



PRIZE WINNING QUILT

Made in Montague
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CHEER!

TFHS competes
Page 8

LAKE PLEASANT MILLERS FALLS MONTAGUE CENTER MONTAGUE CITY TURNERS FALLS

The Montague Reporter

YEAR 8 - NO. 21

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THE VOICE OF THE VILLAGES

FEBRUARY 25, 2010

Selectboard Chair Patricia Pruitt will not Run Again



DETMOLD PHOTO

Patricia Pruitt

BY DAVID DETMOLD

MONTAGUE – Three years ago, when she decided to run for a second term, selectboard chair Patricia Pruitt said she would not seek a third.

This week, Pruitt confirmed that decision. "I'm not in the running for a third term."

She said the reasons for that decision are different than she thought they would be back in 2007.

"Basically, my husband and I have to figure out how to get on with our lives at this point. Economically, it's been a rough year, and I think our family needs my attention."

She added, "It was a very tough decision. I've been very interested in the schools and how we can work out a better working relationship with them.

We're just at the point now where that's beginning to happen."

Three years ago, Pruitt made a similar comment about school-town relations in the run-up to her second term, when she said, "Just because you have a collaborative relationship doesn't mean you automatically solve problems. It takes time."

Also in 2007, she put the redevelopment of the Strathmore Mill high on her agenda for a second term. One week after Pruitt made that remark, the redevelopment prospects for the 244,482-square foot, 19th century paper mill suffered a serious blow when a devastating arson fire reduced building #10 at the Strathmore

see PRUITT pg 12

VERMONT SAYS NO!

TO 20 MORE
YEARS OF
VERMONT YANKEE



DETMOLD PHOTO

Vermont Senate President Pro Tem Peter Shumlin told the chamber, "We embark today on a new energy direction for Vermont, if we have the wisdom and courage to Vote 'No', on Entergy's bid for a 20-year extension of the operating license for the Vermont Yankee nuclear plant. Moments later, by a vote of 26 - 4, the Vermont Senate did just that.

BY DAVID DETMOLD

MONTPELIER All day Wednesday, snow swirled around the Doric columns of the Greek Revival portico and the gold leaf dome of the Vermont statehouse, as opponents of the Vermont Yankee nuclear power plant jammed the halls, filled the small gallery in the ornate Senate chamber, and lined the walls of that room to listen to the historic debate unfolding beneath its ornate rotunda. National media packed the corners of the Senate chamber with television cameras, and the *New York Times* filed a story within minutes of the final gavel falling on the 26 - 4 vote to deny Vermont's lone nuclear reactor the 20-year extension on its operating license its parent

corporation, Entergy Louisiana, had sought.

The 38-year-old Vermont Yankee reactor in Vernon is scheduled to retire in March of 2012. It has been plagued by a series of leaks and accidents since Entergy took ownership of the plant from a consortium of Vermont utilities in 2002.

Never before had a state voted on whether a nuclear power plant should continue to operate within its borders, and Vermont's action came just one week after the Obama administration announced plans to commit billions in taxpayer funded loan guarantees to revive the fortunes of the domestic nuclear power industry, which has not seen an order for a new reactor in America since the

core melt accident crippled Three Mile Island Unit II in 1979.

Cort Richardson, a utility analyst from East Montpelier, said, "This is precedent setting. It comes at a time when Obama has raised the nuclear industry out of the scrap heap and breathed new life into it."

Ginny Callan, of Calais, VT, a founding member of the grassroots Vermont Yankee Decommission Alliance, which led marches attended by thousands of tri-state residents and large sit-ins at the gates of Vermont Yankee from 1978 - 1982, was also in the Senate chamber on Wednesday. She said, "I hope this vote serves as a wake-up call to the rest of the

see VERMONT pg 14

NOTES FROM THE MONTAGUE SELECTBOARD

Weight Limits to be Reduced on Fifth Street Bridge

BY DAVID DETMOLD

TURNERS FALLS – The traffic plan for Turners Falls during the upcoming renovation of the Gill-Montague bridge, which is expected to remain one way into Turners during the four years of construction, hit an unexpected snag this week.

Town administrator Frank Abbondanzio told the selectboard on Monday he had received a call from the Department of Transportation informing him that the 5th Street bridge, which crosses the power canal by Southworth Paper, is about to be posted for 5-axle trucks at a maximum capacity of 15 tons.

Three-axle trucks would be limited to 13 tons, and two-axles to 12 tons. Abbondanzio said regular inspection of the bridge resulted in concerns over the gusset plates, "related to the Minneapolis bridge collapse, and new requirements resulting from that incident."

Posting that bridge "raises significant issues" for the traffic flow plan, to be discussed with DoT officials at the Great Falls Discovery Center on Friday, February 26th at 2:00 p.m.

Abbondanzio said on Tuesday he had been on the phone with Montague's representative Steve Kulik and senator Stan Rosenberg to try to deal with this latest detour in what had already looked to be a very challenging four years for traffic in and out of the downtown.

"How will we get big trucks out of town," is the issue, Abbondanzio told the board. "The only way for them to leave will be through Millers Falls or down Route 63," to Montague Center, since the road through Montague City to Cheapside in Greenfield leads to a railroad overpass with insufficient clearance for tractor trailers, or a lengthy side trip past Poet's Seat.

see MONTAGUE pg 10

Triumph for Local NMH Student Director: The Glass Menagerie

BY SUDI NIMMS

MOUNT HERMON – The splendid new Rhodes Arts Center on the Northfield Mount Hermon campus in Gill is home to a beautiful new state-of-the-art theater, which recently hosted a superb student-directed production of Tennessee Williams' classic, *The Glass Menagerie*.

Last weekend, local NMH senior Brady Ward directed a talented and dedicated cast of students who gave a performance worthy of the 1940s masterpiece. Director Ward is the son of NMH science teacher Jay Ward, NMH class of 1968.

The Glass Menagerie takes place in the rented, furnished apartment of Amanda Wingfield and her two grown children, Tom and Laura. A semi-autobiographical "memory play," it is narrated from the downstage area to the audience from Tom's point of view, who then joins other family members upstage on

the set to play out the drama. Tom at once despises and envies his father for abandoning their family. "He was a telephone man who fell in love with long distances," Tom tells us. The father is also considered a fifth character in the show, as his absence is keenly felt by the family's struggles and poverty, and his portrait glows in stark relief on the dining room wall.

Mother Amanda, based on Williams' own mother, who is described as "the puritanical daughter of an Episcopal rector," is trying desperately to survive the Great Depression in St. Louis with minimal skills – other than southern charm – and the help of her children, who are not participating as Amanda would like.

Tom longs to get away and join the Merchant Marines to escape his deadly dull job at the shoe factory, but feels obligated (mostly by his guilt-tripping

see TRIUMPH pg 11

PET OF THE WEEK

Manx Cookie



Oreo Delgado

My name is Oreo Delgado and I am a one-year-old male Manx mix cat looking for a good home. Don't gobble me up! I'm not that kind of Oreo! However, I am black and white and sweet all over! I get along with all people, so I'm sure you and I will get along great. Do you like kids? Me too! My previous family had a lot of kids, and they were so fun to play with! I need a nice home where I can romp and play and hang out. Please come meet me and find out if your family is the right one for me. I'm sweet just like a cookie! Just try to resist me! For more information on adopting me, please contact the Dakin Pioneer Valley Humane Society at (413) 548-9898 or via email: info@dpvhs.org.

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WENDELL LIBRARY NEWS

Ecological Program Upcoming

An Ecological Program will be offered at the Library's "Free University" beginning next month. *Basic Ecological Principles: How They Affect Our Lives* will be offered as a free 8-session survey tutorial in March and April at the Library with Dr. Paul Godfrey, Professor Emeritus of Biology, University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

Among the topics will be *The Web of Life* ("when one looks at the world we find everything is hitched to everything else," said John Muir), *Concepts of the Ecosystem* (what are they?), *Energy flow in Ecosystems* (how does it work?), *Ecological succession* (changes through time and space), *Carrying Capacity of Ecosystems and of the Earth*

(how much is enough?), and much more.

Dr. Godfrey will use simple demonstrations of principles with hands-on activities, presentations, background readings, videos, and Power Point presentations. The program will include optional field trips on weekends to local areas of interest. Please sign up at the Wendell Library by March 6th.

People of all levels of experience are welcome to attend. Once we have a list of interested participants, the dates and time will be determined based on best time for the majority. Each session will be 90 minutes.

Call the Wendell Library for more details at (978) 544-3559.

MONTAGUE CENTER LIBRARY NEWS

Ice Cream Social Well Attended



Veronica Phaneuf and Mary Melonis of Montague Center are Friends of the Montague Public Libraries. The Friends sponsored a well-attended Ice Cream Social at the Montague Center Library on Monday, February 8th.

NEW SALEM LIBRARY NEWS

Julie, Julia and French Cooking Events

The public is invited to join us for any of the following free events sponsored by the Friends of the New Salem Public Library: Movie Night for the film *Julie and Julia* on Saturday, March 6th, 7:00 p.m., Community Book Discussion

for the book *Julie and Julia* on Sunday, March 7th, 3:00 p.m., French Cooking with Karen Powers on Tuesday, March 9th, 3:00 p.m. Please call (978) 544-6334 to reserve a spot. Also, every Tuesday in March is a Story Hour, 3:30 p.m.

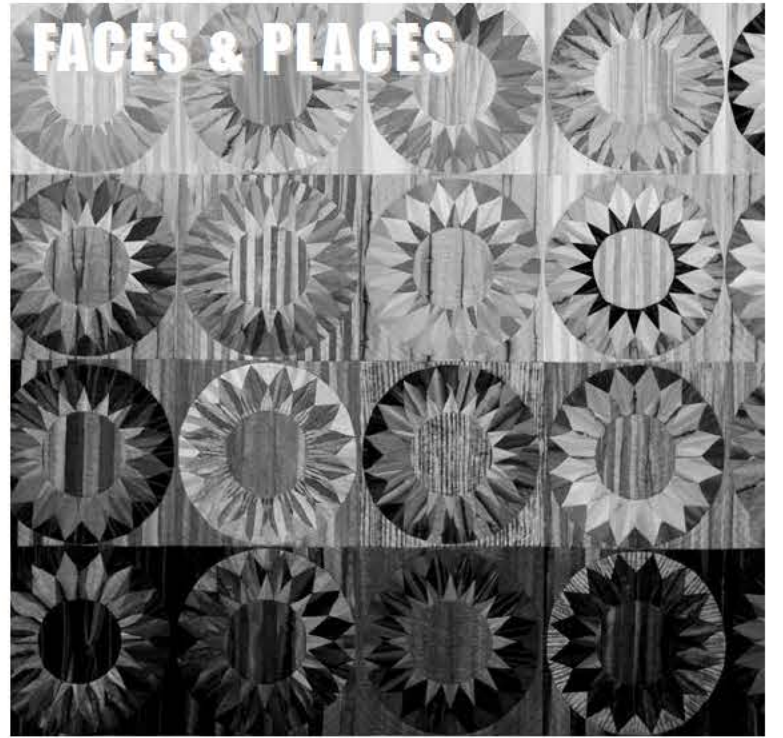
SENIOR CENTER ACTIVITIES – March 1st to 5th

GILL/MONTAGUE Senior Center, 62 Fifth Street, Turners Falls, is open Monday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. Congregate meals are served Tuesday through Friday at Noon. Meal reservations must be made a day in advance by 11:00 a.m. Messages can be left on our machine when the center is not open. Meal site manager is Becky Cobb. Council on Aging Director is Roberta Potter. For information or to make meal reservations, call (413) 863-9357. The Friday afternoon Writing Group is continuing and has room for new members. Thursday Morning Tai Chi is free and open to the public. Feel free to call the senior center for information on any programs.

Monday, March 1st
10:00 a.m. Senior Aerobics
10:45 a.m. Easy Aerobics
1:00 p.m. Knitting Circle
Tuesday, March 2nd
9:00 a.m. Walking Group,
10:00 a.m. to noon Brown Bag,
No Chair Yoga

12:45 p.m. COA Meeting
1:00 p.m. Canasta
Wednesday, March 3rd
10:00 a.m. Senior Aerobics
10:00 to 1:00 p.m. Blood Pressure Clinic
10:15 a.m. Brown Bag
1:00 p.m. Bingo
Thursday, March 4th
8:30 to 10:00 a.m. Foot Clinic
10:00 a.m. Tai Chi
1:00 p.m. Pitch
Friday, March 5th
10:00 a.m. Senior Aerobics
10:45 a.m. Easy Aerobics
1:00 p.m. Scrabble
1:00 p.m. Writing Group

ERVING Senior Center, 18 Pleasant St., Erving (Old Center School, 1st Floor), is open Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. for activities and congregating meals. For info and reservations, call Polly Kiely, Senior Center Director, at (413) 423-3308. Lunch is daily at 11:30 a.m., with reservations 24 hours in advance. Transportation can be provided for meals, shopping, or medical necessity. Call



Ann Feitelson and Ronna Erickson of Montague were among the winners of the National Quilt Museum's sunflower-themed *New Quilts from an Old Favorite* contest, taking fourth place with their joint creation, pictured above, called *Rising and Radiant*. It's a straightforward pattern gone wild by the use of electric green, hot orange, purple and burgundy striped fabrics. The quilt is on display along with the other finalists at the Museum in Paducah, KY through June 15th, and then will travel to various museums, art galleries and quilt shows through December, 2011.

Montague Cultural Council Seeks Volunteers

If you are interested in the cultural well-being of your community, the Montague Cultural Council needs you. We are seeking volunteer members to help create a vision for arts, sciences, and the humanities for the town of Montague. Each year the Montague Cultural Council receives funding from the state to provide the town of Montague with educational programs, performances, and exhibits through a

competitive application process. Member responsibilities include an online orientation through the Massachusetts Cultural Council website, helping with council initiated projects, and attending meetings to determine grant recipients.

Please contact Lisa Enzer at (413) 367-2658 for more information about becoming a council member.

Books In Action

Shutesbury Elementary School hosts Books In Action, a celebration of reading, on Friday, March 5th from 6-8 p.m. This unique event is the result of a collaboration between the four Union 28 School Librarians (Shutesbury, Leverett, Swift River and Erving). The evening is filled with activities, food and games all themed around the state book award nominees. Questions or more info?, please call Marcia Bernard at (413) 259-1212, extension 133.

Anything Goes!

Presented by
Turners Falls High School and
Great Falls Middle School
Music and lyrics by Cole Porter
March 5, 7:00 p.m.
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JESSICA HARMON ILLUSTRATION

Local Briefs

COMPILED BY DON CLEGG – A Benefit Concert for the Trask Family will be held at the French King Bowling Alley in the Banquet Room on Friday, February 26th, starting at 6 p.m. The Trasks have been living in a motel in Greenfield ever since sewage backed into their Erving home.

Scheduled to perform are Annie Hassett, Ruby's Complaint, Curly Fingers Dupree, and Afterglow. Tickets are available at the door or by reservation by calling Bill at (413) 423-3120. Admission is \$5 and children under 18 are free.

Saturday, February 27th, between 9 a.m. and noon, stop by Turners Falls High School on 222 Tumpike Road for a "Food For Thought Farmers Market." Available will be Emu products, winter vegetables, honey, salsa, jam, beef, eggs and baked goods. A few vendors will even be cooking up samples. Vendor fees benefit the Gill/Montague Education Fund.

Are you considering forming a new walking group for the 2010 Meals on Wheels Walkathon? A brunch for walk team organizers will be held on Saturday, February 27th at 9 a.m. at Franklin County Home Care Offices, 330 Montague City Road, Montague City. The Meals on Wheels program is already providing 120,000 home-delivered meals a year to homebound elders and people with disabilities in the 30 towns they serve in Franklin County and North Quabbin. The program is for everyone who needs it.

Many elders, just leaving hospitals, receive medically appropriate meals until they are back on their feet. More than seventy volunteer drivers deliver not only a hot, healthy meal each day, but also provide a well-being check-in. Current funding does not cover the entire cost, and Franklin County Home Care, which runs the program, anticipates doubling the need as "Baby Boomers," who are just now

beginning to retire, become age eligible. FCHCC is attempting to build up the Walkathon, with the help of many, many friends in the wider community and is putting out the call for new walking groups! Greenfield Savings Bank has set aside \$10,000 to double the contributions of new walkers and new sponsors, in a drive to help Home Care build up the Walkathon. For more information or to RSVP call Pam Kelly at (413) 773-5555 extension 2226 or (978) 544-2259.

Franklin County Technical School will have its **Second Annual Dodgeball Tournament** on Friday, March 5th. The tournament will start at 6 p.m. in the FCTS gymnasium. Teams of 5 players will face off in double elimination games. Admission is just one dollar and registration fees are \$25 per team. All teams wishing to participate in this fun evening must be registered by March 3rd, by either e-mail (dprasol@fcts.org) or at (413) 863-9561 extension 233. Proceeds benefit the graduating class of 2010.

Come join the Oak Ridge Detachment of the Marine Corps League for a **St. Patrick's Day dinner** of corned beef & cabbage on Saturday, March 6th, from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m. at the Bernardston Vets/MCL Club, 16 Hartwell St. (across from the old Streeter's Store) in Bernardston. Adults: \$12, Children 7 and under: \$5. All proceeds benefit the many charities the MCL supports.

Send items for local briefs to reporter-local@montaguema.net

Eagle Error

In last week's Eagle Watch column, we inaccurately stated that eagle eggs in the Barton Cove nest had hatched at the beginning of March in years past. We meant to say eggs were laid in past years by the first week of March. The chicks come about a month later, if all goes well. Let's hope they do!

Massachusetts PCA Directory Signs Up 5,000 Workers Since September Launch

A new state website, www.mass.gov/findpca, makes it easier for people with disabilities and elders to recruit and hire Personal Care Assistants.

Individuals can search the website directory for qualified PCAs by zip code and other criteria, such as access to a car, hours of availability and work experience. Current and potential PCAs can apply for jobs at no charge.

The directory is a free tool for the more than 18,000 people with disabilities and elders who qualify for the MassHealth PCA program. The program provides funding for them to hire qualified individuals to assist them at home with daily activities, including bathing, dressing, meal prepara-

tion, and other tasks they are not able to do for themselves.

People with disabilities and elders who do not have access to a computer are encouraged to contact

Franklin County Home Care (413) 773-5555 or (978) 544-2259, or call toll-free to Rewarding Work Resources Inc. at (866) 212-9675.

Those needing support at home, but who do not participate in the MassHealth PCA program, may use the directory for a small fee. Individuals looking for work as PCAs may register online or may call the Applicant Call Center toll-free at (866) 211-WORK. There is no charge for workers to register.

Genealogy Gathering

BY SARA CAMPBELL
TURNERS FALLS – The Carnegie Library in Turners Falls will host a session for people interested in researching their family history on Monday, March 8th at 6:30 p.m.

Are you Polish? Irish? Canadian? Or a Yankee? Beginners and experienced genealogists are all encouraged to join in and share their stories and questions.

This will be an initial organizational session to gauge interest in local family history and to find ways we can work together to make information available to other researchers.

The local history collection at the library will be explored, as well as internet resources. Forms and advice on getting started will be provided to beginners.

Attendees may want to bring a wireless laptop to follow along or take notes.

Preregistration is suggested, but not required. Send an email "reservation" to rememberingancestors@yahoo.com

Psychic Fair

The National Spiritual Alliance will sponsor a psychic fair Saturday, February 27th from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Thompson Temple across from the post office in Lake Pleasant. Divination methods include astrology, hand reading, vibration connection, and tarot cards. Consultation is with a medium of choice. Reiki and spiritual healing services will also be available.

Wendell Earth Day Plans

All local residents and organizations promoting environmental stewardship and sustainable living, farmers, artists, craftspeople, and performers are invited to participate in the 2010 Wendell Earth Day Celebration on Saturday, April 24th. There will be festivities on the commons from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. and an afternoon work party at Fiske Pond. At noon there will be a community potluck; and Kellianna will be singing. Please contact Marianne at msundell65@hotmail.com or at (978) 544-8981 if you'd like to set up at this event, or for more information.

Erastus Field and Me

LEVERETT – On March 7th at 3:00 p.m., the artist Louise Minks will present a talk on portrait painting at the Leverett Field Museum. The first part of the program focuses on Erastus Salisbury Field's tools, training, approach and philosophy of portraiture and the changes brought about by the introduction of photography.

Minks will also discuss the tools, training, approach and philosophy of portraiture in her own work. A selection of slides of her portraits – many are of Leverett citizens – will accompany Minks's talk. Don't miss this opportunity to learn more about two Leverett painters: one from the 19th century, and one currently working in our midst.



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CUT AND RUN

BY JOE GRAVELINE

NORTHFIELD – Early last summer, I had the opportunity to see a biomass harvest in progress at my friend's land in Shelburne Falls. As my truck climbed the drive up to the wood lot I could hear the sound of heavy equipment competing with the high-pitched whine of chain saws and the intermittent roar of a giant chipper that sounded like it was fighting a battle with the strongest trees in the forest.

When the crew broke for lunch, all went quiet. The hillside was covered with scars in the earth from the skidding activities, and the vegetation was bent and broken. Light spilled into the newly created clearing in the forest, reaching the soft under grasses that had not seen direct sunlight for a lifetime. Trees of all sizes were lying on the hill, some in neat piles, some crossed over the tops of others. Parked on the edges of the yet-unfinished cut were two large skidders, hot to the touch and equipped with cables and chains ready to drag the less accessible trees down the slope to the processing part of the operation. A tractor trailer rig backed up to the chipper was about three-quarters full of chipping material, that only a few hours earlier had been standing trees and brush processing out oxygen and moisture through leaves and needles moving in the breeze of that fine summer day.

This load was headed to the Westminster biomass power plant, the second tractor trailer load from the lot that day. "Is there any money in this sort of operation?" I asked.

My friend explained the operator was not in a position to pay much for cutting on his land because the state set a low tonnage rate for the chipping material, and a tractor trailer full of chips would only bring a few hundred dollars for the load. Up to this point in the season, it was costing the operator more to cut, process and deliver the chips than he could make by selling them.

John told me the logging operator was upset at how far behind he and the other loggers in the area were in delivering their contract quota, due to the bad winter and the fact that the cutters couldn't get into the woods to

bring out the product in a timely manner as anticipated.

The logging operator's large investment was apparent. The feller-buncher alone can cost up to \$300,000, the skidders sell used for \$30,000 to \$80,000 and up. The chippers cost tens of thousands more, and miscellaneous equipment like the work trucks can run \$30,000 each. As a businessman, I can understand the frustration and need for a hard push just to try to meet the mortgage payments on this amount of equipment.

On the way home, I tried to reconcile the Green Energy mantra the biomass proponents keep talking about in reference to Pioneer Renewable Energy's proposed 47 MW biomass plant in Greenfield. On the hillside in Shelburne that day, I observed two skidders, four chain saws, one feller-buncher, one large chipper, a couple of pickup trucks and a tractor trailer rig, all consuming oil to harvest, process and deliver a product that is supposed to burn green in a biomass plant.

The proponents claim a 50-mile radius is needed to harvest a sustainable supply of biomass materials for the Greenfield plant alone. The Westminster, MA and Portsmouth, NH biomass plants are already trying to sustain their operations using harvests taken from the Shelburne and Wendell forests now.

The theory, numbers, and sacrifices just don't make sense to this old Yankee. The concept that there is an endless supply of biomass material to be harvested year-round here in Western Mass in my judgment is an empty claim. We can't get into the forest for as much as four months or more a year, yet the power plants that burn the biomass will demand an uninterrupted supply of trees all year long.

I will breathe easier when the false claim that biomass is a green solution to making electricity, and that it will offer us freedom from dependence on foreign oil, is revealed to be nothing more than a bad idea we are intelligent enough to reject. As I returned home from Shelburne that day, my solar panels were producing over 4,000 watts of quiet, clean energy. Rah!



ROY & SLATTS ILLUSTRATION

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

A Few Misconceptions in 'Fame' Review

We would like to thank Sudi Nimms for her detailed and heartfelt review of Ja'Duke's *Fame*, the musical, this past weekend. While it was for the most part a very reliable account of our presentation, there are a couple of misconceptions we'd like to clear up for your readership.

First of all, your reporter was correct in presuming that Kimberly (Waynelovich) Williams was responsible for the show's choreography, and the lavish praise for her skills and that of her students is greatly appreciated. She clearly has an understanding of dance and all of the principles involved in making dance productions successful.

Because the cast of this musical consisted primarily of students from our studio, Ja'Duke Center for the

Performing Arts, we would like to correct two inaccuracies included in the text of the review.

In the actual show performances, the phrase "rich b___" was replaced with "rich witch," and Jose's solo became "Can't Keep It Cool," in deference to the child-oriented and family-based philosophies embraced by our studio.

We appreciate her reporter's observation that some of the actors appeared somewhat young for their roles. We were pleased to be able to fill all of the student roles in *Fame* with our own studio students, in keeping with our philosophy of education that endeavors to provide our students of the arts with as many performance opportunities as possible. Although the cast was youthful, all of the roles were played

by junior high and high school students, the age group about which the show was written.

Lastly, we agree with your reviewer that the "missing" songs she mentioned in the review were notable. Unfortunately, those songs were from the movie *Fame* but not part of the original *Fame* musical content, as is often the case when a musical is made into a movie.

Thank you for the opportunity to clarify these points. We appreciate the Montague Reporter's interest in reviewing local entertainment offerings, and particularly your reviewer's time and efforts in attending a performance and creating a very engaging review.

Charlotte Waynelovich,
on behalf of JCPA
Turners Falls

Volunteers Duty Bound to Stay Behind During an Accident at the Vernon Nuke

I'd like to add another view on the Vermont Yankee safety question. As a volunteer firefighter for over 20 years, I am duty-bound to protect the public to the best of my ability in an emergency situation. If there were cause for an evacuation of my town and neighboring towns because of an acci-

dent at Vermont Yankee in Vernon, I along with other members of my fire department (and other emergency services volunteers) would be the ones to stay behind, to coordinate and execute an evacuation of all town residents.

Evacuation is a very time-consuming process in a rural town. Most of the towns in Vermont Yankee's evacuation zone are rural. Door to door contact is needed in many cases. We learned that very

clearly during the aftermath of the ice storm of December 2008.

To my knowledge, a full scale, all-town coordinated evacuation of Vermont Yankee's evacuation zone has never been tested. This evacuation would involve emergency personnel from three states. Fortunately, we have not yet had to evacuate all the people in this zone in an emergency situation that could arise from a nuclear accident. I pray we never have to.

Vermont Yankee's operating license is set to expire in 2012. The plant in Vernon has lived out its predetermined life span. Let's put it to rest. I'd rather be making plans for the firefighters' annual chicken barbecue.

– Alan Surprenant
Ashfield

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GUEST EDITORIALS

If I Were A Taliban

If I were an earnest and thoughtful young man living in the tribal regions of Afghanistan or Pakistan, I suspect I'd weigh my options and make a beeline for the Taliban.

I might think twice about the rigors of Sharia law, the dehumanization of women, and the dynamiting of sacred Buddhist shrines. In the end, however, my decision to Talibanize myself would have little or nothing to do with ideology or religion. It would come down to three practical considerations.

First, there is the devil-I-don't-know, or "The Great Satan," equation. Do I go with the guys in the kafiyas, with the Kalashnikovs and the odd and wonderful Pawkul hats... the guys who are always smiling into their long beards, even as they commit odd and wretched atrocities? The Mujahideen, after all, are nothing if not colorful, and talk about creds! Cruel, but deep. Just ask the CIA.

On the other hand, I could

stick with the Americans in their regulation camo and Kevlar, with helmets and goggles that make them look like so many ants – awkward, uncomfortable and anonymous, forever aiming poorly, shouting, and calling in drones. If they aren't actually working for The Great Satan, they totally play the part.

In short, do I go with the guys whose cruelty is native, familiar and precise, or with the invaders whose cruelty is mechanized, exotic and inept? Check.

Next there is the "Better-Safe-Than" argument. How do I best protect my butt? It would quickly become clear to me that it is far less dangerous to plant a roadside bomb and to disappear into the populace than it is to drive down that selfsame incendiary road in a Humvee flashing what might as well be a sign that reads "Shoot Me, Please."

A Taliban, of course, can fade into a landscape that is forever willing to absorb him, wrap himself in the rocks and sky. An



What should we do? Come sir, to draw toward an end with you.

American, when there is a lull in the killing, is forever consigned to a firebase, a purgatory with nothing but sandbags on the horizon. Check.

If I really thought about it, perhaps I could get past The Great Satan and Better-Safe-

Than arguments. I might even be persuaded to sign onto the slogging Western campaign to wrestle a just and stable democracy from this mess. I might, that is, if it were not for the third and most important of the three considerations – The Clincher.

This involves nothing less than predicting who, at the end of the day, will be left standing. It's a gamble. Nobody likes a loser, especially the winner.

The Taliban forbids gambling, which is just as well since betting on one people over another is ghoulish and heart-breaking, especially when so many dear and noble lives are at stake. Simply put, however – and just for the sake of argument – The Clincher goes something like this:

Nobody, but nobody, ever went broke betting against the United States in a struggle like this.

This is what I would realize as I headed off into the mountains, toward Pakistan, to join my Mujahideen brothers. Going short on America right now is about as close to a lock as you are going to find.

Check.

– Wesley Blixt
Greenfield

Readers w/out Broadband Unite!

The Massachusetts Broadband Institute (MBI) is applying for federal funding in round two, after having been rejected in round one. MBI says a major reason for the rejection was the bland character of the support letters they submitted. Apparently, most letters said broadband is a 'good idea,' but provided little or no evidence of actual need and demand by Western Mass residents.

The time is now (postmark deadline is March 5th) to submit strong letters for the renewed application, stating in detail the writer's need for broadband access to the internet. The round two application must be supported by evidence of strong demand.

MBI has asked WesternMA Connect to coordinate the letter process. While the letters should be addressed to Larry Strickling, Assistant Secretary and Administrator, U.S. Department of Commerce, they should be sent to Sharon Ferry, WesternMA Connect, 75 South Church St., Pittsfield 01201. People may

email scanned letters (or letters with an electronic signature) to sharon@westernmaconnect.org as well.

Here's a quick template for the letters:

Start by saying, "As a resident of the Town of [insert town name], I am writing in support of the Massachusetts Broadband Institute's application to the Comprehensive Community Infrastructure Grant Program." Then tell your story – insert a strong, compelling description of the negative impacts the lack of broadband access has had on you, your family, your work or business, and how you will use broadband access once it is available. It is helpful to include specific examples. For businesses, highlighting examples about the potential for future business opportunity, job creation, or economic development may be particularly persuasive.

– Peter d'Errico
Leverett

Atomic Water Has a Long Shelf Life

BY JOSHUA DOSTIS
NEW SALEM - In 1981, I created a comical coloring book designed to help the public realize the unavoidable hazard nuclear energy presents to the world.

"Doc Schnuke's Atomic Water Story" clearly expressed the "Leaky Pipe Syndrome," and

Franklin County Poets Wanted

The Friends of the Greenfield Public Library is pleased to announce the 19th Annual Poet's Seat Poetry Contest. The contest is open to all Franklin County residents. Awards will be given in three categories: first, second, and third place in the adult division and the four top poems in the youth division – age 12-18 (divided into 12-14 and 15-18 for judging).

Entries should be typed or clearly printed in black ink, with the name, address, phone number, and e-mail (if applicable) on the reverse side of the poems; no identifying information on the front. Also on the reverse, young

over 15,000 copies were distributed throughout New England.

My attention was focused on water because back in those days I ran a waffle stand on Federal Street in Greenfield, and every morning for almost three weeks, two gentlemen would come into my restaurant and fill up their water bottles with fresh spring water I was providing for my customers. They never ordered waffles, but would give me a couple of bucks for the water.

One day I asked them about it, and they told me they were NRC inspectors going up to Yankee Atomic in Rowe, and they never drank the water at a nuke plant.

This inspired me to create the "Atomic Water" label, now a collectible, and the comic.

Now, 30 years later, the truth comes out. Atomic water is here!

water I was providing for my customers. They never ordered waffles, but would give me a couple of bucks for the water.

One day I asked them about it, and they told me they were NRC inspectors going up to Yankee Atomic in Rowe, and they never drank the water at a nuke plant.

This inspired me to create the "Atomic Water" label, now a collectible, and the comic.

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NOTES FROM THE ERVING SELECTBOARD

School Committee Proposes \$264,755 Increase in Secondary Education

BILL FRANKLIN – The Erving selectboard met with the school committee and the finance committee Monday night to go over the FY '11 school budget. The selectboard had asked the school committee – along with all other town departments – to bring in a level-funded budget

Aside from a 2% cost of living allowance for town employees, all the other departments brought back budget requests in line with the selectboard's level funding request.

The school budget was the exception, coming back with an overall budget increase of \$250,799 over last year's figure of \$2,943,558.

The Erving school budget is divided into two sections, for elementary and secondary education. Next year's elementary school budget is down slightly from the current year's, but the secondary school budget is up by \$264,755, bringing the total for school operations to \$3,194,357.

"We ain't got two hundred thousand to give you," said selectboard chair Andy Tessier.

Noting that all the other departments had come back with level budgets, Tessier added, "Year after year the school budget has come in over... We need rubbish removal; we need police; we need other things."

"I don't think it's fair," said assistant assessor Jacquie Boyden, "that everyone else should make cuts... Some of the

nice things that Erving has always been able to afford, maybe we can't afford them any more."

Boyden went on to challenge some of the line items in the school budget. "What about the late bus? No one else has one. You could cut ten thousand there."

Beth Lux, from the school committee, responded, "What you're saying you have is less than what we're saying we need."

Union 28 superintendent of schools Joan Wickman argued that the committee has very little control over the secondary school budget. "We have a very fluid situation of students that come into Erving. It becomes a challenge to budget accordingly." Wickman said the school committee is only keeping \$50,000 in the budget for contingency, "in case someone moves into town," in particular if the student has special educational needs.

"Every other school district has reduced its budget," said finance committee member Stan Gradowski. "Why not contact other districts to find out what they did to streamline costs? Let's find out what works, and what doesn't."

There seems to be a "structural problem" in the way we are financing education in Massachusetts, said Charlie Paulin, Union 28 business manager. "Every time a few students come and go, the costs change

drastically."

Even small changes in student population or student needs can set the entire budgeting procedure on its head, causing large fluctuations in costs from one year to the next.

"The day before school starts," commented town administrator Tom Sharp, "a family could move in with twelve children or a special needs student. This could raise our costs by a hundred thousand and wreak havoc with the rest of the budget."

In addition there is the problem of students who choose out of

the district or attend charter schools, which cause a net loss to the town. Wickman said the main reason students are choosing schools outside the district, particularly sixth graders attending Great Falls Middle School in Turners, is because of their sports programs. Thus, cutting programs that make local schools attractive, such as sports, art or music, can have an adverse side effect of increasing school choice students leaving the district, taking state aid with them.

"My husband teaches at a nearby school," said school committee member Melanie Burnett, "They have no music program. We are trying to preserve what people come here for."

Dan Hammock, of the finance committee, sounded an ironic note when he said, "If everybody

moves here we can't afford to send their kids to school. Maybe we should change the signs that read 'Erving - a nice place to live' to 'Erving - a nice place to visit.'"

The school committee planned to meet on Tuesday to go over the budget again.

Tessier said, "We have to bring a balanced budget to the town meeting."

In other matters Tom Sharp announced some "excellent news." The town received an \$81,000 Department of Energy Resources grant to replace windows in the Erving town hall with more thermally efficient windows, to save energy.

"This time next year," said Sharp, "we'll all be a little cozier. We'll have to jump through some hoops, but we have the grant."

Montague Democrats Will Caucus April 8th

Montague Democrats will hold their caucus to select candidates for town office elections on Thursday, April 8th, from 7:00 to 8:00 p.m. in the second floor meeting room of the town offices, 1 Avenue A, Turners Falls. Successful candidates will receive the party nomination to appear on the May 17th town election ballot. Voting is by paper ballot.

Only registered Democrats may run in this, what amounts to a primary election for local offices. Democrats who wish to run in the caucus must deliver their intention in writing to Democratic town committee chair, Jay DiPucchio, by 5:00 p.m., Friday, April 2nd. Notice may be by mail, email or in hand. Verbal declaration cannot be documented and is not acceptable.

Individuals choosing to run without seeking Democratic party nomination should check rules with the town clerk. Occasionally, candidates for the caucus nomination also gather signatures for nomination through the town clerk process so they can still appear on the May ballot if they are defeated at the caucus.

By the Democratic town committee's vote following the 2003 caucus, registered un-enrolled voters also may vote in the Democratic caucus. No absentee balloting is allowed. Below are listed term expirations.

OFFICE	TERM	INCUMBENT	PARTY
Selectman	3	Patricia Pruitt	Dem.
Town Clerk	3	Debra Bourbeau	Dem.
Treas/Tax Collector	3	Patricia Dion	Dem.
Assessor	3	Teresa Miner	Dem.
Bd. Of Health Member	3	Jay DiPucchio	Dem.
Library Trustee (3)	3	Karen Latka	Dem.
	3	Cynthia Tarail	Dem.
	3	Leslie Lomasson	Dem.
Park & Rec. Comm.	3	Linda Ackerman	Unenrolled
Soldier Memorial:			
Trustees (1): Veteran	3	John Murphy	Dem.
Non-Vet.	3	Not Applicable 2010	
Montague:			
Housing Authority	5	Stanley Zera	Dem.
Tree Warden	3	Mark Stevens	Unenrolled

The second floor meeting room of the town office is wheelchair accessible by elevator entrance at the rear of the building, or by the front door

Send letters of intent to: Jay DiPucchio, Democratic town committee chair, 35 Central Street, Turners Falls, MA 01376. For more information: 863-8656 home, or by email: here.now@verizon.net

Sign Up for Free and Reduced School Lunch for Students

GILL-MONTAGUE – In these extremely trying economic times, families are often hardest hit when a parent loses their job or faces a reduction in hours.

If a family has had a reduction in income, they may re-apply at any time during the school year for free and reduced price meals. Free and reduced priced lunch and breakfast is a way for families to offset the loss of income and ensure their school-aged children will receive healthy, nutritious meals.

If you have experienced a lay-

off or reduction in income for any reason, and you have children that attend the Gill-Montague Regional School District, please complete a free and reduced price meals application. You can pick up an application at your child's school or by calling the food service office at (413)863-7315. All information is confidential.

For more information, please contact: Jim Loynd, food service manager, Gill-Montague Regional School District, (413) 863-7315 or via email at: jloynd@gmrds.org.

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NOTES FROM THE WENDELL SELECTBOARD

Concerns Raised on Green Community Act Criteria

BY JOSH HEINEMANN – Laurie DiDonato and Mary Thomas of the town energy task force came to the selectboard on February 17th with concerns about how Wendell might be affected if the town decides to pursue designation as a Green Community under the state of Massachusetts Green Communities Initiative.

Under the guidelines set forth in the state initiative, towns that qualify as Green Communities must meet five criteria in order to be able to apply for grants for energy efficiency improvements and renewable energy projects from an annual state fund of \$10 million.

Among the criteria DiDonato and Thomas expressed concerns about is a requirement that towns must designate areas where renewable energy research and development, or the manufacture of renewable energy components, be allowed by right. A related criterion requires expedited permitting for renewable energy research and development or manufacturing in town.

Didonato asked if the Energy Task Force could consult with town counsel before the town decides on whether to seek Green Community status, because neither the task force nor the planning board is comfortable with sweeping changes to zoning bylaws. She said task force members do not feel confident they understand all the ramifications of changing town bylaws to meet the state criteria for inclusion in the initiative. She said such a change to the bylaws might open Wendell up to unwanted development.

Selectboard chair Christine Heard hesitated to authorize the energy task force to use town counsel due to the expense. Heard suggested the task force first consult with the Franklin Regional Council of Governments. Board member Dan Keller suggested the task force also talk more with the planning board.

DiDonato also expressed concern about another of the five criteria required for a town to be designated as a Green

Community, namely that it adopt the so-called energy stretch code, a voluntary addendum to the state building code which requires a town to impose tighter controls on buildings' energy use. The stretch building code would lead to increases in the cost of new construction, but proponents of the stretch code say those increased up-front costs produce cost savings in utility bills, and environmental benefits as well. DiDonato said the ramifications of the stretch building code are as yet poorly understood.

In other news:

The town has \$6,569.67 remaining in grant money from the Greener Watts program, which the town accrued by a number of citizens agreeing to a voluntary surcharge on their electric bills to promote Green Energy initiatives. The energy task force wants to talk with town librarian Rose Heidkamp, who played a large role in generating that money, about ways the remaining funds could be best used.

The finance committee met with the selectboard to discuss the meeting with state representative Steve Kulik (D-Worthington) held in the town office meeting room on February 13th, and also the formation of a money management study committee.

Wendell's entire selectboard attended the meeting with Kulik, along with Wendell finance committee and school committee members from Swift River and Mahar, and representatives from the New Salem selectboard and finance committee.

The meeting was called because Kulik and representative Chris Donelan (D-Orange) helped draft an amendment to the recently enacted education reform bill to allow a town to withdraw from a school superintendency union, such as Union 28, after a majority vote of that town's school committee. The amendment was one of over a hundred amendments to the bill, available online for public review only a few days before the bill was voted on.

At the February 13th meeting Kulik listened to criticism of the amendment, and apologized for the process by which the amendment was crafted, and the complications it might create for other towns in a school union.

Finance committee member Jim Slavas compared a school union to a marriage: simple and easy to join into, but much more involved when it breaks up and there are children involved and shared property to be divided.

Finance chair Michael Idoine said Kulik appeared willing to work to improve the amendment. Selectboard member Jeffrey Pooser thought the meeting was successful.

Also on the 13th, Kulik expressed surprise that Wendell had not yet received compensation for the expenses related to the 2006 tornado clean up. The payment was authorized by the legislature, and signed by the governor, but the check has not arrived.

Town administrative assistant Nancy Aldrich said the town expects to receive approximately \$150,000 to defray expenses resulting from the July 2006 tornado, of which almost a third would be used to reimburse neighboring towns for their assistance with the storm clean up.

Kulik said he would continue to pursue the matter until the town receives the money.

Idoine said a town money management study committee has been named, consisting of himself, Ted Lewis, Doug Tanner, Jennifer Gross, Cecile Guilbault, Shay Cooper, Dale Kowacki, and Joe Coll. The committee will look at other similar sized towns and make recommendations about whether money management positions such as tax collector and treasurer should be elected or appointed in Wendell.

Before the finance committee members left, Heard said the state's new open meeting law requirements, which go into effect July 1st, require committees to post their meeting dates and minutes at all town posting places.

see WENDELL pg 12

NOTES FROM THE LEVERETT SELECTBOARD

Police Department Presents a Budget

BY DAVID DETMOLD – Chief of police Gary Billings said arrests have more than doubled in town since 2008, and accidents are up by two thirds. If he were forced to cut his budget by 5% – a scenario the selectboard has asked all town departments to prepare, in case state aid is cut by a similar amount – Billings says he would be forced to cut into hours for part time police officers, just at a time when "some of the more unsavory elements," seem to have discovered Leverett.

At Monday's selectboard meeting, Billings brought in a budget request for \$328,470 for his department, for FY '11. This would include a level funded expense budget for \$175,917, salaries at \$143,779, including \$31,847 for part time officers, and \$8,774 for building maintenance.

Billings said calls to the Leverett department through the Shelburne dispatch center increased from 749 in 2008 to 883 in 2009, with about 300 to 400 calls coming directly to the station. Out of 23 arrests in 2009, 15 were criminal motor vehicle violations, four for domestic violence, three for driving under the influence, and one for larceny over \$250 by identity theft. He also said Leverett experienced

about half a dozen breaking and entering incidents during the last year.

The town will spend \$10,176 to meet Quinn Bill salary bonus requirements for Billings and the other full time member of the department, Tim Batchelder. Batchelder recently completed his BA at Westfield State College, so his contractual compensation under the Quinn Bill will rise by 10% in the coming fiscal year, Billings said.

Though the legislature may yet reverse the governor's cuts to Quinn Bill reimbursement, at this point the state is offering to pay only \$450 of the town's \$10,176 commitment, town administrative assistant Wendy Foxmyn said. That's down from \$945 last year.

"That's not reimbursement; that's an insult," said selectboard member Peter d'Errico.

The finance committee and selectboard poked around in the line items in Billings' proposal for a while.

"Last year we squeezed your budget in a number of places," recalled d'Errico wistfully.

"You've done that three years in a row," Billings responded.

But after a bit of desultory back and forth about whether

see LEVERETT page 10

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A DAY AT THE BEACH -



Shutter Island

1 eagle = the pits 4 eagles = the heights

BY TODD DETMOLD

CHICAGO - "You're a rat in a maze," hisses Jackie Earle Haley, now Hollywood's go-to character actor when you need someone to garble their dialogue and look like a freak for ten minutes. I'm not sure if what he means is that Leonardo DiCaprio's Bostonian Fed-uh-ruhl Mahh-shul is the victim of a scientific experiment or if he's just going to end up with a lot of cheese.

Haley's George Noyce and DiCaprio's Teddy Daniels are meeting (in Haley's only scene) on opposite sides of a rusty grid of bars that hold Noyce prisoner on Shutter Island. It's a labyrinthine mental hospital - equal parts Overlook Hotel and Shawshank Prison - that gives its name to Martin Scorsese's new prestige horror film. Daniels has been called in to investigate the disappearance of one of Shutter Island's patients (Ben Kingsley's Dr. Cawley prefers they not be referred to as 'prisoners'), a homicidal woman named Rachel Solando who vanished overnight from within her locked, guarded cell.

From the start, it's apparent

that nothing is as it seems and everyone involved may or may not be lying.

And just in case the thundering hurricane, the creepy deranged inmates and the menacing heartbeat of the "modern classical" song score aren't signifiers enough that something will be hitting the fan in a big way, there's a whole convoluted ensemble of terrific actors cast as inessential characters whose only purpose is to deliver expository jargon as a means to an ending.

There are two cops in charge (Ted Levine and John Carroll Lynch), two head psychiatrists (Kingsley and Max von Sydow), two terrifying inmates from Daniels' past (Haley and Elias Koteas). Daniels brought a partner along (Mark Ruffalo), making two Marshals to bandy theories back and forth, and he also brought along the baggage from two separate traumas. There are

even two Rachel Solandos, and when the big twist comes out, it gets explained twice, not counting the trailer or the first twenty minutes of the feature, during which you might've already figured things out on your own.

So let's have a quick talk about the economy of a story.

Picture Laeta Kalogridis, the crack typist who wrote Oliver

taken most - if not all - of those doubles and cut them right out. This story is an unwieldy mess. When it's time to deliver exposition, you can practically smell the toner of the Xerox machine Kalogridis must've used to transfer novel to film.

If you haven't already figured out the twist by the time *Shutter Island* reaches its climax, don't

worry. Not only will Ben Kingsley explain everything that you've seen beat by beat (with a dry erase board with I-swear-to-God anagrams), once he's finished there's going to be a handy ten-minute flashback to show you the finished puzzle Kingsley has just described.

During this climax as well as several other expository stretches, as the story ground to a

halt for ten or so minutes, I found myself wondering what it might've been that attracted Scorsese to this project in the first place.

Because the fact is: I'm of two minds about *Shutter Island*. For all its flaws the movie is an aesthetic marvel, with several flat-out gorgeous dream sequences and the kind of lush photography and production

design you only get to sink your teeth into on the too-rare occasion that a master filmmaker such as Scorsese deigns to make a lowly genre film. Reteaming with occasional cinematographer Robert Richardson and perennial editor Thelma Schoonmaker, Scorsese crafts a film that, even as each hint to the final twist drops to the floor with a thunk, is sporadically absorbing and often a good deal of fun. Occasionally, the film even manages to mine a sense of dread and a hint of terror. I might add that the girl behind me in the theater would disagree that the film is frightening only on occasion; it was clearly working for her, as every drop of blood and unlit corner elicited a shriek.

Clearly, Scorsese's interest in this puzzle lies in the pieces rather than the finally assembled picture, which is beneath him, you and me. I almost believe he selected the project simply to have some fun; the tricks he employs in the name of a straight-up horror are many. There are reverse shots, brooding negative space, a surprising amount of CGI and even a good old fashion jump scare. Did he simply feel the need to get this stuff out of his system in an appropriate story? It's a terrible storm to weather for the characters and a two-and-a-half-hour psychodrama for us, but for Scorsese it almost feels like a day at the beach.



Mark Ruffalo and Leonardo DiCaprio partner as Marshals investigating a missing homicidal person in Shutter Island, the thriller directed by Martin Scorsese

Stone's *Alexander*, at his computer working up his screenplay adaptation of Dennis Lehane's mystery novel *Shutter Island*. In blocking out his story, he has stuck to the book pretty faithfully so far, but remember that the word for what he is creating is "adaptation". In my dictionary under "adapt", I could show him another word: "modify."

A smart writer would've

Turners Cheer Squad Heading to Chicopee Meet

BY ANNE HARDING - A dozen young women from the Turners Falls High School are heading to Chicopee this Saturday, February 27th for a cheerleading competition that could qualify them for the state championships.

The Turners Falls team spans grade levels from freshmen to seniors, with a majority of juniors and seniors this year. This experience of the squad gives Turners a competitive edge they've lacked in recent years.

There have been some erroneous web postings, so it should be noted the competition

takes place at the Chicopee High School, not Chicopee Comprehensive. The event runs from 7:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., but the

TFHS team will likely perform later in the morning.

Twenty-eight teams from the Pioneer Valley and the

Berkshires are competing, but only two are Division 4 teams - TFHS and Hopkins Academy.

On the surface it might not seem like much of a competition, with only two teams in your division, but the

truth is far more complex. Competitive cheerleading has a system similar to gymnastics or figure skating, where teams compete against a set of standards and must meet rigorous thresholds to make it to the championship meets. To qualify for the state championship, a team must score at least 160 out of a possible score of 200.

Saturday's squad includes: Sarah Underwood, Samantha Horan, Riley Harriman, Julie Thompson, Brittany Yolish, Taylor Howe, Nicole Fuller, Kelsey Waldron, Emily Mailloux, Elysia Ollari, Jolina Blier, and Caroline Sena.

The cheerleading season runs from the last week of August through the last week of February. Cheerleaders at TFHS

continued next page



TFHS Cheerleaders Taylor Howe and Nicole Fuller

COMEDY AT THE SHEA Dave Rattigan Saturday, March 6th Rattigan founded and performed at the premier of Comedy at the Shea. For this show, he heads a talented comedy lineup that includes Mike Cote, Maria Ciampa and Matt D. His comedy CD has been played around the English-speaking world. The Shea Theater, 71 Avenue A, Turners Falls. Showtime 8 p.m., doors open at 7 p.m. Tickets \$15, available on-line at www.sheacomedy.com, www.scampscome-dy.com and at the World Eye Bookshop, Greenfield. Beer and wine served in the lobby before the show. Call the Shea at (413) 863-2281.

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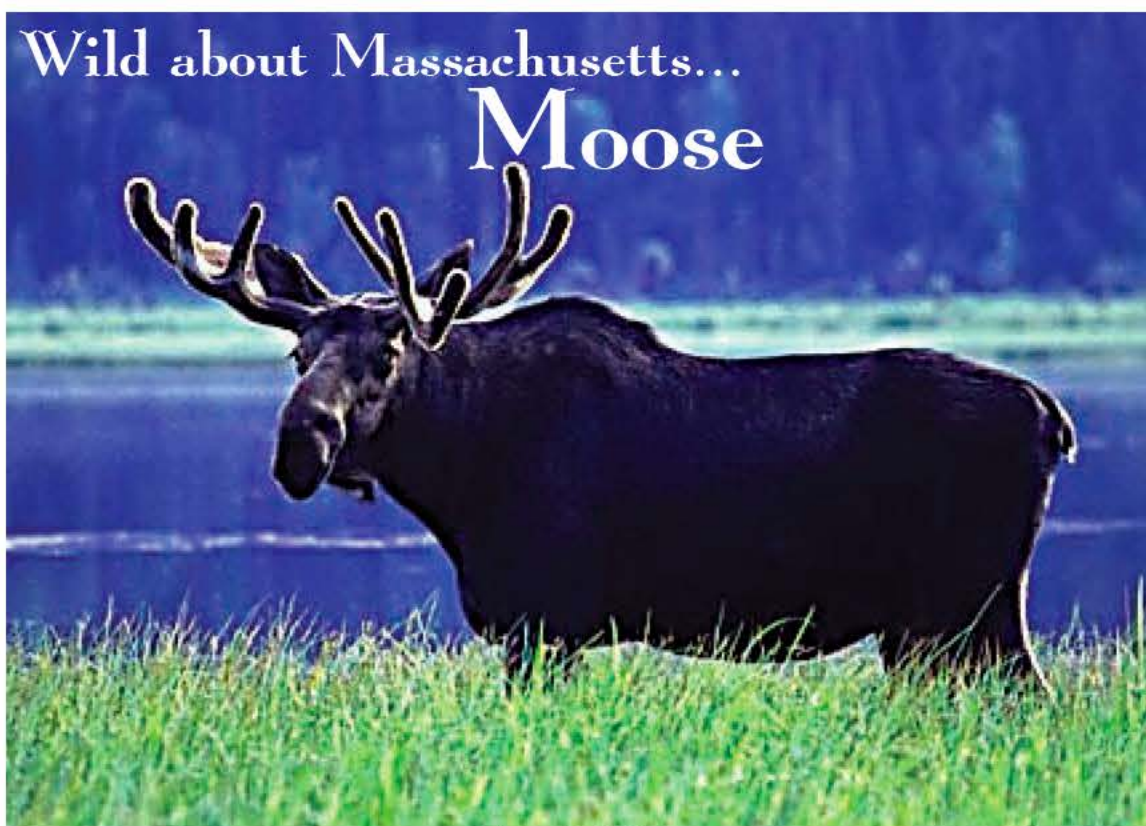
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Mature Bull Moose

Wild about Massachusetts... Moose

BY DAVID DETMOLD

GREAT FALLS – Moose in Massachusetts are growing in numbers, and more likely than ever to come into contact with humans and their automobiles. That was the gist of the brief talk given by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service intern Tashanique Daniels to a patient crowd gathered on Saturday afternoon at the Great Falls Discovery Center.

After wrestling with computer problems for a quarter of an hour, Daniels ran through a ten-minute Powerpoint presentation about Massachusetts moose, revealing these highlights:

Moose are native to the northern climes of North America, Europe and Asia; they are the world's largest deer. They can live to be 15 to 25 years old, grow

continued from previous page support the football team in the fall and basketball team in the winter, but they are exceptional athletes in their own right.

A typical workout early in the season starts with a mile and a half run, followed by a series of jumping exercises, pushups and sit-ups. Following these warm-ups the squad breaks into smaller groups to work on cheers, dance moves, stunts or other aerobic workouts. Many of the members have backgrounds in dance with local troupes, and some have gymnastics training.

Most of their names can be found on the school's honor roll, and squad members are also active in other sports or clubs, so some only cheer for half the season. There are swimmers, National Honor Society members, dancers, actors, and athletes from the soccer, volleyball, field hockey and basketball teams. This complicates the job of coaching and preparing for competitions. In addition, MIAA

to weigh 1200 to 1500 pounds, swim up to ten miles, and run as fast as 35 miles per hour. Although only about 1000 or so live in Massachusetts, there are two million moose in the world. That's right – two million moose, not mice!

Male moose have antlers, females don't; but both males and females have beards called dewlaps. Antlers are not horns, strictly speaking; they grow anew each year, and are covered with capillary-rich velvet while they are growing and hardening. Moose antlers serve as hearing aids, as well as armament. Male moose shed their antlers at the end of each mating season, which lasts from September through November.

Females two years old and rules stipulate that squad members must cheer during the winter basketball season to be eligible for competition.

Kerri Lapointe was working as a special needs paraprofessional at the school in 2005 when the cheer coach learned she was a 1998 graduate of TFHS and former cheerleader. After one season co-coaching, Lapointe's co-coach relocated to another state, and Lapointe became the head coach.

It's a tough sport to coach solo, but a fortuitous meeting at the supermarket the following year brought Jessica James to the coaching team – she's another former cheerleader and a 1996 graduate of TFHS. The two women were having one of those casual conversations, catching up with each other's lives, when James wistfully commented about Lapointe's coaching gig, "I miss it so much," and they've been working together ever since.

Lapointe believes she and James make good a good team because they have complementa-

older can bear young, usually giving birth to twins, rarely triplets, in May or June, after an eight-month gestation period. Calves are weaned at three weeks, and stay with their moms for a full year.

Wolves and grizzly bears prey on moose calves, but not in Massachusetts, where black bears and motorized vehicles are their only adversaries.

Moose love to eat birch, aspen, willow, horsetail, sedges, pond weed, bark, twigs and buds, and like to hang out near rivers or wetlands. Moose can eat underwater, holding their breath while they chew.

This brief overview left some in the crowd hungering for more specifics about Massachusetts moose. Checking in with Stephen

ry strengths. James is extremely organized and great at "stunting," while Lapointe is stricter and loves the choreography. Since the team competes in a multi-faceted scoring system, it helps to have multi-talented coaches.

Saturday's event will have at least five judges in the panel, and each will score a specific aspect of the routines. Teams get one opportunity to perform their best two-minute routine. About half the routine will be traditional cheering; the remainder, a combination of dance, gymnastics and jumping, will be set to music.

The team will be judged on: gymnastics, jumping, choreography, arm movements and transitions. The stunts yield higher points with greater degrees of difficulty, and there are intricate rules and ranking systems that range from beginner and intermediate to advanced and elite levels in all areas of the judging.

Congratulations cheer squad and good luck in your competition on Saturday!

DeStefano, a research scientist and professor of natural resources and conservation at UMass Amherst, turned up more interesting moose facts.

Since March of 2006, with support and funding from the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, DeStefano has been working on a study of the ecology of moose in Massachusetts.

To gather information on moose habits and habitat, DeStefano, along with UMass graduate student Dave Wattles and field assistant Ken Berger have placed GPS collars on 30 Massachusetts moose, and gathered data from most of those already. The results of that study will be summarized soon in the newsletter of Mass Fish and Wildlife, but here is an advance view.

"What we're finding so far is the home range size for moose in Massachusetts is anywhere from 10 to 30 square miles," said DeStefano. "The bulls have larger areas than the cows, particularly in the fall. During rutting season, they will travel 10 to 20 miles, to Vermont or New Hampshire."

DeStefano said moose in Massachusetts are using "a lot of regenerating cuts," where forestry has left openings in the woods, as mainstays for their foraging. "They feed on the young buds and twigs, leafy materials in spring and summer. With such a large body size they need to eat a lot. In summer, they spend times in the wetlands, particularly cows with calves. It's cooler there, and they feed on the aquatic vegeta-

All year round they are living up to their Algonquin name ('twig eater'), eating buds and twigs, DeStefano said. "This winter would be a particularly easy one for moose" to forage, he added.

DeStefano said, "The moose population is pretty well established in the state. There are around 1000 moose in Massachusetts, and there could be up to a couple thousand. One of the reasons I say that, virtually everywhere you go in Central and Western Massachusetts you see moose sign, as far east as Barre. Further east, they will get into the suburbs, and that is not a good situation for them. But they are really well established in Central and Western Mass."

He added, "Female moose [in Massachusetts] often have twins, which is a sign of good habitat, good nutrition."

Moose were extirpated from southern New England by the end of the 1700s, as their forest habitat was cut down to make way for farmland in about 70% of the region. Nowadays, Massachusetts is 60% forested. Moose began making their way south to the Bay State again in the 1960s and '70s, Destefano said. By the '80s they had established a breeding population in the state. Moose have extended their range south to Connecticut now.

"Because Massachusetts is so developed, with so many roads, we have had moose-vehicle collisions, which is a problem. Some people have become concerned about their level of browsing and tree regeneration. We're looking

see MOOSE pg 10

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MOOSE from pg 9

at that," said DeStefano. "It's a very localized concern."

He mentioned an orchardist who has been trying to fend off moose from grazing on his trees. "That was a problem," he acknowledged.

He said situations like that one could be handled, perhaps, by "Hazing the moose. But you have to sustain that. Animals get used to all kind of things, including noisemakers. And fencing is an expensive solution."

In general, DeStefano said, moose and humans in Massachusetts had better get used to each other. "With an animal that big, you're going to have issues. Mass Fish and Wildlife's large animal response team has done a great job of going in and trying to get moose safely out of areas where they pose a danger to the public. If that doesn't work, they'll dart them," and remove them to a state forest. Only very rarely, as in instances where the moose are in danger of crossing an interstate highway, have responders resorted to killing a moose.

How does someone place a GPS collar on an animal that weighs more than 1000 pounds and stands seven feet tall at the shoulders?

DeStefano said some of the moose he and his assistants have collared are the ones tranquilized after wandering into urban areas. But he said, "Dave Wattles and Ken Berger have spent hundreds of hours, walking in on moose and darting them from the ground," to collar them. In other states, helicopters are used to track and tranquilize moose, but the terrain in Massachusetts is not suitable for that.

What should you do if you spot a moose?

"The wisest thing is not to approach them. Moose can appear very docile and often they are. But they are really fast (they can run 30 miles an hour or more), and they're dangerous. People should back off if they see a moose, and call Mass Wildlife (508) 389-6300; or the Mass Environmental Police 1-800-632-8075.



LEVERETT from pg 7

training of part-time officers should be listed as an expense or a salary line item, the board got down to more serious concerns.

"Is the sap running yet?" They weren't talking about an escaped convict.

"I've got 30 buckets waiting to be boiled down," admitted Billings.

The board tried to calculate whether a sample gallon of Billings locally famous maple syrup would fall under the \$50 maximum allowed for gifts to elected officials under the state's ethics law, but Billings insisted that was proprietary information.

In other news, the board met with Glen Ayers and Josh Surette, Leverett's representatives to the New England National Scenic Trail Stewardship Council, to discuss the status of the Metacomet-Monadnock Trail in Leverett, and a possible conservation purchase of 20 acres "right on top of the cliffs," off Rattlesnake Gutter Road.

Ayers said a dispute with one major

landowner on Brushy Mountain - Cows Lumber - following the federal designation of the M&M trail may force the relocation of the trail to the east of Leverett's borders. "Right now there is a five mile gap in the trail when it reaches Leverett," Ayers said.

The selectboard hoped the dispute could be resolved in such a way as to allow the trail to continue along its historical route through town.

Ayers said the community preservation committee has been approached to fund the friendly purchase of a 20 acre rear lot off Rattlesnake Gutter road, as part of a series of conservation purchases he hopes will form a nature corridor in a loop from Montague Road at Cave Hill up Rattlesnake Gutter to the Peace Pagoda.

The board will hold a special meeting - to which lawyers and specialists in affordable housing are being invited, and to which the public is welcome - on Thursday, April 1st at 7:00 p.m. at town hall, to work on a plan for providing affordable housing in town.



MONTAGUE from pg 1

What's more, "the bigger problem is with Southworth," which receives two truckloads of material daily and ships six truckloads of finished goods each day, on average, according to Abbondanzio. With no access from Canal Street, the only way trucks could enter the Southworth Mill, never an easy turn for even the most experienced tractor trailer driver, would be to come down the hill from Greenfield and cross the White Bridge.

But that bridge is slated to become one way only heading out of Turners for the duration of the reconstruction of the Gill-Montague Bridge.

"Southworth is our number one priority," said Abbondanzio.

"I'm working with them."

The 5th Street bridge was not previously posted, said Adam Hurutbise, spokesperson for the Mass DoT, meaning it was allowed to carry whatever loads were statutorily allowed on adjoining roadways.

In other news, Lisa Davol, the coordinator of the RiverCulture program, who is trying to increase traffic coming into town, working with businesses to expand the arts-based economy in Turners, introduced a new partner in that effort: Peter Hamelin and the Brick House's PowerTown Music program.

Hamelin, past president of the chamber of commerce in Portsmouth, NH, and a former owner of the Stone Church music hall in Newmarket, recently

moved to Third Street in Turners and joined the board of the Brick House community resource center, where he began working to expand the entrepreneurial base of the teen center's music program. Their fledgling Power Town Music program just scored a big coup by bringing Peter Tork of the Monkees (that's right) to Burrito Rojo for a standing-room-only benefit last Thursday that pulled down 1200 bananas for the Brick House.

"It's an exciting project," Hamelin told the selectboard. "We're getting a lot of kids involved. It was great to see them at the show the other day, working the door, providing the opening act music."

Hamelin said the teens involved at the Brick House's center have been learning how to play in bands and record their own music for at least six years, and now some of the early graduates of that program are ready for bigger things.

"They are starting to tour and record CDs. We want to work with them to coordinate musical events, find bands and book them, show them how to set up a festival."

Toward that end, Hamelin and Davol propose working together to find a good night for summer concerts to be held in the bandshell at Peskeomskut Park. Wednesday nights, following the Farmers Market, might be the natural choice to bring more people downtown, no matter what route they take to get there.

Board member Pat Allen liked the idea. "Turners is getting to be a very fun place to be." She told Davol, "Thank you for your creative ideas, and the work you are doing pulling people in."

Allen also thanked Hamelin for his initiative with Power Town Music in Turners.

"I felt really at home and wel-

come here," responded Hamelin. "I like to be of service for the betterment of Turners Falls and the people here."

Davol set aside the second Saturday in August for the annual downtown block party; she will work with Hamelin on booking the music for that event.

On the energy conservation front, Abbondanzio reported the town's investment grade audit for the upcoming energy performance contract to reduce utility bills and energy use in town buildings had narrowed its focus, and reduced its cost and pay-back.

"We started out with a three-quarter million project, now down to \$250,000," he said. The decision was made to eliminate energy upgrades at the highway garage, since retrofitting that building would have required the town to make a twenty-year commitment to keep the DPW at that location. The town hopes to build a new highway garage within that span of time.

Now, the energy performance contract will focus on replacing lighting fixtures and improving insulation at other town buildings, less costly measures that

will pay for themselves within ten years, Abbondanzio said. The town is working with Siemens Building Technology on the energy performance contract.

Abbondanzio said the town's hopes for putting solar photovoltaic panels on the roof of the new police station were dimming, since a state grant program to help fund such municipal projects had been overwhelmed by proposals and run out of money. "We have to find another way of funding that project."

He said the town was considering using some of the \$19,000 remaining in the landfill feasibility fund to hire a consultant to examine the solar potential at the seven-acre, south-facing, former burn dump off Turnpike Road.

The results of a survey of the adjoining former landfill were not encouraging, in terms of solar potential, because the top of the capped landfill was not big enough to support more than about 670 kilowatts of solar electric potential. He said WMECo is also looking at the 400 acres they own on the Montague Plains as a possible solar photovoltaic site.



TAX BILLS MAILED

Town of Montague tax bills have been mailed. Also mailed were the personal property bills. Payment is due on or before May 3rd, 2010. Any new owner not in receipt of a tax bill should contact the tax collectors' office at 863-3200, extension 202.

THANK YOU

Nancy Holmes says, "Thank you to everyone who helped make the second annual food drive to support the Franklin Area Survival Center a great success once again. The members of the class of 1969 and TFHS Alumni collected 175 lbs of food and over 100 dollars."

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4:15 p.m. Removed large blue tarp from West High Street. Advised home owner of property.	[REDACTED] for number plate violation and operating with a suspended license, subsequent offense, on Route 2.	3:22 p.m. Suspicious person at Greenfield Auto. Spoke with subject, moved same along.
4:29 p.m. Assisted Montague police with report of gun shots on Green Pond Road. Unfounded.	9:31 p.m. Civil citation issued for possession of one ounce or less of marijuana.	3:58 p.m. Report of past larceny at Prospect Heights Lane. Report taken, currently under investigation.
10:50 p.m. Disabled motor vehicle on Route 2 by bypass. Flat tire. Stood by until AAA assistance arrived.	Saturday, 2/20	Sunday, 2/21
Friday, 2/19	3:15 p.m. Suspicious vehicle with hazards on Route 2 near Prospect Street, spoke with driver,	5:48 p.m. Assisted Northfield Police with unwanted intoxicated male subject at Highland Street.

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Horace Mann School not Ruled Out for Montague Center

“Financial Feasibility is the Key” committee chair tells supporters

BY DAVID DETMOLD - The capital improvements committee (CIC) held a well attended hearing on the future reuse of the Montague Center School building on February 18th.

A number of audience members expressed interest in the town considering allowing the school building to be reused as a school – specifically a Horace Mann in district charter school, as a means of bringing students back to the Gill-Montague Regional School District.

But committee chair Les Cromack made it clear that it would be up to the school committee, not the CIC, to decide whether a Horace Mann school would be welcomed at the GMRSD, and both Cromack and committee member Pat Allen said if the district wanted to form a Horace Mann school at an existing school building, Hillcrest would be a better choice.

“That’s virtually ready to go,” said Cromack. “Montague

Center is not.”

However, Cromack said the CIC’s goal is to find an acceptable reuse of the Montague Center School (MCS) building – which has been vacant for a year and a half, since the former K-3 elementary school there was consolidated into the Sheffield Elementary School, following a school committee vote in favor of expanding MCS, the rescinding of that vote, an invitation for parent group proposals to form a new governance structure for the school, and the ultimate rejection of those proposals by the school committee during a tumultuous period of review of the school’s status within the district in 2007 - ‘08.

“We have the interest of the community in mind,” Cromack told the audience last Thursday.

He added, “The compatibility of use with the surrounding community is our primary criteria.”

The CIC will seek a zoning change for the MCS building at

an April 1st special town meeting, re-zoning it from the current recreation-education zone (which would basically limit the building’s reuse to a school or government office) to a neighborhood business zone (which would allow a number of possible reuses for the building including retail sales and services, multifamily dwellings, business or professional offices, craft workshops or light assembly shops, and other uses that would be “compatible with residential environs.”

Building inspector David Jenson said because of the size of the building, almost any reuse under neighborhood business zoning would be subject to a special permit hearing before the zoning board.

Cromack said the consultant hired by the town to examine the building’s possible reuse – Greenberg Associates of Putney, VT – had come up with four possibilities based on the feasibility and marketing study for

the building. They are: condominiums or rental housing (considered the top likelihood, Cromack said), independent living or co-housing, a learning institute (which would require the least amount of change to the building, Cromack said, but would still require a significant amount of investment to bring the building up to code, including handicapped accessibility), or professional offices.

The town intends to issue a request for proposals on the building, following the April 1st town meeting, with a July 15th deadline. School committee chair Michael Langknecht said

that deadline would allow the GMRSD sufficient time to submit a proposal, or invite a parents’ group to submit a proposal for a Horace Mann school, to compete with any other proposals that may be forthcoming under the RFP.

Cromack said another goal of the CIC is to get the building “back on the tax roles. That’s what the taxpayers want us to do. The wrinkle is the Horace Mann school possibility is still a possibility.”

Planning board chair Ted Armen said the proposed change to neighborhood business see **SCHOOL** pg 13

TRIUMPH from pg 1

mother) to support the family. Laura is painfully shy and has a slight limp that she feels defines her.

Amanda wants her son to move up in the shoe factory and make something of himself. She also wants Laura to emulate her mother’s glory days of a young lady of the South who attended cotillions and parties and had, one glorious Sunday morning, seventeen “gentleman callers”. Laura sidles away from her mother’s every maneuver, yet Amanda persists in pestering Tom to bring home a gentleman caller for Laura. Tom is irritated and Laura is mortified, but at last Amanda’s wish becomes reality and the gentleman caller comes for dinner.

Director Brady Ward brings forth performances from his actors that are true to their characters. It is therefore palpably painful to watch Amanda, Tom, and Laura struggle in their mea-

ger existence.

As Amanda, Junior Hanna Rosenberg, from Vermont, is believably critical and overbearing to her children with her high-pitched drawl, only to turn completely around to become giddy and full of southern hospitality for the gentleman caller.

Sophomore Cordeleia Dewdney, also from Vermont, portrays the introverted Laura. Dewdney plays Laura beautifully with her almost unnoticeable limp and frightened, apologetic manner. Her dresses are as pale as her pallor and as ghostlike as her countenance. You can tell that Laura is as emotionally fragile as her glass collection, and seems as mythical as her favorite piece – the unicorn.

Senior Fin Miller, from Vermont as well, plays Tom with willful tenacity. We see his character struggle to choose between the life he wants and the hand he is dealt. Senior Eric Muhlenfeld of Montana plays Jim, the gentleman caller. Tom

describes Jim as “an emissary from the world of reality,” intimating that Tom’s family life is that of fantasy. Muhlenfeld portrays a boyish charm and gentleness to the young upstart Jim, who brings stars to Laura’s eyes.

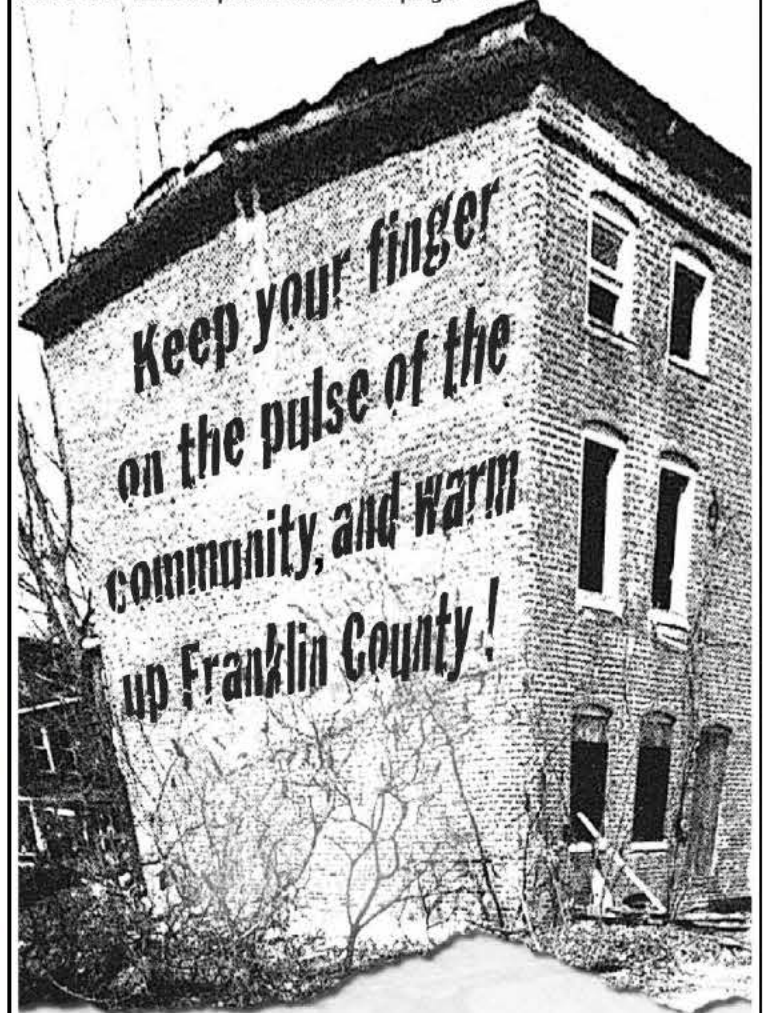
It was a pleasure to watch these young and very gifted actors grace the stage with ease beyond their years. It was as fine a work as seen in some of the better theaters in the community, and the best high school production in memory.

For ticket information and reservations for other upcoming events at the Rhodes Arts Center, log on to the NMH web site at www.nmhschool.org. There are always music concerts, art shows, dance concerts or plays going on in this beautiful Center. The next theater production will be Oscar Wilde’s priceless comedy of manners, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, on April 1 to 3. Enjoy the show!



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Hurry Hard!

BY SARA CAMPBELL

PETERSHAM — Robert Koolkin of Gill showed his form at the open house last Sunday at the Petersham Curling Club. Koolkin was inspired four years ago by the performance of the USA curling team in the 2006 Olympics in Turin, where they won the bronze medal. Koolkin joined in league play at the club and became a member of its board of directors. The camaraderie and physical challenge keep him coming back.

The Petersham Curling Club, celebrating its 50th anniversary this year, welcomed over 250 guests on Sunday, who came to experience the sport first hand. Visitors got a guided tour of the facility, looked over the stones, brooms and shoes, got an introduction to the rules of the sport, and finally took to the ice to practice sweeping and delivering the stone.

Sunday's open house was



Dr. Robert Koolkin shows how to deliver a stone at the Curling Club

organized by Ronald Meck of Shutesbury, another four-year veteran of the sport. The membership went all out to greet the public with food from their kitchen, the opportunity to watch Olympic curling on TV with live commentary, and of course those friendly bartenders.

At the Petersham club, the men's leagues curl on Monday and Tuesday evenings, the women's on Wednesdays, and

the mixed league plays on Friday. The season begins in mid-October with the golf and curl biathlon, thanks to the adjacent Petersham Country Club. The clubhouse is outfitted with plenty of seats in view of the ice, overhead cameras to watch the scoring opportunities, and of course a roaring fire.

Information about the club and future events can be found at www.petershamcurling.org.

PRUITT from page 1

to rubble over Memorial Day weekend.

Then John Anctil, a lighting and production specialist in the film and video industry from Lowell, moved west to Turners like the industrial magnates of the 1870s. He brought a plan to raise the Strathmore from the ashes of that blaze and transform it into a Green campus as an educational center and production facility to produce film and video with positive social content. But after investing about three-quarters of a million dollars of his own money, by his estimate, Anctil failed to convert that dream into reality, and the town of Montague moved to repossess the mill for back taxes due in January.

"I feel really bad about the

Strathmore," Pruitt said this week. "When Anctil was informed we're taking the Strathmore back, that was not a happy moment, but it was a necessity." She said the town will need to put some creative thinking into what can now be done with Strathmore, including the possibility of trying to move the lone building that abuts the Southworth Mill into private hands separately from the rest of the mill, to provide a spark for redeveloping the rest of the complex.

Pruitt said, "The town has accomplished a lot of positive things in the last three years. The most outstanding and visible achievement is the new police station, but the RiverCulture program is another thing that effects the whole town in a very positive way." Also, she noted, "We've gotten a lot of grant money to help with conserving energy in town buildings," like the \$150,000 in federal stimulus grant money from the Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources the town received news of last week to replace inefficient boilers in town hall.

But, she admitted, "Anything to do with money right now is a

challenge.

"We've been working hard to hold onto our services, to keep our employees as best we can. We haven't engaged in wholesale cuts. We've been very inventive, as in the way we moved to pick up trash this year with a commercial hauler rather than buy expensive new recycling trucks."

She added, "The big frustration is our old buildings. We're not making the kind of progress we'd like to be making. We still have our desires for a new garage, a new library building, and senior center. The wish list is long. It will take time." But overall, Pruitt said, "I have a real sense of accomplishment. Not that I've done anything individually, but insofar as positive things have happened, I'm very pleased I've served on the board. There have been frustrations certainly, and you tend to hear more from people when things go wrong, rather than when things go right. But I put that down to New England modesty: they don't like to indulge in praise that much."

Three years ago, when Pruitt announced she would not run again, she said 2010 would be the year for others among the

thoughtful and committed citizens of Montague to step forward and run for office. They will have the opportunity to do that in the upcoming May 17th town election, without facing a popular incumbent. Nominating papers are available now, due back with the required 50 signatures by March 29th at 5 p.m.

Pruitt did not mention one other reason she may have chosen not to run. Three years ago, she said she was spending three or four nights a week at meetings. "It's at least a 20-hour a

representing Wendell at the annual budget meetings of the Veterans Agency, veterans agent Leo Parent asked if either Lewis or someone else could be appointed to represent Wendell at those meetings.

Pooser said he attended an informative regional broadband meeting along with representatives from 40 Massachusetts towns. A Vermont group of 20 municipalities was also represented. Those Vermont towns have agreed to consider internet access a public utility, and provide fiber optic connections to every home, at an estimated cost of \$100 million. The model allows towns to pay back the financing costs in 10 years, after which they estimate they can make a profit on providing fiber optic hook-ups to their residents. Pooser said the same model may be transferable to western Massachusetts.



WENDELL from pg 7

Keller said that Republicans had gone to Democratic caucuses around the state, claiming the open meeting law allowed it because the caucuses take place in town-owned buildings. Lawyers for the Democrats have said the caucus is not subject to the law, because the Democratic Party is not a government organization.

Keller said anyone may come to a caucus of the Wendell Democrats, but so far no one but Democrats have turned out.

New meeting dates for updating the community development strategy are March 3rd, and March 17th. An updated strategy is needed for Wendell to continue to be eligible for Community Development Block Grant interest free loans to bring qualifying residents' homes up to code.

Since Ted Lewis is no longer on the selectboard rep-

resenting Wendell at the annual budget meetings of the Veterans Agency, veterans agent Leo Parent asked if either Lewis or someone else could be appointed to represent Wendell at those meetings.

Pruitt has four grandchildren. We hope she will get a little more time to spend with them when she takes a well-earned rest from managing town affairs this summer.

"I intend to stay involved," she said this week. "Maybe on the finance committee, if there's an opening; we'll see."



HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE GILL POLICE LOG

Operator Left Scene

Tuesday, 2/16 7:10 p.m. Unwanted subject at a Main Road residence.	Charged with attaching license plates to a motor vehicle, uninsured operation of motor vehicle and operating with revoked registration.	11:50 a.m. Report of gun shots in the area of Center Road. 12:20 p.m. Assisted Center Road resident with trespass issues and property damage complaint.
Wednesday, 2/17 12:12 a.m. Domestic disturbance at Main Road residence.		6:31 p.m. Assisted Northfield police with intoxicated, unwanted subject on Highland Avenue.
Friday, 2/19 8:05 p.m. Look out report for suicidal subject who fled from an ambulance on Route 2.	12:16 a.m. Motor vehicle accident on Mountain Road, operator left scene. Criminal complaint sought against [redacted].	Monday, 2/22 3:10 p.m. Assisted Main Road resident with retrieving property from residence.
Saturday, 2/20 9:30 p.m. Criminal complaint sought against [redacted].	Charged with leaving scene of property damage accident.	

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JESSICA HARMON ILLUSTRATION

BY FRED CICETTI

Leonia, NJ – Q. *Does the plague still exist?*

In the 1300s, the Black Death, as plague was called, killed about one-third of the people in Europe. A combination of antibiotics and improved living conditions have made plague rare today.

Plague is found throughout the world, except for Australia. The greatest number of human plague infections occurs in African countries. However, the largest concentration of infected animals is in the United States and in the former Soviet Union.

Franklin Regional Transportation Plan Update Survey

The Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG) has created a survey to help obtain public input to update of the long-range Franklin Regional Transportation Plan. Specifically, the results of the survey will help shape the future of transportation in the region by providing future project ideas and guiding the direction of transportation in the county.

The Transportation Plan, which was last updated in 2007, is a comprehensive document which provides the basis for future transportation planning in the region. The Transportation Plan reviews current transporta-

THE HEALTHY GEEZER: Avoid the Plague

The World Health Organization reports 1,000 to 3,000 cases of plague worldwide every year. An average of 5 to 15 cases occur each year in the western United States. These cases are usually scattered in rural areas; they are caused by bites primarily from infected prairie dogs. There has not been a case of person-to-person infection in the United States since 1924.

Plague is often mentioned as a bioterrorism weapon along with anthrax, smallpox and botulism. A bioweapon carrying plague is possible because the bacterium that causes plague occurs in nature and could be isolated and grown in quantity in a laboratory.

With prompt treatment, the overall fatality rate from plague is less than 15 percent. Without treatment, mortality rates can be as high as 60 percent for bubonic plague and 100 percent for

pneumonic plague. Death can occur within days after symptoms appear.

Plague is an infection caused by the bacterium *Yersinia pestis*. The bacteria are found mainly in rats and their resident fleas. Rat or flea bites spread plague.

There are three forms of plague: bubonic, septicemic, and

pneumonic.

Bubonic inflames the tonsils, adenoids, spleen and thymus. It induces fever, aches, chills, fatigue and tender lymph glands. Bubonic plague is the most common type in humans, but is rarely spread from person to person.

Septicemic, in which bacteria multiply in the blood, causes fever, chills, shock, bleeding, abdominal pain, diarrhea, vomiting, and death of tissue in fin-

gers, toes and nose.

Pneumonic plague occurs when the bacteria enter the lungs and cause pneumonia. This can be spread between people. It kills faster than the other forms of plague. Symptoms include fever, nausea, vomiting, weakness, chest pain, difficulty breathing, and a bloody cough.

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

Grandparents Parenting Grandchildren

GREENFIELD – The women sit in a circle, and in the room around them, their grandchildren are playing. They are here to talk about their situations, because they are parenting or co-parenting their grandchildren.

They may be facing unfamiliar challenges. Ideas about nutrition, discipline and social interactions may have changed since they raised their children. Some may come with a sense of guilt or failure if they have custody of a grandchild due to their own children suffering from drug abuse or serving prison time. Others are co-parenting because the child's parents are either separated, need

to work, lack housing, or are in financial need.

According to the Center for Law and Social Policy, more than 2.5 million children in America are being raised by grandparents or other relatives because their parents are unable to care for them.

Grandparents that lack support are at high risk for depression and other stress-related illnesses.

The Franklin County Family Network has created a safe place where parenting or co-parenting grandmothers of diverse backgrounds and parenting styles can come together to create commu-

nity, break isolation, talk about their experience as parents and grandparents, and explore other relevant issues.

The drop-in group, called *Meme & Pepe*, meets every Thursday from 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at the Greenfield Family Center, 90 Federal Street, in Greenfield. A free light meal is provided and transportation is available. This program is offered by the Family Network of Community Action, with the support of the Franklin County Home Care Corporation. For more information, contact: Francia Wisnewski at (413) 475-1553.

tion infrastructure in the region and makes recommendations for future projects. Many parts of the transportation network are reviewed and discussed in the plan, including roadways, passenger rail, freight transport, airports, bus services, sidewalks, and on-road and off-road bike routes. A draft version of the updated plan will be released for public review later this year.

The survey can be found online at www.frocg.org, under the section "What's New." It can also be found in hard copy at all town halls and libraries, on FRTA buses, and upon request.

SCHOOL from pg 11

ness zoning could still allow a school to go in at the building, which, "as the study points out, is the best use of the building as it now stands..."

Allen interjected, "No, the easiest."

Cromack said the key to the CIC accepting any proposal would be, "it has to be fiscally feasible."

Montague Center resident Mark Lattanzi wanted to know whether a proposed Horace Mann's school's ability to reverse the GMRSD's current \$900,000 annual school choice and charter

school deficit could be included in the town's calculus on fiscal feasibility. Cromack said it certainly could be.

GMRSD superintendent Carl Ladd addressed a letter to the CIC, which read, in part: "I am very interested in pursuing any idea that will serve the best interests of the children of Gill and Montague. I believe that we owe it to our families and communities to provide outstanding educational opportunities for all, and that we should provide students and their families with choices within the district so that we do not lose them to other districts. Those student losses have become larger over the past several years, which have placed a tremendous strain on the annual school district budget and will undermine any effort we make toward long-term fiscal sustainability. Stabilizing student enrollment must be a factor that weighs heavily in any plan for sustainability - fiscal or educational... I feel strongly that if putting a Horace Mann Charter School in the

Montague Center School makes sense fiscally and educationally, then I believe that it is our moral obligation and educational responsibility to actively pursue that possibility."

Selectboard chair Patricia Pruitt said assistant Department of Elementary and Secondary Education commissioner Jeff Wulfson, at a recent meeting with town and school officials, "made it clear the department is looking for innovative programming, and parents are looking for that. They are looking at a Horace Mann school as a possible vehicle for bringing that innovation," into the GMRSD.

The Horace Mann idea for MCS was first raised by a parents group in 2008, in response to an invitation from the school committee to submit proposals for a new governance structure there.

That group went on to propose a 240-seat K-6 out of district Discovery charter school, with an emphasis on environmental education for Franklin County, a proposal rejected by the DESE last week.

Connect With The Wisdom of the "Female Brain"

Eleventh Annual Belly & Womb Conference at Sirius Conference Center in Shutesbury on March 20th is a gathering for the celebration and healing of women's empowerment. The conference is Saturday, March 20th from 8:30 a.m. to 8:00 p.m., with an evening event the night prior on Friday, March 19th with Sheri Winston (intimateartscenter.com).

The gatherings are for women of

all ages and features a wealth of con-current workshops. The conference is in alignment with current research unveiling the concept that our bellies are truly the home of our bodies' second "brain", and is home to as much, if not more, synaptic firing as our minds.

This event, the only one of its kind in the country, is the inspiration of Massachusetts-based women's

empowerment leader Alisa Starkweather. For more information about the pre-conference class, the full conference program, registration and ALISA's other work, please visit www.alisastarkweather.com.

With over a dozen teachers, workshops will be offered on a rich range of topics, also offering a nourishing lunch and dinner to event participants.

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VERMONT from pg 1
country and the Obama administration about the irrelevancy of nuclear power, the inadequacy of decommissioning funds, and the terrible job the Nuclear Regulatory Commission is doing.”

As a small band of Republicans led a disciplined rearguard action of blocking amendments through the afternoon in the Democrat dominated Senate, the debate produced a rare moment of bipartisan enthusiasm for the nation’s president.

“Let’s embrace President Obama,” gushed Peg Flory, (R-Rutland), “in his push for reliable new technology nuclear plants.”

Flory introduced an amendment to build a new nuclear plant on the Vermont Yankee’s 125-acre campus, and to keep the old plant running until a new reactor could be brought on line.

“For those who believe nuclear power can be made safe, as President Obama has said, take a look at that.”

Her Senate colleagues did, and turned the amendment down, 24 - 6.

Senator Kevin Mullin (R-Rutland) proposed an amendment to condition a license extension for Vermont Yankee on a number of factors, including a power purchase agreement for 115 of VY’s 620 megawatts to be sold in state at 5 cents a kilowatt hour, instead of the 6.1 cents/kWh Entergy has offered Vermont utilities, along with a

commitment to fully fund the decommissioning of the plant. His amendment failed 25 - 5.

An attempt by Phil Scott (R-Washington) to shunt the Vermont Yankee relicensing bill to the Economic Development Committee for further hearings was turned back on a vote of 24 - 6.

Then, after four hours of debate, the Senate prepared to vote on the original bill: whether to give a positive recommendation to the state Department of Public Utilities to relicense Vermont Yankee for 20 more years. Without a positive vote in both houses of the state legislature, VY’s relicensing bid cannot advance.

“As a business person,” said Hinda Miller, D-Chittenden, “I wanted to support Vermont Yankee, but we did not have a believable partner. Entergy has not shown itself to be capable of operating an aging plant.”

Recent revelations of an ongoing leak of radioactive tritium into the groundwater at the reactor site did much to undermine Entergy’s credibility, according to numerous speeches on the floor. Their bid for relicensing was also damaged by the fact that Entergy officials told the legislature last year there were no underground pipes carrying radioactive water at Vermont Yankee.

Miller continued, “There is a paradigm shift in the land from

judging a business activity from the viewpoint of the shareholders, to the viewpoint of the stakeholders. ‘How does this affect our community and our economy?’

“There is no doubt there will be an immediate economic impact,” from closing down Vermont Yankee on schedule in March of 2012, said Miller, and losing some of the 600 high paying jobs at the plant. Hundreds of jobs may be retained for up to a decade during decommissioning.

“By this vote today, the move to support innovation and entrepreneurship has accelerated, to serve the next generation Vermonters with the next generation of energy, jobs, and security for our state,” Miller said.

As the final vote neared, Randy Brock (R-Franklin), who had voted with other Republicans in the chamber to block the progress of the relicensing bill, said, “When it comes to the end of the line, I will vote ‘No,’ on relicensing. ‘We have a business partner in Entergy, if its board of directors had been infiltrated by anti-nuclear activists, they could have done nothing more to destroy their case. Their dissembling, prevarication, and lack of candor have been striking.’”

Susan Bartlett, (D-Lamoille) said, “The scariest testimony has been coming from the Natural Resources Committee. Nobody has control of this,” she said, referring to the tritium leak. “It seem pretty evident there is an illegal discharge in the ground water and environment of Vermont, which all Vermonters hold in trust for future generations. But we have no jurisdiction



Signs of the Times above State Street in Montpelier, just before the state Senate gavelled Vermont Yankee’s bid for a 20-year license extension to a close.

about it. That really makes me wild!”

All day long, young pages in green jackets ran back and forth to the desk of each senator, delivering a flurry of messages on pink note paper, stating the views of their constituents about the upcoming vote, as the proceedings streamed live to computers and radios around the state and region. Those notes soon covered senators’ desks in drifts 50 or 60 high.

“This is a great example of why Vermont is one of the best democracies in the country,” said Senate President Peter Shumlin as the debate closed. “Let no one deny the importance of this vote. Even if Entergy tries to sue us on federal pre-emption... they will fail. We embark today on a new energy future for Vermont.”

The gavel fell. The votes were counted. Decorum gave way to

cheers that resounded throughout both floors of the statehouse.

Anti-nuclear activists who had been dragged down the marble stairs after demonstrations in the same building in the 80s slapped senators on their backs and congratulated them for their vote. Among them was John Warshaw, a founding member of the Vermont Yankee Decommissioning Alliance, now a selectman in Marshfield who owns and operates three small hydro dams supplying Vermont with nearly 1% of its electric power.

“We planted the seeds of doubt in the late 70s,” said Warshaw. “More and more people came to realize nuclear power is not everything they told us it was.”

Outside, in the steadily falling snow, a middle aged woman stood on the statehouse steps.

“I’m going to cry,” she said. And she did.



KAREN WILKINSON ILLUSTRATION

WENDELL ENERGY CORNER

Winsert Workshops for Wendell Town Hall

JONATHAN von RANSON - A free workshop attended by a dozen people from Wendell, Warwick, Orange and Athol created and installed interior storm windows last Saturday for a number of the windows in the Wendell town hall.

The removable “Winserts” are made of wood, plastic film and foam. The interior storms should drastically cut drafts and conduction loss and complement the insulating work completed at that building earlier in the winter.

Brian Nugent of Athol led the

workshop using frames he’d custom made in his workshop from dimensions provided by the Wendell energy task force. Nugent has been leading regular Winsert workshops in Orange. He presents Winserts both as a do-it-yourself system and a potential cottage industry for an enterprising person.

A second workshop will be offered on the technique, while finishing the Winserts for the remaining town hall windows. Call (978) 544-3758 for more information.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE MONTAGUE POLICE LOG

Drivers Apprehended

Thursday, 2/18
9:57 p.m. Assault and battery on Seventh Street. peace restored.

Friday, 2/19
1:10 a.m. Arrest of [redacted] for driving under the influence, failure to operate a vehicle within marked lands, operating to endanger, and speeding.

1:47 a.m. Arrest of [redacted] for domestic assault and battery.

Saturday, 2/20

12:43 a.m. Arrest of [redacted] for second offense of driving under the influence, and operating to endanger, speeding, failure to stop for police, marked lane violations, failure to signal, and possession of an open container of alcohol.

9:50 a.m. Larceny at Our Lady of Czestochowa. Services rendered.

12:05 p.m. Fire alarms at the Strathmore Mill on Canal Road. Referred to other agency.

8:27 p.m. Arrest of [redacted] for driving under the influence, operating to endanger, failure to notify RMV of address change, alcohol in motor vehicle, and failure to wear seat-belt.

10:30 p.m. Arrest of [redacted] for driving with a suspended license, subsequent offense, registration- not in possession, and excessive noise or smoke from exhaust.

Sunday, 2/21
4:42 a.m. Arrest of [redacted] for driving under the influence, leaving the

scene of property damage, operating to endanger, marked lane violation, and failure to use care starting, turning and backing up, etc.

7:04 p.m. Domestic disturbance on Turners Falls Road. Peace restored.

Monday, 2/22
7:53 a.m. Bicyclist accident on Montague City Road. Report taken.

2:38 p.m. Larceny at Aaron Clark Cemetery. Report taken.
7:03 p.m. Domestic disturbance on Turners Falls Road. Services rendered.

Tuesday, 2/23
6:46 a.m. Larceny at Franklin County Technical School. Report taken.

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ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT



JACK COUGHLIN ILLUSTRATION

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 25th
Miro Sprague at Ristorante DiPoala, Turners Falls from 6:30 to 9:30 p.m.

At the Rendezvous, Turners Falls: Jim Olsen's *Rendezvous Ramble* (honky-tonk DJin') 7 p.m. free. THEN: Butcher Holler (Eilen Jewell's Loretta Lynn Tribute) 9 p.m. \$10 cover.

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 26th
Deja Brew, Wendell: *Nexus*, Harmonic Eclectic Rock, 9 to 11 p.m.

Burrito Rojo, Turners Falls: Boston-based musician Eric Schmider and his band *The One Smith* with Warwick singer-songwriter *Santina King*, 7:30 p.m.

At the Rendezvous, Turners Falls: Hallmark's own Ben Blaufuss and *Ghost Quartet*, \$3 cover.

Christina's, Erving: *Love Bomb*, 6 to 9 p.m. (413) 423-3100.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 27th
Wendell Full Moon Coffeehouse: singer-songwriter *Tracy Grammer*, who's been described by the Boston Globe as "one of the finest pure musicians anywhere in folkdom," will grace the stage with her buddies Jim Henry (mandolin, dobro, guitar) and Guy DeVito (bass). From the uplifting to the down-low and back again, expect an evening of delicious music and warm camaraderie. Open Mic at 7:30 p.m. \$6 to \$15. (978) 544-5557, www.wen-



Laura Siersema, *Talon of the Blackwater at Burrito Rojo, Turners Falls on Friday, March 5th at 8 p.m.*

At the Rendezvous, Turners Falls: *Lost Mountain and Appalachian Still*, \$5 cover.

Christina's, Erving: *Art Steele*, 6 to 9 p.m. (413) 423-3100.

THROUGH SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 28th
The Gallery at Hallmark, Avenue A, Turners Falls: *Art + Space: Collected Work from Local Artists*.

Vermont Center of Photography, Brattleboro: Photography by Evie Lovett and text by Suzanne Kingsbury, titled *Four Days: North American Indian Days on the Blackfeet Reservation, Browning Montana*. 20% of the artist's proceeds from sales will be donated to the *Piegan Institute* in Browning, MT, a school which instructs students in the Blackfeet, or Piegan, language. Gallery is open Fridays 1 to 6 p.m. and Noon-5 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays.

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 28th
Family Contra Dance with Wild Asparagus from 2:30-5:30 p.m. at the Guiding Star Grange, Greenfield. Contrasts, squares and singing. Family dance is a great way for people of all ages and abilities to learn. \$8 adults, \$6 students & seniors, \$4 kids, under 5 free. All proceeds benefit the Greenfield Center School. Info. 773-1700.

Deja Brew, Wendell: *Rik Rolski*, Acoustic Guitar, 8 to 10 p.m.

Family Dance, 3:30 to 5:30 p.m. At the Montague Grange, Montague Center. Simple, happy dances paced for little feet. Perfect for 5 to 15 year olds. Sixteen to 60! Dances are always on the last Sunday of the month, from September through April. \$4 per person, or families \$7 to \$12 sliding scale,

and include a light snack.

MONDAY, MARCH 1st
Traprock Center for Peace and Justice hosts a *Free Soup and Games Night* at Hope and Olive, Greenfield from 5 to 8 p.m. Enjoy free soup and good company, and help support Traprock. In addition to donations, baked goodies will be available, and all the proceeds from the bar will go to Traprock Center for Peace and Justice. www.traprock.info.

At the Rendezvous, Turners Falls: *Slope Poetry* from Jono Tosch and Lucy Ives, 7 p.m. followed by Terry Gilliam's *Brazil* on the big screen at 9 p.m. no cover.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 3rd
Deja Brew, Wendell: *Knitting & Crafts Night*, 7 to 10 p.m. Any craft and any skill level welcome. Get a chance to win our monthly crafty gift with every \$5 you spend at Craft night. Drawings held on the last Wednesday of the month.

Ice Fishing Clinic: Join State of MA's Jim Legacy for a free ice fishing clinic.

Meet at the picnic tables at Barton's Cove. Call more for more information to 413-863-3221. 3:30 to 6 p.m. Boy scouts can fulfill their requirements for the fishing merit badge.



Comedy at the Shea, Turners Falls. March 6th. Showtime 8 p.m. Dave Rattigan headlines on Saturday, March 6th with Mike Cote (above), Maria Ciampa and Matt Donaber. (left).

7:30 p.m. no cover.

FRIDAY, MARCH 5th
Greenfield Community College Chorus Concert: Preview Concert: *Back to Gospel: Choral Classics and More*. 12:15 p.m. GCC, Music Room, Main Building Room S-358.

Burrito Rojo, Turners Falls: *Talon of the Blackwater*. Laura Siersema, vocals, keyboard, Billy Klock, drums, Wim Auer, fretless bass. 8 p.m. No cover.

At the Rendezvous, Turners Falls: *High Country, Low-Fi* with Jeffrey Foucault and friends, 9 p.m. \$5 cover.

FRIDAY & SATURDAY, MARCH 5th & 6th
Anything Goes! Presented by Turners Falls High School and Great Falls Middle School. Music and lyrics by Cole Porter, 3/5 at 7 p.m. Saturday at 1 p.m. and 7 p.m. Tickets and Information: 863-7215.

Pothole Pictures, Shelburne Falls: *Looney Tunes Cartoon Festival*. 90

minutes of Bugs, Daffy, Elmer, Roadrunner and faulty ACME products! Showtime is 7:30 p.m. Admission \$6 for adults, \$4 for kids under 12. Music before the movie at 7 p.m. Friday Doug Creighton and Bob Snopce-traditional Quebecois music on melodeon and guitar. Saturday *Last Night's Fun* plays traditional Irish tunes.



Photos by Evie Lovett on display at the Vermont Center of Photography in Brattleboro through 2/28.

SATURDAY, MARCH 6th

Death & Taxes a new film about how people refuse to pay for war and redirect their federal taxes toward peace. 30-minute film shown at 4 p.m. in the upstairs meetingroom at Green Fields Market, Greenfield. Free, open to the public. Information: (413) 397-89-76.

Comedy at the Shea, with Dave Rattigan, Mike Cote, Maria Ciampa, Matt D. at The Shea Theater, Turners Falls. Showtime 8 p.m., doors open at 7 p.m. Tickets \$15, available on-line at www.sheacomedy.com or at World Eye Bookshop, Greenfield. Beer and wine served in the lobby before the show. Info: (413) 863-2281.

Siren Café, Greenfield: fund raising concert for The Brick House featuring North Poletapes (J.D. Hairston), Brian phantom Fairlane, Simon Eaton, Luke Eaton, Dakota Roberts, and Eric D'Ambra. The concert will start at 7 pm, a donation of \$3-5 will be accepted. For more information contact: Bridger Felton, (413) 824-6446/Bridger@powertownmusic.com.

At the Rendezvous, Turners Falls: *The Equalites*, reggae, \$5 cover, 9 p.m.

SUNDAY, MARCH 7th
At the Rendezvous, Turners Falls: *Oscar Night!* The big show on the big screen, free.

ONGOING
In the Great Hall of the Great Falls Discovery Center, Turners Falls. March 5th to March 27th. *From Hornbooks and Samplers to facebook and SMART Boards, Living and Learning in the Connecticut River Valley*. Celebrate the *Big Read* through this interactive exhibit!

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THURS - Drop-in, 3 to 6 p.m. & Movie Night, 6 to 8 p.m.
Free (except some trips), open to local teens. Some require permission slips. Info: Jared at 863-9559.
Hot Spot Teen Center is in **The Brick House**
24 Third Street, Turners Falls, 01376

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Showtimes for

Fri., February 26th to Thurs., March 4th
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FRI, SAT, SUN 12 3:30
2. COP OUT R in DTS sound DAILY 7:00 9:30
FRI, SAT, SUN 12:00 3:00
3. THE WOLFMAN R FRI, SAT, SUN 12 3 DAILY 7 9:30
4. DEAR JOHN PG13 DAILY 6:40 9:20
FRI, SAT, SUN 12:15 3:15
5. VALENTINE'S DAY PG13 DAILY 6:40 9:20
FRI, SAT, SUN 12:15 3:15
6. THE CRAZIES R in DTS sound DAILY 6:30 9:00
FRI, SAT, SUN 12:30 3:30
7. SHUTTER ISLAND R FRI, SAT, SUN 12:30 3:30
DAILY 6:30 9:30 in DTS sound

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SAT: 2/27 | 9:30 PM | \$5
Lost Mountain and Appalachian Still

SUN: 2/28 | 3-7PM | \$3
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MARY AZARIAN WOODBLOCK

BY LESLIE BROWN

MONTAGUE CITY – While last week brought another snow-storm unwelcome to those of us who garden, there were clear signs of spring in the air. The snow was fluffy and light and the air still smelled and felt different from the sharp, dry winter atmosphere. Walking out to the main road, I heard first and then saw a flock of red winged blackbirds. These birds are often the first to return as we edge towards spring, giving their squeaking whistles. They sound as if they are trying out their voices for the first time in a long while. They are scrappy and resilient, traveling in packs and happily ignoring snowy weather. When I got to work I saw another great sign: a small clutch of robins.

It may be true that both of these typical harbingers of spring never left us during this warm winter. They may not have gone south but instead moved just a bit southward, poised for an early return to our area. I do know that many of the winter birds I expect at the feeder never showed up this year. The common flocks of hungry purple finches and goldfinches may have moved down from northern New England, but only a few goldfinches showed up in my yard.

While the Connecticut is run-

ning full and quickly, it is not spotted by ice flows as it would be in a normal winter. I don't know what the winter snows and ice fields were like in the river's northern reaches. We may yet see a more normal flood of ice and high water a little later on. Still it seems evident that this has been a milder and less snowy season for us as we missed the major storms that socked the mid-Atlantic states.

In any case, the bird calls are stronger, the days lengthen, and the squirrels chase each other madly. Recently I saw a crow gathering sticks at the top of a tall pine.

It's time to start seeds for the early garden. The rule of thumb is to set out seeds six to eight weeks before you expect to put the plants in the ground outside. This week I'm starting leek and onion, lettuce and spinach to get a jump on the garden. I expect to plant these seedlings out in mid to late April.

Starting your own plants from seed is not difficult and does not demand much equipment. Light is the most critical. We are fortunate in having a south-facing sunroom, but a few grow lights will serve as well. You can also rely on a windowsill for your early seed starting, but you will need one which will receive strong sun for the better part of the day. You'll also want to attend to turning the seed tray around daily to avoid tall, thin growth as the developing seedlings stretch to reach the maximum solar exposure.

Get yourself a light planting mix, usually one part soil light-

ers to dirt. I have some specially developed seed starter which is no more than equal parts of sphagnum moss and vermiculite. This mix is really too light and lacks the nutritive values of soil so I am going to use it mixed half and half with potting dirt. You can create or buy your own mix; the goal is a growing medium which will allow for maximum root development in a short period of time. You want the growing medium to hold water, but not too much, as one of the major losses in early seedlings is caused by over-watering. This promotes the fungus that causes damping off.

Once you have mixed the planting medium, water lightly and stir so that the mix is evenly moist but not wet. If you can pour extra water off, it is too wet and you are better off leaving it to dry out a bit before you begin planting.

Most seed packets contain tips for achieving the greatest germination rate and for depth of planting. Note if your seeds require light to germinate. If so, merely press the seed into the soil but do not cover. Otherwise, plant about the depth of the size of your seeds. Leek and onion seed are tiny; they should be just covered

with dirt. For all seeds, press the dirt firmly over them so as to create contact with the soil. Seed your plant trays sparingly, especially if you are averse to thinning.

Most any recycled container can be used: plastic grocery trays which held mushrooms or greens, egg cartons, old baking trays, etc. Fill with soil, plant your seeds and cover with clear plastic bags or wrap or lids to keep the moisture in. Read the seed packets for germination times and watch carefully. Once the seedlings show a stem or leaf, remove the covers for daytime in the sun and replace covers at night to keep in the warmth. Use a warming pad or place on the top of your refrigerator to speed germination.

Once your seedlings are up, allow a good square inch around the sturdiest ones, and be ruthless in weeding out small or weakly producing plants. While these steps seem wasteful of seed, keep the goal in mind, which is to produce the strongest, healthiest specimens to jump start your garden.

Once your seedlings develop their true leaves, think about replanting in new soil, allowing

each seedling to expand its roots to the fullest. At this point allow two to three square inches of growing room for each seedling, and begin feeding your plants weekly with a weak mixture of water and a foliar stimulant like liquid seaweed. If you have thoroughly aged manure, you can just put a little in a quart of tepid water and create a mild manure tea.

When your seedlings look like the starter plants you find at the farmers market, it's time to think about getting them into the garden. About a week or so before temperatures have moderated and your garden soil has dried out enough, begin to harden up new plants by putting them outdoors in a sheltered place on warm, sunny days. Avoid days when it is windy because it will dry out your plants and stress the stems and roots unnecessarily. When you can grasp a handful of garden dirt, squeeze it together in your hand and it crumbles, let the planting begin. Don't worry about frosty nights. These early crops can take it.

Sit back and enjoy the prospect of the earliest fresh lettuce and spinach to be found!

Happy gardening!

Rhododendron – A Shrub for all Seasons

BY FRAN HEMOND

MONTAGUE CENTER – Beautiful, purposeful, hardy and happy in its environment, the rhododendron plays host to the Breakfast Club of visitors to our bird feeder at Cold Brook Farm. It also offers tribute to a lady of an earlier generation who realized this evergreen bush would settle the big farmhouse into its site.

In earlier days, the house was impressive; tall elms gave it a frame, but the porches did not nestle in, as they do today. Perhaps there was no need for handsome bushes. It was a busy place. A hitching post with a stepping stone greeted visitors. The elm tree near the house had a real swing, a wooden board and long ropes that reached to the high branches, and challenged the timid. A croquet set was up and down as its players wished, and was open to any aptitude and skill. Just stay out of grandmother's white rose bed.

The elm trees succumbed to Dutch Elm disease, and were

replaced by maples. The hitching post and stepping stones were victims of low-slung modern vehicles, an up-to-date version of swing and play equipment went to the backyard, and a foresighted lady saw that rhododendron was suited to the front lawn.

Right now in February, its evergreen leaves are shiny and full. They are little umbrellas that curl with the cold to conserve moisture, and on a zero morning, they are tightly battened down. You can guess the temperature by the opening and closing of the little umbrellas. The top branches offer spots in the sun to warm up. The lower branches are close enough to discourage the jays, if not keep them completely out. The birds that use the feeders have a spot

to show off, and a handy shelter.

Come spring, and the rhododendron will soon flower again. Its big rose blossoms are a spectacular show for little work, and they make fine cut flowers. A nest in the middle of the hedge has been occupied for some years, but the nest is only seen in winter. Thick foliage in summer hides the occupants nicely.

Perhaps best of all, rhododendrons like our acid soil. They generally manage our winters

well. They should be shaped up immediately after blossoming. They will accept trimming any time, but the next year's buds form very shortly after bloom, and out-of-order trimming then means no flowers the next year.

Always handsome, shelter in winter, blossom in spring, elegant in summer and fall, the rhododendron is a shrub for all seasons.



Seed and Propagation Workshop

GILL – On Sunday, February 28th, from 10:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at Laughing Dog Farm in Gill, we will review basic horticulture regarding seeds, seed biology, genetics, seed saving, seed storage, testing and viability, as well as the significance of heirlooms and other open-pollinated seeds. Home mixing small batches of compost-based germination and potting soil will be demonstrated, along with seeding, germination and growing options, especially for small

spaces, using minimal heat. We will also demonstrate and practice several propagation shortcuts like using cluster grown seedlings transplanted to multi-cell flats. Damping off disease and measures to prevent seedling mortality will be discussed at this basic level workshop. Greenhouse tour followed by hot soup and informal discussion. Donation suggested. For directions write to dbotkin@valinet.com, or call (413) 863-8696.

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