



FORGIVENESS

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HAPPY ST. PATTY'S DAY!

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THE VOICE OF THE VILLAGES

MARCH 13, 2008

Eco-Sensitive Development Zoning Proposed

JOSH HEINEMANN restriction can allow
WENDELL - Acting as a consultant for the forest conservation committee appointed by the selectboard, Northampton city planner Wayne Feiden presented a draft of a proposed 'eco-sensitive development' amendment to the zoning bylaws at an open hearing in front of the planning board, on Tuesday March 4th. If the proposed bylaw change is enacted, acreage considered for development would be divided into two sections: 65% of the land, including areas determined to have the most significance for biodiversity, wildlife habitat and corridors, forest conservation, historical importance, agriculture, visual assets, or recreational use, would be set aside with a permanent conservation restriction as approved by the planning board. The conservation

restriction can allow activities consistent with a working landscape, like tree cutting, agriculture, hunting, fishing, and trails, or it could limit one or more of those activities, if appropriate. The remaining 35% of the land can then be developed with greater flexibility and streamlined permitting. Planning board chair Deidre Cabral said the idea is to encourage development along lines the town considers appropriate, while maintaining a working landscape and a viable wildlife corridor connecting the Quabbin Reservoir through Wendell to the Connecticut River.

Acreage with building constraints include water bodies, wetlands, 100-year FEMA defined flood plains, or slopes over 25%. Half these features' total

see **ECO** pg 12

Two Plans for Future of Montague Center School

BY DAVID DETMOLD

"We didn't expect two proposals, and we didn't expect two such outstanding proposals," said interim superintendent Ken Rocke, following Tuesday night's Gill-Montague school committee meeting. Back in December of last year, the committee voted to close Montague Center School and Hillcrest School, but not before throwing out a lifeline to any community group that wanted to come up with a viable proposal to keep either elementary school open. The committee set a March deadline to decide on any such proposal that might come in. Tuesday night, instead of one, they got two.

One question for the committee, as they prepare for a Thursday, March 20th afternoon working session to go over the proposals, which both aim to keep Montague Center School open, is whether they can give both plans - and the groups backing them - the

green light to go forward, if the proposals meet the criteria the committee set

forth in December.

Could the committee approve two proposals for

keeping Montague Center

see **SCHOOL** pg 8

Once Upon a Mattress



No, it's not a play about the former Governor of New York. It's the High School Musical at Turners Falls High this weekend, based on the Princess and the Pea. Will Princess Winifred (Lara Ames, left) get her man? Will the sharp-tongued harridan, Queen Agravaing (Abbey Daniel-Green, right) prevail, and banish her would-be daughter in law to the outer reaches of the realm? Will the hapless king, Anton Luz, (second from left) find his voice? And what does his loquacious minstrel (Kris York, second from right) have to say about the mixed-up affairs of this cockeyed kingdom? You'll all have to be there to find out, Friday and Saturday night at 7:30, or Sunday at 1:30 p.m.

Usher Mill Demolished

JOSEPH A. PARZYCH
ERVING CENTER - It is ironic that Ronald Bussiere and his son Kurt, owners of Patriots Environmental Corporation of Worcester, a company that engages in demolition, asbestos remediation and environmental cleanup, had been negotiating the purchase of the Usher Mill in Erving when arsonists set fire to one of the five buildings in the complex. The Bussieres eventually bought the property and are now demolishing the fire-damaged building with an eye to salvaging usable material.

"We're recycling as much of the building as



Kurt Bussiere, left, who co-owns the Patriots Environmental Corporation of Worcester, stands with excavator operator Gary Bond in front of the former Usher Mill in Erving.

possible," Kurt Bussiere said. "The beams are

southern pine; they go to a company in

Southbridge, MA. They'll see **MILL** pg 11

Selectboard Sets Airport Policy

BY DAVID DETMOLD

On March 11th, the selectboard set policy for the airport commission, set a date for a downtown block party, and set their stamp of approval on MCTV's annual report. The meeting room was full of pilots, airport commissioners, cable television producers, arts boosters, and a couple of Girl Scout troop leaders, who asked for and received permission to set up a table to sell cookies in front of Our Lady of Czestochowa this Saturday, to coincide with the church bazaar. Just a typical day in the life of

Montague.

First off, the selectboard spent a solid hour ironing out details of the policy by which they would appoint two new members to the airport commission, which the selectboard voted late last year to expand from five to seven members.

Allen Ross, who has served as the board's liaison with the airport commission since a brouhaha broke out at public meetings in February of '07 between a pilots' group called the Save the Turners Falls Airport

see **AIRPORT** pg 10

PET OF THE WEEK

A Friendly Fellow



Jacob

My name is Jacob and I'm a 2-year-old elkhound mix in need of a good home. As long as the weather's nice, and you ask a staff member, I would love to say hi and show you how loving I really am. I am a friendly boy that loves spending time playing outside. I even like the snow! I am a Dixie Dog from North Carolina! Kids: age 8+, cats: confident only, dogs: yes. For more information on adopting me please contact the Dakin Pioneer Valley Humane Society at 413-548-9898 or via email leverett@dpvhs.org.

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CARNEGIE LIBRARY NEWS

Wind and Bubble Program

BY LINDA HICKMAN

TURNERS FALLS - On Saturday, March 22nd, Mad Science will present "Wind and Bubble" at 10:30 a.m. at the Carnegie Library. This hands-on science program featuring air,

all kinds of bubbles, and dry ice is well suited for young children and their families, and is sponsored by Family Network and the Montague Cultural Council.

For more information call the library at 863-3214.

WENDELL LIBRARY NEWS

Learn Loom Weaving

Learn to weave with master weaver Dvora Cohen at the Wendell Free Library. Teaching session on Saturday, March 15th, 11 a.m. to noon, with more sessions to follow. Dvora has loaned her 100-year-old floor loom to the library for the next several months so you can try your hand at weaving. The loom will be available for use any time the library is open. (Attend a training

session in order to use the loom.) Initially the loom will be set up to create laptop mats for the library's meeting room tables. We can all take turns practicing patterns while we create these mats. After the computer mats are completed it may be possible for individuals to create a small project of their own. For more info call the library at 978-544-3559

Girl Scout Cookies

TURNERS FALLS - Support local Girl Scout Troops 21 and 24 with your purchase of Girl Scout Cookies, this Saturday, March 15th across from Our Lady of Czestochowa Church, at 9th and K Streets. The sale, from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., is timed to coincide with the church bazaar. Girl Scout cookies cost \$3.50 a box, and all money raised will help the girls afford their field trip to Battleship Cove in May.

Woods Management for Landowners

GILL - UMass Amherst forest resources specialist Paul Catanzaro will lead a woods forum at the Gill town hall on Thursday, March 27th from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. The woods forum is an informal discussion designed to help connect woodland owners with each other and local forestry and conservation professionals to discuss and share information about their woods. Topics will include timber harvesting, natural resource conservation, development of forestland, and the local forestry economy.

"Many of us don't think about our woods on a day-to-day basis, except to enjoy the privacy, scenery, and tranquil environment," said Catanzaro. "However, at some point in every landowner's life, a decision about what to do with our woods arises. When the time comes, it is important for woodland owners to know they have options and know where to find information."

The forum will feature a Q & A session for landowners and a free light dinner. For more information, and to RSVP, contact Jay Rasku at 978-248-2118 or info@nqpartnership.org.

SENIOR CENTER ACTIVITIES -- March 17th - 21st

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

Monday, 17th
10 a.m. Senior Aerobics
11 a.m. Easy Aerobics
Tuesday, 18th
1:00 p.m. Spring Painting Classes. David Sund instructing. Gill & Montague residents \$10 for 6 weeks; all others \$15.
Wednesday, 19th
10 a.m. Senior Aerobics
11:15 a.m. Hospice 101; Veronica Lynch of Hospice of Western Mass. Will explain the Hospice program. How it operates, who provides service, cost, volunteers. If you have

any questions about Hospice, this is where you will find the answers.
12:45 p.m. Bingo
Thursday, 20th
1:00 p.m. Pitch
Friday, 21st
10 a.m. Senior Aerobics
11 a.m. Easy Aerobics

ERVING Senior Center, 18 Pleasant St., Ervingside (Old Center School, 1st Floor), is open Monday through Thursday from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. for activities and congregational meals. For information and reservations call Polly Kiely, Senior Center director at 413 423-3308. Lunch daily at 11:30 a.m. with reservations a day in advance by 11:00 a.m. Transportation can be provided for meals, Thursday shopping, or medical necessity by calling Dana Moore at 413-422-2584.

Monday, 17th
9:00 a.m. Exercise
9:45 a.m. Library
12 Noon Pitch
Tuesday, 18th
9 a.m. Aerobics
10:15 a.m. Business Meeting
12:30 p.m. Painting
Wednesday, 19th

FACES & PLACES

... AND THEN THERE WERE THREE!



A third egg appeared in the eagles' nest in Barton Cove on Thursday. Check out all the action on MCTV, Channel 17!

Church Bazaar

Our Lady of Czestochowa will hold a church bazaar on Saturday, March 15th, from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. featuring Polish foods, Polish crafts, arts and crafts, and a bake sale. Father DiMascola advises us that "The ladies have been baking golabki all week," in preparation. Girls Scout troops 21 and 24 will be selling cookies just across the street, at the corner of K and 9th, during the day.

GREAT FALLS MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS OF THE WEEK

Grade 6 : Lauren Grimard
Grade 7: Brandon Lenois, Wyatt Bourbeau
Grade 8: Alyssa Nicotra

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JOE GRAVELINE

Dial Self Completes \$1.2 Mil Purchase and Renovation Project

BY DAVID DETMOLD

THE PATCH - An old three story brick tenement on the Patch that has provided housing for hundreds of homeless teens and young people referred by the Department of Social Services over the last two decades, was saved from becoming homeless itself by quick work on the part of Dial Self executive director David Voegele and a multi-pronged response from state agencies and lenders, including the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (MDHCD), the Cooperative Fund of New England, and Boston Community Capital.

As program staffers mingled with state and local officials in the bright and spacious community room at the back of the renovated staff apartment and office, Voegele explained, "We had been tenants here for 20 years, when the owner notified us he wanted to sell, and gave us first option to buy. We were in the position of being displaced, or becoming homeless ourselves."

A brainstorming call to the Coop Fund of New England put Voegele in touch with Bill Alexander of the MDHCD, "who was tremendously enthusiastic and supportive," about the prospect of acquiring and rehabilitating the aging structure. Renaissance Builders was called in to design a plan, and they carried the project through to completion with the help of bridge funding from Boston Community Capital. Throughout the yearlong top to bottom \$800,000 renovation, tenants in the four double bedrooms were able to remain in the building, while staff kept the program running amid the scaffolding, sawhorses, and whine of power saws.

State representative Steve Kulik thanked program staff for "having the vision to embark on such a complicated and ambitious project."

Montague selectboard chair Pat Allen said, "So many positive things have happened in the



Program Director Kate Allen, (l-r) Eric Alexander, of the Mass Dept. of Housing and Community Development and Rep. Steve Kulik, (D-Worthington) join in the ribbon cutting ceremony for the \$1.2 million purchase and renovation of the Dial Self building on 11th Street in the Patch on Friday, March 7th

last few years in Montague. Equally significant is the web of support for young people your agency is working to provide. If not for that, we wouldn't have much of a community. Thanks to the Montague Catholic Social Ministries, the Brick House, and Dial Self, there's a tremendous difference in the personality of downtown."

Dial Self program director Kate Allen, radiant with pride over the accomplishment marked by Friday's ceremony, explained the purpose of her agency was to meet the transitional housing needs of two broad groups: young people aging out of foster care, and runaway and homeless youth at risk of being in an unsafe living situation. During the course of an average six month stay, youth counselors work with each client to establish personal goals, and depending on their goals, help get them services for life skills, job training, permanent housing or continuing education.

"We expect people to either go to high school or get a GED or set an educational goal, or seek vocational training," Allen said.

Case workers follow-up with after care when the young people transition out of the program, to college dorms, their own apart-

ments, or, if appropriate, to move in with family members.

Sierra Kelley, 18, lived on 11th Street for about six months and now lives on Conway Street in Greenfield, at one of Dial Self's scattered site apartments.

"My DSS worker suggested it," (getting involved with program). Kelley is going to Greenfield Community College 20 hours a week now, and she plans to transfer to Manchester Community College in CT, where she'll live in East Windsor.

She said this about Dial Self: "It's a great motivator. If I was still living at my mom's house I wouldn't have finished high school. I was homeless for awhile before I came here."

"They teach you about budgeting, tax prep, managing money, saving money. A lot of speakers come in. We have games and volunteers coming in to help us. They teach you how to take a bus, get transportation," she continued.

She would recommend the program to other teens who found themselves in her situation. "It's a good opportunity. If you take advantage of what's out there for you, it's here to help you."

Christal Mosby, age 19, lives at the 11th Street building now.

She said, "I like (the program); it's good. I heard about it through my counselor. I called when they started doing the renovations and I was on the (waiting) list for almost a year. They got me out of my house (she was living with six kids in a three bedroom apartment with her mom, her uncle, and his child, a very crowded house).

"They helped me move into 11th Street and have more independence. I come to these (Life Skills) meetings every week, and it's not much different from when I was living at home because I'm already a pretty independent person. But being here, I can get things done faster than when I was at home," she added.

Since being involved with Dial Self, Mosby has opened a bank account, found a doctor, taken a regular babysitting job and learned how to support her-

self. She plans to complete her General Equivalency Diploma (GED), improve her budgeting skills and get a car.

"It's closer to being able to be by myself and not depending on anyone to do anything for me," she said of the program. "It's a huge reward for me too, to get to live at 11th Street. The apartments are cute and you have enough room."

In the community room, a suggestion sheet by the door held one entry: for the French Connection. A whiteboard listed ideas for the root causes of violence included entries like "money, sex, classism, the military, cliques, and homophobia." A new computer work station sat by the office window; across from a plush couch, a complete entertainment center awaited an audience; a map of the world hung on one freshly painted wall.

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Kathleen Litchfield

Editorial Assistants
Hugh Corr
David Brule

Circulation
Suzette Snow Cobb
Don Clegg

Layout & Design
Kathleen Litchfield
Boysen Hodgson
Katrien Hoyden
Karen Wilkinson
Suzette Snow Cobb

Photography
Joe Parzych
Shawn Woolsey

Technical Administrators
Michael Muller
Michael Farrick

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"The Voice of the Villages"

Bush Torture Veto Abhorrent

As you may be aware, over the weekend President Bush vetoed legislation that outlaws interrogation techniques tantamount to torture. On Tuesday, House Democrats acted quickly to voice their outrage by calling a vote to override the President's misguided veto. While the veto override ultimately failed by a vote of 225 to 188 - 51 votes short of the two-thirds majority required to override a veto - I joined over 150 of my colleagues in standing up to the president and voicing my opinion loud and clear. Simply put, torture - whether it is called that or something more sanitized - is immoral, counterproductive, ineffective and harms our reputation abroad.

The anti-torture legislation, part of the Intelligence Authorization Conference Report, passed with my support in December. The legislation required all U.S. government agencies, including the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), to abide by the Army Field Manual on Intelligence Interrogation. This manual outlines permissible interrogation techniques and specifically prohibits practices such as simulated drowning known as waterboarding, the inducement of hypothermia, the use of military dogs, and the enactment of mock executions. Currently, only members of the military and other Department of Defense employees are required to follow these regulations.

The lack of specificity regarding acceptable interrogation techniques has weakened our moral authority and frustrated our efforts to gather international support around stopping human rights abuses, eliminating terrorist havens, and penalizing rogue regimes. Ending the ambiguity clouding our interrogation policies by requiring all intelligence personnel to abide by the Army Field Manual will help restore our image as a nation whose stature is based not just on mili-

tary might but on adherence to the rule of law and universal notions of human dignity.

Critics assert that harsh interrogation techniques, while unfortunate, are necessary when confronting terrorists willing to sacrifice their own lives and those of innocent civilians for political and religious ends. But many former interrogators have questioned the reliability of the most brutal interrogation techniques. They insist that such practices merely compel the suspect to tell the interrogator what he or she wants to hear. General Petraeus, our top commander in Iraq, stated last year, "Some may argue that we would be more effective if we sanctioned torture or other expedient methods to obtain information from the enemy. They would be wrong."

Yet even debating the effectiveness of these measures obfuscates their harmful effect on the reputation of the U.S. in the eyes of the world. Whatever the value of intelligence extracted utilizing harsh interrogation techniques, it is overshadowed by the damaging symbolism of the U.S. employing tactics easily denounced as torture. The conflicting interrogation policies among various U.S. government agencies helped create an atmosphere of permissiveness and uncertainty, which led to serious abuses such as those at Abu Ghraib.

I am profoundly disappointed that the President vetoed this legislation. Now, as the U.S. confronts the threat of Islamic extremism, it has never been more important that we stand behind the principles that this nation was built on. We must demonstrate our abhorrence of torture not through proclamations, but through consistent, unambiguous policies that prohibit interrogation techniques demeaning to our founding principles.

- Rep. John W. Olver
D-Amherst



Budget Hearing, Monday, March 17th

MONTAGUE - Town officials have estimated the size of the budget deficit Montague is facing this year at \$1.5 million dollars. With few options available: raiding dwindling reserves, trying again for a Proposition 2½ override, or cutting staff and services chief among them, the selectboard and finance committee are turning to the public for ideas.

What town services do you value? Where do you see waste and inefficiency? Under what, if any circumstances would you support a property tax hike? Do

you have suggestions for how the schools can save on expenses, cut back on school choice losses, or increase revenues? Should the town take more from reserves (estimated at about \$2.5 million, including the assessors overlay reserve account) to plug the gap for another year? Or should the town and schools cut more staff, risking further school choice losses, possible state takeover of the district, and the loss of vital constituent services?

Bring your questions, ideas, and suggestions to the second

floor meeting room of town hall on Monday night. If you can't make it, the hearing will be broadcast live on MCTV Channel 17 at 7 p.m. Also, a live call-on feature will be available, for people who would like to have their comments or questions entered into the record live on air. On Monday night, you can register your views or get your questions answered by calling 863-3200, extension 121 or 204. TFHS students will be volunteering to answer the phones and run the comments or questions in to the selectboard.

Community Land Trust Follow-up, Monday, March 31st

MONTAGUE - On Tuesday, March 4th, about 30 people gathered in the second floor meeting room of town hall to discuss the possibility of forming a community land trust (CLT) in Montague, to support affordable homeownership,

protect rental properties, and help prevent foreclosures. There was a wealth of practical experience in CLT development and management in the room, along with a healthy dose of skepticism: you can watch the entire proceeding on MCTV, Channel

17. Proponents of the concept (including the Brick House, Equity Trust, and this newspaper) will hold a follow-up meeting on Monday, March 31st at 6 p.m. at the office of Equity Trust, 177 Avenue A. Come along, and bring a friend.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE MONTAGUE POLICE LOG

Burglary and Vandalism

Thursday, March 6
2:49 p.m. Report of burglary / breaking and entering at China Town restaurant on Avenue A, Turners Falls.
8:13 p.m. Report of vandalism at Eleventh Street address, Turners Falls.
10:38 p.m. Report of larceny at Cumberland Farms on Montague City Road, Turners Falls.
Friday, March 7
2:02 a.m. Report of larceny at a Second Street address, Turners Falls.
2:44 a.m. Report of accident with property damage on Seventh Street, Turners Falls. Arrested [redacted].
Charged with driving under the influence of liquor, operating to endanger, failure to wear seat belt, marked lanes violation, failure to use care starting, turning, backing.

10:39 a.m. Arrested [redacted].
Charged with possession of class D drug.
Saturday, March 8
1:50 p.m. Report of larceny at a Central Street address, Turners Falls.
6:10 p.m. Report of larceny at a Federal Street address, Montague.
Sunday, March 9
4:10 a.m. Report of neighbor disturbance at a Fifth Street address, Turners Falls. Peace restored.
5:32 p.m. Report of shoplifting at Family Dollar, Avenue A, Turners Falls. Arrested [redacted].
Charged with disorderly conduct and resisting arrest.
9:46 p.m. Report of vandalism at a J Street address.
Monday, March 10
4:01 p.m. Report of hit and run accident on L Street, Turners Falls.

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GUEST EDITORIALS

Pull Out of the Death Spiral

BY MICHAEL NAUGHTON
MONTAGUE - Last week, John Hanold did a brilliant job of describing how a family's finances can be a useful model for understanding the fiscal questions facing our town (MR VI #22). I'd like to expand a little on that theme. I haven't consulted Mr. Hanold, so the thoughts and conclusions here are my own, but I'm grateful for the work he has done in laying the foundation.

As he noted, using a family's savings to cover an increase in monthly expenses is usually a bad idea, since the savings will eventually run out and leave you with higher expenses and no way to pay for them. I say "usually" because using savings to cover a temporary increase in expenses can sometimes be a good idea. A Christmas Club account is a good example. In this case, the whole point of having the savings is to be able to spend more during one period. Or perhaps you expect a salary increase that will cover your new expenses, but you won't get it for a month

or two. You can use your savings to tide you over until you get the increase.

The key characteristic of these situations is that they are temporary, and you control when they start and stop. You are using your savings to even out a bump, instead of simply spending them when you have no reason to think that your expenses will go down or that your salary will go up. Unfortunately, the latter is exactly what the town has been doing for the past couple of years, and it is the main reason that our town's projected deficit for '09 is as big as it is: \$1.5 million.

It's no secret that I think this has been a bad idea -- I've been pretty outspoken about it -- and it is not an idea that has improved with time. Although "use of reserves" is officially on the table as an option at the upcoming budget forum, I hope all concerned will view it with a healthy skepticism. The question should be: is their use being proposed as part of a larger plan, or because there is no larger plan? If the lat-

ter, then we should have no part of it. It is past time to begin facing our problems, and the longer we delay the worse they get.

So, how do we do that? Again, the model suggests two alternatives: we can reduce expenses, or we can increase income. As Mr. Hanold points out, the most likely source of a salary increase for the town is from property taxes. It's perhaps worth pointing out that in fact we do get an increase every year of about 4%. Our problem isn't that our expenses are going up while our income is the same -- our problem is that, while they are both going up, our expenses are going up faster than our income. It's that difference between the rates of increase that's causing what's sometimes called our "structural budget gap".

A tax increase, in the form of a Proposition 2½ override, would help in the short run - just as spending our reserves has helped in the short run - by plugging that gap for a while, but it would do nothing to help the "rate of increase gap" problem.

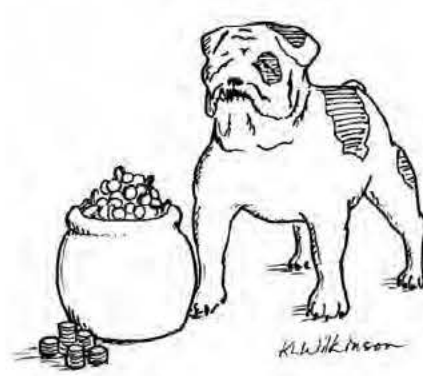
Unless something is done to fix that problem, we'll be back where we are now before we know it. Given the hole we've dug, I think we could make hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of cuts and pass a \$500,000 override, and we'd be facing a deficit again as early as next year. Maybe not as big as the deficit we're facing right now, but a deficit all the same. And frankly, given the general economic situation right now, I'm not sure that an override of any size would pass.

Which brings us to reducing expenses. Again, I emphasize that the problem is not just the size of the expenses, it's their rate of growth. No solution that fails to address the rate of growth problem can be successful in the long run. The irresponsibly shortsighted -- um, I mean "arguably sub-optimal" -- decisions of the past few years may have backed us into a corner where continued use of reserves and/or a tax override are the most viable tools for avoiding greater disasters, but these should ONLY be considered as part of a plan that addresses the root cause of the problem.

The key question at the upcoming budget forum, in my opinion, will not be whether the town nurse is more important than an

extra police shift, or two more teachers are more important than the parks and recreation department. The question will be whether our financial leaders -- those who have been living with the numbers and to whom we look for guidance -- have any vision for how to get us out of this death spiral. If they do, then I think we owe it to them to consider their suggestions in good faith, even if we don't like them very much (and we won't). If they don't, then I think we should reject any attempts to paper over the problem for another year. There is always the option of just paying for what we can afford and going without the rest. If no better plan comes forward, then I think that is the best way to go.

Mike Naughton grew up speaking math as a second language. He has been a Montague resident since 1974, and he is a town meeting member and serves on the Capital Improvements Committee. He can be reached at mjnaught@crocker.com or by looking in the telephone book. The opinions expressed here are his own and are not necessarily shared by anyone else in town government.



I've already mentioned utilities; even though we can't quickly calculate the rise, we know it's significant.

Another often-mentioned driver is benefits, which rose over 88% for employees and retirees and 79% for veterans over the course of the last nine years. Health insurance increases and a rising veteran population are contributors.

I also looked at three groupings of related services, figuring that overall trends might be most useful. The "core group" of treasurer-assessor-accountant-clerk appears to have lost a position over nine years, and spent only about 25% more during that time period. The "compliance" group (planner, building inspector, board of health) gained a position, or slightly more, and spent 45% more, perhaps in response to growth in user populations, and the "quality of life" group (library, parks and senior center) stayed at the same staff level and spent about 46% more, driven by a changing population and the expansion of services like interlibrary exchange and senior programs.

This is where we compare the increase in dollars to the extent

and quality of services we now receive. From my point of view, it is hard to find fault. The regulatory environment is more demanding as the years pass, and our hopes for the town -- and needs for its residents -- have changed to generate higher expectations of town departments. My conclusion, from skimming these data, is that we are pinched more by inadequate revenue than by excess spending.

The public forum on the budget, to be held at town hall on March 17th (at 7:00 p.m., as part of the selectboard meeting) will give townspeople a chance to offer their opinions of what is important to us, and what commitment we can make to keep the services we have.

John Hanold is the chair of the finance committee. The thoughts expressed here are entirely his own, and do not necessarily represent the views of other members of the finance committee, other town officials, or the public at large.

EYE ON TOWN FINANCES

Is Montague Failing to Control Cost of Town Government?

BY JOHN HANOLD - In recent years, I've heard people wonder aloud if town government has expanded beyond the town's needs and capacity. I decided to test that theory by looking at some of the changes in town departments over the last nine years. What I found shines some light on the history, and though exact comparisons are difficult, the general view is clear. The town has actually reduced the number of employees, and the level of spending has increased slower than normal inflation.

In what follows, bear in mind that a modest 3% per year increase in the town's operating expense would amount to about a 31% hike over nine years, while a more realistic 4% rate would equal more than 42%.

The general fund spending proposed for Fiscal Year 2009 - excluding the Water Pollution Control Facility and the schools - is a little more than \$7,000,000; nearly 40% over FY00. If debt

service is removed, the increase is about 38.5%. This reveals an interesting fact: debt service in the 2000 operating budget grew only about 14% to 2008 - the increase from 2008 to 2009, for part of the new sewer project, is a more significant difference. The control of debt service levels undoubtedly contributes to the town's record of regularly issuing bonds at attractive rates.

In summary, a 38.5% increase over nine years is not in itself cause for concern, particularly when revenue increases from year to year are closer to 4%. The reason lies in some of the details, and it is no surprise that forces pushed spending in different directions. Utilities, for instance, were budgeted jointly with the highway department in 2000, but if today's Department of Public Works budget is combined with the utilities budget for municipal buildings we can see the rise in spending, when compared to the DPW in 2000, is 24.8% -- well below

even the 31% threshold over nine years.

Part of the reason for that is staff levels: the DPW superintendent has asked for an increase from sixteen to seventeen positions for 2009, but there were 25 in the department in 2000. Similarly, the police department has dropped from nineteen police and six dispatchers to sixteen and six, with the reduction primarily in patrol officers. The spending increase for the police since 2000 is 22.5%, again well below the 31% baseline.

Staff levels in the rest of town hall have re-distributed themselves slightly, but are basically unchanged: perhaps half a position added.

At the sewer plant the attrition of two positions during the 1990s was never restored, and staffing there has remained at five full-time and two less-than-full-time positions.

So, what has happened over the years to drive expenses up?

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Rwandan Politician Speaks on Forgiveness

BY ALEX GOTTSCHALK GREENFIELD - On Wednesday, March 5th, the former head of Rwanda's parliament bought his message of hope and reconciliation to Greenfield.

"This is a story of suffering, but also one of resilience since I was able to overcome my anger and resentment," Joseph Sebarenzi told the audience at the First Congregational Church. Sebarenzi, who is member of the Tutsi minority of Rwanda, lost most of his extended family during the Rwandan genocide of 1994. During this time period, at least 800,000 Rwandans were killed. Most of the killings were done by members of the Hutu majority. "People did not see me as their brother, they saw me as a cockroach," Sebarenzi stated calmly to the audience, which filled the entire church sanctuary.

Acts of genocide had

occurred before 1994 in Rwanda. Between 1959 and 1967 20,000 people lost their lives in the Central Africa nation. In 1973, the ten-year-old Sebarenzi was hidden by Hutu friends who felt a moral obligation to help him. In 1994, the worst wave of violence to date overtook Rwanda. During this period, Sebarenzi was forced to flee to the neighboring country of Burundi. His seven brothers and sisters, along with his parents, were killed by Hutus.

Despite this appalling loss, Sebarenzi concentrated his lecture on forgiveness and reconciliation. "It's very hard to think of forgiveness. You begin to hate those who would even talk of it. My spirituality was

gone, I was very angry and cynical, I thought to myself, 'Where was God' when this was happening."

However, a reawakened spiritual life has helped Sebarenzi, a Christian, overcome his traumatic past. "Pain and anger is a burden... It's a gift you give yourself. Spirituality teaches us to forgive. In every form of spirituality you always hear reconciliation, not retaliation. If we respect our spirit, we have to forgive," he said.

From 1997 to 2000, Sebarenzi was head of Rwanda's parliament. During this period, "I was in a good position to promote democratic ideas, and ideas of

reconciliation. If I had taken revenge, my offenders would have become victims and the cycle of violence would have continued. It is in the best interests of future generations to abstain from this."

In 2000 he was forced to leave the country again, when he was informed of an assassination plot against him. Currently Sebarenzi lives in Vermont where he teaches conflict resolution at the School For International Training, in Brattleboro.

Sebarenzi acknowledged that he still struggles with his own and his country's history at times, expressing anger and dismay that the United Nations did not intervene during the genocide of 1994 and that for him "...there is always a struggle, sometimes it's one step forward, one step back. It [forgiveness] is something that comes slowly, slowly, slowly." Nevertheless, Sebarenzi

ended his talk, which received a standing ovation, on a hopeful note. "We are all brothers and sisters. We have some differences, but those are just details. If I can try to forgive, so can you."

Pastor Judith Kinley reminded those in the audience that Sebarenzi's story was not meant to be listened to strictly as an intellectual exercise. "We've all been moved and inspired tonight, but that is not enough. We need to be working on toward forgiveness in our personal lives and in our community."

The talk was sponsored by the Interfaith Council of Franklin County, Temple Israel, Our Lady of Peace Church, Community Crisis Response Team and Greenfield Community College. For more information go to www.interfaithcounciloffranklincounty.org.



Joseph Sebarenzi

NOTES FROM THE ERVING SELECTBOARD

Eco-Friendly Wastewater Treatment Discussed

BY NICOLE CLAYTON

An Erving man who said he is tipping his hat into the ring for selectboard, Andrew Goodwin, of Old Swamp Road came to the board meeting on Monday, March 10th, and proposed turning the Erving wastewater treatment plant into an eco-friendly facility. Although the town is already embarked on a \$6.4 million dollar renovation plan, working with engineers Tighe & Bond, Goodwin suggested they inquire into the potential of Using John Todd Ecological Design, Inc. a Wood's Hole company that specializes, according to their website (www.toddecological.com), in "Eco Machines -- miniature ecosystems that use the natural abilities of bacteria, plants and animals to turn toxic sewage

and industrial waste into food, fuel, clean water and commercial crops." Although Goodwin admitted systems like Todd's have only been used successfully in small scale application, he asked the board, "Please do not have a closed mind. Just call the company and ask the questions and see if they will come out and let us know what they can do for us."

Board chair Andy Tessier, who has some experience in municipal wastewater treatment operations in his professional life, countered by saying, "I take exception to your feeling that we are closed minded. We have an open mind. However, in my experience when you put these systems out to full scale they don't work. I don't need that aggravation, and I don't

believe anyone else does either."

Goodwin replied, "This is why I want to run for the selectboard. Just open up your minds." He later said he has submitted his paperwork to run for a seat on the selectboard in the annual election; Jeff Dubay's seat is coming up this year. Administrative coordinator Tom Sharp and Dubay, agreed to call and ask some questions of the company in regards to the towns needs. However, at this time the board has no plans to hold off on the current plan for the plant.

Engineering consultants from Tighe & Bond came to the meeting prior to Goodwin's proposal, reviewing paperwork for the treatment plant upgrade. They reported that everything

appears to be running on time and on budget. The board will now move forward to the bidding stage for the renovation project.

The selectboard appointed Glenn McCrory to the position of highway equipment operator. He will begin this post as soon as he has completed the mandatory physical and drug test. Sharp informed the board that McCrory came highly recommended by every one of his references.

The board also agreed to change their meeting time from 6:00 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. on Monday nights, to better accommodate members' schedules. The next meeting will be held on Monday, March 17th at 6:30 p.m. at town hall; the public is welcome to attend.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE ERVING POLICE LOG

Small Fire, Sick Raccoon

Tuesday, March 4

6:00 a.m. Motor vehicle accident, car vs. deer, on Rte 2, Farley.

10:14 a.m. Report of tractor trailer unit taking down wires on River Street. Notified cable company and homeowner.

11:14 a.m. Assisted Northfield police with sick raccoon on Gulf Road.

9:25 p.m. Report of barn fire on Murdock Hill Road, small wood pile put under control.

Thursday, March 6

12:50 p.m. Report of kayak floating down Millers River. Kayak owner located and OK.

Friday, March 7

7:30 a.m. Criminal application issued to [redacted], for operating after suspension.

Monday, March 10

10:20 p.m. Criminal application issued to [redacted], for failure to inspect motor vehicle and operating motor vehicle after revocation.

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NOTES FROM THE WENDELL SELECTBOARD

Tax Bills Late Again

BY JOSH HEINEMANN - Town treasurer Carolyn Manley received the board's approval to borrow money from stabilization, at the Wednesday, March 5th meeting, because tax receipts are slow to come in to town hall, since tax bills have yet to be sent out. She asked the board to encourage the assessors to hurry up and get the tax bills in the mail, and suggested establishing permanent semi-annual estimated tax bills, as recommended by the Department of Revenue.

Selectboard member Christine Heard asked town coordinator Nancy Aldrich to invite the assessors to a selectboard meeting and discuss the chronically late tax bills. Chair Ted Lewis said there is no reason for the bills to be going out late, as the assessors have everything they need in their office.

On another point, selectboard member Dan Keller said the highway department's salt and sand budget is gone, but the general highway budget still has some operating money left.

Hands Across North Quabbin

Mark Shoul and David Ames of Athol met with the selectboard to discuss Hands Across North Quabbin, and encourage the town to send a representative to a May 3rd forum to select one important issue facing the nine North Quabbin towns, and develop strategies to address that issue using grassroots, bottom up democratic processes and

cooperative work. They mentioned a steady stream of problems facing the region, including lack of jobs, affordable housing and transportation, schools, crime and land use, and they said the focus of the forum is to foster people's involvement, to give them a sense of their own power to build trust among groups with different agendas and ideas, as well as to address and solve the chosen issue on a regional basis.

Shoul said the root problem in civic culture is the vicious cycle of disillusionment and withdrawal by citizens, which leaves a vacuum that gets filled by the most extreme and loudest voices. He said that only 33% to 45% of Americans think most Americans are trustworthy, and too many people believe that politics will not solve public problems; politicians have become more skilled at political conflict than at addressing issues and solving problems.

He cited fifteen years of dispute within the Athol Royalston School District, that was addressed by a forum and follow up similar to the forum scheduled for May 3rd. Shoul claimed the process led to the reaccreditation of Athol Regional High School. He complimented Wendell for maintaining a strong tradition of people working together to solve problems. Heard accepted the compliment, saying the new library and office building would not have been completed but for the effort of a broad range of citizens. Shoul said

regional problems will start to change exponentially, as the grassroots process of mutual aid gets established.

Keller said Hands Across North Quabbin seemed like a good project, and he would be happy to support it. He suggested the organizers utilize the email forum maintained by Jonathan von Ranson (commonfarm@crocker.com) as a way to reach at least some Wendell residents, and to recruit participants for the May 3rd forum.

Waiting for Spring

Aldrich said she had a letter from woman in town who has a body awaiting spring burial in the new cemetery, but she had been unable to make arrangements.

Aldrich read from a letter sent by the New Salem selectboard supporting the alternative method of assessing towns for the Swift River School budget (in accordance with the original district contract). She said that would probably work at Swift River School, but if the Mahar district used alternative assessment, it would save Wendell \$100,000, but cost Orange \$300,000.

Aldrich said the town is still paying \$35 a month for a telephone line at the town hall. Since the conservation commission has moved from town hall to the new office building, she wondered if that line was still useful. Heard said there is one person who attends town meetings by speakerphone,

and Good Neighbors also might need a telephone. She suggested switching to a telephone line that prohibits outgoing long distance calls.

Building Update

Keller gave a building update following the walk-through of February 21st. The office building computer control for the heating system still has problems, and Johnson Controls has not yet solved them, or communicated with the town about when they plan to fix them. Lack of hot water in the front bathroom turned out to be a closed valve, easily fixed. The concrete dam around the boiler was poured late and failed to adhere to the concrete floor, so the dam leaks. Clerk of the works John Flemming caulked the seam, but Keller called that "a Mickey Mouse fix."


Royal Steam Heat fixed two leaks in the heating system; their workers had to get through a twelve-inch square access panel to get at one of the leaks. The engineer said the glycol mix in the heating system does not take away as much efficiency as Keller had thought, but Flemming said the glycol requires more maintenance than plain water. The building committee will discuss replacing the glycol with water at its next meeting, along with any issues regarding the library.

Lewis said plumbers prefer plain water in a heating system, and the police have five or six generators, one of which could power the furnace if electric power is interrupted for a long time, to protect the system from freezing.

Aldrich read from the traffic counts taken by FRCOG

through the summer. In one week, nine vehicles were measured traveling over 75 m.p.h. on Locke Hill Road a half mile north of Old Stage Road, and 40% of vehicles were traveling over the speed limit. On Mormon Hollow Road from August 22nd to 25th, two cars were traveling over 75 m.p.h. and 209 were traveling over 50 m.p.h.


Ed Hines is making a monthly list of town committee meetings to post around town.



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Urban Wins Coca-Cola Scholarship

BY DAVID DETMOLD

TURNERS FALLS - Turners Falls High School senior Ali Urban is on her way to Atlanta, at the end of April vacation, courtesy of the Coca-Cola Company, which has already agreed to give her a \$10,000 scholarship towards her college education. Urban, whose popular High School Highlights column has been a regular feature in the Montague Reporter for the last two years, was among 80,000 high school seniors who applied to this year's Coke college scholarship contest, and among 250 finalists nationwide who are guaranteed at least \$10,000 to help pay for the college of their choice. On the weekend of April 24th - 27th, Urban will fly to Atlanta with the other finalists for in person interviews to see which of finalists will be among the 50 who receive \$20,000 scholarships. Urban said she's just happy to have received the recognition she has already won.

"I'm very excited about going. It's a huge honor to have gotten this far." She is looking forward to touring the sights of Atlanta, including the aquarium and other local landmarks, including, of course, the World of Coca-Cola. The weekend will culminate with a banquet at the Georgia World Conference Center.

Among the attractions Urban will visit during her all expenses stay in Atlanta is the Martin Luther King Jr. Center, which is fitting, because she was herself the recipient of the local Bright Lights Living the Dream Award at Greenfield Community College's annual MLK ceremony in 2006, given in recognition of young people who espouse the ideals of peace and justice in their lives. At 16, Urban had already been a regular volunteer at the community meals program, taught swim classes at the Y and at summer Bible camp, and assisted in fundraising activities for the Gill Montague Education Fund, an academic, arts and athletics enrichment program for the



Ali Urban

Gill-Montague district schools.

It was in her capacity as a board member of the GMEF that Urban stood before the school committee on March 11th, promoting the upcoming gala - featuring Don Campbell and his band with 'the Essence of Country' - on April 26th at 7:30 p.m. at the TFHS auditorium, and encouraging people to underwrite the cost of that program with tier giving subscriptions and advertising. (to find out more go to www.thegmef.org) so that all proceeds can go to student enrichment activities. As she finished her speech, school committee member Joyce Phillips took the opportunity to praise Urban for her success in the Coca-Cola scholarship contest, saying how much pride the whole school community takes in her success.

Urban said, "I'm really looking forward to going to college." Her top picks are Middlebury and Williams. "I'm interested in international politics," she said, adding, "I'd like to go into a career in diplomacy." What a breath of fresh air she would be at the State Department or the United Nations. We look forward to the day. Congratulations, Ali.

SCHOOL from pg 1

school open at the same time? "We haven't struggled with that question yet," said Rocke.

The first proposal presented on Tuesday came from the husband and wife team of David and Sheri Leh, Montague Center School parents. Sheri Leh, who works as a paraprofessional at the school, gave the pitch, and she and her husband fielded questions afterward.

The gist of their proposal is that Montague Center School should remain an elementary school within the Gill-Montague Regional School District (GMRSD), governed by the school committee and superintendent, as it is now. Furthermore, the Lehs' group proposes that the school should expand over the next two years to become a K-5 elementary school, and that the town of Montague should pay for capital improvement costs associated with making the school wheelchair accessible.

The Lehs contend that doing so would be a cost-effective alternative for the GMRSD for two reasons. One, they say it would be cheaper (between \$114,000 and \$194,000, depending on whether an exterior or interior elevator would be required at the old side of Sheffield) to bring Montague Center School up to ADA requirements than it would be to bring Sheffield up to ADA requirements. If Montague Center is closed next year, and all Montague elementary students are moved to Sheffield by 2009, as the GMRSD vote of December 12th, 2007 intends, the Lehs say there will not be room to house them all in Sheffield without ADA renovations to the old side of Sheffield, and four new bathrooms. The cost of

renovating bathrooms for younger students, along with costs for asbestos removal, an ADA ramp, and electrical upgrades, are not included in the Lehs' cost comparison between renovations needed for the two school, and would make keeping Montague Center as a K-5 district school an even more cost effective option for the town.

Secondly, the Lehs maintain, a commitment to keeping Montague Center open as a K-5 district school would reverse the exodus of school choice students in the younger grades, and retain more students of this age range currently in district schools. The Lehs' estimate that retaining or recovering just 13 district elementary students from grades K-9 would bring in \$650,000 in state aid to the district over ten years, and thereby recover the \$623,971 cost of renovating Montague Center School.

After the meeting, Rocke said the committee had not as yet acted on the section of the December 12th motion that states, "the school committee will immediately appoint a building planning committee to assess the cost for necessary renovations to Sheffield," to allow for the transition of all Montague elementary students to that school. He said he would reserve comment on the accuracy of the Lehs' comparison figures, for now.

The Lehs' group is undertaking an informal survey of Montague parents of school age students who are presently choiced out of the district, or parents of children younger than school age, to see whether they would commit to keeping their students in district schools if Montague Center remains open as a K-5 school. They say they have interviewed three such families so far, with six children among them, four

of whom are likely to return to district schools if that option is available.

At Tuesday's meeting, Rocke affirmed that 167 students are presently choiced out of GMRSD schools, at an average cost in lost state aid of \$5000 per student per year, or roughly \$835,000 in lost state aid for the district each year.

The Lehs said although Montague Center is not the smallest school in the district, "It has the lowest per square foot cost for heating and electricity," of the district elementary schools. They described a plan for creating 30 new parking spaces along the town park on Station Road, bus turnaround and handicapped parking spaces near the school, and a limited use lift to meet ADA requirements in an area near the principal's office, that would not cut into the eight available classroom spaces.

Since the motion to reconfigure Montague Elementary Schools as passed in December contains the preamble, "in order to increase the equitable distribution of resources across the district, promoting equal access to services and programs for all students," the Lehs' responded to a question about how their plan would provide for equal access for children of poverty or with special needs, by saying Montague Center would follow the district's education plan, provide SPED services, and be open to kids from all parts of town. "There are kids in poverty from Millers Falls, Lake Pleasant and Montague Center attending Montague Center School now," David Leh said.

The second proposal for keeping Montague Center School open was presented by Sue Dresser of Montague

see SCHOOL pg 9

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SCHOOL from pg 8

Center and Deb Foucault, of Lake Pleasant. In essence, it called for the creation of a Horace Mann Charter School (a mission-based elementary school that remains within the district) centered on the theme of environmental education, and taking advantage of the natural resources surrounding the school, including the Sawmill River watershed. Montague Center is already one of four Environment as Integrating Context schools in the Commonwealth, with a grant-funded program incorporating environmental learning into all aspects of the curriculum.

The Lehs' proposal also emphasized the continuation of environmental education at Montague Center.

Horace Mann Schools are chartered by the state Department of Education through a lengthy and rigorous application process, which Dresser and Foucault say should bring added confidence to the committee in considering the alternative model. A Horace Mann school, for which there are just 47 charters available statewide, would require the founding group to establish a board of trustees to govern the school and administer funds, which are provided by the state DOE on an equal per student

cost to other district schools. Dresser said a memorandum of understanding between the Horace Mann trustees and the local district schools would spell out in advance the terms of the relationship between the two, including the role of the superintendent of schools in relation to the Horace Mann school.

A state charter for a Horace Mann school needs to be renewed every five years, Dresser said. One of the first steps, should the committee approve the proposal, would be for the founders group to secure an agreement from the GMRSD teachers association to work with the Horace Mann model. But she said the mission based approach to education at Montague Center is already rooted in the culture of the school.

She also said the founding group would consider applying for a school building assistance loan, and that some aspects of renovating the school would be borne by the town and school district. If the founders group borrowed \$150,000 for renovation costs, and relied on the town and the GMRSD for \$200,000 (assuming some renovations could be put off for later years), once established the Horace Mann School would endeavor through grants and private fundraising to pay back the loan at \$40,000 a year for five years. She said local fundraising had already netted about \$7,000 in cash and pledges for the Montague Center School renovation fund.

Dresser said a Horace Mann School would also act as a magnet to bring students to the district, and halt the exodus of



Turners Falls High School physical education teacher Deborah Loomer stresses the importance of fitness in her classes, which garnered her a spot on the front cover of Massachusetts Teachers Association's *MTA Today*, February/March 2008 issue.

district students to school choice, thereby saving the town money. She said the environmental charter school would be available to all district students in Gill and Montague, and she said the environmental curriculum could be spread to the other district elementary schools as well.

After the meeting, committee member Ted Castro-Santos said he thought there was nothing in the December 12th motion that precluded the committee from allowing both groups to advance their proposals, to the next stage, simultaneously. Although the Leh's proposal did not propose an alternative method of governing the Montague Center School, opting to retain the current governance structure, it provided clear alternative costs and comparisons between

renovating Sheffield and Montague Center, which Castro-Santos said would be of value to the committee and the community at large as the school's fate was decided.

"We encouraged a diversity of approach. I think the complete silence from the Hillcrest community was a bit of a surprise after what we heard last year. With that said, (how we handle two proposals for the same school) is something we'll have to hash out on Thursday. Allowing both to go forward on a completely even footing, in my opinion, might not be of benefit to either group. My thinking is to suggest a prioritization scheme. Let's try the Horace Mann. There's a lot there that could benefit the district. If that fails, then," the committee could revisit the Leh's plan, Castro-Santos said.

Dresser, in the hallway after the meeting, said both community groups had been collaborating and supporting each other in their plans to save the Montague Center School.

The meeting room was filled with teachers and parents from both Hillcrest and Montague Center schools. Acrimonious outbursts, which had characterized past school meetings on the subject of school closing were absent Tuesday night: no questions or comments came from the floor.

In other school committee news, Rocke said in light of a recent bomb scare at the high school, new security measures had been put in place, including a receptionist to open the doors, after school and evenings. Negotiations are continuing with Rocke to extend the term of his contract with the GMRSD. The school committee voted to approve school choice for students to choose into the district next year. Sixty seven students availed themselves of that option this year, mostly in the upper grades.

Erving school committee representative Sandy Miner said she attended the TFHS open house on March 5th, and found the turnout of parents "very disappointing. There were more teachers than parents or students. If you want to know where your tax dollars are going, come to an open house and find out." She described teachers waiting with presentations, and she being the only one present in a classroom to hear them. "It was very sad."

MCAS Meeting Held



Nina Gaeta of the Massachusetts Parent Information and Resource Center conducted an MCAS testing workshop last Thursday at the Sheffield Elementary School. Ten parents attended, representing 14 out of the 150 Sheffield students.



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AIRPORT from pg 1

committee and the airport commissioners over rising lease fees and changes in policy and procedures implemented by airport manager Michael Sweeney, explained his thinking in expanding the size of the commission. "I think there has been sort of a pattern of current airport commissioners not letting new people have an equal say at the table. Adding new members is part of our responsibility to get it to be a better functioning board."

Board chair Pat Allen wanted clear policy guidelines in place before new members were appointed, and the board carefully worked their way through criteria they intended to apply. For starters, the board affirmed the practice of establishing a quorum at all town boards and committees, in conformance with advice of counsel, as a majority of currently serving members, rather than a majority of the total seats available. Secondly, the board affirmed its discretionary right to sit in on interviews with prospective new commission members, though recognizing that in most cases, appointments are made after an initial letter of inquiry is followed up by a prospective member's conversation with the commission's chair, or attendance at a trial meeting. The board said it would be inclined to give weight to the recommendation of the commission's chair on the matter of new appointments, but also made it clear that it viewed the airport commission as a unique case, given present controversy.

Ross said, "In this search process... we should involve the airport commission in recruiting members, to add some talent and decrease tension." He said in addition to conducting joint interviews, the board should seek more than just a letter of interest from prospective members. He mentioned the need for *curricula vitae* outlining applicants' backgrounds and skills, "and then how they would address some of the issues the airport commission has been struggling with, *i.e.* how to make the airport more profitable, and improve safety."

Board member Patricia Pruitt

cautioned against making the process too cumbersome. "Nobody wants to attend an inquisition to be appointed to the airport commission." She also cautioned against "diluting our appointing authority" by relying too heavily on the commission's recommendations for new members. "What if the airport commission is strong on a particular person, and we are not?"

On the subject of whether or not to appoint non-residents to the airport commission, or to any town board or commission, the selectboard divided, with Allen favoring appointing non-residents as non-voting consultants or resource people, and Ross and Pruitt favoring allowing non-residents to be appointed as voting members to the airport commission, as a special case.

Ross said, "I feel the airport serves a regional area. It has technical features, marketing features. But there's a limited talent pool in Montague. We are selling ourselves short," to limit the commission to only town residents. He pointed out that the former airport chair, Brian Carroll, is moving to Greenfield and his experience and status as a non-hangar owner (who does not have the conflict of interest hangar owners do on certain fiscal questions that come before the commission) would be lost to the commission if non-residents were excluded.

"If we develop a board to see the airport as a regional asset it will help this town," he added.

Pruitt said, "So many folks at the airport are from out of town, contributing to it, skilled as pilots or at running an airport. Why should we cut ourselves off from people who have that much to contribute?" She continued, "The climate at the airport has been characterized by distrust between people on the commission and people using the airport. That's a key thing that has to change. It's a town airport; it's not a regional airport. We have a modest goal for it to break even every year, which it isn't doing yet."

Pruitt joined Ross in outvoting Allen to allow non-residents to be appointed as voting members of the airport commission, and



DETMOLD PHOTO

Boardwalk from 7th Street to High Street

later joined Allen in outvoting Ross to limit the number of non-residents serving on the commission to no more than two. The selectboard will consult with the airport commission and review applicants' letters of interest (new letters are welcome until this Friday, March 14th) before making new appointments.

MCTV Praised

Speaking for the cable advisory committee, (CAC) John Reynolds had words of praise for MCTV's progress over the last year. "I'd like to acknowledge the beautiful job MCTV has done, and the way they have straightened out a number of financial issues that used to plague us. We actually came out ahead of our projected budget." Delivering the annual report on the local cable access provider, Reynolds spoke favorably of the number of shows they have taped, and their coverage of "all the activity in town." Goals for the coming year include adding a live drop at Peskeomskut Park's new bandshell, and perhaps at other locations, working with ComCast to improve sound quality in some parts of town (which the CAC is holding ComCast responsible for), and according to Montague Community Cable Incorporated board president Michael Muller, "focusing on getting more producers, and training more of a diversity of people." Among the groups MCTV is working with to produce shows about their activities are the Friends of the Great Falls

Discovery Center, the Sheffield PTO, the senior center and the Carnegie Library. Continued coverage of concerts in Gill, and the possibility of sharing production facilities with Erving residents are anticipated. Currently, MCTV is particularly looking for people who would be willing to learn digital editing skills; call 863-9200 if interested.

Art Pathways

RiverCulture coordinator Lisa Davol and Precinct 4 resident Diane Ellis addressed the board about the potential to develop two town-owned walkways from 7th Street and L Street up to High Street as 'Art Pathways,' with help from a number of collaborating agencies, including the Brick House, the Franklin-Hampshire Regional Employment Board, and school groups. Ellis said, "The goal is to create artistic walkways on the boardwalks," with an initial focus on the two concrete sidewalks the town maintains through the woods between downtown and the Hill. There are five more walkways in this area that are privately owned.

Ellis said the groups involved envision "restoring and recreating the space" around these boardwalks, which feature concrete pillars and guywire banisters, "cleaning up the wooded areas, removing trash, and working with high school youth groups and kids involved in after school sports to come up with a vision for artistic representation for youth." She said the theme would be left up to the young people who would guide the project, but might involve turning the concrete pillars into some form of art representing "pillars of the community." Also, the organizers would like to install recycling containers and trash receptacles, and incorporate some wheelchair accessible features and sightlines at points at either end of the steeply inclined paths.

Davol said RiverCulture would hold a brainstorming session to gather people's ideas

about the boardwalks, their past history and how they could be improved, before commissioning an artist to work with local youth to make the vision come to life. She said the end result would "encourage people to come downtown, utilizing a more pleasant space."

Ellis called the boardwalks, "an incredibly unique feature to our community, now underutilized and in disrepair. This project is inspiring and exciting to me."

Allen compared the potential for the art walkways for Turners Falls to the Bridge of Names for Lake Pleasant. Pruitt thanked Ellis for coming up with "a wonderful idea."

The board also gave approval for RiverCulture's second annual block party, to take place on August 9th, with an initial organizing meeting for volunteers to take place at town hall on March 27th at 6 p.m. The block party, which will feature a parade, children's activities, art, food, and music, will take place on Avenue A between 3rd and 5th Street, the same as last year.

New Sidewalks

Town administrator Frank Abbondanzio said work would progress this summer on repairing a number of town sidewalks that are in very poor condition. More than half a million dollars will be spent, about half from funds allocated by town meeting for sidewalk repair, and half from 2007 Community Development Block Grant funds. Sidewalks to be reconstructed include sections of Center Street and Union Street in Montague Center, Grand Avenue in Millers Falls, 2nd Street, Stevens Street, Unity Street and 7th Street in Turners Falls. Work should be completed within 90 days of bids going out in July, Abbondanzio said.

The board gave permission for the DPW to expend up to \$20,000 extra on snow and ice removal this year, should it be necessary to deal with any more winter storms. The department has already run through their entire snow and ice budget for '08.



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LAST IN TRANSLATION

BY BUDDY RUBBISH

TURNERS FALLS - It was two weeks ago, the burning helplessness less severe now.

In retrospect, it was not really a Super Bowl at all, and as far from a Super Sunday as you can get

I was returning home from Equi's Candy Store, with some of their dark almond bark in a brown bag:

More beige than brown, folded at the top.

The sun was fighting its way through a big, gray cloud, pounding, pounding.

On 2nd Street, I ran into a friend we'll call Rick, who speaks Spanish like a local, but very little English.

Unfortunately for him, I had decided to enlighten him about Equi's Store, our little local jewel, right on Avenue A, a family making their own fresh dark, milk, and truffle chocolate for generations, except in the hot summer months.

I was very confident in my ability to turn three years of high school Spanish into a cohesive enough bag of nouns to get my message

across.

It was not until yesterday, when I began looking up some words online, that I realized my message might have been a bit 'off point'.

This is a loose translation of what Rick heard

from his crazy American friend, as he was being handed a chunk of nut bark:

"On our town's Main Street stands a horse, made entirely of chocolate.

Every day the horse immerses himself in chocolate, just as his ancestors did a hundred years ago, side-stepping it only on their porches, where it can be very hot and unfulfilling, like chopping confetti with an axe. In the unrelenting heat of the porch, chocolate can form coalitions, sometimes sincere, but often gloomy, though no one will acknowledge this.

As this will soon become



Buddy works on his lawn.

a secret, tell your friends, and everyone you meet about this horse, our happy chocolate horse."

As this translation has come to my attention, Rick's reaction at the time makes more sense, the pinned eyes, the tight smile and quick head nodding that silently whispers, "It's alright, you poor old bat, no reason to get too excited," while slowly backing away.

I saw him later that week, and asked him if he had been to see the big chocolate horse.

He yelled across the street that he had been either very busy or was hiding.

I'm betting he never goes to see this horse of chocolate, and I really can't blame him.

Damn Pats.

Buddy writes sporadically from downtown Great Falls, declining to live anywhere named after a war criminal.

USHER from pg 1

clean them up and ship them to South Carolina where a company saws them into flooring. The Southbridge company will chip the waste wood trimmings and ship the chips to a bio-fuel electricity generating plant in New Hampshire."

Patriots Environmental Corporation's workers are salvaging whole bricks. The firm owners plan to crush broken brick and concrete rubble to make 'hardpack,' a crushed gravel substitute that compacts well.

Bussiere plans to move Patriots Environmental's portable stone crusher to the Usher Mill to crush approximately 5,000 cubic yards of concrete and brick rubble on site. The firm plans to salvage scrap metal and truck it to local scrap yards.

It may have been greed for scrap metal that allegedly lured two suspected arsonists to strip copper wiring from the Usher Mill to sell at current high prices. The arsonists are believed to have set the July 30th, 2007 fire to cover their tracks, or to create a cheerful bonfire.

Suspected arsonists John Rousseau and Michael Dreslinksi, both 28, residents of Clinton, began building their long rap sheets for various crimes at age 17. A partial list of their crimes includes vandalism, burglary, breaking and entering, arson, larceny and animal cruelty. In Stirling, they are alleged to have set fire to the historic home of Mary Elizabeth Sawyer, author of the fabled nursery rhyme "Mary Had a Little Lamb," a few weeks after setting the Usher Mill ablaze. Police caught the two suspects by the use of a Global Positioning System device planted on their vehicle, recording their every move. When the suspects returned to view the fire at the Usher Mill, they were greeted by arresting officers.

"The guys that set the fire cost us a lot of money," Bussiere said. "We had a party interested in leasing the building before the fire. We'll save the buildings in back, but one of the build-

ings has asbestos we'll have to remove."

Since the company is in the business of demolition and environmental remediation, removing hazardous material is right up their alley. Patriot Environmental employee, Juan Perez, proudly showed his asbestos removal license. Perez said he is legal and licensed.

"We plan to make everything safe," Bussiere said.

Situated by the Millers River, the Usher Mill is rich in history. The 5.76 acre parcel has been the site for various operations, starting out as a grist mill in 1827. In 1918, the Heywood Wakefield Furniture Builders constructed their plant there. In 1930, the Fred W. Mears Heel Company manufactured heels for women's shoes on the site until 1964. Mears held many patents, most notably one for a machine to trim wood heel blanks, and a machine for tunneling wedge heel blocks. In 1964, Harry Usher Housen bought the plant and began making paper and warehousing product at the site as the Usher Division of the Erving Paper Company, until approximately 1990. The mill remained vacant after that.

The Usher Mill buildings connect to a 35,000 gallon water tower and a 100,000 gallon reservoir. The plant also has domestic water and sewer connections, as well as a discontinued railroad spur that could be put back into service. Road access to the plant is via a low railroad overpass on Arch Street. The Bussieres did not say who the prospective tenants for the remaining buildings would be, nor what the tenants would engage in at the site.

When the Bussieres founded their company, they were casting about for a name for their new company, while watching a winning Patriots football game. Inspired by the Patriots success, they named their company Patriots Environmental Corporation. They have enjoyed success, but in demolishing buildings rather than demolishing opposing teams.



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 74 PROSPECT ST. TURNERS FALLS

Celtic Heels at the Shea

BY ANNE HARDING

TURNERS FALLS - In advance of St. Patrick's Day, the evening of March 1st was a whirlwind of activity as the Irish Dancers of Celtic Heels trod the floorboards of the Shea Theater. Invited to attend by a young friend, May Grzybowski, a fifth grader at Erving Elementary School who has taken Irish dance classes for less than two years, I was anticipating a typical dance school recital. Her enthusiasm for the pending show was infectious, so I asked her what was so great about 'Irish Dancing.' I got a brief lesson about traditional dances, intricate steps, the very cool soft ghillie shoes, and Ceili dances. Most importantly, May stressed how much fun she has in the classes. It was clear from the show that the performers had as much fun as the folks in the audience did.

The music was a unique and rousing blend of contemporary Irish rock from the personal collection of instructor Cara Cafasso, who confessed one drawback to her choosing a new song is the often sleepless night she'll spend mentally putting

steps to the music. Her passion for both the dance and the music was obvious throughout the night.

While Cafasso's Celtic Heels dance school may be less than two years old, she is no stranger to dancing. Under their mother's tutelage, Cara and her sister Kay began dancing at a young age, beginning with traditional tap, jazz and lyrical modes. But when they started delving into the traditional Irish dance they were hooked. As many of their aunts, uncles and cousins still live in Ireland, the family periodically traveled overseas, and each time found new opportunities to dance and learn.

The March 1st performance featured more than forty dancers ranging in age from under five to over fifty, with Irish dance experience ranging from three months to several decades. Some of the dancers had never been on stage before. It was a grand mix of traditional and modern dance, beautifully choreographed to incorporate the many levels of dancers. It was a rare treat to see the Cafasso sisters performing with their mother Joan McGrenaghan

Bo on some of the numbers.

The traditional Ceili dances were evident in the Bonfire Dance and Fairy Reel. Also known as figure dances, they require only a few basic steps and are perfect for group dancing at social events. To me they appeared complex, but Cara and May both assured me they weren't too difficult to master. Danced in lines, circles or squares, this type of group dance has been passed down from generation to generation, with Cafasso's own choreography adding an original flair. The ghillie or soft shoe dances also lend themselves more to leaps and jumps.

There was of course an abundance of jigs, hornpipes and reels, with rarely a misstep, in spite of the upbeat tempo and fast-paced syncopated rhythms: incredibly fancy toe and heel work in the distinctive hard shoes, in perfect beat to the music. In addition, there were several numbers choreographed by Cafasso exhibiting original footwork, complex patterns and expressive movement.

Throughout the evening as dancers changed costumes and



Members of the Irish Dancers of Celtic Heels rehearse.

caught their breath, the audience was treated to musical interludes alternating between fiddler David Cafasso with guitarist Lila Feingold, and bagpiper Jonathan Hohl Kennedy with fiddler Amanda Bernhard. I confess I was so intrigued by Kennedy's Uilleann pipes that I paid less attention to the other musicians than I should have.

Also known as the elbow pipes, Kennedy joked they were designed to allow smoking and drinking while playing the instrument. A bellows strapped to the right arm is controlled by raising and lowering the elbow, sending air to the bag held under the left arm. Pressure on the bag forces air through a reeded melody chanter and a number of drone pipes and regulator stocks - all of which have keys to play - some by the right hand and

some by the left. Holding a pint or a smoke would require more hands than the average Irishman comes equipped with.

The final numbers of the evening brought all the dancers on the stage together. Amazingly enough there were no collisions in spite of the weaving in and out of complex patterns.

Celtic Heels tends to run through the school year, and offers classes for people of varying ages and experience. Classes take place at Karen's Dance Studio in Greenfield. A beginner class will be offered in March, and there will likely be summer workshops to follow. For more information, call Cafasso at (413) 475-3353 or contact: celticheels@gmail.com

ECO from pg 1

acreage is subtracted from the total lot size in determining the 65% - 35% split. But not more than 40% of the preserved open space can be areas under those building constraints. Credit can be given for affordable housing as defined by MGL chapter 40B, for green buildings, as defined by the Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED), or LEED Neighborhood Design (ND) certification, or for work the developer does to enhance public access to the protected land. Bonus density is allowed in the developed area if 85% of the original parcel is preserved.

Cabral said in Wendell, histor-

ically, lots have often been carved out of an existing parcel and sold to a relative or a friend for a building lot. If that lot conforms to zoning bylaws (three acres and 200 feet of road frontage) the owner may build with no approval required by the planning board. Under the proposed bylaw change, a building lot may be taken off a larger parcel in this manner and developed with no approval required only once every ten years. The idea is to slow 'cookie cutter suburban sprawl.'

Board member Heather Reed asked what would happen, under the new bylaw, if the planning board voted not to accept a developer's ecological assessment of land under consideration

for development. Feiden answered that the burden of providing and paying for an acceptable ecological assessment would belong to the developer.

Michael Idoine asked about the possibility of a retreat cabin on the restricted land, and Cabral's first thought was that one would not be allowed. But Feiden said the conservation restriction could allow one, if the cabin did not interfere with the primary goals of the restriction. If necessary, the conservation land could contain a septic system or play area, subject to planning board approval, he added.

Idoine wondered whether agricultural activities not mentioned in the conservation restriction could take place in the

restricted areas. Feiden answered that unless the restriction prohibited them, they could be allowed.

In response to board member Jenny Gross's question about shared driveways, Feiden said the bylaw would allow a developer to reach more houses than are currently allowed with a single shared driveway, without creating the liability and impact of a development road.

Gross predicted people will come to the town meeting and want to make changes to the proposed bylaw there, but she said the proper place to make such changes would be in the planning board sessions that will prepare the bylaw for town meeting.

Idoine said he liked the general outline of the proposal very

much, but said he would like to get it to town meeting with a little more clarity. He thought people might think it was too complex, and not to want to be told what to do with their property, or to be limited on the return on their land.

Cabral said she was not sure the planning board could have the bylaw complete in time for the annual town meeting, on June 3rd, suggesting that it might find a place on the warrant of a future special town meeting.

Work on the bylaw was paid for in part by a Massachusetts Smart Growth assistance grant, and in part by \$2500 in matching funds approved by Wendell town meeting in June of 2007.



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JESSICA HARMON ILLUSTRATION

THE HEALTHY GEEZER

What's Causing My Upset Stomach?

BY FRED CICETTI
LEONIA, NJ -Q. *My grandson asked me to participate in a family tree about our medical conditions. He wants to ask me questions about my health, but I'm a pretty private person. I don't know about this. What do you think?*

I respect your reluctance to discuss personal matters with your grandson. However, the information you have to share with him would benefit your entire family and future generations. Perhaps your grandson could submit questions in writing and you could answer them in the same way. That might help avoid uncomfortable moments.

A medical family tree or family health history (also

known as a medical genealogy) is like the ones genealogists prepare, but it also includes all the maladies suffered by members of the family. A medical tree can reveal patterns and help everyone in a family choose medical tests, diagnose diseases, prevent medical problems, and assess health risks.

Many of the causes of our illnesses are inherited from our ancestors. Almost a third of known diseases have genetic links. These include colon cancer, heart disease, alcoholism and high blood pressure.

Family gatherings are an opportunity to get started on a medical genealogy. If you want to prepare one, you should write down your questions in advance. You should ask enough questions and the right questions to make a medical genealogy useful to members of the families and their doctors.

The following is important information about each family member—living and dead—

that should be included in a health history. Frame your questions to elicit this data.

1. Birth and death dates.
2. Cause of death.
3. All medical conditions with dates and outcomes. Include anything outside the norm, not just serious diseases. Don't forget problems such as allergies, vision and hearing difficulties.
4. Birth defects.
5. Mental health problems.
6. Lifestyle description. This would include information about smoking, drinking, diet, obesity and exercise.
7. Racial and ethnic background. Some medical conditions are more common in certain groups of people.

If you want to prepare a medical genealogy, an extremely helpful resource is "My Family Health Portrait," an online tool provided by the U.S. Surgeon General. You can use it at: <http://familyhistory.hhs.gov/>

The tool guides you through a series of screens that helps you compile information for each of your family members. Then you get a graphic printout with the information organized in a diagram or a chart. The tool allows users to return and update information.

My Family Health Portrait requires only a computer with a web browser. The health information you provide is stored only on your computer and not on a U.S. government server. You own the information file and can choose what to do with it at any time. It is easy to email the file around to all family members.

Users also have the option to download the original My Family Health Portrait software and install it on their computers if they have the Windows operating system.

I used the online tool to do my own family tree. It was a simple process that produced a valuable report. I also tried the downloadable software. I rec-

ommend avoiding this program; it had many flaws and was worthless.

If you want something more basic, you can get a free five-generation ancestor chart at:

<http://www.familytreemagazine.com/forms/download.html#>

This chart is designed for a standard genealogy, but it's a good basic document to create your own medical family tree.

The information in a medical tree provides indications, not guarantees that family members will inherit problems from their ancestors. How you take care of yourself is a major influence on your health.

(My next column will be about genetic testing.)

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

OFF THE RAILROAD TRACK

Brattleboro Museum and Art Center: Networks and Intersections

BY FLORE - If you are lucky enough, while visiting the exhibits, try to arrive in the afternoon, at this outstanding museum, housed in the former Brattleboro train station. You will actually hear the whistle blow, closer than a thousand miles!

For freight trains still travel past the former Union Station that became the Brattleboro Museum and Art Center. It still possesses the same vibrations of the olden days, when squeaky wagons would pull up there to pick up passengers.

In each room, visitors marvel at the way the light works so well with the art on display. Each exhibiting space has been given full attention to enhance the creation of each artist. Take the main room, the former lobby. It is shared currently by four artists under the theme: "Networks and Intersections."

Elizabeth Duffy has an incredible way of extending the

life of the simple, everyday materials she touches. All discarded objects, according to Duffy, make a statement. In the re-making of objects, she "seeks to evoke wonder and a sense of the unexpected, through the process of transformation."

On the other hand, Esme Thompson searches for parallels in her acrylic pieces integrating the human creation and the one found object in nature. As she puts it, "The painting is a journey that continues to unfold, reminiscent of the ongoing pattern of organic growth."

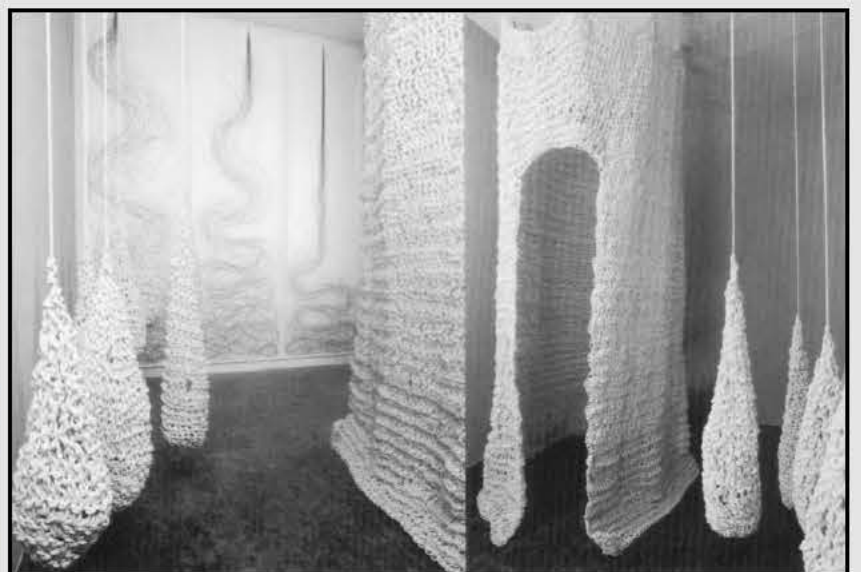
Louise Hamlin envelops her painted world with plastic netting. She keeps the confrontation tight, between the solidity of appearance and light affecting the real color of known objects. "Shadows can transform air into solidity and density into weightlessness..."

Duncan Johnson's intricate sculptured forms, for their part, are expressed through the magic

of the material he prefers to use: wood. His linear patterns are created by embedding nails of all sizes in the wood's surfaces. The wood is presented as is, sometimes in the raw, either naturally untreated or stained in soft earthy tones.

Next, let's step inside a tiny room, where you will be face to face with the intricate beehive-colored installation made of knitted heavy ropes. Alisa Dworsky called it: "In Tension." I felt as if some Vikings would come out of it at any time. Breathtaking pieces, especially as you walk right in the heart of the installation!

Next is the artist Peter Sis. He tells, with the images' forceful voices, from son to father and father to son, a beautiful true story, "Tibet through the Magic Red Box," how he discovered his father Vladimir's hidden



Alisa Dworsky's "In Tension" - a bright yellow crocheted installation at the Brattleboro Museum of Art, is worth a visit.

journal, while the latter worked in Asia. It was kept and locked in a red box, on the desk of his father's study in Prague. It became, for Peter Sis, the initiation of a journey...

If this was not enough of a feast for the eyes, walk further down a corridor to smell "Urban Blooms". Meet the haunting ceramic sculptures of Linda Hey.

Our culture's ambivalence plays the lead role in the conception of her pieces.

She ponders, "the question of what our society values, and

how fragile or strong nature will have to be, to handle it."

These unusual exhibits will be on display until March 22nd.

Take advantage of the hint of spring in the air to drive up north.

Located at 10 Vernon Street, Brattleboro, the museum is open daily, from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., closed Tuesday. More info at: www.brattleboromuseum.org or by calling: 802-257-0124.

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JEP'S PLACE Part LXX

CIRCUS PIGS

BY JOSEPH A. PARZYCH GILL - Pa did not stop in the yard when he came home one day. He drove the tan Essex out past the barn by the old green car. We ran out to see what was going on. Pa had two pigs in a burlap bag in the back seat. He hauled them out and dumped them into the pigpen. They seemed ordinary enough. "Go get them something to eat," my father said, his eyes twinkling.

We got some garbage and milk from Ma. He poured the slop into the pig's trough and commanded, "Pray."

The pigs put their front hooves together as if in prayer. The pigs could understand our language, but we couldn't understand theirs. Maybe pigs are smarter than we are, I thought.

"O.K., eat."

The pigs began to eat.

The pigs were Hans and Fritz. I figured their previous owner Fred Kerslake had named them after a couple of mischievous comic strip characters who were always getting into trouble.

The pigs were well named. Since they were trained to climb a ladder, climbing the side of the pen was no problem, and they were soon getting out of the pen. In their circus act, the pigs pulled their owner on a cart, walked a narrow board to simulate a tight rope act, climbed a ladder and slid down a slide, worked a teeter-totter and performed other tricks. Catching them at our farm when they got out of the pen was easy. They came when called by name and went back into the pen when commanded, especially when tempted with food.

- Continued Next Week

Red-Winged Blackbirds Give the Word: Spring is in the Air

THE GARDENER'S COMPANION

BY LESLIE BROWN

MONTAGUE CITY - The river is high, swollen with the rain, brown with silt, full of melting snow and ice. The trees bordering the flood are standing in deep water now. Unlike the growth in effluvial places that benefit from seasonal flooding, they are resigned to this wading. Eventually however, they succumb to this watery undermining; you can see the hulking trunks of their cousins floating at the water's edge.

It is cold with a tumultuous wind this first day of early daylight savings time. It is bitter, but the sun is strong, even now at late afternoon. As I wade through the back yard to the bike path, I am startled by occasionally sinking up to my knees in softening snow.

It may still be winter, but spring is definitely on its way.

Yesterday the red-winged blackbirds announced their return to New England, chattering and trilling in the poplar trees. The ice is peeling away from the base of the trees and the brown earth is showing

on the southern banks.

So are the tunnels of the voles. These intrepid creatures seem to continue to travel under the snow pack where the earth is warmer. They can't wait to dig deeper and forage among the roots of my favorite roses and any other succulent developing spring roots. I'll try again this year to irritate them sufficiently with underground sensors, mothballs and hot, soapy water down the burrows to move them on to someone else's yard, but they are quite intransigent and I am not hopeful.

Traveling to Florida for the February spring break was a pleasure at the time, but upon returning into a full-blown snowstorm, I found that the pleasures of sun and greenery and actually sitting outdoors with my morning coffee only aggravated my sullenness as winter continued and depressed my hopes for spring.

So I came home and started my leek and onion seed in the sunroom. Two weekends later, the new shoots are appearing, more like hoops really as the seeds of these plants push up the dirt and only straighten like blades of grass when they have achieved an inch of growth. It won't be long before it is time to thin and feed them as the planting cycle for the coming garden season gets underway.

I also went to the bulb show at the Lyman greenhouse at Smith

College last weekend. It is a far better tonic than a trip Florida.

The display fills two rooms with thousands of fragrant, colorful flowering bulbs of all kinds, some exotic, most native. Each room has a centerpiece, an artist's palette of white, yellow, lavender and deep purple blooms, massed in extraordinary numbers, delighting both the eye and the nose.

These centerpieces include freesia, tulips, daffodils, canna lilies and hyacinth. The second display is refreshed with statuary. The outside walls of both rooms sport the yellows, reds and oranges of striped tulips, daffodils with white petals and colored centers, camellias and forced cuttings of decorative cherry, apple and forsythias.

It is almost too much to take in. Since the crowd is also huge and hungry for spring, it moves deliberately with a running commentary which allows for slow perusal of these delights. The best part is that we can look forward before too long for these same flowering beauties in our own yards and gardens.

Only last weekend, I despaired of spring. Now the sun is hot whatever the temperature, the birds are singing heartily and the beach of snow is gradually sinking in the backyard. Sap buckets have begun to appear on the maple trees. Soon it will be time to look for pussy willows.

Spring is definitely in the air.

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Wednesdays: Ottomatic Slim
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By the way, the Roadhouse turns 5 years old on March 18th!

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HIGHLIGHTS OF THE GILL POLICE LOG

Road Washed Out

Monday, March 3
8:05 a.m. Assisted with medical emergency on French King Highway.
10:50 a.m. Welfare check of resident on Walnut Street.
1:45 p.m. Assisted with medical emergency on Myrtle Street

Tuesday, March 4
3:50 p.m. Fire alarm sounding Mount Hermon campus, all o.k.

Wednesday, March 5
8:50 a.m. Assisted resident on Boyle Road, keeping the peace.

5:45 p.m. Report of road washed out on Chappell Drive, Highway Department notified.
8:03 p.m. Past report of a motor vehicle accident at French King Highway business.

Sunday, March 9
11:45 a.m. Report of vehicle left abandoned in woods off of Mountain Road.
3:10 p.m. Assisted highway department with tree down across Main Road near Lyons Hill Road

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JACK COUGHLIN ILLUSTRATION

FRIDAY, MARCH 14th
Great Falls Coffeehouse: *Ferne Bork, Dan Tinen & Bruce Kahn Trio* with *Joe Graveline*, 7 p.m. The coffeehouse is in the Great Hall of the Great Falls Discovery Center, Turners Falls. Doors open 6:30 p.m., info (413) 863-3221.

Deja Brew, Wendell: *Bill Downes and Dan Marani* - Acoustic Rock, no cover 9 to 11 p.m.

Rt 63 Roadhouse, Millers Falls: *The Bus Drivers* - rock & roll covers, don't miss this band! 9:30 p.m.

FRIDAY & SATURDAY, MARCH 14th & 15th
Pothole Pictures, Shelburne Falls: Looney Tunes Cartoon Festival! 7 p.m. Music before at 6:30 p.m.

SATURDAY, MARCH 15th
Easter Bazaar & Gaik 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. At Our Lady of Czestochowa Church, 84 K Street, Turners Falls. Crafts, items from Poland, tag sale items and a food sale.

Echo Lake Coffee House: Singer/songwriter and political activist, *Colleen Kattau* with her band, *Nice Guys*, Leverett Town Hall, 7:30 p.m., \$10. Info: (413) 548-9394.

Deja Brew, Wendell: *Blame It On Tina* - Folk Rock, no cover 9 to 11 p.m.

Carbon-Free and Nuclear-Free: A Roadmap for U.S. Energy Policy. Book Signing and Discussion with scientist Dr. Arjun Makijani, principal author of the recently released book. At the Greenfield Solar Store,

#2 Fiske Avenue, Greenfield, 1 p.m. For more information about the book and its principal author, www.ieer.org/carbonfree/index.html

SUNDAY, MARCH 16th
Seed Fest at the Montague Grange from 1 - 5 p.m. with a potluck to follow. Join us to learn how to save seeds, and to hear about a few of the wide variety of seed growing projects in the Pioneer Valley. Seed swap begins at 4 p.m.. Everyone is welcome. Details about the day's events at www.growseed.org, or Suzanne at 367-2281.

Free, mini-Zero Balancing body work sessions, 1 to 4 p.m. to kick off **Zero Balancing Awareness Week**, March 16 - 22. Held in the meeting room of Green Fields Market, Greenfield.

Scandinavian Dance, Montague Grange, Montague Center. Hambo, Schottis, Polska, Waltz & more! All levels of experience, no partner necessary, 3 to 6 p.m.

The Dead of Winter Film Series at the Montague Bookmill, Montague Center. This week's free film for the frozen, *Still Crazy* (1998) Aging rock-and-roll band reunites for a tour—don't miss Bill Nighy's performance. 7 p.m. All films are free (with a passed hat).

Deja Brew, Wendell: *Kevin Skorup & Mario Cote* - Celtic Music, no cover 7 to 9 p.m.

THROUGH MARCH 16th
On display at Hallmark Museum of Contemporary Photography, Turners Falls: Paul Taylor *Themes and Variations* at Gallery 85, Susan Kae Grant *Night Journeys* at Gallery 52 & 56.

MONDAY, MARCH 17th
Deja Brew, Wendell: *St. Patrick's Day Party* - Irish Folk & Fiddle with Ronald Meck & Adrian Meck, no cover 8 to 11 p.m.

Montague Center Library, Evening Sing-a-Long, 6:30 p.m. Childrens librarian Linda Hickman plays guitar and banjo. Info. 863-3214 or Montague Center Library, 367-2852, on Monday evenings.

Live jazz at Ristorante DiPaolo, Turners Falls, *Interplay Jazz Band* 6:30 to 9:30 p.m.



Colleen Kattau performs with Nice Guys at the Echo Lake Coffee House, Town Hall, Leverett, on Saturday, March 15, 7:30 p.m. Colleen combines music and activism, recognizing the guitarra armada or 'armed guitar' concept of Latin American troubadours where the guitar and voice are mightier than the gun and where poetry and melody intermingle to create multiple layers of sound and meaning.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 19th
Worst Hard Time reading/discussion series at the Montague Center Library, 6:30 p.m.

Book Discussion of The Omnivore's Dilemma (rescheduled snow date) 6:30 to 8:30 p.m., Carnegie Library, Turners Falls. Librarian Linda Hickman leads a discussion of Michael Pollan's fascinating book.

At The Rendezvous, Turners Falls: Quiz Nite with Quizmaster Chad, come test your mettle, 8 - 10 p.m.

Deja Brew, Wendell: *Joe Laur* - Guitar, no cover 8 to 10 p.m.

THROUGH MARCH 20th
"Blank Slate/Clean Slate" an exhibition by Turners Falls sculptor Tim de Christopher, LaFontaine Fine Arts Ctr, Mt. Wachusett Community College, Gardner.

THURSDAY, MARCH 20th
Deja Brew, Wendell: *David Robinson & Tommy Filault* - Blues, no cover 8 to 10 p.m.

Celebrate Spring: Wildflowers of the Northeast with John Root. Photo expedition of wildflowers and celebration of the intricacy and enchanting beauty of our native flora. At the Great Falls Discovery Center, Turners Falls. Info. 863-3221 or www.greatfallsma.org

The National Spiritual Alliance, Lake Pleasant: A Spring Equinox

Celebration, 7 to 9 p.m. Facilitated by Luci Adams and involving discussion of how different faith traditions celebrate the beginning of Spring.

TUESDAYS THROUGH JUNE 10th
Accessible Birding with Joe Superchi. Visit local sites 8 a.m. to 10 a.m., meet at the Millers River Environmental Center, 100 Main Street, Athol. Open to birders of all abilities. Call ahead for wheelchair van access (978)248-9491.

FRIDAY, MARCH 21st
Deja Brew, Wendell: *Josh Levangie* - Johnny Cash covers, no cover 9 to 11 p.m.

SATURDAY, MARCH 22nd
Deja Brew, Wendell: *Eric Love* - Rock, no cover 9 to 11 p.m.

At The Rendezvous, Turners Falls: Rockitqueer No 6! No cover. 9 p.m.

SUNDAY, MARCH 23rd
Deja Brew, Wendell: *Steve Crow, Peter Kim, Don Macavly* - Acoustic Trio, no cover 7 to 10 p.m.

MONDAY, MARCH 24th
Live jazz at Ristorante DiPaolo, Turners Falls, *Rick Tutunjian & Joe Green* 6:30 to 9:30 p.m.

SATURDAY, MARCH 29th
Wooden Fender concert series presents: *Root Cellar* in concert at 7 p.m. in the Warwick Town Hall. The group features Greenfield's singer/songwriters Pat & Tex LaMountain, Celtic singer/guitarist Jennie McAvoy, singer/pianist Daphne Bye, & cellist/ bassist Mark Fraser, all of Deerfield. Enjoy Grilled Shish Kabobs & herb rice at 6 p.m. \$5. Suggested donation, \$10. (413) 773-5388, www.patandtex.com.

The Bright Morning Star band 'reunion concert' at All Souls Unitarian Church, Greenfield, 8 p.m. A benefit for the 'Safe & Green' cam-

paign, a grassroots education and action effort that aims to replace nuclear power with energy conservation and efficiency coupled with safe, sustainable, and affordable power sources. Info: 863-8952.

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4. VANTAGE POINT PG13 DAILY 6:45 9:15
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5. STEP UP 2: THE STREETS PG13 DAILY 6:45 9:15
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6. NEVER BACK DOWN PG13 DAILY 7:00 9:30
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IRISH SKETCHBOOK

The Hills of Donegal

BY DAVID BRULE
NORTH AMHERST -

*"Come by the hills to the land
where fancy is free*

*And stand where the peaks
meet the sky and*

The loughs meet the sea

*Where the rivers run clear
and the bracken is gold in the
sun*

*And the cares of tomorrow
can wait till this day is done"*

Sean's voice rises up above the din in the Harp pub, the Friday night gathering of the Irish diaspora in this corner of Massachusetts is picking up steam, and patrons are partying as only the Irish and near Irish can, especially at this time of year. Yet the poignancy of the words and the clarity of the voice reach to the back of the house where even the loudest voices drop silent. Pints posed on the bar or still in midair, patrons turn their attention to the singer or peer deeply into their frothy glasses, finding somewhere in the foam of the stout the start of a collective memory and yearning evoked in the phrasing of the song. Soon there won't be a dry eye in the house. The singer and the song continue.

*"Come to the hills to the land
where life is a song*

*And sing while the birds fill
the air with their joys*

All day long,

*Where the trees sway in time
and even the wind sings in tune,*

*And the cares of tomorrow
can wait till this day is done."*

Now the spell is cast, and many of us are thinking about hills. In the Irish frame of reference that this week requires, you could think about the hills of Kerry or Kildare, Cork or Kilkenny, Glendalough or Armagh. For some of us, it's the hills of Donegal. And luckily for us who love Donegal, it isn't easy to get there. You have to leave most tour buses behind, forget about the paddy-whackery of the Killarney stereotypes, and the leprechaun tea cozies. Donegal is way up in the Northwest corner of Ireland, and you need a good reason to go there. And as in everything, there's the easy way and the hard way. I always prefer the hard way, that is, a meandering road that has me going a half a day west, in order to turn slowly north on my way through

Connemara, Mayo, Sligo, lovely Leitrim, to Donegal. It's always best in this country to get off the main roads, to see what'll happen. Otherwise your visit here will be like a drive down the interstate.

This trip, and this story, is tak-

far from the village, who spent enough time here praying and being a hermit to lend his name to the spot. In fact the places he frequented as a holy hermit are recorded in the local lore, and a pilgrimage takes place here every April: the faithful walk the length



View from Donegal shows the holy well, and cairn stones left by the pilgrims.

ing us to the village of Glencolumkill on a far western peninsula in Donegal. Now, this Glen is isolated enough so that you have the feeling of being on the edge of the world. Which in fact, you are. The roads get progressively smaller until you're sharing them only with sheep, who are not particularly impressed by your need to get anywhere anytime soon. Another factor in the sense of isolation is that English has disappeared from the road signs several hours ago, because this is the Gaeltacht, a Gaelic speaking region where most inhabitants grew up speaking Irish, and prefer to keep it that way. The small road leads through rolling moor land and stacks of turf cut and set in rows to dry. The village of Glencolumkill is set in a valley created by a wee river that flows down from the highlands just to the north to reach the sea at the edge of the village. In addition to being home to a folk park project begun in the 50s to help locals find employment here, it's also home to a thriving cultural center that specializes in Irish-language workshops, classes in weaving, pottery, local dance and song, archeology and hill walking. This has been very successful in attracting visitors interested in an 'intelligent' option for an Irish vacation in learning and participating in Irish culture during their stay.

The Glen gets its name from a famous saint who was born not

of the various stations, oftentimes barefoot, beginning at midnight and finishing a little after dawn at the holy well.

Columbkil (the Dove of the Church) was an Irish saint born in Donegal in AD 521. Like St. Patrick, he's one of the best-known Irish saints, but unlike St. Patrick, he was a truly Irish native born into the great northern O'Neill clan who ruled this part of the country at the time. Columbkil, like most Irish saints, was the center of many adventures and legends. One of the favorites being the Battle of the Books, which people still tell in the pubs in these parts if the mood is right, like now.

It seems that Columbkil had a great love of books, as would any holy man, and that his teacher St. Finnian had recently made the pilgrimage to Rome to procure a new translation of the Psalms. When Columbkil learned of this he asked to borrow the book, and St. Finnian agreed, on the condition he not copy it.

As it turned out, however, Columbkil did spend many nights copying it before returning it, more than likely rationalizing that he was serving God by being able to spread His Word through the new translations. Being suspicious, St. Finnian sent a spy to find out what Columbkil was doing late at night with the book. The spy peered into the saint's cell through a keyhole to catch him at his copying. Luckily for

Columbkil, he had rescued a great heron who now lived with him in his room. Unluckily for the spy, the heron saw the man's eye at the keyhole and with one lightning-fast thrust of his beak, the heron quickly turned the intruder into a one-eyed spy!

St. Finnian, however, was not about to let St. Columbkil get away with the copying. He appealed to the high king Diarmiad. Not only did Finnian want his book back, but he also wanted the copy. The king ruled in his favor and ordered the book and its copy returned. Columbkil refused, got his northern clan of O'Neills to march against the high king and the clan of the southern O'Neills, and eventually after much death and destruction at the foot of Benbulbin in Sligo, Diarmiad was defeated by the northerners.

Within two years, Diarmiad was killed in another battle and the northern O'Neills took over as the high kings of Tara for centuries to come.

But the Battle of the Books took an unexpected turn. Columbkil got to keep his copy, but he was filled with remorse at the huge number of dead - over

3000 - and vowed to leave Ireland in self-imposed exile. He left in AD 563 for exile on the island of Iona, off the coast of Scotland. He apparently returned once to Ireland before his death, but under strange circumstances.

Since he had sworn his feet would never again touch Irish soil, nor would his eyes see Ireland again, he apparently arrived home blindfolded, sitting backwards in the boat, and when he stepped on shore, he had clods of peat attached to his feet so that it could be said that his feet didn't actually touch the earth of his homeland. Or at least, that's what they'll tell you at Biddy's Crossroads pub in Glencolumkill, in between the jigs and reels, the pints of stout, the turf fire and the Irish whiskey, in the hills of County Donegal.

*"Come by the hills to the land
where legends remain*

*Where the stories of old fill the
hearts and yet come again,*

*Where the past has been lost
and our future is yet to be won,*

*And the cares of tomorrow
can wait till this day is done."*

*Lá feile sona NaombhPadraig
daoibh! Happy St. Patrick's Day!*

MCTV Schedule: March 14-19

Eagle Cam:

7:00 - 8:00 a.m.

1:30 to 6:00 p.m.

Friday, March 14th

8:00 a.m. Montague Selectboard 3/10

10:30 a.m. Senior Aerobics

11:00 a.m. Improving the Bottom Line

12:00 a.m. Community Land Trust Meeting 3/4/08

6:00 p.m. Disco Center Fossil Tracks

7:00 p.m. School Committee 3/11

9:00 p.m. Amandla

10:30 p.m. Fabulous Maurice

Saturday March 15th

8:00 a.m. School Committee 3/11

10:30 a.m. Amandla

12:00 p.m. Carlos Anderson In the World of It

12:30 pm Fabulous Maurice

6:00 p.m. Coffee House, Jeff Martell

7:30 p.m. Community Land Trust Meeting 3/4/08

8:00 p.m. Darker Image

9:30 p.m. Flu What Can You Do?

10:00 p.m. Montague Update: Russ Brown

10:30 p.m. Power Canal Draw Down

11:00 p.m. Safe and Green Campaign

Sunday, March 16th

8:00 a.m. Chronicles Vol 5

8:30 a.m. Chronicles of Czestochowa

9:00 a.m. Carlos Anderson: Why We Were Born

10:00 a.m. Child and Family

10:30 a.m. Community Land Trust Meeting 3/4/08

12:00 pm Flu What Can You Do?

6:00 p.m. Independent Voices

6:30 p.m. Coffee House, Jeff Martell

8:00 p.m. Common Man Denise Grendan

9:00 p.m. Community Land Trusts in Action

10:00 p.m. Encore Body Art Helga and Crabby

11:00 p.m. Encore Body Art Mermaid in Net

Monday March 17th

8:00 a.m. Enjoy the Ride

8:30 a.m. Independent Voices

9:00 a.m. Memorial Day '07

9:44 a.m. Mik TV

10:30 a.m. Grange Variety Show

6:00 p.m. Montague Update: Lisa Enzer

7:00 pm Town of Montague Budget Forum LIVE

10:00 p.m. The Essence of Country

Tuesday March 18th

8:00 a.m. Veterans Day 07

8:30 a.m. Wind Changer: Mona Lisa

9:00 a.m. Women Girls & HIV: Role Models

10:00 a.m. Wisdom Way Solar Village

11:00 a.m. W. Mass Dem: Chris Forgey

12:00 p.m. The Essence of Country

6:00 p.m. Thomas Jefferson

6:30 p.m. Underground Railway Concert 07

8:00 p.m. Sustainable Energy

9:00 p.m. Skin N Bonz

10:30 p.m. Silly Wizard Sharpy Show

Wednesday March 19th

8:00 a.m. Mighty Minds

9:00 a.m. Dancing Princess

10:00 a.m. Senior Self Defense 1

6:00 p.m. Senior Aerobics

6:30 p.m. Safe and Green Campaign

8:00 p.m. RTR Investing in Treatment

9:00 p.m. Preachin the Blues

10:00 p.m. Positive Profiles in Courage

11:00 p.m. Physician focus: Radiology

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