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LAKE PLEASANT MILLERS FALLS MONTAGUE CENTER MONTAGUE CITY TURNERS FALLS

The Montague Reporter

YEAR 6 - NO. 24

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THE VOICE OF THE VILLAGES

MARCH 20, 2008

Backyard Sugaring

BY JOE KWIECINSKI
MONTAGUE CENTER
It's a beautiful day in the neighborhood, and the highly affable jack-of-all-trades, Mark Lattanzi, is trying to introduce a willing but somewhat slow

but efficient tools. "All you need is a big, open pan like they use in restaurants. Then you stack up your bricks, make a fire pit, and you're off to the races." Mark has been sugar-

beamed, clearly a man who treasures the avocation on his quarter-acre property just behind the Congregational Church on Center Street in Montague where he hangs buckets on his sugar



SHAWN M. WOOLSEY PHOTO

According to Mark Lattanzi, pictured with his backyard evaporator behind his Center Street home, "If you can boil water, you can make maple syrup."

learner to the mystical but very practical art of maple syrup making. "It's actually a straightforward concept," Lattanzi said, pointing to his elementary

ing consistently for more than 15 years now, either helping others or doing it himself. "I thought the process was great right from the very start," he

maples every year at this time. "We moved here in 1997," Lattanzi said, "and I started working with a neighbor across the street. see SYRUP pg 12

OVERFLOW CROWD AT BUDGET HEARING

DAVID DETMOLD
MONTAGUE - With a tip o' the tam to St. Patrick, Montague capital improvements committee chair Les Cromack concluded his remarks at a joint public hearing on Monday between the selectboard and the finance committee on the \$1.5 million budget deficit facing the town for fiscal '09 by saying, "There's no pot of gold coming over the horizon." Not even if the Governor builds a casino in Holyoke?

Although the hue and cry went up to petition the legislature for more state aid for schools and towns - and the word revolution was bandied about in regard to unfunded state mandates for special edu-

cation transportation costs - there were also plenty of down home remedies offered to help Montague pull itself out of the perennial red ink it has found itself in since state aid dropped off, and then flattened in 2002 - 2003.

More than 60 people attended the forum, overflowing the selectboard meeting room and filling the second floor hall and aisles. High school students from the Tech School ran questions from the live cable access television audience forward, and the selectboard fielded them each in turn. Here is a complete rundown of the audience comments and concerns and the boards' responses, which are also available for home view-

ing on MCTV Channel 17 in the weeks to come.

First off, finance committee chair John Hanold went through a detailed analysis of how Montague got in its present fix, including the use of \$650,000 in free cash last year for costs that appear again in this year's budget. Meanwhile, the town has only \$319,000 remaining in free cash, and so can dedicate only \$300,000 of that amount to make up continuing shortfalls in operating costs. Using other reserve funds, such as the overlay assessors account, the TFHS debt stabilization fund, and the sale of real estate at the industrial park, is fraught with similar peril, in

see BUDGET pg 8



STEVE COBB PHOTO

Wednesday, citizens of Montague, Gill and West County vigil at the east end of the Gill-Montague bridge on the 5th anniversary of the war in Iraq

THEATER REVIEW

Once Upon a Mattress at TFHS

BY DAVID DETMOLD
TURNERS FALLS

Sometimes a mother's love can be a source of strength. At other times, it can be a trifle stifling. But there has never been a case of maternal instinct run quite so amok as that displayed by Queen Aggravain (Abbey Daniel-Green) in her tour-de-force performance as the clinging *magna mater* with her tendrils wound tight around the vocal cords of her husband, the mute king Sextimus (Anton Luz) and the heartstrings of her listless son, Prince Dauntless the Drab (Aaron Cappucci). These were among the highlights of an accomplished cast in this weekend's revival of *Once Upon a Mattress* at the



DETMOLD PHOTOS

Brilliant costuming enhanced a stellar cast in last weekend's production of "Once Upon a Mattress" at the Turners Falls High School.

Turners Falls High School, directed by Findhorn transplant Lori Sunshine.

In this matriarchal realm, by reginal decree, no one can

marry until Dauntless does, and no woman is princess enough to win her son away from Mommie Dearest. And so the courtiers live in a continual

Dauntless for pouting when she fails the final test, (which involves a really hard question: "What is the middle name of

state of suspended animation, whipped to a frenzy each time another candidate for the prince's matrimonial prospect arrives, only to have their hopes dashed when the possible bride is daunted by another of Aggravain's impossible tests. As the curtain opens, the lovely Princess 12 (Olivia Nicotra) is merely the latest victim to fall afoul of Aggravain, and we can't blame

the daughter-in-law of the best friend of the blacksmith who forged the sword..." that killed the dragon slain by St. George? *Sheesh.*)

'Mom, sometimes I get the impression you don't want me to get married.' 'Why, of course I do, darling' replies the Queen, as she pinches his cheek. 'If only I were 20 years younger...!' Sometimes, she seems a little less than kin, a little more like the kind of mother to whom the thought of cradle robbing has perennial allure.

But, thankfully, there are other forces at work here, as powerful as a mother's love. You can't keep an entire kingdom waiting at the altar forever,

see PLAY pg 13

PET OF THE WEEK

Sun Worshipper



Annie

My name is Annie and I am a ten-year-old black and white pointer mix in need of a good home. I am a sweet older girl with soulful brown eyes that just beg you to take me out for a walk. I am lively and affectionate and love to enjoy sunny days outside. I like to be inside too — do you have any room for me to lay by your feet? It's never too late in life to meet your very best friend, and I am looking for mine right now! I should be fine with children 12 years and older, Dogs: yes, Cats: 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.

CARNEGIE LIBRARY NEWS

Sea, Sand and Surf

BY LINDA HICKMAN

TURNERS FALLS On Saturday, March 29th, Mad Science will present Sea, Sand and Surf at the Carnegie Library at 10:30 a.m. and 11:15 a.m. Young children and their families are invited to participate in these free hands-on science programs. Each identical session

will be 30 minutes long. Group size is limited and registration is required. Please call (413) 475-1554 to register or for more information. Franklin County Family Network and the Montague Cultural Council, a local agency supported by the Massachusetts Cultural, are sponsoring the workshops



Montague Briefs

Women Business Owners Meeting March 25th

TURNERS FALLS - On Tuesday, March 25th, the Gill - Montague Women Business Owners Association will meet from 6 to 7:30 p.m. at Avenue A Chiropractic & Massage, at 296 Avenue A. The association is newly forming and all women business owners in Gill and the five villages of Montague are welcome to attend!

Each woman will have a chance to share a two-minute intro for herself and her business and then guest speaker Siobhan Hinckley, marketing specialist (who formerly

worked in marketing for Whole Foods Market) will give a presentation. The association is forming to support women business owners, to help them create and grow their businesses throughout networking and mentoring. The meeting is being hosted by Avenue A Chiropractic & Massage; food will be provided by Avenue A Cafe; and there will be a raffle for a free massage given by Debra Graham.

Please RSVP by calling Karen Adams at 863-0088 or 413-768-8333.

Local Musicians to Rock the Shea Theater at Benefit Concert

TURNERS FALLS - Local musicians will rock the stage of the Shea Theater on Sunday, April 6th from 1 to 5 p.m. All proceeds will benefit the theater's operating expenses.

Music will include the gypsy jazz of Di Di Coy (formerly Taxidermy Grandma);

originals and covers, blues and improvisation of the Steve Crow Trio, comprised of Steve Crow on acoustic guitar and vocals, Peter Kim on electric bass and Don McAuley on drums; plus hip hop, rock, indie, rap, reggae, garage, soul, funk and a little twang by the

FACES & PLACES

Small Scale Logging



Skidder in the yard of Dick French, Main Road, Gill

Land Trust Follow-up Meeting

A follow-up meeting will be held at the office of Equity Trust, 177 Avenue A, on Monday, March 31st at 6 p.m. to consider the possibility of forming a community land trust for Montague.

All area residents interested in supporting affordable homeownership, protecting rental properties, and helping prevent foreclosures are invited to attend. For more information, please call 413-863-9038.

Come along and bring a friend.

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SENIOR CENTER ACTIVITIES -- March 24th - 28th

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

Monday, 24th
10 a.m. Senior Aerobics
11 a.m. Easy Aerobics
Tuesday, 25th
Tax preparation for people filing for federal stimulus refunds only. First come first serve. AARP Tax-Aide volunteers provide free tax return preparation for Montague and Gill Seniors at Montague Senior Center. 1:00 p.m. Spring Painting Classes. David Sund instructing. Gill & Montague residents

\$10 for 6 weeks; all others \$15.
Wednesday, 26th
10:30 a.m. Blood Sugar, Cholesterol, and Blood Pressure screening
10 a.m. Senior Aerobics
12:45 p.m. Bingo
Thursday, 27th
1:00 p.m. Pitch
Friday, 28th
10 a.m. Senior Aerobics
11 a.m. Easy Aerobics

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

Monday, 24th
9:00 a.m. Exercise
9:45 a.m. Library
12 Noon Pitch

Lowercase g's with J.D. Keating.
Additional guest performers will be announced. Tickets are \$6 and may be purchased in advance at Avenue A Cafe in Turners Falls and at the Shea Theater Box Office by calling 413-863-2281.

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JOE GRAVELINE

Girl Scouts Take the Stage at the Shea

BY SARA CAMPBELL

TURNERS FALLS - Saturday, March 15th was Girl Scout Day at the Shea Theater. Twenty-six girls from ages seven to thirteen participated in a workshop that taught them what it means to act in a real theater. Led by David Grout, community theater director and actor from Turners Falls, the girls learned to develop characters, to project their voices, and looked behind the curtains to understand the parts of a stage. The girls enjoyed learning what really happens back stage, how the curtains are opened and how the lights and scenery are hung.

The Country Players' Amy Connelly and her daughter Maureen taught the girls about



David Grout teaches Girl Scouts what it means to act in a real theater during Girl Scout Day at the Shea Theater in Turners Falls

the magic of stage make-up. The day's activities fulfilled the requirements of the Junior Girl Scout Theater Badge and the Brownie "Let's Pretend" Try-it. The awards were made at the end of each of the two sessions

to the girls who attended from several local troops, and as far away as Westfield and Florence. Though the same activities could have taken place in a school or church hall, by holding the event at the Shea the

girls were able to experience the feeling of being on a stage, where real productions happen.

The event was a successful wrap-up to Girl Scout Week, which takes place each year in mid-March. Local activities last week began with recognition at local church services on Sunday, a bowling party at the French King Entertainment Center on Monday, a Tea Party with Dads on Tuesday, and Everyone's Birthday party

on Wednesday.

This event was funded by the Massachusetts Cultural Council, through its local cultural councils in Montague, Gill, Erving, Bernardston, Northfield, and Greenfield.



Girl Scouts also enjoyed bowling at French King Entertainment Center.

The Amazing Trained Pigs of Riverside

BY JOE PARZYCH

RIVERSIDE - Fred Kerslake lived in Riverside opposite the former gas station, next door to the Red Apple gift shop. Seabourne Frederique Kerslake Sr. was born in England in 1865. It's unknown who hung the name 'Seabourne' on him. Seabourne may have been considered a cool name in 1865, but he preferred to be addressed by his nickname, "Lil".

The Kerslake family first immigrated to Salem, NY, and then to Montague City where Lil's father raised pigs. One day, Lil found 12 piglets next to their dead mother, and raised them by feeding them with a spoon. They followed him around like puppies. He found they caught on quickly and could be easily trained.

Soon Kerslake began touring with Ringling Brothers, Barnum & Bailey, and the B.F. Keith vaudeville circuit. Kerslake's pigs were a hit in the

U.S. and Europe. They performed for English royalty and for the Kaiser in Germany prior to WWI. He also took his troupe on the U.S. fair circuit, and was a regular attraction at the Franklin County Fair.

Lil Kerslake married Mary Jamieson, Roberta Lapan's great aunt. After retirement, Kerslake lived in Montague City and later, on Pisgah Road in Gill. He died in 1949 at the age of 84.

Lil's son, S. Fred Kerslake, who had worked for his father, took over when the elder Kerslake retired. Fred began touring with a five-pig act in 1913. Lapan, and other neighborhood kids, liked to watch Fred train the pigs. Charles

Shebell, of Riverside, was one of those who delighted in watching Fred at work.

"The pigs would get too big over the winter," Shebell said. "So, Fred would keep just one to train the others. They would



S. Fred Kerslake the Younger, working his trained pigs

catch on right away. Pigs are a lot smarter than dogs."

Fred tried training terriers, figuring he wouldn't have to constantly break in a new troupe each season. But he found that dogs are not at all as

quick on the uptake as pigs.

"Fred didn't have the patience his father had," Shebell said. "He gave up trying to train the dogs and went back to using pigs. He had a long whip, more like a stick, that he just used to tap the pigs to prompt them. The SPCA was after him all the time for that, and I think it had a lot to do with him giving it up."

Fred married trapeze artist Mary Kessler, whom he'd met while traveling with circuses. They settled in Gill where Fred raised prize poultry and dogs. His wife was known for having a razor tongue. Fred eventually hung himself.

(What happened to the trained pigs? Turn to page 14 to find out, in this week's installment of Jep's Place.)

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"The Voice of the Villages"

Meaningful Gun Control

BY MARVIN SHEDD
BERNARDSTON - The Supreme Court began hearing oral arguments this week over an appeals court ruling that found Washington D.C.'s ban on individual handgun ownership to be unconstitutional. This will be the first time the Supreme Court weighs in on the issue of gun rights since 1939.

The Second Amendment to the Bill of Rights, the right to "keep and bear arms," has long divided politicians, judges and the general public. The highest court in the land, however, has always steered clear of resolving whether words written when the prevailing weapons were muskets and flintlock pistols really guarantees an individual right to own a weapon, or whether it refers to the collective right of a militia to do so. Here is the actual wording of the Second Amendment, problematic punctuation and all: "A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed."

The issue has been around for decades and I'm not likely to add anything that hasn't been debated or discussed countless times. One of the common retorts to gun control advocates is that if we start putting controls on guns that the government will soon be confiscating guns from law abiding citizens. Sorry folks, it just doesn't hold up. I don't believe, for one second, that most of us who support gun control endorse taking guns out of the hands of legitimate sportsmen.

The time has come to drop rhetoric that serves only to inflame or incite. It is time to seek common ground, to find ways to place reasonable controls on gun ownership; to do away with loopholes that allow guns to fall into the wrong hands. Don't be fooled by sound bites from the NRA. To cite the

Second Amendment in defense of an emotionally disturbed person who shoots up a school with an AK-47; to suggest that we can make the streets safer by allowing people to carry concealed weapons, is irresponsible and serves no purpose.

The problem of gun violence isn't going to get better anytime soon. It is, essentially, a public health crisis crying out for intervention. If you are interested, go to: www.guncontrol.ca for statistics on where the United States falls in comparison to the rest of the world in relation to deaths from gun violence. At thirteen deaths per 100,000 people, we far outrank every other country. If our gun laws don't change, there can be little doubt that we will see more of the violence at schools, malls, and churches that has become so commonplace. We will continue to witness all manner of horror perpetrated by people who found it far too easy to get their hands on a gun.

I'm not sure how, or if, the Supreme Court will weigh in, or if the rendering of a decision will have any meaningful impact. I am sure that our children should feel safe in school, that each of us should be able to walk down the street or go to the mall without fear of getting shot. Those who are interested only in perpetuating myths and propaganda will continue to fight against any and all gun control measures. Those who take the long view on society and civilization will insist that a sense of reason be part of the discussion. The time has come to put an end to the violence, and to make our communities safe once again.

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COMING UP A LITTLE SHORT

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Winter's End

We are approaching the vernal equinox, but if you are observing the weather outside, and are as pessimistic about the weather as I am, you might be wondering if spring will ever follow. The Mama's and the Papa's come to mind; to paraphrase: the sky is gray, and I am walking. I checked to see if the stoplight was titled Memory Lane. It wasn't.

It is dark, even with the time change. Gusty is the wind, gutsy are the New Englanders that try to brave this type of weather. We are experiencing more lion than lamb, as Marches go.

Pedestrians may soon forget standing in ankle-deep ice water at the exits and entrances to crosswalks. Bicyclists won't

wear three layers of clothing simply to survive getting about without frostbite. If you're a driver, you won't worry about sliding into either above-mentioned group.

Visualize a 70% sunny day, the light green of the buds newly shown on the trees, and not a brown, muddy snowbank in sight. The local downtowns that have recently resonated with bucket loaders and plow trucks will be replaced by the hum of street sweepers whisking away all memory of winter.

The lawns will once again breathe, the summer birds will once again sing, and perhaps a few spirits will be restored as we bid adieu to winter.

- Timothy Adams
Montague City

Iraq Moratorium

The Valley Moratorium Committee and Veterans for Peace will hold a march and vigil in Greenfield on Good Friday, March 21st, to commemorate the sacrifice for Peace on Earth and the love of all humanity this day marks in the Christian faith, and also to mark the fifth anniversary of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, and the imminent loss of the 4000th U.S. soldier there.

People who believe in peace will be gathering in back of Green Fields Market, 144 Main Street, proceeding down the sidewalk to the common. Bring signs and banners, bring a friend, most of all, bring yourself.

- Eric Wasileski
Montague Center

A Fantastic Performance

Congratulations to the students of the Great Falls Middle School and Turners Falls High School, as well as all the volunteers, who were involved with the recent production of *Once Upon A Mattress*.

What a fantastic performance by all. Thanks for an enjoyable Sunday afternoon to appreciate our local talent.

I had the opportunity to be involved, as well as view, the *Essence of Country* promo on MCTV, Channel 17. For all

those who view this promo please keep in mind that the entire filming, as well as the editing, was done by the production class students at the high school, with the assistance of their teacher Doug Finn.

These are just two of the wonderful works performed by the students in the Gill Montague Schools.

Congratulations, and keep up the good work.

- Sandy Miner
Ervingside

**American Dead in
Iraq and
Afghanistan
as of 3/19/08**



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



Land Use Concerns re: Ecosystem Sensitive Development Bylaw

Thank you very much for the informative piece concerning the proposed Ecosystem Sensitive Development (ESD) bylaw being drafted in Wendell in consultation with Wayne Feiden (MR VI #23). I would like to share some comments I have regarding the draft bylaw and article with your readers.

The current draft bylaw aims to address issues including sprawl, open space protection, and wildlife habitat fragmentation through a creative approach whereby a portion of a lot may be developed while the remainder, 65 percent, is protected by a permanent conservation restriction.

While the Forest Conservation Bylaw Study Committee and the Wendell planning board should be applauded for developing such a comprehensive and systematic approach toward land protec-

tion, I do not believe the bylaw at this point adequately protects natural resource uses, such as hunting and fishing.

After hand-delivering a letter to the planning board mailbox on the eve of its discussion of the draft bylaw, I met with the Forest Conservation Bylaw Study Committee. In the draft language, the bylaw provided protection for timber harvesting as a potential present or future use by containing language stating that the planning board would only approve a conservation restriction that did not disallow this use (while not mandating the use). I submitted similar language which would also protect hunting and fishing as a potential use, while still allowing property owners the right to post their land as they might see fit. After my discussion with the committee, I am hopeful that the final ver-

sion of the bylaw will contain language preserving hunting and fishing as potential land uses, and I am grateful to the committee for listening to my comments.

However, the chair of the committee did state that the most important aspect of the bylaw, in her view, would be land protection, and that land uses are secondary. I couldn't disagree more.

Land uses, including timber harvest, hunting, fishing, hiking, and many other passive recreation uses, which do not present significant impacts to the land, and which are wholly consistent with the purposes of the ESD bylaw, are just as important as to protect the land itself. In my view, it would be unwise to exclude these uses under the ESD bylaw. It is of paramount importance in this case to protect passive land

uses through clearly stated language because the proposed ESD bylaw would provide for the first time a systematic and permanent restriction of land uses in Wendell, and in such a systematic effort land use interests consistent with the bylaw could seriously suffer if the bylaw is not carefully crafted.

I would also like to note that while it is certainly important for the public to engage the planning board and other relevant committees prior to town meeting, and equally important for the planning board to address public comment, the board should be mindful of its role in bylaw development. Their role is to draft and present bylaws to town meeting for approval. If in the process of bylaw development, citizens feel their interests have not been adequately represented by the planning board, it is cer-

tainly their right to introduce amendments on the town meeting floor for approval or disapproval. To imply otherwise, as apparently one member of the planning board has, simply discounts the importance of town meeting as the final arbiter of bylaw adoption or amendment.

While certainly it would also be useful to solicit the opinion of local land trusts on this bylaw, as it is my understanding the Forest Conservation Bylaw Study Committee may do, this opinion should not carry more weight than the stated interests of local residents and voters.

I look forward to continuing to address this issue with the Forest Conservation Bylaw Committee and the planning board.

- Raymond DiDonato
Wendell

Good to the Last Mouse

One cold and snowy morning, in early February, I got myself ready to travel from home in Wendell to a workshop in Northampton. I had to be there by 8:30 a.m. I hopped in my truck at 7:35, with no time to spare, soy yoghurt shake in hand.

I drank my breakfast as I drove and when I finished the shake I was still thirsty. Sitting in my cup holder was my seltzer bottle filled with good Wendell

water. I had lost the cap to it a few days before, so it was convenient to grab the bottle and take a swig. A few miles down the road, I took another swig of that good water, (and it was good).

On the third swig, I felt something in my mouth. I retrieved it - small and brown. "What the...? Oh, my God!" I pulled off the road and looked at the bottle. I screamed for a minute and then opened the door and spat repeat-

edly, because, floating in that bottle, was a very soggy and very dead mouse. I screamed a little more, and drove to a nearby convenience store. By then, I was just hopping around and muttering loudly to myself. "What have I done? What did I do to myself?"

I held the bottle at arms length and flung it in the dumpster (may Mother Earth forgive me for not recycling that plastic bottle). Then I called my spouse and screamed some more, but by now I was also laughing hysterically. I finally got back on the

road. Despite my best intentions, I got to my workshop ten minutes late.

I alternately gagged and wept with laughter for the better part of the next week. It appears that the incident has caused me no physical harm. And, since laughter is such good medicine, I think I may have added several years to my life. Just the same, I'm now careful to keep my water bottles carefully capped, and I recommend you do the same.

- Chris Wings
Wendell

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Forum to Address Woods Management Options

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 Gill town hall is located at 325 Main Road in Gill.

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 the tranquil environment to live in and raise a family," says Paul 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 Woods Forum will feature:

- A discussion in which landowners can ask questions and get answers from neighbors and professionals about

management and conservation of their woods.

- The opportunity to meet people working locally that can help landowners make an informed decision about their land, including representatives from local land trusts and local foresters.

- Take-home resources.

The Woods Forum will focus on the communities of Bernardston, Erving, Gill, Greenfield, Leyden, Northfield and Warwick. A free light dinner will be provided. For more information, and to RSVP, contact Jay Rasku at 978-248-2118 or info@nqpartnership.org.

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NOTES FROM THE GILL SELECTBOARD

COLAs, DPW Truck Request and Sixth Graders

BY ALEX GOTTSCHALK

One of the top items on the Gill selectboard agenda on Monday night was the new Cost of Living Allowance (COLA) proposal from the personnel board. A point of contention at town meetings in recent times, it looks certain to be discussed at upcoming meetings, as the board has proposed only a 2.5% increase instead of 4.1%, that reflects more accurately the increased cost of living.

"If it's come up twice, it's going to come up again", said selectboard member Ann Banash who admitted to the rest of the board that she had initially voted for the smaller increase, but had recently rethought her decision: "We need

to fight to get it up to 3%".

"It's deplorable that people think [town staff] should get a 2.5% increase. We have very good employees in this town. Are we going to be able keep them with that kind of recommendation?" asked selectboard member Nancy Griswold rhetorically.

Among other items discussed were two articles that have been the subject of much debate in the last year. The first was a proposal for a new truck for the Gill DPW; the second was the moving of Gill sixth graders to the Great Falls Middle School in Turners Falls.

According to Mick LaClaire, the DPW chief, Gill's DPW vehicles were already in bad

shape last year, and after this long sloppy winter of sleet, rain and snow, the condition of one plow and sander has further deteriorated. And while LaClaire had lobbied hard for a new vehicle last year, it was not forthcoming. This year may be different. "One truck has to go on the agenda, no ifs, ands or buts about it", declared board chair Leland Stevens.

One of the sticking points of getting a new truck last year had been varying costs, and the board agreed that prior to a proposal being made at town meeting, a firm set of prices needed to be set so no resident would have unanswered questions about the potential price tag. "We need to have this

done from soup to nuts, and be able to have an answer for every question before it's even asked," said Griswold.

In reference to Gill sixth graders remaining in Gill Elementary School while some of their peers exercised intra-district choice to move across the bridge to Turners, Banash said the issue was worth revisiting as almost a year had passed since the decision to keep the sixth grade in Gill was made at town meeting. The consensus appeared to be that Gill students attending school in Turners were adjusting well to the change, and getting access to better facilities than their counterparts who remained at Gill elementary. "I truly

understand why parents want to keep their kids there, but it doesn't make much economic sense," stated Griswold.

In other news, the board decided to pro-rate liquor license fees twice a year rather than in one annual sum. There are four liquor licenses in Gill, and each cost their applicants \$990. Under the new policy, applicants would pay a fee of \$485 every six months. "That should ease the pain a little," said Stevens.

It was also decided that the Friends of Gill could post upcoming events on the Gill town webpage, (www.gillmass.org) as long as other non-profits such as the church could do the same.

Anti-bullying Lessons at Sheffield

BY BRIDGET SWEET

TURNERS FALLS - Students from Sheffield Elementary School accompanied Hillcrest second graders on a trip to Greenfield last Friday to see *Horton Hears a Who!* The field trip was funded by a grant from the Northeast Foundation for Children, based in Turners Falls.

The NEFC funding was earmarked to assist Sheffield in a "schoolwide focus on anti-bullying," according to principal Chip Wood. "We are helping students build kindness and empathy for each other. Anti-bullying has been part of the social curriculum through

the Responsive Classroom approach." Wood said the field trip to the Garden Cinema was especially timely because March is the National Education Association's 'Read Across America' month, centered on Dr. Seuss's birthday.

Besides, what could be a better way to explore the consequences of picking on someone different than you than by going to see the newly released 20th Century Fox animation of *Horton Hears a Who!?*

After all, "a person's a person, no matter how small".... or no matter what

language they speak at home, or what the color of their skin is. Last Thursday, to emphasize this message, Wood, as the Mayor of Whoville, led his students, citizens of Whoville, into the gymnasium, which he presented as Whoville Town Square. Nine students, as Smalls, stood in a circle holding *Horton Hears a Who!* books. Everyone shouted several times, 'We Are Here!' This occurred in various schools across the country at exactly 9:15 a.m.

After the movie, one third grader in Mrs. Wood's class said, "I liked it because a lot of characters in it are like most

kids at school." A 4th grader in Mrs. Hazlett's class got this message from the film. "Be nice to friends. (I will) not tell everyone what to do; be kind to others," when asked if the movie helped her. Meanwhile, some 5th graders had a more light-hearted view. "It was fun," and "It was good to get out of school." They chuckled when asked if the movie helped them think about the difference between bullies and friends.

Mrs. Calkins 3rd graders wrote a letter to a character in the story. Their writing, editing, revising and creating a final draft enhanced penmanship, questions they had about the character and communication skills.

Afterwards, they colored or


sat while listening to the teacher read the children's story *Loser* by Jerry Spinelli, followed up by a question and answer discussion about how students treat children they view as different from them.

Together, Sheffield staff and students are working for a better community within their school. "Apology of Actions" rules are displayed in the main hallway as reminders. Along with reading, writing and arithmetic, Sheffield students are absorbing life skills, from learning about how it feels to have your feelings hurt on the lunchroom or playground, to learning what the tiniest speck in Whoville has to say.

After all, a person's a person, right?



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HIGHLIGHTS OF THE MONTAGUE POLICE LOG

Breaking and Entering

Tuesday, March 11

1:12 a.m. Following a motor vehicle stop in Turners Falls, arrested [redacted]

Charged with operating a motor vehicle with revoked license, failure to use care starting, stopping or turning, operating to endanger, failure to stop at stop sign, failure to wear seat belt and failure to use turn signal.

7:33 a.m. Report of burglary, breaking and entering at an L Street address, Turners Falls.

9:47 a.m. Report of burglary, breaking and entering at a Central Street address.

2:58 p.m. Report of unwanted person at a Fairway Avenue address, Turners Falls. Advised to contact police if repeated.

Thursday, March 13

12:33 p.m. Report of domestic disturbance at a Turnpike Road address. Arrested [redacted]

Charged with assault and battery (domestic).

3:05 p.m. Arrested [redacted]

Friday, March 14

4:34 a.m. Following a motor vehicle stop, arrested [redacted]

Charged with operating a motor vehicle with a revoked license and improper use of fog lights.

9:03 a.m. Report of vandalism at a Bridge Street address, Millers Falls.

Saturday, March 15

12:54 a.m. Report of neighbor

disturbance at a Turnpike Road address, Turners Falls. Peace restored.

1:34 a.m. Report of motor vehicle theft from a Central Street address.

1:35 p.m. Following a motor vehicle stop, arrested [redacted]

Charged with operating motor vehicle without a license.

8:40 p.m. Following a motor vehicle stop, arrested [redacted]

Charged with operating unregistered motor vehicle and operating a motor vehicle under the influence of liquor.

9:48 p.m. Report of neighbor disturbance at a Fifth Street address, Turners Falls. Peace restored.

11:18 p.m. Report of loud noise disturbance at an Avenue A address, Turners Falls. Arrested [redacted]

Charged with possession of Class D drug.

Sunday, March 16

8:40 p.m. Report of domestic disturbance at a Fourth Street address. Peace restored.

Monday, March 17

12:28 p.m. Following a motor vehicle stop, arrested [redacted]

Charged with possession of Class D drug, speeding and outstanding default warrant.

NOTES FROM THE ERVING SELECTBOARD

Cable for Farley, School Budget Discussed

BY DAVID BRULE - On Monday, March 17th, two main topics were discussed at the Erving selectboard: a report on progress towards bringing cable to the Farley section of town, and the Erving Elementary School budget for FY09.

In business related to the cable project for Farley, Bill Solomon, the attorney whom the selectboard has retained to assist the cable committee, appeared optimistic that the committee would reach its objectives in negotiating with Comcast. George Bohrer, who chairs the committee, was equally

optimistic that Comcast service to Farley will become a reality. He noted that there was also progress made to provide PEG cable access to events at Erving Elementary, including school committee meetings and various functions held at the school.

Concerning the proposed FY09 school budget, brought forth by superintendent Joan Wickman, a large number of supporters filled the meeting room and included school administrators, teachers, department heads and parents. The budget proposed was

approximately \$149,000 over last year's budget, equivalent to a 7.7 % increase. The selectboard held firm that all town departments were to be level-funded, with no increases this year. The board was willing, however, to go with a 3% increase, indexed to inflation, instead of 0%, which would amount to an increase of \$60,000. The superintendent, administrators and teachers are left with the challenge of finding ways to cut \$90,000 from their proposal.

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BUDGET from pg 1

Hanold's view, and so the town proposes to reduce the amount allocated from these accounts by more than \$180,000 this year, to preserve the option of using similar amounts of reserves in years to come.

[After the meeting, Hanold provided a tally of total cash reserves in various accounts, including less than the \$1.425 million remaining in the assessors overlay reserve, a large percentage of which is due to be released to the town. The total of Montague's possible available reserves at this time is \$2,358,321.]

Hanold said the rise in operating expenses for the schools (whose assessment to the town is projected to increase by \$812,410 this year) and the town (whose operating budget is expected to go up by \$551,736) accounts for roughly 60% and 40% of the expected shortfall, respectively.

Only \$470,000 Increase in Revenue Expected

Hanold said there would be no immediate prospect of raising revenues above last year's levels, other than the customary increase to the tax levy allowed under Proposition 2½, which this year is expected to equal \$401,433, once a \$139,356 uptick in town debt for the combined sewer overflow work has been subtracted. Unless of course the town were to break from tradition and approve a Proposition 2½ override to ease the pinch on operating budgets - or specific capital outlays like a new recycling truck - or unless that pot of gold suddenly materializes from Beacon Hill. Once local fee increases (\$68,000) and some ancillary expense items are added and subtracted, "We have a \$1,530,000 problem," Hanold admitted. "Now, what do we do about it?"

Hanold took the audience through a detailed laundry list of possible cuts, ranging from decreasing the mowing allowance for the Dry Hill Road cemetery (still inaccessible to all

but the hardest mountain goats) by \$2,000 to denying the DPW's request to restore one lost position, at a projected savings of \$29,000. Other items that might be heading for the hopper are that new recycling truck (\$140,000), a new loader (\$125,000) and reducing DPW equipment purchases by \$25,000.

Not to single out the DPW all by itself, the boards proposed possible elimination of entire departments, including the senior center (\$30,000), the parks and recreation department (\$98,000), branch libraries in Montague Center and Millers Falls (\$35,000) or even doing away with curbside recycling entirely (\$39,000). As usual, the town nurse position, currently unfilled, was again on the chopping block (\$25,000).

But all those cuts put together, and many more the boards could enumerate, totaled no more than the town's side of the problem, with no definite word from the schools on how they might be able to ameliorate their part of the budget shortfall.

Calls Waiting

The first question came in from a caller viewing the proceedings at home. The caller wanted to know, "How much does the police department spend on overtime annually. If the amount is greater than the cost of hiring another officer, would you hire another officer?"

Chief Ray Zukowski handled that one. He said the cost of overtime would equal \$117,000 (out of a total salary expense line for the 16-member department of \$987,973, or about 11.8% of the total salary for the department.) He said hiring a new officer, plus benefits, would



Ralph Kimball is 75 years old, retired, and lives on Avenue C. He works three part-time jobs and said his property taxes have risen steadily over the last 10 years. His social security check has not kept pace.

"How much more can the town expect out of me?"

cost the town about \$50,000, "so hiring two would about eliminate" the cost of overtime. He added, "It's been looked at for 20 years, and never put into place."

The next question, also a caller from home, wanted to know what the town was doing to get a revenue producing landfill operational on the town-owned state permitted 36-acre site off Turnpike Road. Selectboard chair Pat Allen assured the caller that a committee was being formed to look into this, and offered the chance to join it.

James Massoni from Precinct 4 wondered if the Strathmore Mill, into which the town had sunk \$200,000 in repairs, couldn't be sold to eliminate the deficit. Allen responded that town meeting had actually authorized \$300,000 in repairs, and the board did not expect a sale of the property would fetch much immediate cash, due to its state of disrepair, but allowed that long term prospects for garnering tax revenue from the facility were improved.

Massoni asked if the town owned the deed to the Mill as yet. Allen replied in the negative.

Massoni also asked if the town's commitment to the new \$5.7 million police station was a "done deal." Allen and Hanold

said it was, and that it would not affect the present budget shortfall, as voters had passed the project as a debt exclusion override, outside the tax levy. Hanold said \$900,000 in grants had been applied for to reduce the eventual cost of the project, which should be up and running next fall.

Fresh Air

The next question was a practical one. "Could we get a little fresh air?" Doors and windows were thrown open. Turned out the thermostat in the town hall was turned up to 72

degrees, according to Precinct 5's Chris Sawyer-Laucanno, who raised this as an issue in controlling energy costs when his time to speak arrived.

Art Gilmore, Precinct 2, exhorted the crowd to make way for a landfill. "Truck traffic? We remember when the Rod Shop and the paper mills were running trucks through town every day. We were grateful for the trucks because they represented jobs." He said a revenue stream from a landfill on Turnpike Road could pay for a new senior center, or a new library, "so our children and grandchildren won't have to be paying taxes for a future debt."

He said, "I just get so concerned when you say cut town employees," and recommended the boards "take a hard look at their health insurance to retain their jobs." He said workers from the DPW were getting sick from too much overtime [the staff at that department is down to 16 - equivalent to the police department in numbers - but DPW chief Tom Bergeron said his department allocated only \$66,614 in overtime this year, for snowplowing, line painting, storm clean-up and the like, to maintain Montague's 103 miles of roads. Out of a total salary expense of \$766,835, Bergeron allocated about 8.5% of his

personnel budget for overtime.] and town hall workers were trying to handle the needs of five different villages with very little, or no, support staff.

He continued, "I highly recommend a Proposition 2½ override, but only if the school committee takes some hard tactics to look at what we do for them."

He had some specific suggestions for the school committee: switch to a 5 - 8 middle school, use Hillcrest for lower grades (no elevators needed), abolish classroom aides (if teachers are professional they should be able to handle their own classrooms) institute a parking fee for all students who drive to school, and conduct all sports activities during the day to cut down on the lighting bill.

Carol Shields of Randall Road ("I'm not sure what precinct I'm in!") wanted to know how much of the \$97,000 parks and recreation budget was attributable to salaries. The answer came back: essentially all of it. Shields wondered if an 'adopt a park' program could be instituted, for volunteers to take care of various public spaces and parks in town.

Dean Letourneau of Precinct 4 said, "I beg to differ with the finance committee whiz-man," that the cost of sewer repairs was not impacting the budget. The costs, equaling, he estimated about \$97 on the average tax bill, are coming out of taxpayers' wallets one way or another. Soon, the police station costs, which are going to be roughly equivalent, will be added to the property tax bill. He questioned Bob Trombley about a \$400,000 appropriation for additional sewer work that town meeting had approved - but the town had never borrowed and allocated. Trombley said the money has been kept in reserve until the CSO work is nearing completion. But Allen agreed it would create yet another debt, if and when those funds are ever used.

Letourneau said slightly more than 30% of the 3617 households in town were made

see **BUDGET** pg 9

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BUDGET from pg 8

up of seniors living on fixed income or people living below the poverty line.

GMRSD Defends Budget

Frank Sokolosky of Precinct 3, asked the GMRSD what they were doing to draw a line in the sand on the '09 budget.

School committee chair Mary Kociela replied, "At this point we have not restored many of the cuts that we made in the last several years. We've been labeled underperforming by the Department of Education. We have to report to them next week with our turnaround plan for the district.

"We've been working to raise revenues. We joined the GIC (state health insurance program). The consolidation issue is moving forward on elementary configuration. We have two new proposals around Montague Center. But in addition, we're moving students into Sheffield from Hillcrest."

She added she would be seeking additional funds for the district from the DOE.

Interim GMRSD Superintendent Ken Rocke said, "The schools are grateful for the support the towns have shown them. This is a 5.49% budget increase that is in line with budgets coming out of other schools and in line with town service budgets."

[Mike Naughton, of Precinct 2, pointed out later that if debt for the school building project - paid for by a debt exclusion override - is removed from the budget, the G-M schools are actually seeking 5.82% increase.]

[After the meeting, finance committee chair John Hanold stated that the rise in Montague's town operating expenses, projected, from '08 to '09, not including debt, would equal \$441,512 in a \$6,637,586 budget. That would amount to an increase of 7.1%.]

Rocke continued, [Over the last ten years] "state aid has increased less than 1%, while the assessments to our towns have



DETMOLD PHOTO

John Hanold addresses the crowd at the budget hearing Monday night, as town administrator Frank Abbondanzio reviews data sheets and selectboard chair Pat Allen appears to pray for a miracle.

been rising 9% to 10% each year." [He later explained that GMRSD budgets have risen 4.5% during the same time period, "roughly indexed to inflation.]" "It is because state aid has fallen that your assessments are going up."

Rocke said, "The \$900,000 (budget shortfall attributable to the schools) is just Montague's share. Gill carries 15% of the budget. We'd have to cut \$1,050,000. You wouldn't have schools left. You'd absolutely decimate not just your schools, but your towns as well. We need adequate state aid for our schools, so our towns don't have to go through this."

Rocke called the GMRSD's budget, "essentially a level service budget." He said the fact that the G-M schools were one of only three school districts in the state to take advantage of the opening to join the lower cost state health care system (GIC) last year, will result in savings of \$400,000 for the district, which the school committee has decided to put into "very modest" restoration of positions lost earlier in the decade. "We're trying to build back some of the positions that have been cut over the years."

After the hearing, Rocke clarified, "For the cost of what is essentially a level services budget, we are trying to regain the competitive edge in school choice by adding back positions

that were lost." He hopes to apply the gains from joining the GIC plan to restoring a reading first specialist, a math coach, a literacy coach, a receptionist at the high school for security purposes, and rebuilding central office positions, among other priorities, although the actual gains will not be known until GIC sign up takes place this May.

Included in the school's budget request is \$100,000 for new positions, apparently separate from the expected gains from GIC.

Rocke said one of the three GMRSD employee contracts - the teachers - is up for negotiation this year. The cost of

step increases and COLAs for all GMRSD employees adds about 5% to the personnel expense line item for the schools this year.

Who Granted These Raises?

Greg Garrison of Precinct 4 wanted a more specific breakdown of the costs leading to the \$1.5 million budget gap. "Who granted the raises?" he demanded. "Who signed the contracts? You had to know last year, if it's a three-year contract, you

don't use it to fund operating costs."

Town administrator Frank Abbondanzio said all three town employee union contracts are up for renewal this year. At the moment, only 2% step increases (no cost of living [COLA] increases) have been figured into the '09 budget. He said the 2% step increases amount to \$60,000, for town employees. "COLAs would add \$30,000 per step, if negotiated." The town currently employs 64 people, not including the shared dog officer position or the personnel at the wastewater treatment plant, whose salaries and benefits are largely paid for out of sewer user fees.

[After the meeting, GMRSD business manager Lyn Bassett confirmed the district school presently employ 230 people, for a total personnel expense in '08 of \$8,492,000. She said the

see BUDGET pg 10

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BUDGET from pg 9

contracted wage and benefit increases for paraprofessionals, lunchroom workers, and janitorial staff would result in a 5% salary increase for those workers for '09. The teachers contract is up for negotiation this year, but for budgeting purposes, Bassett said the GMRSD was estimating at least a 3% increase in teachers and administrator salaries. Calculated at between 3% and 5%, the increase in personnel expenses for the G-M schools will rise somewhere between \$254,760 and \$424,600 next year, and for the duration of the contracts. The paraprofessional and lunch room staff contracts expire in '10.]

Abbondanzio said town energy costs for next year would rise by 18%, or \$34,000. The snow and ice budget would increase \$13,000, solid waste collection would rise \$60,000, and veterans benefits, in the wake of five plus years of war in the Middle East, would rise \$43,000. Employee health benefits would rise \$158,000, for health insurance and pension costs. The town's increase for the debt from the sewer project will total \$110,000 this year, Abbondanzio said, while the sewer users will also see an increase in rates totaling more than \$100,000 this year.

Precinct 2's Bob Sojka wanted to know whether costs savings in personnel and equipment could not be realized by combining the Turners Falls Water Department with the DPW. He expressed concern about the proposals to keep the Montague Center School open as a Horace Mann school, or as a district school. "I hope it would operate at not one penny more than it would cost to educate students at Hillcrest."

Mike Naughton, of Precinct 2 asked, "If we do an override, or eliminate parks and recreation, will it keep us from coming back here next year? Because I don't think it will."

Finance committee member Jeff Singleton said, "More state aid is the solution. We are attempting to put our case to the state."

Naughton countered, "We need to reduce the rate of growth

of expenses. Gill and Montague cannot support a \$17 million school district that thinks a 5% or 6% increase is appropriate."

Ralph Kimball of Avenue C said he was 75 years old and "retired, I think. Fortunately, I own my own home. I work three part time jobs." He said his property taxes have gone up steadily over the last ten years, but his social security check has not kept pace. "I have to live within my means. How much more can the town expect out of me? My savings account that was supposed to support me in my golden years dwindles all the time."

Phone calls came in, from a young person wondering what volunteer opportunities existed for people her age wanting to contribute to the town. Joining certain committees, supporting RiverCulture, volunteering for the Turners Falls block party, or helping out with the libraries or the parks and recreation were all ideas mentioned in response.

Another phone caller wondered whether merging the Turners Falls and Montague Center fire departments under town hall would "eliminate some redundancies." Allen said, "That's something people have wondered about for 40 years."

Defending Services

Victoria Nelson, from Precinct 4, said, "Thirty percent of us are living below the poverty line, or on fixed incomes. Keep the Senior Center. It's been an economic lifesaver for me, and an emotional and social one as well."

Chris Sawyer-Laucanno criticized the town's benefit package for health care, that provides employees with a 90% town contribution. "The health care split is way out of whack with reality."

He noted that the US Department of Health and Human Services figures for 2007 show the average split is now 70% - 30%. Companies often pay a 50% - 50% split on health care for highly compensated employees."

He added, the federal Energy Independence and Security Act just got signed, providing \$90 million in grants for municipalities to "go Green" in their municipal buildings. "We ought to be first in line talking to Kerry and Kennedy and Olver," about those grants, Laucanno said.

He recommended a little revolution from Western Mass on unfunded state mandates - like out of district transportation costs for SPED students - and added that the town should turn down the heat in town buildings.

Amen, Precinct 1, spoke up for the Montague Center Branch library. "It's so cheap. It's really unthinkable (to close it down) when you think how many seniors and how many children use it." She added, "The robber barons who paid for the Carnegie Libraries, they're not paying for them any more. We should be holding onto these things."

Joe Janikas recommended increasing the employee contribution to the retirement system, and inquired when the town would be able to meet its unfunded liability to that system. Town accountant Carolyn Olsen said that milestone should be met in the year 2024.

Cynthia Tarail, Precinct 1, said, "Our future starts with our children. I know the struggle people who are working everyday, or retired, go through. We have to take a stand for more state and federal aid. Thirty five thousand for a library! [Actually, that would be the savings from closing both the Millers Falls and

Montague Center branch libraries.] We're talking about affecting children. They need these services, that we as working parents can't afford to provide them, so they can grow up to run the town and pay the taxes. They're not going to be the productive citizens we need if we don't school them, and 'park' them and 'library' them. We have to."

Cromack, of Precinct 1, said, "The increase in town revenue is \$400,000. A prudent money manager will sit down to figure how much he has to work with, and how to allocate the funds to meet his needs. Unfortunately, the federal government, the state, and the town don't work that way."

He added, "We have come to the point where there is no way we can fund the budget request we have, from the schools. It's impossible. On the townside, the cuts are devastating. We must take these drastic steps that can enable us to live within our means in this town. There is no pot of gold coming over the horizon."

Last Call

Among the final calls and comments of the evening, one caller at home wanted to know if the town was making use of prisoner labor, (DPW chief Tom Bergeron said yes, to paint town buildings and pick up the sides of roads) and another caller wanted to know whether the schools could do away with the option of school choice, and have students go to school in their own towns again. Ken Rocke explained school choice was mandated by state law, for students who wish to leave the district for other schools, and said the GMRSD had recently voted again to allow students to choice into the district, for two reasons: to allow

them to take advantage of educational opportunities the GMRSD provides, and to enhance district revenues (approximately \$5,000 in state aid follows each student that choices in or out of the district. With 66 students currently (estimated) to be choicing in next year, and 157 choicing out, Rocke told the forum that the district was suffering a net loss of state aid on school choice in the neighborhood of half a million dollars.

[But in fact, following the meeting, Rocke confirmed the 157 students choicing out are taking with them \$956,717 in state aid, regardless of how many students choice in. Additionally, the GMRSD lost \$219,960 in charter school tuition, for the current year. Rocke cautioned that if the GMRSD were able to attract those students back to district schools, more staff would have to be hired to educate them, offsetting some of the potential gain in state aid.]

On the topic of eliminating curbside recycling, Bergeron said the program brings the town of Montague about \$24,000 a year from the Springfield Materials Recycling Facility, but costs the department the equivalent of two staff positions (\$60,000) and an annual lease fee for the recycling truck (\$23,000). Selectboard member Patricia Pruitt said town residents may have to get used to the idea of bringing their recyclables to the transfer station, while asking themselves, "What more can we do?" She said like libraries, schools cost money, but they are both essential for ensuring a bright future for our children. Selectboard member Allen Ross said a serious override may also be in the future, as part of a mix of approaches to alleviate the budget crisis.



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More on Police Overtime

BY DAVID DETMOLD
MONTAGUE - Interviewed after Monday's budget hearing, Chief Ray Zukowski was asked to explain why the Montague police department relies so heavily on overtime pay, which makes up 11.8% of the department's personnel expenses. He said it is cheaper to pay overtime, at time and a half, than it is to hire, train and equip a new full-time officer.

Zukowski said in a department as small as Montague's, with 15 fulltime officers plus the chief, it is difficult to accommodate officers' need to take vacation, or comp time, or sick days, without rotating in another officer to fill the shift. That is primarily why Montague's police department relies on overtime.

"The size of our department is a drawback. You have to fill the shifts. You can't run them short shifted," Zukowski said. In a

larger department, with four or five patrolmen on at a time, it is possible to leave the shift short from time to time without unduly affecting service. But with the call volume Montague's police department receives, the fact daytime shifts often have just two officers on, with only three on nights and weekends means you have to fill every shift.

Contractually, fulltime officers have the right of first refusal on overtime, before the shifts are offered to reserve officers, Zukowski said. If neither full time officers nor reserve officers want to take an empty shift, Zukowski said he can - and does - force a full timer to come in and take the shift.

In Greenfield, with 35 officers, down from an authorized strength of 39, chief David Guilbault said he normally relies on an overtime budget of about \$100,000. But he said that

amount had been halved recently. He is trying to boost the amount of overtime his department is allocated, to provide more flexibility filling shifts.

"I can use overtime more expeditiously than I can new hires under the contract," said Guilbault. "It's easier and cheaper, at this juncture."

Zukowski's force is currently budgeted \$113,000 for overtime, and he has asked for \$117,000 for overtime in next year's budget. He said the department has lost two officers since 1992, and now must find money in the budget to retain the DARE officer and the narcotics detective, positions formerly paid through grant funding and the drug task force.

Town administrator Frank Abbondanzio said, "There's no way it works to hire a new officer to fill all the shifts. They've cranked the numbers; overtime is spread around the clock."

Tix on Sale for Gill-Montague Education Fund Gala

TURNERS FALLS - Tickets are on sale for the annual Gill-Montague Education Fund Gala, featuring Don Campbell and his band, at the Turners Falls High School on Saturday, April 26th, at 7:30 p.m. The Gala is presented in conjunction with Bear Country 95.3, with corporate underwriting from Hillside Plastics and the Montague Elks, with additional sponsorship from Construction Monitoring Services. and New England Extrusion, who all helped to defray the costs associated with the concert.

Campbell and his band mates have opened for Willie Nelson, Merle Haggard, Randy Travis, Tanya Tucker, and Charlie Daniels, among others. Tickets for the Gala are on sale now at Scotty's in Turners Falls, World Eye Bookshop in Greenfield, Bear Country 95.3 and WHAI studios in Greenfield, and by calling Sandy at TFHS 863-7218. They may also be purchased online at www.thegmef.org.

Funds raised through the gala will be used to fund educational enrichment opportunities in the schools of the Gill-Montague schools district.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE GILL POLICE LOG

Domestic Issues

Wednesday 3-12

4:41 p.m. Arrested [redacted]

Charged with unlicensed operation of motor vehicle and speeding on West Gill Road.

Thursday, 3-13

5:31 a.m. Barking dog complaint on Mountain Road.

1:21 p.m. Report of power lines down at Main Road and West Gill Road; assisted with same.

5:50 p.m. Assisted with medical emergency on Center Road

Friday, 3-14

9:14 p.m. Assisted Bernardston police with 911 misdial call on Depot Street.

Saturday, 3-15

11:20 a.m. Checked alarm at elementary school on Boyle Road. All OK; alarm was accidental.

Sunday, 3-16

6:06 p.m. Report of domestic disturbance on Chappell Drive.

6:48 p.m. Arrested [redacted]

[redacted] Charged with domestic assault and battery.

6:49 p.m. Arrested [redacted]

[redacted] Charged with violation of a restraining order.

7:08 p.m. Report of past disorderly conduct at French King Hwy. business. Under investigation.

Monday, 3-17

4:05 p.m. Vehicle left abandoned in travel lane on Main Road. Towed for safety reasons.

6:35 p.m. Welfare check at West Gill Road residence, all OK.

7:44 p.m. Assisted Northfield police with distraught subject.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE ERVING POLICE LOG

Motor Vehicle Crashes

Tuesday, 3-11

1:37 p.m. Report of burglar alarm on French King Highway. False alarm.

2:45 p.m. Report of past disturbance on French King Highway. Report taken.

Wednesday, 3-12

7:15 a.m. Two car motor vehicle accident on Route 2 and River Road. Investigated.

8:15 a.m. Requested by Northfield police to close North Street due to the extreme road conditions on Gulf Road, with several motor vehicle crashes.

Thursday, 3-13

8:20 a.m. Caller reports woman pushing a stroller on Route 2 near the Smokin' Hippo establishment. Checked area, gone on arrival.

Friday, 3-14

6:30 a.m. Report of car vs. deer

accident. Route 2 near Route 63.

8:15 a.m. Medical emergency on Old State Road. Assisted Erving Fire and Orange Ambulance.

6:40 p.m. Medical emergency on Lillian's Way. Assisted Erving EMTs and BHA Ambulance.

Sunday 3-16

2:45 a.m. Report of fire rear of Erving Paper Mill. On scene with Erving Fire Dept. Unfounded.

1:20 p.m. Suspicious person at French King Entertainment Center. Checked same. No problem found.

4:15 p.m. Alarm on West Main Street. All OK.

6:45 p.m. Assisted Gill police with arrest at Chappell Drive.

Monday, 3-17

4:17 p.m. Arrested [redacted]

[redacted] for operating after revocation of license, open container of alcohol, and speeding.



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SYRUP from pg 1

“Three years later, I went on my own and began keeping records. We made three gallons that year. In 2004, we had our best year, producing 15 gallons, but eight or nine is our average per season.”

Lattanzi, whose day job is selling “air time” for both radio station WRSI in Greenfield and WHMP in Northampton, clearly relished his role as he initiated an unenlightened visitor with a crash course in “Sugaring 101.” Mark gestured to his evaporator made up of a steel arch or fire-box and a stainless steel pan. The fire is maintained behind a cast iron door. “We use slab wood and scrap wood, which are both quite abundant in our area.” Make a note of that.

Lattanzi is concerned with clearing up one canard the uninitiated entertain about maple sugaring. “People always ask me, ‘How many trees do you tap?’ Actually the better question is more like how many taps are put

out, not how many trees you have. I place 36 taps a year, and the number of taps depends on the size of the tree. The tree must be at least one foot in width to be the right size to tap.”

The start of the sugaring season is coincidental with the renewal of nature in early spring. The sugar maple trees begin to produce sap, which is actually food for the leaf buds on the tip of the branches. “When we tap the tree,” explained Lattanzi, “we are taking the sap from the tree. This doesn’t hurt the tree at all; it just gets the process in motion.” Then Lattanzi collects the sap and puts it in plastic barrels before boiling it. “The rule of thumb,” Lattanzi said, “is that it takes 40 gallons of sap in order to make one gallon of maple syrup. When you’re boiling, what you’re doing is the most primitive form of cooking. You’re literally just boiling the



PARZYCH PHOTO

The sugar shack at the Northfield Mount Hermon School

sap. It’s actually simple: If you can boil water, you can make maple syrup.”

But Lattanzi is being modest.

A neighbor of his, Chris Mason, observed: “Over the years I’ve known some people who started sugaring. They didn’t last more than two or three years. Mark, on the other hand, keeps on working faithfully and continuing to add new and better equipment.”

Even in a small sugaring operation there is a great deal of work involved -- installing the taps, hauling the buckets full of sap, chopping and stacking wood. Then there’s tending the fire. And don’t forget filtering the sap in a paper and cloth filter before putting the precious fluid in Mason jars.

Isn’t this all just a tad too much work? “I can’t imagine not doing this,” Lattanzi replied. “I simply love sugaring. Just the taste of your very own syrup is worth the effort. To do it yourself, to share your result with family, friends, and neighbors, to enjoy that unique taste -- that’s what it’s all about.”

Lattanzi is ably assisted in his backyard maple syrup production by his wife, Cindy Tarail, and their little daughter Bella whose specialty is functioning as “our official

taste taster.” Lattanzi met Cindy when the two were undergraduates, both majoring in geography at Vassar College. “I was into economic geography,” Mark recalled. He later put his scholastic knowledge to work, spending nine years at CISA, the Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture.

Lattanzi boils the sap only on weekends. “Before we bottle the finished maple syrup,” he said, “we check its density. If the syrup isn’t dense enough, we keep cooking it until it’s the proper solidity. If it’s too thin, the syrup spoils and if it’s too thick, the product turns into maple sugar crystals.”

A man for all seasons, Lattanzi also puts his labor of love into a little historical perspective. “Just think,” he tells his rapt student of Sugaring 101, “hundreds of years ago maple sugar was political. It was promoted at one point as a sweetener made by free men. During the debates over slavery in the United States, abolitionists felt our maple sugar was a far superior sweetener to the cane sugar made in the Caribbean under conditions of slavery.”



LET’S GO SUGAR SHACKING!

BY FLORE

Many discoveries are made accidentally. For us in New England, one of the more fortuitous accidents was the day when venerable Chief Woksis flung his tomahawk into the trunk of a sugar maple tree. According to the Iroquois legend, the morning after he’d sliced into the tree, he noticed the golden ambrosia flowing out of the open wound. But it was his wife, of course, who was the ingenious one! She decided to cook venison in the sap but as the liquid boiled away, it left an unusual sweet maple taste on the meat.

Over generations, the Native Americans perfected the art of tapping and sugaring. They discovered that by making V-shaped slashes, the sap would flow easily into hollowed out wooden receptacles. Had it not been for the Native Americans’ willingness to share their precious natural insights, we immigrants

would have had a much harder time surviving in this new world. And we might have even missed out on maple sugar!

It’s the right time now to head for the perfumed air of a local sugar shack and sample and savor the gift of the Iroquois. Here’s a listing of a few local sugar shacks:

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Chestnut Hill Road
413-367-2031

Erving:

Zilinski Sugarhouse
20 East Prospect Street
413-422-2365

Gill:

Upingill
411 Main Road

413-863-9739

Leverett:

The Field Family
Sugarhouse
264 Long Plain Rd., Rte. 63
413-548-9886

Hadley:

North Hadley Sugar Shack
181 River Dr.
413-585-8820

Deerfield:

Williams Farm Sugar House
477 Greenfield Rd.,
On Rtes. 5 & 10,
413-773-5186

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JESSICA HARMON ILLUSTRATION

BY FRED CICETTI

LEONIA, NJ -Q. [My last column was on medical genealogy. This is a follow-up on genetic testing.]

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.

A medical genealogy or medical family tree can reveal patterns. If you have prepared a

medical genealogy and found that a disease seems to run in your family, you might want to consider genetic testing. This form of testing can help you plan.

DNA, or deoxyribonucleic acid, is in the genes you get from your parents. DNA guides the cells in your body. If your DNA contains a mutation, you could develop a medical condition.

A test can reveal mutations that raise the risk of developing a disease. Positive results for certain diseases can induce people to take preventive action, such as surgical removal of endangered organs.

About 900 genetic tests are now offered by diagnostic laboratories.

The tests cost from less than \$100 to a few thousand dollars. Your health insurance may not cover testing.

Testing usually requires a blood sample, but may require hair, skin or other tissue samples, such as cells from the inside of your cheek.

Genetic testing should be viewed as a fallible tool. A positive result for a mutation doesn't mean you'll get a disease. And a negative result doesn't mean you are immune.

Multiple mutations can cause a disease. Multiple genes can be responsible for a single disease. There are gene changes that develop without any link to your

ancestors; they happen because you smoke or get too much sun or sometimes for no known reason.

If you decide to try genetic testing, remember that what you learn about yourself could be reassuring, but it could also be upsetting.

Genetic testing is a subject to discuss first with your personal physician. You may be referred to a medical-genetics specialist, who is trained to interpret the results of tests.

To find genetics professionals in your area, contact the National Society of Genetic Counselors at www.nsgc.org; GeneClinics at www.geneclinics.org; or the

American Society of Human Genetics

at www.faseb.org/genetics. To find more information about the medical conditions present in your family and about support groups, contact the Genetic Alliance at www.geneticalliance.org.

You may also want to consult a lawyer to protect your interests. Results of genetic tests are usually kept in your medical records. When you apply for insurance, the prospective insurer may want to examine your medical records. In some cases, your employer might also have access to your medical records.

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

PLAY from pg 1

especially when one of the chief knights, Sir Harry, (Brian Campbell) has been so bold as to get one of the leading ladies - Larkin - (Amber Marion) pregnant.

Harry is a handsome lad, with a tendency to impersonate a suit of armor when his lady breaks into extended song, but he has spunk, and that's a quality in short supply in these parts. What's an errant knight to do in a fix like this? Go find a suitable princess to make a match for Dauntless, so all the other couples in the land can get formally hitched, and so he does.

Enter the redoubtable Princess Winnifred, a little awkward but more than willing, in fact in such a hurry to make her fortune and find her Prince that she swam the moat to reach him. That should have been test enough for any doting mother, but Aggravain is determined to keep her boy in short pants and tucked behind her skirts forever, so she devises another insoluble ruse to foil Winnifred. After her long journey, she must be tired, so how about lying down on a bed made of 20 of the softest mattresses in the land? But, if Winnifred is able to sleep without feeling the pea Aggravain has hidden beneath the 20th mattress, then she's no princess, and cannot marry her son.

All around the castle, the corridors are filled with winsome lads and lasses rooting for Winnifred, and others who have good reason to trip up the queen. Chief among them, and one of the great surprises of the evening, is the king himself, a man of infi-



Among the principals at work in *Once Upon a Mattress* were (from left to right, starting at the top) Aaron Cappucci, as Dauntless, Lara Ames as Winnifred, Christian Drew as the Jester, Anton Luz as the King, Kris York as the Minstrel, Amber Marion as Larkin, Brian Campbell as Harry, Chris Humphrey as the Wizard, and the peerless Abbey Daniel-Green as Queen Aggravain.

nite jest and most excellent fancy, even though he spends almost the entire evening speechless.

Indeed, I have a new hero, and his name is Anton Luz. How a young man with no voice can steal nearly every scene he appears in may remain a mystery for anyone who failed to make the show. Nevertheless, he did, through sheer force of personality, conveyed with unerring physical humor and a wider array of facial expressions than Jim Carey or even Marcel Marceau could muster. He was great.

But no more than a number of others in this stellar cast. Let's start at the beginning: even before Nicotra brought Princess 12 magically to life, the spotlight found firm footing on the broad

shoulders of the Minstrel (Kris York) who looked like he could have as easily been cast in a World Wrestling match, but instead displayed the court bearing and rich baritone of a Robert Goulet in Camelot. The lute looked like a bauble in his hands, (it's a good thing he didn't actually attempt to play it!)

Larkin is a study in contrasts, running hot and cold, thrilling with her high alto one moment, and chilling with her tendency to throw fits at the slightest pretext the next. But hers is a character that showed remarkable development as the play progressed, a notable virtue in a number of cast members, but none more so than she. She showed real strength as she rushed off to make her for-

tune, carrying a wicker satchel and an emblematic birdcage, re-emerging in the next scene in Normandy, sporting a beret, like a member of some fifteenth century French resistance. Why not, for never was a tyrant more worthy of resistance than her Queen.

Words of praise would be almost wasted on one so talented as Christian Drew, who was back in his element as the Jester. No idle fool, he made every gesture count, investing his harlequin with expressive dignity. Best solo of the evening award goes to him for his spot-on rendering of Very Soft Shoes. He had them eating out of the palm of his hand.

Not to be overlooked, with his six-foot frame tucked beneath a conical wizard's cap, was the

utterly malicious Wizard, Chris Humphrey, who played the part with the fiendish glee of a young Malcolm McDowell. Whether hunched over a steaming vat of dry ice or towering above the footlights, he proved an able abettor to the Queen's wicked plots, undone only by his major character trait: vanity.

Everywhere you glanced in this whirling kaleidoscope, the eye found new objects of delight. Sunshine, in her directorial debut in Turners Falls, proved she was no newcomer to the world of theater: she was able to keep numerous moving parts and set pieces running smoothly and simultaneously, working now on the wings, now at the edge of the stage, now

see PLAY pg 14

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JEP'S PLACE Part LXXI

Hans & Fritz

BY JOSEPH A. PARZYCH GILL - I believe these pigs were from the last pigs trained by Fred Kerslake. He had inherited the act from his father Seabourne Frederique Kerslake who much preferred the nickname "Lil" to the moniker "Seabourne." Lil's father raised pigs and when a brood sow died, Lil raised her piglets by feeding them with a

spoon. They followed him around like puppies. He found that they caught on quickly and that he could easily train all of them. He began taking the trained pig act to county fairs, and soon began touring with Ringling Brothers, Barnum & Bailey, and the B.F. Keith vaudeville circuit, in addition to the fairs. His pigs even toured Europe and performed for heads of State. The pigs grew too big over the winter, so Lil kept one

pig to train the new troupe each spring. When he retired, his son S. Fred Kerslake took over the act. He did not have the patience his father Lil had, and he tired of continually training a new troupe. He figured dogs would not outgrow the act and he began training terriers. But he found that they were not as smart as pigs. They did not catch on quickly, and he went back to training pigs. Lacking his father's patience, he used a whip to hasten their

learning. The whip was on the end of a long thin stick, which he used to tap the pigs to prompt them. The SPCA did not take kindly to his training methods and kept after him until he grew tired of the whole thing and sold the pigs. I have no idea how Pa found out they were for sale, but he bought Hans and Fritz, much to our utter delight. After the pigs were at the farm for a time, they went off their feed. Pa was worried that they were sick. At dusk one evening, we heard a commotion. Chickens were cackling and squawking. They had taken to roosting on the

top railing of the pig pen. Hans & Fritz regarded this as their own little KFC fast food outlet and were apparently enjoying a snack each evening. We locked the rest of the chickens in the hen house, and Hans & Fritz went back to the hog trough for food. Being isolated on the farm made the occasional visitor a special treat. When word spread about our circus pigs, people began showing up. We delighted in showing company our pigs. Often, Hans & Fritz would run around and perform all manner of antics, running and jumping over each other, or whirling around in place. We learned later that the pigs performed a spontaneous "free-for-all" at the end of each performance when they were on tour. It was not anything they had been trained to do. They just loved to show off and hear us applaud. We thought of the pigs as pets, bought for our amusement, not realizing what would eventually happen to them. We couldn't wait to show them to Helen.

- Continued Next Week

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This week Joe Parzych visited the Dickenson Memorial Library in Northfield and read from Jep's Place for a crowd of about a dozen, in spite of the rainy March day. The deluxe autographed edition of Jep's Place is now available at Nim's Market.

PLAY from 13

with nearly the entire ensemble dancing and singing at once, as during the aptly named Spanish Panic. She had great material to work with, and brought out the best in her cast. The costumes, courtesy of Nancy Daniel-Green and a bevy of assistants, were flat out gorgeous. And the musical accompaniment, provided by a six-member pit band under the seamless direction of Henry Gaida was superb.

The audience also loved the ensemble ladies, who proved that the move of sixth graders to the middle school came not a moment too soon for these rising stars. Megan Horan was particularly poised in the spotlight: we can't wait to see her and her coterie get speaking parts next year.

Let's return to the topic of the winsome Winnifred, who stole not only Dauntless's heart (I'm In Love with a Girl Named Fred), but the entire court's. As played by Ames, she's a brassy, sassy lass, who never saw the inside of a finishing school, but she provides just the spark of life the listless kingdom needed. She had

many great moments, not least her deft handling of what might have been an embarrassing opening night faux pas when she dropped a verse in the middle of her torch song, Happily Ever After. She never missed a beat, kept dancing, apologized broadly stage right, ("I'm sorry I screwed up for you guys!") picked up the chorus and completed the number to ringing applause. Ames also seemed to grow in her role as the evening progressed, a credit to her dramatic ability to turn an awkward interloper into the belle of the ball. Bravo!

But without doubt, the play's central figure and pitch perfect performance was Daniel-Green's Aggravain. Brought off with verve and vigor, she gave an commanding portrayal of the depravity to which a desperate matriarch can go in her effort to control her baby's destiny. With a sneer that could curdle new milk, a tongue like a knife, she delivered one virtuoso blast of invective after another, depriving an entire kingdom of air and leaving the audience breathless.

And Dauntless, what of him? A fine, understated performance.

Milquetoast has more spine. But he found his gumption at the end, and set his father free, his mother hopping, and his lady love on the top mattress in the land. It was a great show, and like so many things that happen in high school, if you weren't there, you missed it.



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ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT



JACK COUGHLIN ILLUSTRATION

FRIDAY, MARCH 21st
Brick House Concert featuring the bands "TMD", "Fashion People", and "Fat Worm of Error". 7 p.m., \$5. The Brick House is located at 24 Third St., Turners Falls.

The Montague Bookmill and the Lady Killigrew Cafe present: Music at the Mill, **David Wax**, an innovative blend of Americana folk and traditional Mexican. davidwaxmuseum.com, 8 p.m.

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

SATURDAY, MARCH 22nd
Pancake Breakfast: pancakes with real maple syrup, sausage, juice & coffee. Held at 2nd Congregational Church, Greenfield. 8 to 11 a.m. (413) 774-4355.

Easter Egg Hunt, Diemand Farm, Wendell. 10 to 12 p.m. Egg hunt (bring a basket), egg coloring, Easter craft, baby animals! Info. (978) 544-3806.

Rt. 63 Roadhouse, Millers Falls: **Mystic Rebels** - Reggae: Bob Marley, Peter Tosh covers, 9:30 p.m.

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

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

SUNDAY, MARCH 23rd
The Dead of Winter Film Series, Montague Bookmill, Montague Center. **Best Years of Our Lives** (1946) William Wyler's tale of WWII

vets; tender with an underlying toughness. Free (with a passed hat); food & drink available at the Lady Killigrew and the Night Kitchen. 7 p.m.

Deja Brew, Wendell: **Steve Crow, Peter Kim, Don Macaulay** - 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.

TUESDAY, MARCH 25TH
Accessible Birding with Joe Superchi. Visit local sites 8 a.m. to 10 a.m., meet at the Millers River Environmental Center, 100 Main St., Athol. Open to birders of all abilities. Call ahead for wheelchair van access (978) 248-9491. Continues each Tuesday through June 30th.

THURSDAY, MARCH 27th
Block Party Planning Meeting, 6 p.m. at the Montague Town Hall. You are invited to attend a planning meeting for this year's August Block Party in Turners Falls. riverculture@montague.net

The GCC Peace & Social Justice Club invites you to "Peace and Truth for Reel," free film: **The End of Suburbia: Oil Depletion and the Collapse of the American Dream**, 7 p.m. with discussion to follow.

Deja Brew, Wendell: **Larry Kopp** - Blues, no cover 8 to 10 p.m.

FRIDAY, MARCH 28th
Deadline for artists residing in Massachusetts to submit entries for the "Barns of Franklin County" art show and sale. Entry forms may be picked up in the lobby of the Greenfield Community College Downtown Center. Email version available, contact Beverly Phelps edcp.bap@comcast.net.

Montague Parks & Recreation Family Fun Night, 6:30 - 8 p.m. Unity Park Fieldhouse, Turners Falls. Ping-pong, board games, music, and raffles! Snacks. Children must be accompanied by an adult. Free. Drop-in.

The Montague Bookmill and the Lady Killigrew Cafe present Music at the Mill: **Mawwal**. 8 p.m., Montague Center. Food, beer and wine available. www.mawwalmusic.com



MAWWAL performs both original music and arrangements of traditional Middle Eastern music in a spirited and beautiful trance-inducing acoustic ensemble. At the Montague Book Mill on Friday, March 28th, 8 p.m.

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

SATURDAY, MARCH 29th
Hallmark Museum of Contemporary Photography, Ave A, Turners Falls. Artist's Reception for Lili Almog at Studio 52 - **Perfect Intimacy Revealed Through Photographer's Eyes** and Linda Butler - **Meditations on Simplicity** in Studio 56, 1 - 5 p.m. Illustrated public Artist Talk held in the auditorium at Hallmark Institute of Photography, Industrial Boulevard, Turners Falls, Seating - 7:15 p.m. Lili Almog Talk - 7:30 to 8:15 p.m. Intermission with Linda Butler Talk - 8:30 p.m.

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.

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

The Bright Morning Star band 'reunion concert' at All Souls Unitarian Church, Greenfield, 8 p.m. Benefit for the 'Safe & Green' campaign, a grassroots education and action effort to replace nuclear power with energy conservation and efficiency coupled with safe, sustainable, and affordable power

sources. Info: 863-8952.

SUNDAY, MARCH 30th
The National Spiritual Alliance, Lake Pleasant: Healing Lecture & Participatory Demo., 1 to 3 p.m.

Family Dance, Montague Grange: simple, dances paced for little feet. Perfect for 5yr olds to 15. Sixteen to 60! Tim Van Egmond with **Shingle the Roof**, 4 to 6 p.m.

Amandla Community Chorus Spring Concert: With special guest, Sisters of the Drum. For 20 years, the Amandla Community Chorus has brought songs from around the world to enthusiastic audiences. Held at Temple Israel, 27 Pierce Street, Greenfield. \$8-\$15, sliding scale. 7:30 p.m.

THROUGH MARCH 30th
Photography exhibit at Vermont Center for Photography, Brattleboro: **The Long View, Panoramic Photographs from Exhibiting Members** Gallery Hours are Thursday, Friday from 2 to 7 p.m., Saturday and Sunday from 12 to 5 p.m. Info: (802) 251-6051

MONDAY, MARCH 31st
Deja Brew, Wendell: **A Night of Spoken Word** - Open Mic, no cover, 7 to 10 p.m.

Live jazz at Ristorante DiPaolo, Turners Falls, **Joe Belmont** - solo guitar, 6:30 to 9:30 p.m.

TUESDAY, APRIL 1st
Book Discussion Group: **Animal, Vegetable, Miracle** - Author Barbara Kingsolver Held at Northfield Mountain Recreation Area. 7 - 9 p.m. Pre-register by calling (800)859-2960.

SATURDAY, APRIL 5th
Comedy at the Shea with Larry Lee Lewis and comedians, The Shea Theater, Turners Falls. Some proceeds benefit Franklin County Relay for Life (American Cancer Society) and The Turners Falls All Sports Booster Club. Material appropriate for 18 and older. Showtime 8 p.m., doors open at 7 p.m. Tickets \$15, available on-line at www.sheacomedy.com, and at the World Eye Book Shop.

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ILLUSTRATION BY ANJA SCHUTZ

BY KARL MEYER

GREENFIELD - It's become part of my personal landscape history. I realized this when I left the edge of the pavement and fitted myself into a narrow, snow-slumped trail made by hikers, cross country skiers, and snowshoers in a wide swatch of woods. Something about the light, and the March snow cover, enabled me to discern the date almost exactly: it was 9 years ago that I'd first taken this path into these woods.

I remembered because I had just moved back to the Connecticut Valley after a stint living in Rhode Island, and then eastern Massachusetts where I'd worked for Mass Audubon. I was thrilled to be back, and went out walking along the edge of this ridge with a small knot of friends. It was a sunny, mid-afternoon when we came abreast of a small hemlock grove along the dirt track. The sound caught my ear immediately; we all stopped.

It was a thin, melodious, wavering trill, coming from somewhere in the shadows of

those hemlocks. Eastern screech owl. There came that sweet, spooky, arc of a trill again. We all stood, mesmerized. These were not thick hemlocks; the little grove was only fifteen feet deep, spread along sixty feet of trail. It seemed there was no way these birds could not have been aware of four people chatting as they moved through the woods.

But there was more to this, of course. These were screech owl courtship calls. Both the males and females of these eight-inch, tufted-eared owls sing. We never glimpsed either of them. But neither did we disturb them. Pair bonding was occurring as this little herd of humans stood silent, taking in the cool March air. By mid-April they would be sitting on four to five eggs, the male and female sharing the incubation. Sometimes the two of them would squeeze into that tiny nest hole together. By May they would be feeding their young pre-digested bugs, mice, and wood frogs.

On this cool March afternoon I continued my walk, reminded that this is now a

familiar wild place, about equal parts park, open woods, and forest. I'm grateful to have it as part of my history. There had been another recent snow, but the angle of the sun was scouring out bare ground in many south-facing places. The maple sap was building in those tree roots, readying to make its spring run. You could just feel it. A little downy woodpecker hammered away at a bark-less snag.

For the next while my walk was unremarkable; contemplative. Footsteps on a softening snow path. I eventually wandered up a path that brought me alongside a little rill. With nothing in particular wedged in my mind, I can only say I was startled by a raucous "bah!, bah!, bah!!" I froze. It was a pileated woodpecker, a familiar resident here. Many decaying hardwood snags in this tract bear their signature fist-sized carvings. I looked up to the trees, but saw nothing.

Then, a shadow, and "bah!, bah!, bah!!" again. It was below me, and to the left, smack in the middle of a ten-foot pool of

water, moving gently by the input of that tiny brook. Red-crest raised, wings held aside, this crow-sized king of the woodpecker family was having itself a bird bath. I didn't move. I thought it had been yelling about my intrusion. This was something else. It fidgeted in awkward contentment in that stream for twenty seconds. When it looked aside I quickly shifted so I could get a better look around the thick trunk in front of me. As the woodpecker shook its wings, droplets rolled off its back. Then it took off.

I thought it would be gone, but the bird stayed. It simply pumped off wing beats enough to take it to a spindly, wrist-thick elm, and then glued itself to the bark, where it used its bill to preen from the tail forward. It was a ridiculously small tree for such a large bird. But then it shot into flight again, not away from me, but back into the puddle. "Bah!, bah!, bah!!", it screamed, settling into the

chilly stream. Again, it bathed for a minute; then took off to a nearby tree. This one was a slightly more suitable maple, the thickness of the barrel of a baseball bat. It did a little more preening there, perhaps dispensing with some of the mites in its feathers.

It repeated this act once more, its boisterous yells coming as it settled into the cold water. I felt like I was watching some Russian bureaucrat visiting an icy Moscow pool, then scooting back into the steam bath. Finally, after a victorious yell, it took off for a more suitable forest tract, landing about 40 feet up on the fat trunk of a hundred-foot white pine. I soon lost it in the branches, in woods that are now part of my landscape history.

Cooling thought: pump up your bike tires, put on your hush puppies, and resolve to drive less often over the face of a warming planet this spring. Happy Equinox!

THIS WILD PLACE

March Madness

Uncommon Visitors on the Pond

BY FRAN HEMOND

MONTAGUE CENTER - The treat of a decade. Common mergansers have stopped in at North Pond for a happy swim on their way home after a winter down south. Every year, a few migrating birds appear when I am watching, but that bright, warm day a beautiful drake took lordly possession and sailed down between the snowed-over banks in the late afternoon sun.

A few merganser girls often have South Pond as a tourist rest, but their modest brown coat enhanced by a rusty crest cannot compare with his big black and white presence and its striking pattern, set off with a no-nonsense red merganser bill, well-suited to fishing. Call them ducks, if you will. They dive for their dinner.

The pond has resident ducks. Mallards are likely to lounge around the pool whenever it is free of ice, and tip to feed on grasses under water. Too, black ducks come to feed

and socialize, but with seemingly more purpose and a wary eye out for intruders. But the common merganser dominating North Pond this early March day and skimming along so resolutely was a drake with a mission.

A lovely merganser duck was by the bank at the far end of the water. She looked well put together, and moved with precision, one slim, powerful bird when she flapped her wings and almost seemed to stand tippy-toe to let us know she was there. I have underappreciated the common merganser ducks of former years here at Cold Brook, or out in the middle of the Connecticut River. Without a handsome drake to attract, the girls had never bothered to show their talents. But this fine evening, the best of a handsome breed had the pond as their stage. They quite rivaled the doings in the pond of my little hooded merganser duck, Cupcake, that I wrote about when she added

an early spring 'lively' for a few years, and one year brought a drake.

I thought the common mergansers might only be staying for the night. I had last seen them as they competed in diving deep and wide, seldom coming up as they exited the causeway back to the South Pond. But today, in a pelting rain, there was an exhilarating sight for a dismal day, a bright scene on the dark water. Two pair of gorgeous common mergansers were sailing down South Pond together as evening closed in.

Peterson's Field Guide indicates that a few common mergansers breed this far south locally, but mostly they nest at latitudes of northern New England and beyond. They winter to our south, and these may be Canadian birds on their way to Newfoundland or more westerly Canada. In any event, Cold Brook Pond must now be an approved spot for migrant mergansers.

MCTV Schedule: March 21-27

Eagle Cam:

Friday 1P-530P, Saturday 1P-530P, Sunday 1230P-530P, Monday 1P-530P, Tuesday 12P-530P, Wednesday 12P-530P, Thursday 1230P-530P

If We Have a Signal You Will Have a Picture
Friday, March 21

8:00 am The Essence of Country
9:30 am Montague Update: Jamie Berger
10:30 am Select Board (3/17/08)
12:00 pm Common Man Eric Goodchild
6:00 pm Montague Update: Susan Shilliday
6:30 pm Carlos W. Anderson: Why we were Born
7:00 pm GMRSD (3/11/08)
9:00 pm Underground Railway Concert
10:30 pm Discovery Center Woodpeckers

Saturday, March 22

8:00 am Montague Update: Susan Shilliday
8:30 am Carlos W. Anderson: Why we were Born
9:00 am GMRSD (3/11/08)
11:00 am Underground Railway Concert
6:00 pm Independent Voices 34
6:30 pm Over The Falls: Community Owned Retail
7:00 pm Special School Committee Meeting (3/20/08)
9:00 pm Amandla
10:30 pm EatonDorRyu Ichi
11:00 pm Flight

Sunday, March 23

8:00 am Independent Voices 34
8:30 am Over the Falls: Community Owned Retail
9:00 am Special School Committee Meeting (3/20/08)
11:00 am Amandla
11:30 am Flight
6:00 pm Gill Montague Gala: Essence of Country
7:00 pm Town of Montague Budget Forum (3/17/08)
9:00 pm Skin N Bonz
10:00 pm Memorial Day Parade & Ceremony

Monday, March 24

8:00 am Gill Montague Gala: Essence of Country
9:00 am Town of Montague Budget Forum (3/17/08)
11:00 am Skin N Bonz
6:00 pm Sustainable Energy
6:30 pm Senior Aerobics
7:00 pm Montague Select Board: (Live)
9:00 pm Chronicles: Mass for Mary Machaiek
10:00 pm Discovery Center: Open Mic Night

Tuesday, March 25

8:00 am Sustainable Energy
8:30 am Senior Aerobics
9:00 am Chronicles: Mass for Mary Machaiek
10:00 am Discovery Center: Open Mic Night
6:00 pm Montague Update: Tim Neuman
7:00 pm GMRSD (Live)
9:30 pm Gill Montague Gala: Essence of Country
10:30 pm Safe & Green Forum

Wednesday, March 26

8:00 am Montague Update: Tim Neuman
9:00 am Gill Montague Gala: Essence of Country
10:00 am Safe & Green Forum
6:00 pm Special School Committee Meeting (3/20/08)
8:00 pm Amandla
9:30 pm Carlos W. Anderson: In The World Not of It
10:00 pm Art Fest

Thursday, March 27

8:00 am Special School Committee Meeting (3/20/08)
10:00 am Amandla
11:30 am Carlos W. Anderson: In The World Not of It
6:00 pm Carlos W. Anderson: We Are Blessed
7:00 pm Montague Select Board (3/24/08)
9:00 pm Common Man: Eric Goodchild
10:00 pm Bermanke

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