How can the selectboard ask them to pay more for the senior center, the town nurse, the libraries, and the parks and recreation department, without first asking town unions to tighten their own belts? And town side employees cannot be expected to agree to much belt tightening unless the teachers do as well.

"Who negotiated these contracts?" demanded Precinct 4's Greg Garrison at the budget hearing held on Monday, March 17th. Well, the answer to that is: town administrator Frank Abbondanzio negotiated the contracts for town side unions, with the help of a labor lawyer and one member of the selectboard for each of the three unions. But Mr. Abbondanzio's own compensation package is directly tied to the outcome of labor negotiations with town hall

see **SCHOOLS** page 5



KAREN WILKINSON ILLUSTRATION

American Dead in Iraq and Afghanistan as of 4/9/08



(Casualty sign temporarily located next to Wagon Wheel Restaurant on Rte. 2 in Gill)

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“Please don’t close the library!”

With the threatened closure of the branch libraries in Millers Falls and Montague Center, Montague Public Library Commissioners did a little campaigning among their younger patrons to generate letters in support of keeping the libraries open. Here are a sample few of those letters, along with one of the individual responses written by Montague finance committee chair John Hanold.

The library is important to me philosophically and practically. Practically I can walk there after school and read or order a book that I can't find in the shelves. It is a truly wonderful asset and is used as such. I think that in order for a people to retain power within our country we need to be able to obtain knowledge. For instance if you couldn't read you couldn't discover why our economy is lousy enough to lose libraries. Why we as a nation have such a deficit. I for one think that the library should be the last thing to go in a town.

- Oliver Armen, 15, Montague Center

Please do not lose the Montague Library. It helps with many things for me and everyone in the town of Montague. My family and lots of others can walk to it and get lots of good books and movies. I love to walk in the library and go straight to the comics shelf and pick out my favorite Calvin & Hobbes. Everyone loves the Montague Library so please do not close it!

- Lucas, 9 and Bella, 8

I am writing this letter because I heard that the library in Montague Center could be shut down for good.

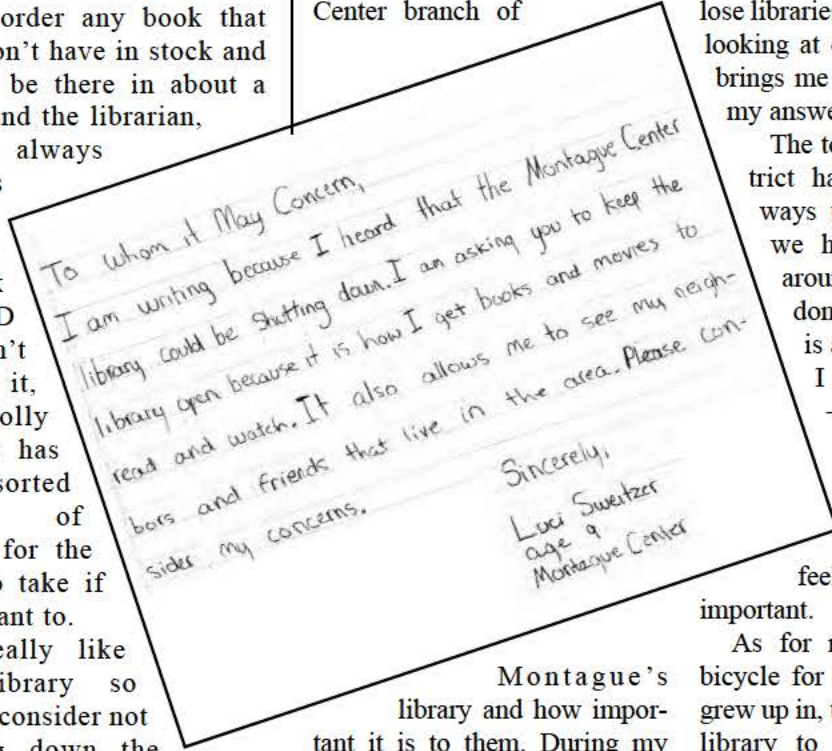
I love the library because I can order any book that they don't have in stock and it will be there in about a week and the librarian, Dolly, always

helps me find a book or DVD if I can't find it, and Dolly always has an assorted array of candy for the kids to take if they want to.

I really like the library so please consider not closing down the Montague Library.

- Kai Sweitzer, 11 Montague Center

Dear Oliver,
I received several letters from adults and young people, after last week's finance committee meeting, telling me how they use the Montague Center branch of



Montague's library and how important it is to them. During my own visits to the Carnegie Library I have also spoken with several of the librarians, and as you can imagine I have heard from the library trustees, too.

Your letter was at the top of the pile, and pointed out that we can't acquire knowledge if we can't read, and that without reading we can't discover why our economy is so bad that we lose libraries. I liked that way of looking at our problem, and it brings me to the main part of my answer.

The town and school district have more valuable ways to use money than we have money to go around, and even if we don't all agree on what is at the top of the list, I don't think anyone - on the finance committee or selectboard or among the townspeople - feels libraries are not important.

As for myself, I rode my bicycle for years, in the city I grew up in, to the closest branch library to check out books. While I was in college the library was my favorite place to study, and now that I live in walking distance from the Carnegie Library I go there reg-

ularly. Part of closing the gap between our income and our expenses, in town, is raising our income. We aren't getting the increases that we need from state and local taxes and fees, so we have decided to ask townspeople for an increase in property taxes. The way it will probably work is that we will use the money we have for sure on police, public works, and town hall services, and ask voters to provide the additional money to support the parks, senior center, and library branches (among other things). My own hope is that people who use or value these services will agree to provide the money we need to continue them.

I find it very painful to be in this situation, because I have tremendous respect for Sue SanSoucie, Linda Hickman, Dolly Letourneau, Mary Ann Packard and the other librarians. Your letter reminds me of how strongly others agree. And thank you for writing.

Yours Truly,
- John Hanold, chair of the Montague finance committee

SCHOOLS from pg 4

staff, and without a coordinated approach from the selectboard - in whom the ultimate authority to approve contracts rests - there is a danger in leaving so much of the responsibility of managing the increase of the town's personnel costs in the town administrator's hands. The same holds true for negotiations on town hall employees joining the GIC: the town administrator is bargaining on his own health benefits. This year demands a different approach, tough tactics, and teamwork, before it is too late to save what we have all worked long and hard to protect and pre-

serve. And that goes double for the schools.

Abbondanzio told the finance committee and selectboard last week that reducing the share of the town's contribution to workers' health plans from 90% to 80% would save \$176,000 for the coming budget year, but he argued that such a change would come at the cost of a buyout in the form of higher steps or cost of living raises. Speaking to this point later, finance committee chair John Hanold said, "This approach assumes the employee will never feel adverse impact," from the budget crisis. Why not?

We know of almost no one who lives in town, other than

school and municipal employees themselves, and the lucky few who still belong to industrial, health care or service unions, who enjoyed a guaranteed wage increase this year. The economy is in the tank, and most of our discretionary income winds up in the gas tank, and in the oil tank as well. Still, taxpayers have plumped for a new police station, and a renovated sewer treatment facility, by approving debt exclusion overrides in excess of \$7 million. Having afforded these facilities, are we now going to leave them short staffed to continue paying routine wage increases and hefty benefit packages to remaining

departmental employees?

A few years back, when town meeting approved the selectboard's recommendation to implement pay hikes contained in the wage and classification study, to bring staff salaries up to par with those of other towns in the region, we acted on the assurance that we could afford the increases, and that our employees deserved them. Only the latter proposition turned out to be true. Yet at the same time, we did nothing to reduce the generous benefit package that had formerly propped up an inadequate compensation scale. We kept employee benefits just as generous as they had been

before the pay hikes.

In doing so, we have backed ourselves into a corner, and crying for more state aid, or yet another property tax increase will not get us out of it.

If some town workers or teachers decide they cannot do without a pay hike this year, let them try their luck in the job market. For now, we think the likelihood is they will see that Montague is indeed paying comparable wages, providing great benefits, and offering long term job security, in tight economic times. In return, our unions need to meet the taxpayers' requirement for fiscal restraint in a truly terrible budget year. **ND**

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Losing More than Just a School

BY JOANNA FRANKEL
MONTAGUE CENTER - I am adding my voice to the chorus of those dismayed and

disappointed by last week's school committee vote rejecting two sound proposals to keep the Montague Center

School open. My heart ached watching that meeting, for the students of MCS who will have to say goodbye to their school; for the teachers, many of whom sat at the meeting last week while their jobs were being cut or altered; for the parents who clearly care deeply about MCS and were willing to go to great lengths to assure its continuation; for the village of Montague Center losing its local school and also for the other villages who are losing the option of intra-district choice into this intimate and creative educational setting; and for the legacy of Anna Garbiel who gave years of spirit, vision, and dedication to MCS, and whose work there is seeming to end too soon after her passing. Lastly, and most selfishly, I mourned for myself, losing the dream of

someday walking my child to the Montague Center School each morning, up the stairs of our little neighborhood school.

On a more optimistic note, I have watched in awe as a group of tireless and devoted parents and community members threw themselves into developing proposals for keeping MCS open. I am truly grateful to all of those people who spent countless hours researching, reading, planning, meeting, brainstorming, driving to meetings and workshops in Boston, and generally envisioning a school that would have been an exciting and accessible environment for children to learn and grow. I also thank the three school committee members who were brave enough to think outside the box and open their minds

to alternatives for the endurance of the Montague Center School.

I believe that most parents, no matter from Montague Center, Turners Falls, Millers Falls, Montague City, or Lake Pleasant, would be saddened if the elementary school in their town, perhaps even the school they attended, were to close. I hope that the district can thrive and prove successful for all students and families, no matter which village they might call home. My fear, however, is that the savings strived for through the closing of MCS will quickly get whittled away through children choosing out. Those who do choose out will be acting less in response to particular schools and more out of a sense of disillusionment in a system that did not hear them.

Planning Board Welcomes Public Input

BY JOSH HEINEMANN
WENDELL - In the March 27th issue of *the Reporter*, Deirdre Cabral answered a letter from Ray DiDonato about a report I filed on the March 4th planning board hearing about Wendell's proposed conservation bylaw ("Eco-Sensitive Development Zoning Proposed", MR VI #13). In that article, I reported a comment by then planning board member Jenn Gross about discussing and amending the proposed conservation bylaw at town meeting, instead of at the planning board meetings, which allow more

time for needed discussion. What I wrote might have been accurate literally, but in the context of planning board hearings the implication may have been taken that the planning board does not welcome public comment.

The opposite is true; the planning board goes to great length to get public input, but at town meeting there often isn't enough time to absorb and understand complicated regulations completely, or to consider the ramifications of amendments on something as complex as the proposed zoning bylaw.

Congratulations, Walter Cyhowski, our 750th Subscriber!

BY KATHY LITCHFIELD
MILLERS FALLS - As a teenager, Walter Cyhowski dreamed of being a baseball star.

"I had a couple scouts watching out for me until I knocked three vertebrae out in my neck; that caused a nerve to pinch in my elbow," said the star pitcher, a Millers Falls native who graduated from Turners Falls High School in 1960. After a chiropractor helped him heal his neck, Cyhowski tried out for the former semi-pro team, the Springfield Giants, and got a big write-up in the Springfield newspaper, he said.

A year out of high school, Cyhowski began attending Windham College on a baseball scholarship, until he was drafted a few months later. He served for two years -- including seven months in Vietnam -- and then returned to Franklin County.

Living in Greenfield, he spent 35 years working in the quality control lab for the former Millers Falls Paper Co., owned by International Paper.



The Montague Reporter's 750th subscriber, Walter Cyhowski, stands with the 1971 Chevy Malibu he enjoys cruising to classic car shows with his son, Phil Cyhowski, of Farley.

The company closed in August of 2000, and even though he had a 70-week severance package, Cyhowski said he couldn't sit still. He decided to go for his CDL driver's license, which he earned in 2002. He has since moved to the family homestead on Green Pond Road, and drives for Leader Home Center out of Deerfield, typically within a 50-mile radius of his Millers

Falls home.

"It's a great job. I enjoy it. I meet a lot of people. I've been on roads I'd never been on before. These people are very nice to work with. I've been as far as two exits from the Canadian border up I-91, but most trips are closer to home," he said.

Cyhowski has two sons - Brian, who lives in Vermont, and Phil, a resident of Farley.

Phil and his wife Sarah have a son, Hugh, who will be 2 years old in May, and another child on the way.

During the summer months, Cyhowski enjoys cruising to Classic Car Shows in the 1971 Chevy Malibu he bought for his son Phil a few years back. They enjoy spending time at the Athol Elks Club show, at Rosner Race Cars in Gill and other shows in Greenfield.

Cyhowski's subscription to *the Montague Reporter* was a March 9th birthday gift from Sarah and Phil Cyhowski. For his prize as the 750th subscriber, he chose a \$75 gift certificate to Sirum Equipment, where he has purchased his riding lawnmower, a tractor, snowblower and chainsaws over the years.

"You know, my father always wanted me to come back to this area. It's peaceful here. I've got plenty of land. It's quiet. I'm just far enough out of town, but it's handy if I need something, I don't have far to go," he said. "The newspaper is a nice relaxing read. I enjoy reading all the local news about things going on in our area."

(Our 725th subscriber, a resident of Montague Street in Turners Falls, preferred to remain anonymous, but chose a \$72.50 gift certificate to Shanahan's Construction Supply Co. as his prize.

Who will our 775th subscriber be?)

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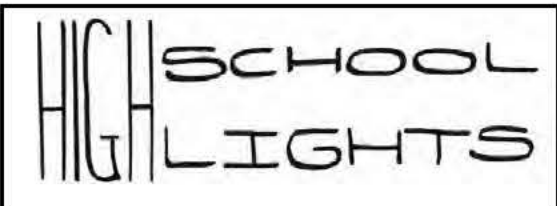
BY ALI URBAN

As a student at Turners Falls High School, I've been exposed to many new experiences and had varied and unique opportunities. I've been to fascinating places such as the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and to a luau on the Hawaiian island of Oahu. I learned about the life of a Roman legionary and benefited from new software and library books. I've worked on exercise videos in Wellness class and made remote operated vehicles in physics.

All of these activities were made possible through funding from the Gill-Montague Education Fund. They've brought standards-based learning

to life, providing enrichment opportunities that would not have been possible without financial assistance from the GMEF. But I'm not the only student to benefit from these programs. The education of each and every student in the six district schools has been enhanced by programs funded by the GMEF.

I have had the opportunity to be associated with the GMEF on both the receiving and giving end of its work. For the past three years, I have served on the GMEF's board of directors as a student representative. Through this work, I have gained valuable knowledge and skills in



organizing and implementing events, securing donations, coordinating advertising and assessing and understanding the grant process. I witness the dedication of members of the board and the willingness with which they serve the students of their school district. They are role models and friends.

The more than \$41,000 dollars the GMEF has used to enrich education at our district schools is made possible by

funds raised at its annual gala. This year, the gala will feature Don Campbell and his band in "the Essence of Country" on April 26th at 7 p.m. Campbell and his bandmates have opened for artists such as Willie Nelson, Carrie Underwood, Toby Keith, Keith Urban and Grechen Wilson.

Please support the GMEF - and the Gill-Montague schools - by your attendance at this event. You'll be doing more than helping enrich education; you'll be enjoying a night of lively entertainment, too.



Don Campbell

Turners Falls Sports Booster Club's 5th Annual Fundraising Event
presents a Comedy/Dinner Show Saturday Night, April 12th
at French King Entertainment Center. Call for tickets 413-423-3047. Dinner starts 6 p.m., Comedy at 9 p.m. with DJ dancing later. \$27.50 Past shows have sold out. Don't wait to call.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE MONTAGUE POLICE LOG

Multiple Arrests

Tuesday, 4/1

7:35 a.m. Report of weapons violation at Turners Falls High School. Services rendered.

1:03 p.m. Report of assault on Fourth Street, Turners Falls.

1:30 p.m. Report of weapons violation at Great Falls Middle School. Services rendered

Wednesday, 4/2

12:35 p.m. Report of loud noise disturbance on Fourth Street, Turners Falls. Arrested

on a fugitive from justice court warrant.

1:30 p.m. Report of burglary, breaking and entering at a South High Street address, Montague City.

10:12 p.m. Report of vandalism at an East Main Street address, Millers Falls.

Thursday, 4/3

10:28 p.m. Report of larceny at a Fourth Street address, Turners Falls.

Friday, 4/4

1:03 a.m. Following a traffic stop, arrested

. Charged with operating a motor vehicle under the influence of liquor, open container in motor vehicle, operating to endanger, marked lanes violation and operating motor vehicle without license in

possession.

8:30 a.m. Report of vandalism at the playground, Crocker Avenue, Turners Falls.

11:24 a.m. Investigated assault at Turners Falls High School.

Saturday, 4/5

12:16 a.m. Following a traffic stop, arrested

motor vehicle with license revoked and failure to wear seat belt.

12:06 p.m. Report of vandalism at a Turners Falls Road address, Turners Falls.

Sunday, 4/6

12:02 a.m. Following a traffic stop, arrested

. Charged with speeding, operating motor vehicle under the influence of liquor, open container in motor vehicle, marked lanes violation, operating to endanger, operating motor vehicle with suspended license, failure to stop for police, failure to use turn signal and a straight warrant.

6:23 a.m. Report of larceny at a Fifth Street address, Turners Falls.

6:26 ap.m. Officer wanted at Farren Care Center, Montague City. Arrested

. Charged with open and gross lewdness, disorderly conduct, destruction of property over \$250 and malicious assault and battery.

Monday, 4/7

11:25 a.m. Report of domestic disturbance at an East Main Street address, Millers Falls.

5:24 p.m. Report of burglary, breaking and entering at an East Main Street address, Millers Falls.

6:47 p.m. Report of an unattended death at a Third Street address, Turners Falls.

7:35 p.m. Report of drug, narcotics violation at a Randall Road address, Montague. Arrested

on a straight warrant. Also charged with possession of marijuana.

Tuesday, 4/8

3:08 a.m. Report of general disturbance at a Third Street address, Turners Falls. Arrested

. Charged with resisting arrest and disorderly conduct.

4:45 a.m. Report of neighbor disturbance at a Third Street address. Arrested

. Charged with aggravated assault and battery.

"A Shared Vision for the Arts" 4th Annual GMEF Gala

BY JOYCE PHILLIPS

TURNERS FALLS - On Saturday, April 26th at 7:30, the Gill Montague Education Fund in conjunction with Bear Country 95.3 will present their 4th Annual GMEF Gala, "The Essence of Country" featuring celebrated singer, songwriter Don Campbell and his band. Funds raised through the annual gala have awarded more than \$40,000 for educational enrichment opportunities in the schools of the Gill-Montague schools district.

Last November, when Don Campbell spent time at the high school filming a promo for the concert, the GMEF learned that he shares much of their vision. "With economic pressures coming from a variety of sources, it becomes that much more important to encourage and foster arts in the schools through innovative means," Campbell said.

"Two of our band members are music teachers, providing guitar, piano and violin/fiddle lessons when they aren't performing," he said. "Music and learning go hand in hand with who we are as a performance and recording group, so working with the GMEF felt like a very nice fit."

The event will take place in the state-of-the-art theater at Turners Falls High School. Corporate underwriters Hillside Plastics Inc. and Montague Elks Lodge #2521 and corporate sponsors Construction Monitoring Services Inc. and New England Extrusion Inc. helped to defray the costs associated with the concert.

Tickets for the gala at Turners Falls High School are available at Scotty's Convenience Store in Turners Falls, World Eye Bookshop in Greenfield, Bear Country 95.3 and WHAI studios in Greenfield and by calling Sandy at TFHS 863-7218. They may also be purchased online at www.thegmef.org.

Hurrah !!! to Jenny
Jennifer Falvey Holmes graduated cum laude from Boston University with a Bachelor of Arts degree in psychology. She is a 2004 graduate of Turners Falls High School. Jen, now living in Boston, is a research intern at the University.
"You have brains in your head. You have feet in your shoes. You can steer yourself, any direction you choose." - Dr. Seuss
Love Mom, Dad, Zack and Nana Currie

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GUEST EDITORIAL

Airport Commission Working Effectively to Meet Town, Airport Goals

BY MARK FAIRBROTHER
MONTAGUE - In a *Reporter* article on March 13th, (Selectboard Sets Airport Policy, *MR VI #23*), selectboard member Allen Ross is quoted as saying, "I feel the airport serves a regional area. It has technical features, marketing features. But there's a limited talent pool in Montague [to serve on the airport commission]. We are selling ourselves short."

It strikes me as odd that a Montague selectboard member would effectively say the people in his own town aren't capable of running the small municipal airport within its borders. As someone who has been on this all-volunteer commission since 1999, this is a disappointing view to hear from one of the town's selectboard.

Then, at the selectboard meeting of March 24th, during a discussion of conflicts of interest, Selectman Ross made the following statement: "I think our airport commission is thinking of hiring people to do landscaping, mowing and stuff like that." He then elaborated that he meant

hire commissioners to do the work, which he felt (correctly) would be a conflict of interest.

I don't know how Dr. Ross arrived at that belief, because there has never been any intent or suggestion on the commission's or manager's part that any commissioner would be paid for mowing, or for anything else.

Let me allay any such concerns Dr. Ross, the other members of the selectboard, or Montague residents may have and make it absolutely clear that no airport commissioner is going to be paid for mowing or grounds keeping at the Turners Falls Municipal Airport. The airport commission is and will remain an all-volunteer service.

In view of Dr. Ross's statements noted above, let me give an overview of the current airport commission. Among the five commissioners we have three pilots, two of whom are also members of the Franklin County Flying Club, and therefore part owners of a hangar on the field. Dr. Ross has made public comments indicating his view that individual Flying Club

members don't really qualify as genuine hangar owners, a view apparently not shared by the Massachusetts state ethics commission. We have a retired civil engineer with over 30 years experience with public works projects. This experience has been invaluable as the airport commission and our engineering consultants have modified and refined the final construction plans for the airport replacement project. We have a member well versed in the environmental issues at the airport who has worked extensively with the consultants and regulators in those aspects of the project. We have members who have donated many hours of their own time and expertise repairing runway lights and beacons, maintaining motorized access gates, researching airport land deed history going back to the early 1930s, driving to Boston and other locations to attend various Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and Massachusetts Aeronautics Commission (MAC) meetings, as well as the more mundane task of sitting through

sometimes long and often boring monthly meetings making sure the work the commission is appointed to do actually gets done.

And then there is the airport manager, appointed by the commission several years ago to assist the airport commission in fulfilling the charge given repeatedly by Montague town meeting to reduce the annual tax burden the airport represents to the town, with the goal of becoming self-sufficient. Michael Sweeney is an experienced pilot and businessman who has worked for a number of years for a multinational corporation supplying high-performance parts to the aviation industry. He has spearheaded the development of alternative sources of funding for the airport, including the 2007 timber harvest, government grants to help pay for grounds maintenance, ongoing rental income and the development of a proposal for non-aviation industrial development on airport property. He was also almost solely responsible for obtaining

commitments from the MAC and FAA for 100% financing of the runway replacement project.

Selectman Ross pushed expanding the airport commission from five to seven members through the selectboard, saying new and different views and ideas were needed on the commission. He could clear up some of the issues he has raised if he would explain to everyone just what, specifically, these new ideas are that would be put forward by new commissioners, how, specifically, these ideas would benefit the town of Montague, and why these new ideas can be put forward, discussed, and if they have merit and are legal, implemented only if the proponents are made full members of the airport commission.

Mark Fairbrother is a member of the Turners Falls airport commission. The views expressed here represent his views only, and not necessarily those of the other airport commissioners.

AIRPORT from pg 1
 the airport property along Industrial Boulevard remains unfenced, and easily accessible to motor vehicles or pedestrians.

The pilots group would like to have the barriers removed, and a sign put up instead, stating the informal road is off limits to all but properly authorized airport users, who carry clearance badges.

The airport commission and manager have maintained that such an approach would not meet MAC and FAA guidelines, in a post-9-11 era of tightened airport security.

Asked on Friday if signage on the road, instead of physical barriers, would meet MAC regulatory guidelines, Welch

replied, "Probably. But we're looking for more of a permanent solution: a gate with card reader access." Welch said that the cost of adding an automatic gate on that road could be tucked into the \$5 million, 1200-foot runway extension project now pending at the airport, with no more impact than "a pimple on an elephant's butt."

But the MAC director insisted that the gating or signage or barricading of the informal road from Pioneer Aviation to the airport was a matter to be decided locally. He urged the pilots and airport commissioners to, "See if we can come up with an accommodation that is satisfactory to everyone. Come up with a plan that makes

everyone happy. You've got reasonable people here; work it out." After all, Welch added, "The whole road (Industrial Boulevard) is wide open."

Welch, plainspoken among the gathered airport commissioners, offered a comment on the hold-up of plans for the runway extension, which is centered on a dispute about Native American concerns regarding a rock formation on a nearby hill. Spokespersons for the Narragansett nation and the Wampanoag Tribe of Gayhead (Aquinnah) have termed the formation "a significant ceremonial stone landscape," and "an active ceremonial site" placed there in centuries past to "keep things in balance." If the

runway expansion proceeds as planned, the hillside on which the stone formation is located would be leveled and used as fill.


Welch seemed dismissive of those claims on Friday. "We're ready to go with construction," he told the commissioners. "You're ready to go with construction. The only thing holding it up is those tree-hugging Indians."

To which airport commissioner Mark Fairbrother replied, "They're rock-hugging Indians. They already hugged the trees, right onto the lumber trucks."

Airport manager Sweeney said he had been actively seeking a five-year USDA grant to "reduce our operating costs" and

mitigate the impact of the planned construction on wildlife and endangered species, by mowing only at certain times of year. Welch congratulated him on this approach.

Fairbrother asked Welch if any money might be available from the MAC to pay for paving ramps that could lead from proposed T-hangars to the new runway. Sweeney said, "We have people willing to put up T-hangars here, but they won't touch it if they have to deal with infrastructure costs."



Welch called that idea an "economic development project," and recommended the airport commission contact their state legislators about the proposal. 

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NOTES FROM THE MONTAGUE SELECTBOARD

Liquor License Holders Taken to Task for Violation

BY ALEX GOTTSCHALK

Liquor license violations were the main item on the agenda for the Montague selectboard on Monday night, April 7th, thanks to a sting operation carried out by local police on March 20th. The following businesses were cited for serving or allowing underage drinkers to purchase alcoholic beverages: The Montague Inn, Carroll's Supermarket, Rt. 63 Roadhouse, Food City and Turners Falls Pizza House.

Chief Ray Zukowski of the Montague police department outlined the logistics of the compliance checks to those in attendance. Two youths, who were known by the police, were sent into various establishments in the area to purchase alcohol. In the instances where the alcohol was successfully purchased, the youths would then leave the premises, without drinking the alcohol, and notify waiting police. Breath tests were administered to the operatives before and after the checks.

All the owners of the five businesses cited were present during the hearing, and none disputed the charges. Due to the varied nature of the businesses - bars, supermarket, convenience store and pizza house - the main concern facing the board was a consistent disciplinary approach that would be fair for all parties cited. The punishments ranged from several days suspension of business to warnings and a fine.

On a positive note, all the businesses said they were taking proactive measures to ensure they would not be appearing before the board again, at least in regards to license violations. The owners of the Rt. 63 Roadhouse, in particular, said they would be sending all their employees to a TIPS (Training Intervention Procedure) seminar, at a substantial cost to the business. Chief Zukowski

said of the Roadhouse "...for the amount of business they get, we've had very few problems."

Likewise, this is the first time in seventeen years that Food City has had any liquor license infractions. When asked if there had been any problems with Turners Falls Pizza House in the past, Chief Zukowski quipped, "Only with slow delivery." (To which the owners responded that their drivers obeyed the speed limits, injecting a little more levity into the proceedings.)

After the violations were reviewed and dealt with, Dennis Rindone of Erving appeared before the board to ask them to endorse the idea of restoring a veterans memorial plaque to the bridge between Erving and Millers Falls. Mass Highway, in the course of restoring the bridge, seems to have misplaced the bronze plaque, and Rindone would like to see a facsimile put in its place. The board agreed to sign the letter Rindone was drafting. The plan also has the backing of the Erving selectboard.

The Massachusetts State Lottery Commission sent the town a letter explaining the new Keno-to-Go system, wherein businesses that sell Keno tickets can have monitors that display the game installed. While this item was being discussed (with the upshot being that no local businesses were in fact interested in the installations), selectboard member Allen Ross took a moment out to explain the reality of lottery playing and where the revenue generated by the lottery actually goes. "There's this illusion, perhaps propagated by the state, that if you play the lottery, you'll help your town," said Ross. "If people in Montague buy a lot of lottery tickets, it doesn't mean that the money is coming back to the town," he continued, "a significant

amount goes to the state. It's a very regressive tax." Ross felt that in light of Montague's current financial situation, it was germane to bring this issue up, as those who may balk at paying \$125 to fund a town override, do not realize that the 2005 average of money spent on the state lottery in Montague was \$787.83 per person.

The board also approved the recommendation by the 43D committee to hire the architectural and engineering firm of Fuss and O'Neill for design services to address access issues at the Strathmore Mill.

In other Strathmore news, windfall owner James Bent of the colorfully named Fabulous Investment Opportunities, who apparently purchased the Strathmore Mill from its former owner, Jerry Jones, last week for \$1, was present at the meeting and given an opportunity to speak about current developments at the property. Bent, while expressing appreciation for the invitation, said that on the advice of his attorney he would not be making any statements that evening. Dressed in work clothes, with a baseball cap pulled low over his face, Bent exhibited a quiet, sullen air at the meeting. He said his purpose for showing up at the meeting was to make sure he himself had access to the mill property, which the board said he does, as long as the town's security guard is present. The town of Montague assumed control of the Strathmore Mill under Massachusetts general law Chapter 60, Section 53, allowing a municipality to take administrative control of a property while tax taking is in progress.

During his tenure as mill owner, Jones, who purchased the 244,482-square-foot complex for \$40,000 in

December of 2002, failed to make any payments at all on his property taxes to the town of Montague, piling up a total bill of nearly \$200,000 in back taxes, fines and penalties. He stripped out large quantities of copper wire and piping, employing occasional laborers, some of whom were involved in starting fires at the mill during salvage operations, occasioning police calls at late hours to the mill for domestic violence, and one of whom, Jonathan Tanzer, was badly burned while stripping a live wire carrying 13,800 volts for salvage on May 6th, 2007. Tanzer was subsequently charged with causing the arson fire that consumed the 19,000 square foot building #10 in the early morning hours of May 26th, and he remains in jail awaiting trial on that charge in Greenfield District Court.

The fire caused serious damage to two other mill buildings, and in the course of taking the property for back taxes, the town of Montague claimed the right under Chapter 60, Section 53 to secure those buildings, installing a dry release sprinkler system,

rewiring the fire alarm system, and putting new roofs on Building #1 and Building #11, at a total cost to Montague taxpayers of \$270,000, to date. Bent has notified the town he does not consider himself liable for repaying those costs. A hearing on the disputed ownership of the mill will be held at land court in Boston at a date to be determined.

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NOTES FROM THE ERVING SELECTBOARD

Salty Water in Erving

BY NICHOLE CLAYTON - Eric Overgaard, a resident of River Road in Erving, came to the April 7th meeting to ask why his water has tasted funny since mid March. Board chair Andy Tessier, who is something of an expert on municipal water systems, explained that the taste is due to a spike in sodium from the drainage of road salt into groundwater, from the rough winter we have just been through. Tessier said Mass

Highway is aware Erving would like the problem resolved, but they need proof the problem is real.

For the last two years, Erving has contracted with Berkshire Enviro-labs of Lee, to test for sodium in the groundwater. The most recent of those quarterly tests, taken on March 25th of this year, revealed a spike of 197 mg of sodium per liter, far in excess of the target cap of 25mg of sodium per liter.

Board member Jeff Dubay said a sodium reading this high will change the taste of the water, and could pose a health issue for those with high blood pressure or a heart condition or any other health issue that requires a low sodium diet.

The spike in sodium in the drinking water should go back to normal by the end of May, as the area gets some strong rainstorms to drain out the sodium content in town wells.

The \$6.4 million renovation project for the Erving waste-water treatment plant will be going out to bid by the first of May, and the bid is scheduled to be awarded by June 30th. Tighe & Bond will be bidding the project, and will award the bid, with the town's approval. Construction should begin in September.

The board signed a \$678,000 contract with Tighe and Bond

for bidding, construction and post-construction services, systems integration, and onsite supervision for the project.

There will be no change in the percentage of the town's contribution to the health and dental plans for Erving employees. The town will continue to contribute 86% for both health and dental; no coverage for dental insurance is provided for retirees, however the town does contribute 79% for retiree health insurance. Board member Linda Downs-Bembury said, "We should not change the amounts; this has been a tough year for people already."

Erving will hold town elections on Monday, May 5th, followed by annual town meeting on May 7th. The finance committee adjourned the April 7th meeting without taking any action, due to a lack of a quorum. The finance committee will meet Monday, April 14th, instead.

Erving Preschool & Kindergarten Programs

The Erving pre-school program is now planning for the 2008-2009 school year. Children who live in Erving and will be at least three years old by September 1st, 2008 are eligible to attend the pre-school. Children who live in Erving and will be at least five years old by September 1st, 2008 are eligible to attend Kindergarten at the Erving Elementary School.

If you are new to town or have not previously enrolled your child in the pre-school program or the kindergarten, please contact the Early Childhood Coordinator, Mackensy Bailey, by calling the school at (413) 423-3326 so we can enroll your child.

STAN from pg 3

of Third Street and Avenue A. The idea behind the founding of the Ministries was to not only give material aid to the deserving, but also to actually help people work their way out of trauma and poverty."

The chair of the Montague Catholic Social Ministries is Barbara Bodenstein, a parishioner at Our Lady of Peace. Other members of the parish serve on the board, while other church members are helping support the ministry financially.

The ministry approached the Montague selectboard to create a homeless shelter a year before the Servicenet shelter, on Farren Avenue in Montague City, came into being. "Members of the faith community were involved with advocating for the creation of a homeless shelter," Father

Stan recalled. "We have also had members of the faith community involved with the hunger problem. We now have people from different agencies applying for grants together. It's amazing how much cooperation exists among various social service agencies."

Another project close to Father Aksamit's heart is the search for peace. Through the Interfaith Council, "we've started to pray for, educate about, and work for peace." The first service of prayer-for-peace took place at Our Lady of Peace Church in May, 2006, sponsored by the Interfaith Council.

"Basically," explained Father Stan, "we asked those who attended to pray from their own tradition. And we felt it important to include a group that was missing [from the Interfaith Council] up until that point, namely Muslims. Our concern

was that since 9-11, there have been many misunderstandings and stereotypes about Islam. By the end of our first joint service, just by experiencing prayer from various traditions, people were able to say, 'Wow! We're all praying for the same thing - peace - without even being instructed to!'

The next prayer service for peace will be held on Mothers Day at Our Lady of Peace, at 7 p.m.

Our Lady of Peace Church was formed from the recent consolidation of three parishes: Ste. Anne's, commonly regarded as the French-Canadian parish in its older days, St. Mary's, with its strong Irish-Catholic tradition, and Sacred Heart of Greenfield.

"When the parishes came together," said Father Stan, "people were asked to vote for the name of the new church. Our Lady of Peace was far ahead of any other choice. With the Iraq War, domestic violence, and two recent murders - one in Turners Falls and one in Greenfield - people desperately wanted peace. The name of our new church is the expression of that deep desire and a new sense of mission and purpose to work for justice and peace."

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Turners Fire District Annual Meeting to be Held

BY DAVID DETMOLD - On Tuesday, April 15th, the Turners Falls Fire District will hold its annual business meeting at the Hillcrest School auditorium at 7:00 p.m. All residents of the fire district, comprising the villages of Millers Falls, Turners Falls, and Montague City, are welcome to attend and vote on the 14 article meeting warrant, which includes a number of big ticket items that are likely to affect the tax residents of the district pay.

Among the articles is a motion to replace water meters for the water department, at a cost of \$12,000, and a petitioned article from residents along Federal Street (Route 63) in Millers Falls, who are seeking to have a water line from the trestle bridge to the last service line at 136 Federal Street replaced, at a



The Turners Falls Water Department's Four Million Gallon Water Tank on Will's Hill

cost of \$210,000. In their petition, the residents state: "Residents in these areas have been experiencing dirty, rusty and odors in the water (sic) for some time. When it is brought to the water department's attention, they do respond by flushing the hydrants, which is a short term fix. The water pressure is such that in the case of a fire the hydrants in these areas would be of little use." The article concludes, "Bills for the water that

we use are sent and paid in a timely fashion; we only hope you will respond to this petition in the same manner."

The district is also seeking to spend \$5,000 for a five year cleaning and inspection of the water department's four million gallon storage tank on Will's Hill, off Millers Falls Road; \$10,000 to replace a boiler at the Lake Pleasant pumping station, and \$75,000 to proceed with development of a new well at

Hannegan Brook, to replace one of the water district's wells, which has been leaking for some time. Another article seeks to allocate \$100,000 to the district's stabilization fund.

The fire district seeks to raise and appropriate \$6,000 for promotional exams, in the expectation that two members of the fire department will be retiring in the next two years, and \$60,000 to install a geothermal heating and cooling system for the living

quarters and business area of the fire station. Prudential committee member Mark Allen said a heating and ventilation unit on the west wall of the firehouse will need to be replaced during the course of construction of the new police station on Turnpike Road, and the availability of the drilling rig and equipment associated with the installation of the geo-thermal system at the police station will allow for a reduced price if the fire station acts now to install a similar system for their building.

Allen estimated the cost of installing the geo-thermal system would be paid back in utility savings within 15 or 16 years, or sooner if the cost of fossil fuels continues to rise.

All told, articles totaling \$478,000 in capital expenditure will be on the warrant at the district meeting Tuesday evening.

NOTES FROM THE GMRSD SCHOOL COMMITTEE

Transition Teams Forming To Guide Elementary Reconfiguration Process

BY DAVID DETMOLD - In the middle of the Gill-Montague school committee meeting on April 8th, after hashing out school choice timelines and transition teams to advise administrators on the hiring of new principals for the Gill Elementary School and the Sheffield School, committee chair Mary Kociela paused to say, "I just want to take a moment to acknowledge the impact of what we did last week." She was referring to the committee's decision to reject two proposals for expanding or providing alternative governance for the Montague Center School, put forward by community groups interested in keeping that school open within the school district. "We're coming to the end of a school year that will see a huge change to this district. It is a huge loss [the closure of Montague Center and the loss of grades from Hillcrest]. It will change the face of our district considerably. I have really high hopes for what this district can do in the next two or three years. I want to acknowledge the loss

while we look forward to the future. I am hoping we can unite the district and the community behind the values we have identified, like small class sizes, equity in core curriculum, music and art in all grade levels..." Kociela said.

On the issue of school choice timelines for GMRSD students who may wish to attend other schools within the district (intra-district school choice), interim superintendent Ken Rocke said parents of such students would be notified of placements by May 9th. But he asked the school committee to void a previous policy that directed the GMRSD to notify parents of students wishing to choice in to the GMRSD from outside the district (inter-district choice) by the last week in June. To remain competitive with other area school districts, Rocke said parents of potential inter-district choice students should be notified of placements by no later than May 12th. Rocke said he anticipated "a number of school choice openings within the district and from outside the dis-

trict." He added, "I am concerned about what's going to happen with school choice next year."

The school committee agreed to void the last week of June deadline for notifying parents from outside the district about choice in placements, and will move to adopt the earlier deadline at their next meeting.

Transition teams will be formed to ease the reconfiguration of district elementary schools. Parents and teachers from Gill Elementary will work with Ted Castro-Santos, in his last assignment before his term on the school committee expires in May, on a transition team to interview candidates for the full-time principal position at that school. Castro-Santos wondered whether the district might like to see if the grant funded Environment as an Integrating Context curriculum that has been so popular at Montague Center School might migrate to Gill Elementary, where nearby natural features would lend themselves to such a program. But other committee members

were cool to this suggestion, saying environmental programs should be equally available at Sheffield, where the proximity to the Great Falls Discovery Center could work to students' advantage.

Gill farmer Sorrel Hatch has turned in papers to run for Castro-Santos' seat on the school committee.

A transition team of teachers and parents and school committee members will also be appointed to guide the transition of Hillcrest grades 1 and 2 and Montague Center grades 1 - 3 to Sheffield School, and to assist in the hiring of a new principal there, as Chip Wood moves on to the post of director of elementary education. Additionally, a building needs committee, chaired by Joyce Phillips and including school committee member Kristin Boyle and Linda Kuklewicz, will see to the facility improvements that may be needed to allow all Montague elementary students to attend school at Sheffield. In 2008, Montague kindergartners will

remain at Hillcrest, but the school committee reaffirmed its intent to have Sheffield house all Montague K-5 students by 2009.

In honor of Earth Day, a parade of students from Montague Center, Hillcrest and Sheffield elementary schools will step off from the Carnegie Library at about 9:15 a.m. on Monday, April 14th, and march down Avenue A to the Great Falls Discovery Center, where local officials will give speeches. Representative Steve Kulik will be in attendance, and the high school band will play. Wood said the "unified group of elementary students, parents and teachers" will offer "a vision of the future we are presenting to the community."

In other school committee news, director of special education Cynthia Joyce has resigned, and Rocke said he hoped to have her replacement hired by the middle of May. Rocke's own contract was the subject of deliberation with the personnel subcommittee on Wednesday evening.

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WENDELL from pg 1

be sent back to the school committee.

Deidre Cabral, chair of the planning board, met the Wendell selectboard at its April 2nd meeting with information she had assembled on the subject of improving the town's website. The site has been static for some time, and Cabral met with Montague Webworks, a small company that could restructure or redo the website and make it more useful to the town, and more used by townspeople. For \$6,000 and a monthly maintenance fee, the town could post meetings and minutes, coffeehouse information, library news, and town warrants. It could be possible to download a permit application, print it at home, fill it out and mail it in to the appropriate board and save having to make an extra trip to the town office during office hours.

Because bylaws are now arranged chronologically, it is necessary to scroll through them to find a specific law. The proposed website could have them sorted or tagged, and make a search much easier. The

town newsletter could also be posted on the site.

Selectboard chair Ted Lewis cautioned town warrants would still have to be posted in their official places. Cabral agreed, but said a revamped town website could be a useful way to involve more citizens in town government, and to make citizen involvement easier. Board member Dan Keller said it sounded like a good idea. For the website upgrade to go forward, an article would have to be approved at town meeting.

Cabral then met with the finance committee to get their opinion of the idea, and returned to the selectboard meeting later saying they liked the idea, but wanted the proposal written out.

Town coordinator Nancy Aldrich read Jenn Gross' letter of resignation from the planning board as of April 1st. It cited other demands on her time.

Aldrich read another letter from FRCOG asking for a list of potential Brownfield sites that may impact public health, and offering help in determining soil and groundwater evaluation. The board members

declined to act on that offer at this time.

Insurance inspection of the new town office building showed no deficiencies, but in the town hall the inspection recommended centrally monitored smoke and heat detectors, and repairs to the walls in the upstairs office where water damage is showing. Aldrich said the leak has been repaired and the water damage is cosmetic. A fire extinguisher in the auditorium was last inspected in 1992.

Terry Williams from the state Department of Revenue is scheduled to meet with the selectboard and the board of assessors at the April 30th selectboard meeting with the intention of establishing a regular semi-annual estimated system of real estate tax billing. Treasurer Carolyn Manley and tax collector Penny Delorey are invited to attend that meeting. Any change in the town's tax billing will have to be approved at a town meeting.

Hands Across North Quabbin asked the selectboard for a donation. Keller asked if there is any money available.

The selectboard expense account has \$1,900, but Lewis said that if the selectboard donates to one charity, it should donate to them all, and there are too many worthy causes. Individuals may donate to the program, which will establish a forum to address a regional problem using citizen input.

An agent of the Massamont insurance agency asked Aldrich if Massamont could give a price for the insurance that Wendell now carries with the Massachusetts Interlocal Insurance Association. Massamont's bid was \$6,000 lower than the \$37,000 MIAA last billed the town, but feeling among board members was that MIAA was easier to deal with. Selectboard member Christine Heard asked when the town needed to decide on

insurers. Keller said MIAA had been very good with the tornado coverage, but not as good with legal matters after the July 2006 tornado, and he favored accepting the less expensive insurance. Lewis said the town's insurance bill had gone up because of the tornado, and he thought the town should go to bid for insurance coverage, although that is not required.

Larry Ramsdell, town custodian, told Aldrich that the 19 hours a week allowed for his work has been more than enough, so far.

Keller reported that the electrical work on the town hall is complete.

A rabies clinic will be held at the town garage on April 19th from 1:00 to 2:00 p.m.

The selectboard went into executive session to discuss a legal issue.



HIGHLIGHTS OF THE WENDELL POLICE LOG

AWOL and an Assault Reported

Monday, 2/25

Suspicious person reported walking on Mormon Hollow Road. Located and gave ride to Town line.

Saturday, 3/8

Amherst high school survival class reported lost and in need of medical assistance for possible hypothermia for one of their participants.

Saturday, 3/8

Tree on wires on Morse Village Road. Wires burning on ground-power out.

Monday, 3/10

Montague Road resident reported annoying phone calls.

Sunday, 3/16

Lake Grove Maple Valley reported

student AWOL - Returned next day by his mother.

Tuesday, 3/18

Staff member reported assaulted by student at Lake Grove Maple Valley School.

Sunday, 3/30

Possible medical assistance needed on Davis Turn Road.

Thursday, 4/3

Motor vehicle accident on Montague Road. No injuries.

Schwartz Tapped for Obama Delegate

Wendell will be represented at the Democratic National Convention next August in Colorado! Ben Schwartz, the Obama campaign coordinator for Franklin County, was elected last weekend as a delegate from the First Congressional District pledged to Barack Obama in the Democratic caucus in Amherst.

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Friday, April 11

8:00 am The 4th Annual Gill Montague Gala
9:00 am Select Board 4/7/08
10:30 am Underground Railway Concert
12:00 pm Tapping Maple Ridge
12:30 pm Wisdom Way Solar Village
6:00 pm Coffee House: Joe Graveline
7:00 pm GMRSD (4/8/08)
10:00 pm Discovery Center: Fossil Tracks
11:00 pm Darker Image #4

Saturday, April 12

8:00 am Coffee House: Joe Graveline
9:00 am GMRSD (4/8/08)
12:00 pm Discovery Center: Fossil Tracks
6:00 pm On The Ridge: John Longo
6:30 pm Northfield Mountain Geology Story
7:00 pm Chronicles of Czestochowa Volume 9
8:00 pm Block Party 2007
10:00 pm Independent Voices 35
10:30 pm Over the Falls: Linda Rollins

Sunday, April 13

8:00 am On The Ridge: John Longo
8:30 am Northfield Mountain Geology Story
9:00 am Chronicles of Czestochowa Volume 9
9:30 am Block Party 2007
10:00 am Independent Voices 35
10:30 am Over the Falls: Linda Rollins
6:00 pm Road To Recovery: Financial Benefits of Treatment
7:00 pm Coffee House Series: Falltown String Band
9:00 pm Montague Update: Paul Mariani
10:00 pm Live at the Bookmill
11:00 pm Refusal

Monday, April 14

8:00 am Road to Recovery: Financial Benefits of Treatment

9:00 am Coffee House Series: Falltown String Band

11:00 am Montague Update: Paul Mariani
12:00 pm Live at the Bookmill
6:00 pm Montague Machine
7:00 pm Montague Select Board: (Live)
9:00 pm Teachers at Sea
9:30 pm Sustainable Energy
10:30 pm Wind Changer Mona Lisa

Tuesday, April 15

8:00 am Montague Machine
9:00 am Teachers at Sea
9:30 am Sustainable Energy
10:30 am Wind Changer Mona Lisa
6:00 pm Live at the Bookmill
7:00 pm GMRSD (4/8/08)
10:00 pm Chronicles of Czestochowa
10:30 pm Senses of Place

Wednesday, April 16

8:00 am Live at the Bookmill
9:00 am GMRSD (4/8/08)
12:00 pm Chronicles of Czestochowa
6:00 pm On The Ridge: John Longo
6:30 pm The Franklin County Democrat: Senator Stan Rosenberg
7:00 pm The 4th Annual Gill Montague Gala
8:00 pm Block Party 07
10:00 pm Tapping Maple Ridge
11:00 pm Coffee House Series: Joe Graveline

Thursday, April 17

8:00 am On The Ridge: John Longo
8:30 am The Franklin County Democrat: Senator Stan Rosenberg
9:00 am The 4th Annual Gill Montague Gala
10:00 am Block Party 07
12:00 pm Tapping Maple Ridge
6:00 pm Wisdom Way Solar Village
7:00 pm Montague Select Board (4/14/08)
9:00 pm Women Girls & HIV: Services
9:30 pm Coffee House Series: Fall Town String Band
11:30 pm Carlos Anderson: We Are Blessed of Treatment

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JESSICA HARMON ILLUSTRATION

THE HEALTHY GEEZER: Hypothermia

BY FRED CICETTI

LEONIA, NJ - Q. I retired and moved from northern Minnesota to Florida. I was wondering if there is any way that someone in the Sunshine State can get hypothermia.

Hypothermia occurs when your body doesn't maintain a normal temperature, which is about 98.6 degrees Fahrenheit. When your core temperature drops to 95 degrees, you are suffering from hypothermia, which can be lethal.

Can your internal temperature drop to 95 or below in Florida? Yes. You can get hypothermia in an air-conditioned environment. It can strike you if you are soaked in the rain on a cool, windy day, or if you fall into chilly water. Water colder than 70 F can begin to cause hypothermia quickly.

People older than 65 years are especially vulnerable to hypothermia because they tend to suffer from illnesses or take medications that interfere with regulating body temperature. Also, older adults often produce less body heat because of a slower metabolism and less physical activity.

Seniors make up about half of the annual fatalities from hypothermia in the United

States.

Low body temperature impairs the brain, so hypothermia is especially dangerous because its victims may not know they're in trouble. Severe hypothermia eventually leads to cardiac and respiratory failure, then death.

Hypothermia comes on gradually. Shivering is a common and obvious sign. Shivering is a natural response that increases muscle cell activity and generates heat.

But, shivering alone does not mean you have hypothermia. Healthcare professionals recommend looking for "umbles," too. These are stumbles, mumbles, fumbles and grumbles.

Watch for these specific symptoms: confusion or sleepiness; slowed, slurred speech; shallow breathing; weak pulse or low blood pressure; changes in behavior such as apathy; change in appearance such as pale skin; poor body control or slow reaction times.

If you suspect that someone has hypothermia, call for emergency medical treatment. Here are some first-aid tips to follow until professional help arrives:

- In general, try to warm the victim. Replace wet clothing. Share your body heat.
- First warm the chest, neck, head, and groin with an electric blanket or warm compresses. Don't use direct heat from a lamp or hot water.
- Don't warm the limbs because you will drive cold blood to the heart, lungs and brain; this will lower the core body temperature. Use an electric blanket or warm compresses.

• If the person's breathing has stopped or appears dangerously low or shallow, begin cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) immediately if you're trained in that procedure.

- Provide warm non-alcoholic beverages. Alcohol lowers the body's ability to retain heat. Forget that image of the St. Bernard with the brandy keg.
- Don't rub the victim, especially an older person who may have thin skin.
- Handle people with hypothermia gently because they're at risk of cardiac arrest.

A typical scenario that can lead to hypothermia is being stranded in the snow while driving. The following are some valuable recommendations for surviving this type of ordeal:

- Attach something that is brightly colored to the car antenna so you can be seen.
- Wrap your entire body, including your head, in extra clothing, blankets, or newspapers.
- Stay awake.
- Run the motor (and heater) for about 10 minutes per hour, opening one window slightly to let in air. Make sure that snow is not blocking the exhaust pipe - this will reduce the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning.
- As you sit, keep moving your arms and legs to improve your circulation and stay warmer.
- Do not eat unmelted snow because it will lower your body temperature.

If you have a question, please write to fred@healthygeez.com

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE GILL POLICE LOG

Larceny Reports

Tuesday, 4/1
5:15 p.m. Report of injured dog on Green Hill Road, all checked OK
Wednesday, 4/2
1:31 p.m. Assisted with medical emergency at Main Road business.
Thursday, 4/3
9:40 a.m. Report of alarm on the Mount Hermon Campus.
5:00 p.m. Four officers assisting with TRIAD meeting in Turners Falls. Collaborative with Gill - Montague - Erving TRIAD
Friday, 4/4
3:15 a.m. Motor vehicle accident on Main Road; no injury
Saturday, 4/5
7:33 a.m. Vandalism, and larceny report taken on North Cross Road.
Sunday, 4/6
12:40 p.m. Motor vehicle complaint on Mountain Road.
8:35 p.m. Unruly subject at Boyle Road residence.
Monday, 4/7
12:58 p.m. Report of larceny of a large amount of fuel from Main Road business.
2:18 p.m. Assisted

Greenfield police on Riverview Drive, with hit and run motor vehicle accident.
3:55 p.m. Assisted fire department on Franklin Road with small brush fire
4:33 p.m. Two vehicle accident with no injury at French King Hwy and Main Road.
7:25 p.m. Assisted fire department with locating smoke in the area of West Gill Road.
Tuesday, 4/8
4:15 p.m. Welfare check requested of resident on West Gill Road.
5:01 p.m. Assisted with medical emergency on Mount Hermon campus.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE ERVING POLICE LOG

K9 Collar

Tuesday, 4/1
7:30 a.m. Report of a sick racoon in area of Franklin Grocery. Unable to locate.
9:00 a.m. Report of a sick racoon in area of Route 2 Bridge and Moore Street.
Wednesday, 4/2
9:00 a.m. Investigation of past breaking and entering on Forest Street.
10:30 a.m. Report of past larceny on Arch Street. Subject observed stealing lumber from construction site.
2:45 p.m. Report of possible jumper on French King Bridge. False Alarm.
3:45 p.m. Assisted motorist with lock-out - handicapped child locked in van.
Thursday, 4/3
4:45 p.m. Report of trailer hitch in middle of French King Bridge. Removed same.

Sunday, 4/6
12:02 a.m. Assisted Montague police, Dorsey Road, in search of subject in area of West Mineral Road. K9 located subject.
11:22 a.m. Arrested [redacted] on a straight warrant.
6:30 p.m. Arrested [redacted] for defective exhaust, seatbelt violation and operating a vehicle under the influence of liquor.

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JEP'S PLACE Part LXXIII

A Bike of My Own

BY JOSEPH A. PARZYCH GILL - When I was 12 years old, I thought I was the only boy in school who didn't have a bike - maybe the only one in the country. No one in our family had one.

A janitor at Mount Hermon School cleaned out the bicycle room at the school dormitories when the boys graduated. He kept the bikes they left behind, and sold them for a dollar or two dollars, prior to WWII.

We bought the first bike with money we earned doing chores for neighbors and picking up soda bottles along the road. Pa went with us and bargained the janitor down from \$4 to \$3.50. The bike had cord tires. They had no tube. If a tire went flat, you needed to buy a new tire.

I had to share the bike with my sisters, and that caused friction. Then the front tire went flat. I filled it with milk. It soured and plugged the leak for a while, but then the hole got bigger and the milk all sprayed out.

With WWII on, there were no cord tires in the stores. I put a tricycle wheel with a solid rubber tire in place of the front wheel. It worked, but the other

kids in school laughed at me riding the bike with the much smaller wheel in front. I endured it, but my heart was set on a balloon-tired bike with tubes in the tires.

I went back to see the janitor. He told me the boys were taking their bikes with them when they left. He had only one bike, and it was a beauty.

"Twenty-five dollars," he said, eyeing me with my tongue hanging out. "And I could get more," he added to make me think it was a bargain, even though it probably did not cost that much new.

All I had was five dollars. When Ma asked me why I was looking so glum, I told her of my problem, never expecting she could help me. But she dug \$20 out of her stash. I never forgot it, and paid her back many times over in later years, long after the event was lost in her failing memory.

With my own set of wheels, I now could join the guys who hung around D.O. Paul's general store. It felt good having a bike, to be one of the guys.

- Continued Next Week

COFFEE from page 1

delighted to be singing with some her Northfield neighbors in the second annual a cappella event at the Great Hall. She very much enjoys her new role and has passed the baton of Friends chairperson on to Anne Jemas.

Jemas is both passionate and eloquent when she speaks of the Friends, the volunteer organization that hosts the music series in the Great Hall - one of the buildings in the old mill complex that houses the Discovery Center (one of three visitor facilities of the Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge). Established in 1997, the overriding mission of this 7.2 million acre refuge is to protect the ecosystems of the Connecticut River watershed and educate the public about these resources. A remarkable undertaking, the Refuge partners federal and state organizations along with private landowners and non-governmental conservation agencies as well as Friends groups.

The coffeehouse series started two years ago as a means to repay a loan borrowed to open the gift shop at the museum. It was intended to be a one-year series, but has been so popular the Friends decided a second series was in order. The organizers (Annie Chappell, Michael Nix, Steve Winter, Sara Doyle, Linda Ackerman, and Dawn Ward) have changed to the second Friday of the month in hopes of gaining audience members that can't do mid-week events. Although there is weekend entertainment competition, the coffeehouse begins at 7 p.m. and ends by 9 p.m., so there's plenty of evening left for true night owls to get to their other venues.

It is somehow fitting that this week's coffeehouse features an act called "Friends." This traditional barbershop quartet features Patty Gardner, lead; Carol Benoit, baritone; Sharon Fontaine, bass; and Sue Lahoski, tenor. In preparation for their first talent show, the four women practiced weekly for an hour or

two, and five years later they are still practicing, continuously learning about the barbershop genre, and growing in local acclaim. They are taking their music to a new level. Recently, the group auditioned for the Celtics and hope to sing the national anthem for the Red Sox Nation at Fenway Park.

Another long-standing friendship has brought Tom Randall to the Discovery Center two years in a row for the a cappella coffeehouse. He is the coordinator of the music program, and the chorus director at the Ralph C. Mahar School in Orange. While the school doesn't have an official a cappella performance group, Randall has invited his chorus members to attend the event as the O-Towns, and expects about 20 of them will. They have been practicing a variety of songs ranging from sacred to folk to jazz and blues - with some featured soloists and duets. Randall promises an excellent show!

If you can't make it this Friday, there is a still a star-studded line-up on the horizon at future coffeehouses with the accordion virtuoso, "Fabulous Maurice" on Friday, May 9th; and Celtic music with "Root Cellar" (Pat & Tex LaMountain, Jennie McAvoy, Mark Fraser and Daphne Bye) on Friday, June 13th.

Jemas noted the coffeehouse series was not only "instrumental" in raising funds for the Discovery Center, but had the added bonus of introducing a diverse audience to the Center. It is always interesting to see how many people have never been in the museum until they came to a coffeehouse performance.

We so often take for granted our own home town, without fully appreciating its natural beauty. Please consider joining the Friends - the fee is nominal (\$15 per individual and \$20 per family) and the benefits are many.

Volunteers are needed for a growing list of events and activities the Friends sponsor or host - Poetry & Prose;

Quinnikut II river cruise; Source-to-Sea river cleanup; welcoming of the International Rowers, and more. For more information, visit the website www.greatfallsma.org/friends or email gfdcfriends@verizon.net.



Sharon Weyers stars as Nurse Ratched in the Country Players production of One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest at the Shea Theater

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JACK COUGHLIN ILLUSTRATION

FRIDAY, APRIL 11th
Great Falls Discovery Center Coffee House present: A night of a capella with the *Friends*, a female barbershop quartet, *The Northfield Four*, singing a mix from gospel to the Beatles, and Mahar High School students *O-Town a cappella* perform, 7 p.m. Doors open at 6:30 pm – coffee & homemade baked goods. Sliding scale \$6 - \$12. (413) 863-3221.



Greenfield Community College Chorus concert performance of songs and choruses from opera and musical theater, 7:30 p.m., Sloan Theater, GCC.

Amherst Books, Main St., Amherst: *Live Lit*. Students in the M.F.A. Program at the UMass read from their recent work. Ashwati Parameshwar, Janel Nockleby, (of Turners Falls!) & Emily Renaud.

Deja Brew, Wendell: *Nexus* - Rock, no cover 9 to 11 p.m.

The Montague Bookmill, Montague Center, Concert Series: *Pitchfork*. Arrive early for couches, armchairs, and to browse the books. \$10 in advance, \$12 at the door, 8 p.m.

Rt. 63 Roadhouse, Millers Falls: Love Bomb, dance, rock & roll covers, come to dance! 9:30 p.m.

At the Rendezvous, Turners Falls: *Jones Trio*, jazz that thumps, \$3, cover.



Motoko (left) and Eshu shine up a storytelling event wherever they appear. Though diverse in style and culture, they blend and tell as one. Absolutely charming, they bring humor, a sense of drama, a talent for singing, and present a seamless performance. At the Connecticut Storytelling Festival where they recently appeared you could have heard a pin drop! ~Peg O'Sullivan, Connecticut Storytelling Center. Motoko and Eshu perform at the Wendell Full Moon Coffeehouse on April 19th, 8 p.m.

FRIDAY TO SUNDAY, APRIL 11th TO 13th and APRIL 18th & 19th
At The Shea Theatre, Turners Falls: The Country Players present *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest*. 8 p.m. Call the Shea to reserve tickets 863-2281 www.countryplayers.org

APRIL 11th TO MAY 31st
On display at the Discovery Center, Turners Falls: *Wild about Nature*: WGBY Photo Contest, photographs of the nature in Western Mass.

SATURDAY, APRIL 12th
River Rat Race Open House at the Millers River Environmental Center, 100 Main St., Athol. Stop in to see the wonderful collection of birds and minerals or just warm up and use our facilities. 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Deja Brew, Wendell: *Richard Chase Group* - Acoustic Folk Rock, no cover 9 to 11 p.m.

At the Rendezvous, Turners Falls: *Rockitqueer*, dance party, no cover.

Rt 63 Roadhouse: *Turn It Loose*, rock & roll covers, dance! 9:30 p.m.

SUNDAY, APRIL 13th

Learn about the spring migration of raptors with Julie Anne Collier at the Leverett Library, 2 to 3 pm. Collier, a licensed rehabilitator of injured birds of prey and cofounder of Wingmasters, will bring some of her magnificent birds to the library. Call Leverett Library, (413) 548 9220 for info. or directions at www.leverettlibrary.org.

Rt. 63 Roadhouse, Millers Falls: *Second Sunday Comedy Show* with comedians Myq Kaplan, Renata Tutko and Dave Yubrah., 7p.m.

Deja Brew, Wendell: *Steve Crow, Peter Kim, Don Macaulay* - Acoustic Trio, no cover 7 to 10 p.m.

At the Rendezvous, Turners Falls: *TNT Karaoke* 8 p.m. to midnight.

MONDAY, APRIL 14th
Evening Sing-A-Longs at the Montague Center Library, Monday evenings 6:30 p.m. The Children's Librarian, Linda Hickman, plays guitar and banjo and performs a variety of children's music, designed for children of any age and their families. Call the Carnegie Library 863-3214 during the week, or the Montague Center Library, 367-2852, on Monday evenings.

At the Rendezvous, Turners Falls: *Slopez - Voo Reading!* Poetry with: Daniel Nester, Alex Phillips and Rebecca Wolff, 7 p.m., no cover.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 16th
At the Rendezvous, Turners Falls: Quizmaster Chad's Quiz Nite Quiz! Put a team together, 8 p.m.

THURSDAY, APRIL 17th
Greenfield Community College and MassArt students: *Student Art Show Opening*. Exhibit includes painting, drawing, photography, video, graphic design, 3D, and computer art of current students, 7 to 9 p.m. in the South Gallery of GCC, One College Dr., Greenfield.

FRIDAY, APRIL 18th
At the Rendezvous, Turners Falls: DJs XML/TBA/Jazzy B present *Crescendo*, \$2 cover.

Rt. 63 Roadhouse, Millers Falls: *Bang Box*, 80's rock & roll covers, 9:30 p.m.

FRIDAY & SATURDAY, APRIL 18th & 19th
Pothole Pictures: Alfred Hitchcock's earliest "Hollywood" movie, the essential 1943 film noir *Shadow of a Doubt*. Based on the real-life story of the 1920s "Merry Widow" killer, and is not only one of the most suspenseful noir films of all time, but also a subtle display of the sleazy underbelly of small-town American life. PG. 7:30 p.m. music before the movie.

SATURDAY, APRIL 19th
Hike Royalston Falls with Dan Bolton (Athol Bird and Nature Club) for this moderate scenic hike of about 6 miles. Beautiful 40 foot waterfall and a natural rock bridge formation. Dress appropriately, bring water and a lunch. Meet at Tully Dam on Route 32 in Royalston, 9:30 a.m. Info. call Dan (978) 249-2162.

Wendell Full Moon Coffee House, Wendell: *Motoko & Eshu* tell stories from Asia and Africa. \$6 - \$12 Info (978) 544- 5557 or www.wendellfullmoon.org. Partial proceeds to benefit the Swift River School. Abundant dessert-o-rama, savory snacks and beverages available. Open Mike at 7:30, feature 8 p.m.

At the Rendezvous, Turners Falls: *UNIT 7*, funk, soul, r & b, rock, \$5 cover.

SUNDAY, APRIL 20th
Scandinavian Dance, Montague Grange, Montague Center, 3 to 6 p.m. Hambo, Schottis, Polska, Waltz and more! Dancers with all levels of experience welcome, no partner necessary.

JULY 7th TO AUGUST 15th
Theater Workshops for Children: Hampshire Shakespeare Company, Amherst is taking applications for summer theater workshops for children ages 5 - 17 yrs. Info. (413) 788-4750 or www.hampshireshakespeare.org.

ONGOING
Hallmark Museum of Contemporary Photography, Turners Falls. On display: Lili Almog, Studio 52 - *Perfect Intimacy Revealed Through Photographer's Eyes* & Linda Butler - *Meditations on Simplicity*, Studio 56.

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3. THE RUINS R DAILY 6:30 9:00 MAT FRI, SAT, SUN 12:00 3:00
4. LEATHERHEADS DAILY 6:40 9:20 PG13 MAT FRI, SAT, SUN 12:15 3:15
5. 21 PG13 DAILY 6:40 9:20 MAT FRI, SAT, SUN 12:15 3:15
6. PROM NIGHT in dts sound DAILY 7:00 9:30 PG13 MAT FRI, SAT, SUN 12:30 3:30
7. STREET KINGS R in dts sound DAILY 7:00 9:30 MAT FRI, SAT, SUN 12:30 3:30

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THE GARDENER'S COMPANION

An Optimistic Starting Mix for the Coming Season

BY LESLIE BROWN
MONTAGUE CITY - The early spring garden looks more like late winter. True, the plots are freed at last of the snow that has receded to the garden edge, but the edging of grass is dry and brown, remarkable only for the runnels of voles. The leaves of the strawberry plants are plastered to the damp ground. I wait to rake them free of their leaf mulch until the soil has dried a bit; I'm afraid to tear the leaves and the tender new shoots underneath.

There are signs of spring, however. The early crocuses

show spots of bright color. In the yard and throughout the woods, daffodils sprout a bright, vivid green. The buds on the Manchurian apricot are growing quickly; this will be the first tree in the yard to bloom. The branches of the forsythia are growing yellow, and the song sparrows are back.

It is damp, cool and gray today, but I am inside, preparing to start tomato and sweet pepper seeds. Even though it doesn't look like spring, these plants will need a six to eight week head start before I can plant them out in the garden along

about Memorial Day. The seeds are incredibly small to handle and it's hard to believe that these little, dry bits no bigger than the head of a common pin will develop into large plants bearing full size fruit.

I am using a very light starting mix, which wouldn't sustain a full-grown plant. But it's perfect for the new seeds, as it does not compact too much and thus leaves air and root room. Several years ago we bought some little mini plant greenhouses, which have Styrofoam seed bins, a wetting mat and holding tray as well as transpar-

ent plastic lids. I also have an electric warming rack to put the greenhouses on. All this frippery isn't strictly necessary. You can start seeds in almost any container and use the top of the refrigerator for warmth until the seed have sprouted, and then move the seedlings to a bright, sunny room.

The key is the warmth of the soil.

This is what gives the new seedlings the climate they like for a strong start. I've planted the seeds barely under the surface of the soil and pressed the dirt around them firmly to ensure contact with the soil. Once the seeds sprout, in 10 - 14 days, I'll take the clear covers off in the daytime. When the plants have developed their true leaves, I'll transplant them into small, sectioned planters, giving each seedling its own space. They will be transplanted once again into four-inch pots before being planted or given away.

This season I am starting six varieties of tomatoes. All but one are indeterminate. The determinate plant will grow to a "programmed" size. The indeterminate plants will continue to grow until they are killed by frost. This means they develop into tall giants, which will need cages or staking for support. I've chosen Abraham Lincoln, a variety developed in the 1920s and prized for the size and flavor of the fruit, and Brandywine Red, an heirloom tomato of medium size and tangy flavor. These two tomatoes ripen in mid-season. I'm also starting Red Zebra and Pineapple. These two tomatoes are milder in flavor but beautiful in their colors.

A plate of these beauties is a treat for the eye as well as the

palate. Bush Celebrity is a reliable plant, disease free, prolific and early bearing. These tomatoes will be ready just after I've started picking my cherry: Gardener's Delight. These small tangy tomatoes are the earliest, and they continue producing all season. They're great eaten sun-warmed, right off the vine as you cruise through the garden.

All of the sweet peppers have been chosen for their color, as they truly all taste much the same: sweet and juicy raw; sweeter and stronger if grilled. I'm growing a red, King of the North, two yellows: Golden Calwonder and Sweet Banana, and one brown, Sweet Chocolate. All of these peppers start as a green fruit. The green peppers you buy in the store would have ripened to yellow, red or orange if left on the plant. My chocolate peppers will begin green as well before becoming a dark chocolate color. All of these are enhanced by cooking, whether grilled or stuffed. They also store and freeze well.

Starting your own seeds allows you to begin gardening earlier and to choose the varieties you want. It also helps to put an optimistic spin on this slowly developing new season. I hope I've washed my long Johns for the last time this year.



MARY AZARIAN WOODBLOCK

Snow Goose on the Canal

BY FRAN HEMOND
MONTAGUE CENTER - Look twice! Early April offers some sights of the moment. Last week a lone snow goose rested in the canal by Migratory Way, finding security among the hundreds of Canada geese that were traveling way up north, we hope, for the summer. Snow geese are occasionally seen here in the Valley on their way up to the Arctic to nest in the spring, or on their way south to areas on the south coast in the fall.

This dusky white snow goose could be overlooked as a gull. But his shape and general aspect deserved a second look. Like the Canadians around him, he had tucked his head under his wing and never gave an observer the chance to check on his bill. The upper bill would be light and the lower bill black, in an adult. His rounder shape was not that of a longer, sleeker gull and he did not float on the water like a gull. Later confirmation with an expert said indeed this snow goose was traveling with his cousins, the Canadians. Their Vs in the sky and noisy calls to watch are wondrous.

The snow goose probably

had spent the winter along the East coast in places like the Delmarva Peninsula, where my husband and I often spent a week escaping from the last of New England's winter. The bird refuges at Assateague and Black Water are in a series of stopovers.

My last record of snow geese is from 1996 at Bombay Hook, and I now wish I had kept good records regularly because the time and place of a sighting jogs fascinating memories. Snow geese are particularly interesting because they come in two colors, white and blue, and Audubon considered the blues immature birds. Currently, they are regarded as members of the same species.

On April Fool's Day, a real treat on North Pond. A second look out the Breakfast Club window spotted the handsomest of the water birds on the pond. A hooded merganser couple, the drake with his striking white hood, which can be raised or lowered, his white chest and rusty tummy outlined in black,



the duck with her demure gray back and rusty crest (which can also be lowered) and her long sharp bill, spent most of the morning cruising and diving. They are smaller than the common merganser who has spent some time here, and even outshine that very lovely bird. My poor records, since 1995, record hoodies here almost every year for a day or two, and particularly record the delightful little hoodie, Cupcake, who brought her friend and stayed a bit.

Hooded mergansers are in the river and local ponds generally during times of migration. I recall six of them swimming across the river from the Unity Park parking lot start of the bike path, on a blustery day with wind and waves so wild no other life was about. It pays to take a second look.

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