

The Montague Reporter

YEAR 19 – NO. 9

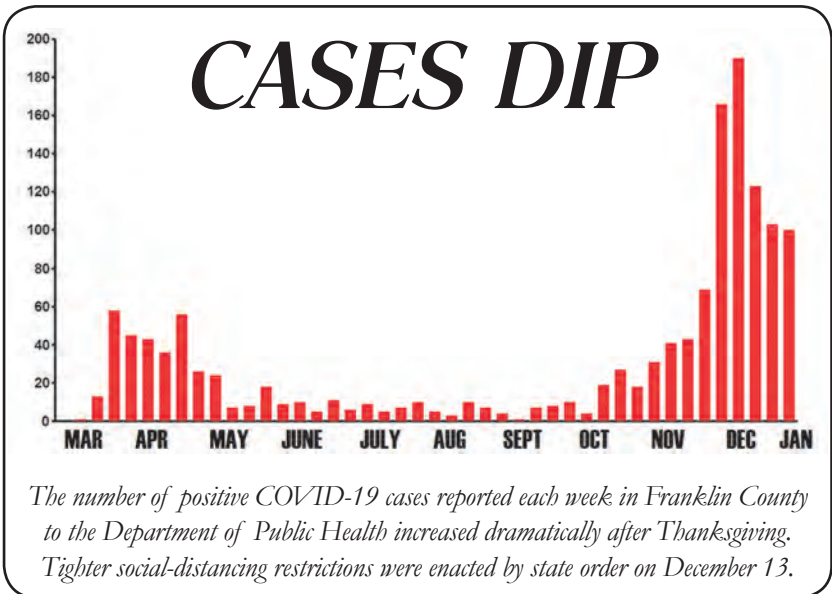
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THE VOICE OF THE VILLAGES

JANUARY 7, 2021



ERVING SELECTBOARD

Sanders Quits Erving Board; Election Plan Undetermined

By KATIE NOLAN

On Monday night, Erving selectboard chair Jacob Smith announced that Peter Sanders had resigned from the selectboard. In a letter dated December 31, Sanders said his resignation, to deal with an unexpected situation, was “effective immediately.”

Both Smith and the member William Bembury expressed regret about the resignation, and said that Sanders would be missed. The remaining board members plan to consult with town clerk Richard Newton before deciding whether to continue

as a two-member board until the annual town election in May or hold a special election earlier.

Sanders continues to serve as the town’s water and wastewater superintendent.

At the same meeting, the board reviewed documentation for the police chief search and approved advertising for the position, conditionally approved the appointments of two patrol officers, and, joined by the finance committee, discussed the POTW#2 sludge dryer project and reviewed budget requests from a number of town departments.

see **ERVING** page A5

LEVERETT SELECTBOARD

Leverett Cops Get Body Cams

By GEORGE BRACE

After a lengthy and complicated discussion at their remotely-held meeting on Tuesday, the Leverett selectboard decided against changing health insurers for town workers in the upcoming fiscal year. Among other business, the board also approved the placement of stop signs at the intersection of Long Hill and Depot roads, and the use of grant money to purchase body cameras for the police department.

Wendy Tirrell of the Massachusetts Interlocal Insurance Association (MIIA) was in attendance to answer questions about a change

in insurers being considered by the town. Residents and members of the finance committee asked numerous technical questions in an effort to better understand the ramifications of the change.

Chair Julie Shively explained that the town is always looking for ways to save money, but the possibility of heading towards a “financial cliff” made such efforts even more important. Town administrator Marjorie McGinnis said she wanted to make clear the town was not looking at other insurers due to unhappiness with its current provider, Hampshire Trust. McGinnis said

see **LEVERETT** page A5

DISPATCH

The Moody Blues, Part III Town to Moody Center: Go Now

Much of Northfield is undeveloped and unprotected from future development. Controlling future development will become an increasingly important priority.

– Northfield Master Plan, 2014

By CHIP AINSWORTH

NORTHFIELD – The Northfield selectboard announced last week it was forming an *ad hoc* committee to hash out the brouhaha surrounding the Moody Center’s plan to put a large housing development on a small parcel of open space in a residential part of East Northfield. Those interested in joining the committee have until January 19 to submit a form posted on the Northfield website, www.northfieldma.gov.

Last month a site plan review of the housing project was submitted

to the town clerk and subsequently presented to the planning board at its regularly scheduled Zoom meeting. The presentation by Moody Center COO James Spencer and architect Christian Arnold was watched by over fifty residents.

Planning board chair Steve Serebinski told Moody reps they’d need a special permit to move forward. This is a significant step for neighbors, because it gives them the right to seek “judicial review” if they want to appeal the project.

The Campus Collaborative Committee will be composed of three Northfield residents, town administrator Andrea Llamas, one member each from the planning board, selectboard and finance committee, and at least one person from the Moody Center and Thomas Aquinas College. “One or two from each, we haven’t decided yet,” said

see **MOODY** page A8

Healthcare Workers, First Responders Line Up for Early Coronavirus Vaccines

By JEFF SINGLETON

We are being inundated with horror stories about the COVID vaccine rollout “fiasco.” According to yesterday’s *New York Post*, approximately 70% of available coronavirus vaccines available to immunize Americans are “sitting in freezers” unused while senior citizens in Daytona Beach, Florida are “camped out overnight” waiting to be inoculated. The paper reports that the Sunshine State has received

1.1 million doses, but only 264,512 have been administered. California, meanwhile, is reported to have immunized only 1.1% of its population, and the nation fell far short of President Trump’s proclaimed target of administering 20 million inoculations by the end of 2020.

Business Insider quotes a “billionaire investor” named Bill Ackerman expressing outrage over delays in getting vaccines to the elderly. “This seems like genocide,” he said. And *The New York Times* adopted

a more moderate tone, calling the rollout in its home city “sluggish,” but also warned that this caused local officials to be “alarmed.”

But how are things going in Franklin County?

Interviews with local officials suggest a great deal of uncertainty and occasionally frustration with the process, which is being organized primarily by the state. The timeline for inoculating specific groups may have been pushed back by several

see **VACCINES** page A4

A Hidden Stimulus: School Meals

By MIKE JACKSON

GILL-MONTAGUE – As the eleventh month of the COVID-19 pandemic approaches, workers in two public kitchens in Turners Falls are still working nonstop, with very little recognition, to provide food for between 250 and 300 children in the community at risk of going hungry.

These kitchens, located at Sheffield Elementary School and Turners Falls High School, are churning out 4,200 meals every week. Every Tuesday and Thursday, the staff head out on buses to deliver bagged and reheatable meals to sites throughout the towns where local parents can pick them up, free of charge, regardless of whether their children are enrolled in the district.

“The routine and job look very different this year,” pupil services director Dianne Ellis told the *Reporter*. “They’re prepping different types of food, because it needs to be able to travel.... Everyone really misses our students. People are all looking forward to a time we can be in the buildings and be together.”

The department is also short-handed, following the departure in November of food services director Heather Holmes. “We’ve served a meal every day since the shutdown happened,” superintendent Brian Beck told the school committee as he shared the news that Holmes had given notice. “She’s really stepped up and done a great job getting this in order.”

The position was posted the same week, but two months later, it has not yet been filled. “We have not found a qualified candidate yet,” Ellis said. “The position would need someone who has a college degree, and has prior experience in food service.”



Sheffield Elementary School cafeteria manager Ann Annear (left) and assistant Melissa Murphy (right) package meals on Wednesday afternoon for Thursday morning distribution.

In the absence of a director, said Ellis, the gaps have been filled by cafeteria managers – Liana Pleasant at the high school, and Ann Annear at Sheffield – as well as by business manager Joanne Blier.

“Joanne’s a bit of an unsung hero,” Ellis added.

see **SCHOOL MEALS** page A3

THE BIG PICTURE

Local & Online: A Storefront, Not a Search Bar

By CHARLOTTE MURTISHAW

GREENFIELD – Groan if you want, but while most people used lockdown as a time to at least think about reading more books, Greenfield resident Andrew Ritchey took it a step further: He and a friend decided to reinvent book distribution. In September, Ritchey and New York-based friend Jamie Johnston started an online bookstore named Massive Bookshop out of Ritchey’s house.

The concept is simple and familiar: Customers go online, order books, and then receive the books. That

being said, there’s much more under the surface. With a goal of growing into a worker-owned cooperative, Massive Bookshop is anti-Amazon and “anti-profit.” recycling all earnings back into stocking books or community organizations. All expenses and earnings are broken down in monthly newsletters to subscribers.

Ritchey talked with the *Montague Reporter* about the inspirations behind the left-leaning bookstore, how it all works, and the illusion of the necessity of rent. (The transcript has been abridged, reordered, and edited for clarity; see a link at the end for the full version.)

MR: What brought you to this? What’s the vision?

AR: The idea for the Massive Bookshop started in conversation with my friend Jamie, who is also in the book business. We were talking about how to do a book cooperative in an interesting way, particularly with the pandemic revealing all of the different weak points in the supply chain, and showing how retail businesses on Main Street are really vulnerable – especially businesses like book businesses, which are dependent on having lots of people continually in the store browsing.

I had worked for the co-op grocery store in town, Green Fields Market, and so I was also thinking about groceries, and seeing what had been happening in the Valley with farms coming together and delivering groceries to people or doing pickups.

see **BOOKSHOP** page A7

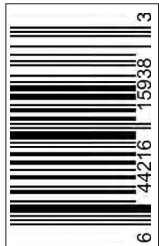


Massive Bookshop’s inventory sits in cofounder Andrew Ritchey’s Greenfield basement – and attic (pictured).

Pretty Distracted By National News, But Here’s Some Local Stuff

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The Montague Reporter

"The Voice of the Villages"

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About Face Computing

Founded by
Arthur Evans Harry Brandt David Detmold
August 2002

Jumping The Shark

“You’ll never take back our country with weakness. You have to show strength, and you have to be strong,” President Donald Trump exhorted his supporters on Wednesday.

Each week, nearly the entire A section of the *Montague Reporter* is edited and assembled on a Wednesday; truth be told, much of it is usually also written on Wednesdays. Wednesday, January 6, 2021 turned out to be a day for the history textbooks, as thousands of Trump dead-enders heeded his call and swarmed the United States Capitol. It was hard to get work done.

Having enjoyed a conduit to state power for four long years, the American hard right must now lurch into a system-oppositional position. One can’t simultaneously worship cops and punch them. Trumpism more broadly won’t vanish overnight; hundreds of professional grifters have collaborated to build a self-sealing media environment that can continue to flatter its base and protect it from outside fact.

The next two weeks will be wild: as we type this editorial Thursday morning, the news is already about potential Cabinet resignations and negotiations over invoking the 25th Amendment. In the two weeks between now and the inauguration of Joe Biden, we will either get to see a president removed from office, or spend a fortnight ruled by a cornered clown. Or maybe aliens will

land, or a world war will break out. Who even knows anymore?

Whatever happens, we are living through the ultimate historic failure of two-party representational democracy. This structure is remarkably stable, but only as long as both parties agree to function in apparently oppositional symbiosis. They will eventually split the electorate in a 50-50 gridlock, after which point if one party is in favor of any given idea, the other must agitate against it.

This holds until the society needs to *change* to survive – a crisis, such as global warming or a pandemic, that requires mass coordinated action – and when that day arrives, the gridlock that once lent a comforting stability will instead produce state failure.

And so here we are, a society polarized between the principles of cooperation and domination. Dumb luck that the right has fired the first shot. The next phase will be a *three-way fight*: a country in sore need of sweeping, fundamental change, with growing revolutionary camps on both the left and the right and an embattled institutional center that depends on the patronage of money.

Crucially, the markets are still strong – money itself is still doing OK – but if we head into a recession, we’ll all be in a very grave situation. Find your friends now, and make plans to keep each other safe.

NINA ROSSI ILLUSTRATION



Kyle Dufault prepares to administer a shingles vaccine at the Walgreens pharmacy in Turners Falls. Kyle says he likes being a pharmacist, and helping people, and has found that people are growing more patient as the pandemic wears on, rather than less.

Letter to the Editors

Stoves Need Pins

Public safety! Hot fire, but the door wouldn’t close, no safety pins! Modern wood-burning stoves, with short two-inch pins, and *nothing*, such as a cotter pin or something attached to the stove, to hold the pin down in place.

Alarming problem: Weekender homeowner opened fire door, fire burning, person didn’t notice the pin was out until after putting in another chunk of wood! *Hot fire*, but the door wouldn’t close! Wood stoves need safety pins!

In contrast, all pins on all the doors in houses are at least four and a half inches long. Hinges on refrigerators, strongly attached. Hinges on supply cupboards, strongly attached.

Why do hot wood-burning stoves have short pins that can slide up and out? Two-inch pins! Nothing attached to hold those pins down in place! *No safety pins!*

I do odd jobs, so I put on four-inch carriage bolts and nuts, but that fixes just one stove. The manufacturers need to send owners longer replacement carriage bolt *safety pins*, with nuts and cotter pins, to fix all those stoves. Then houses won’t burn, and people won’t get burned by falling embers, because of open unhinged fire doors.

The company is north of Seattle. My insurance agent says, because the design is faulty, the company can be sued if you get hurt or your house is damaged.

Wrong design! I called firemen, but they won’t listen, so you need to check your stove. Fire, but no safety pins! Hot hanging fire doors that can’t be closed are dangerous.

Please check the hinge pins on all woodstoves.

Muriel Russell
Colrain

GUEST EDITORIAL

Big Questions About Proposed Airport Deal

By MIKE NAUGHTON

MILLERS FALLS – I’ve been trying to follow the news about the proposed purchase of Pioneer Aviation properties by the town of Montague, and while I’ve heard a lot about how this purchase might be financed, I haven’t heard much discussion about why it’s a good idea. That part seems to be assumed, based on the argument that the properties house businesses (a fueling station, an aircraft repair and maintenance facility, and a flight school) that are said to be vital for the ongoing future of the airport, and a potential sale to someone who chose not to continue those businesses would jeopardize that future.

I have some questions about this that I hope will receive more public discussion before town meeting members are asked to approve it.

For one thing, if these are viable businesses, why is it so unlikely that a new owner won’t want to continue them? The infrastructure is already there (presumably, to do something else a new owner would have to remove or renovate it), there’s a management team in place, and they produce steady and reliable revenue streams. Why is this not an attractive opportunity for a private owner?

The answer may be that the finances only make sense if the purchase is financed by grants available to the airport (these grants would cover 95% of the cost). If that’s true, it suggests either that the purchase price is too high or that the businesses aren’t really viable. A comment by Greg Garrison at a meeting on December 21 alluded to these concerns; I think this deserves more discussion.

Also, the property consists of three lots, and they house other businesses as well: a warehouse and some hangars. Are these vital to the future of the airport? If so, I’d like to hear more about why – and if not, why is it necessary that the town buys them?

Then there’s the question of what this means for the future. I’ve seen several airport managers over the years, and Bryan Camden is one of the best. I think his credibility has been a big factor in selling this project to town officials. But nobody lasts forever, and if this purchase is approved, Montague citizens will be responsible for operating these businesses whether Mr. Camden is there or not. This will include finding people to run the businesses, when, inevitably, the current team is no longer available. Have town officials really thought all this through, and is it in the best interests of Montague to take it on?

Montague doesn’t have an airport because the town decided that it needed an airport; Montague has an airport because a group of people started an airport and after some years gave it to the town. Since then, the town has accepted federal and state grants to maintain and improve it, and those grants have locked the town into continuing to operate it going forward. During that time, town relations with the airport have had their ups and downs; right now, they’re good, but they haven’t always been.

What’s past is past, but this purchase would both continue the grant-dependence cycle and raise the stakes – the town would go from maintaining runways and taxiways and leasing hangars to selling fuel and repairing aircraft. Maybe that’s a good idea, but I think there should be more public discussion. Once the town commits to doing it, opting out won’t be easy to do.

My general feeling is that it’s better to leave property in private hands unless there is a clear public purpose for the government – any government – to acquire it. What is the clear public purpose for this purchase except the belief that it’s necessary to save the airport (which, however well-founded, is a belief, not a certainty), and the airport must be saved because... well, you tell me.

It certainly has its adherents, but it also has its detractors, which suggests to me that any move by the town to expand its operations and responsibilities there should be preceded by a full public discussion of whether that’s what the people of Montague want.

I can see why this proposal might be attractive for the owners – they would sell all their holdings in one transaction for what seems like a fairly good price. I’m less clear on why the town of Montague should be the buyer, or whether, looking at the long run, it should want to be. I hope that there will be more discussion on this going forward.

Mike Naughton is a town meeting member from Precinct 2.

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By NINA ROSSI

Happy New Year! We hope that people enjoyed ripping our wrapping paper off of their presents this year, and that it bestowed a special local flavor to all your gifts.

Many thanks to all the folks who submitted designs and to those who bought wrapping paper. We greatly appreciate the vendors who carried this edition at their stores, and we are grateful to Montague's River-Culture program, which provided funding for the artists.

The very exciting – and free – **Get Down With Your Hometown virtual concert**, hosted by the Shea Theater, is happening this Fri-

day and Saturday, January 8 and 9!

Tons of your favorite performers are in the line up, which starts at 4:30 p.m. Friday evening. Check out Lake Street Dive, Kalliope Jones, Winterpills, The Suitcase Junket, Naia Kete & SayReal, Mal Devisa, Kimaya Diggs and many, many more, and contribute generously to the virtual tip jar.

Find out more, and attend, at www.getdownhometown.com.

The **Greenfield Garden Cinema** will be closed for the winter season, according to news we received from them recently. According to owner Isaac Mass, from July through the end of the year, the cinema operated on 10% revenue due to COVID-19.

The owners want those who did purchase gift cards to know that they never expire, and can be used after the theater reopens if they do not make it in by the last show this Sunday, January 10. Since January and February are the worst months for movie theater sales, Mass says they will not reopen until March or April.

Epsilon Spires' virtual cinema is currently featuring "Vidhi's Bollywood Film Club," showcasing monthly movies in that genre. Watch the 1960 classic *Mughal-e-Azam*, a love story set in 17th-century India, from now until January 16.

Another interesting online offering by Epsilon is a documentary about original Bauhaus member Moholy-Nagy, described as a radical Hungarian visionary who took a pioneering interdisciplinary mixed-media approach to art and design. Check this one out starting on Friday, January 8, and join an online discussion with the filmmaker on Wednesday, January 13 at 8 p.m. All available at epsilonspires.org.

about NQTA's commitment to preserving and maintaining our local trails. As well as encouraging and assisting all our fellow community members to take advantage of our local trail systems."

The **Sojourner Truth School for Social Change Leadership** has new classes available this February. All are free of charge, with subjects such as tech clinics on how to better use the Zoom platform, workshops that address community control over police and decolonizing mental health, to sessions focussing on poetry, mindfulness meditation, and more. Check out the schedule on www.truthschool.org.

The **Connecticut River Conservancy** is hosting a series of free livestream events on Wednesdays from 12 to 1 p.m. The next one is scheduled for January 27 and is called "Hydropower: Do rivers need water, and fish need elevators?" Find out what is proposed as part of the licensing agreement for the Turners Falls Dam and Northfield Pumped Storage Station at this event.

"We have long known that upstream fish passage at Turners Falls is inadequate and the river channel below the dam is dry most of the year," reads the CRC's event description. "The year 2021 is a critical time for all of us to speak up for our rivers. Join CRC River Stewards Kathy Urrfher and Andrea Donlon to find out more about hydro issues like river flows, fish passage, endangered species, and actions you can take to make a difference for your rivers." Go to www.ctriver.org for details.

The folks over at **Montague Community Television** are seeking to hire a producer to create local Spanish-language content. Email a cover letter to infomontaguetv@gmail.com to set up an interview.

Send your local briefs to editor@montaguereporter.org.

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Another Letter to the Editors

Plugging The Pod

Thank you to Elizabeth Irving of Montague Center for the recent letter responding to the podcast. I, too, enjoy the punny headlines and hidden jokes that make this newspaper entertaining as well as informative.

If you enjoy the *Montague Reporter* newspaper, I invite you to listen to the Montague Reporter Podcast, where we strive for the same qualities. We publish new

episodes every few weeks, and you can find us on the Montague Reporter website (look for the link in the top menu) or on your preferred podcast app.

If you would like to join this evolving endeavor, please reach out to us at podcast@montaguereporter.org or call the office.

**Sarah Brown-Anson
Greenfield**

SCHOOL MEALS from page A1

"She's not one to toot her own horn."

Blier reportedly spearheaded the department's largest pandemic relief effort yet, a push to distribute a massive wave of emergency groceries to families on December 22.

"We weren't able to have people come in and work during the break," Blier explained, "so we decided we wanted to do something to make sure [families] had the food that they needed."

By all accounts, the pre-holiday distribution was a major push. Administrators and even volunteers, including school committee chair Jane Oakes, pitched in with the effort, loading up a school van that tailed the regular food bus. Each family was handed two bags of supplemental groceries – cereal and milk; peanut butter, jelly, and bread; tuna fish; staples like pasta and rice – 146 bags in all. "One of the bags had to be close to 40 pounds," recounted Ellis.

While the meal program is largely funded on a reimbursement basis by the US Department of Agriculture, the majority of the funding for this grocery "stimulus" came from a private source: Dean's Beans Organic Coffee Company, headquartered in Orange. The company responded to an increase in online orders last spring by donating to a number of school meals programs. ("It seems like our business is succeeding because people are suffering," owner Dean Cycon said in May. "I thought, 'what can we do to remedy that a little bit?'"")

The company has so far donated over \$100,000 to a total of nine area school districts, according to spokesperson Katherine Parcell.

"Each school district figured out how best to use it, because everyone was in such a scram-

ble," Parcell said. "Some places used it for staffing overages; some used it for infrastructure, because they were having to handle so many more meals and bring in more food."

Gill-Montague, which has received \$12,000 from the company thus far, earmarked it for supplemental food, an item not covered by other COVID emergency grants. Money from the initiative represented the bulk of the approximately \$10,000 spent on the December grocery push, according to Blier and Ellis.

"Abroad, we do a number of different programs with our coffee [producer] cooperatives,



Staging for the December 22 grocery distribution, carried out with private donations and volunteer help.

ranging from healthcare to gender equity and fair trade," Parcell told the *Reporter* this week. Cycon, serving as an election observer in Georgia this week, was unavailable for comment.

"Here in the US, our issue is food insecurity," said Parcell. "We want to focus it, and mimic what we've been doing abroad at home, in terms of a true community development project."

Parcell said Dean's Beans has been in touch with state senator Jo Comerford and Project Bread as it seeks to develop a long-term strategy to impact hunger.

In the Athol-Royalston district, the company has been funding the transportation component of a food pantry the schools are establishing. In Greenfield, it donated to cover \$5,000 worth of grocery store gift certificates before the Thanksgiving break.

Though private and non-profit efforts to patch a strained safety net are often more visible, engaging in publicity as a matter of business, and while attention is also focused on stimulus packages at the federal level, local public school districts may be overlooked as a place to funnel resources.

"There is obviously a need, and there is a group of people who are working on that need," said Parcell. "As a small business, as someone who wants to help, you can just call up your local school and send them money. It's pretty easy, and it's a really big bang for your buck – that money is going directly into the mouths of people who need it the most."

Blier, the Gill-Montague business manager, agreed. "If we have people that want to donate money, maybe we can have food that goes out to families for the February break," she said. "Or for the April break."



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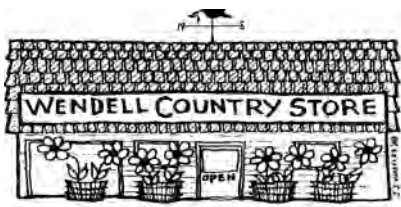
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Hours: Mon - Sat 11:30 am - 9 pm**VACCINES** from page A1

weeks, and previous decisions – including Montague's plan for mass inoculations at the Turners Falls Airport – are currently on hold.

But the state has just unveiled over 60 vaccination sites around the Commonwealth, and local officials generally feel that the basic process is being implemented as planned, if not precisely on schedule. With little infrastructure yet in place to vaccinate nearly the entire population, which is composed of diverse groups in a wide variety of institutional settings, bumps in the road can be expected. This is generally understood to be a work in progress.

The context for vaccine distribution is a three-phase plan announced by Governor Charlie Baker in early December. The first phase, initially timed for December and January, would inoculate hospital workers, nursing home staff and patients, and then first responders such as police officers, firefighters, and ambulance drivers. Phase 2, in February through April, includes at-risk older residents, those with pre-existing conditions, and essential workers in food distribution and public education, among others. Phase 3, which was to begin in April, will inoculate the "general public."

A detailed but readable graphic on the process can be found on the Department of Public Health website: www.mass.gov/info-details/when-can-i-get-the-covid-19-vaccine.

One complication is that vaccinations are targeted to a range of social and occupational groups at different levels of risk for COVID-19. For example, "COVID-facing" health-

care workers were generally located at hospitals, which received and administered their own vaccines. On the other hand, the state distributed vaccines to nursing homes and other long-term care facilities through Walgreens and CVS.

The distribution process for other frontline workers, which starts next Monday, was only finalized last week. Departments with 200 or more employees that follow certain guidelines can administer the vaccine on site, but those in smaller cities and towns will need to receive their shots at over 60 official sites around the state.

Whether the same distribution sites will be used for the final groups in Phase 1, and for those in the next two phases, is not entirely clear. According to Phoebe Walker, community services director at the Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG), the Franklin Community Health Center and LifePath, a non-profit organization serving seniors and their families, are in "active conversations" about how to vaccinate home healthcare workers.

Walker said that the pharmacies may be inoculating people in some congregate care facilities, such as homeless shelters, and that the Franklin County Jail may already have received its own vaccine. Attempts to reach the Franklin County Sheriff's Office were unsuccessful as of press time.

The situation will change rather dramatically with the onset of Phase 2, scheduled to begin in February, as a much larger number of people become eligible.

Walker, who serves on the governor's COVID-19 Vaccine Advisory Group, said that later distribution efforts could combine elements of the various parts of Phase 1. The hope, she indicated, would be to allow all medical providers and pharmacies that currently provide shots for the flu and shingles to administer COVID vaccines.

On Tuesday FRCOG sent an

The situation will change rather dramatically with the onset of Phase 2, scheduled to begin in February, as a much larger number of people become eligible.

email to police chiefs, fire chiefs, and others who manage first responders detailing the locations for vaccinations, which will begin next Monday. Sites will include the Jon Zon Community Center on Pleasant Street in Greenfield, the Community Health Center on Main Street in Greenfield, and the Campus Center at UMass Amherst. The timeline for the required second dose will probably have to extend until early February.

We spoke with a number of local police and fire chiefs, and they all seemed to feel that after several weeks of confusion and uncertainty, the path to vaccinating their staff was becoming clearer. Turners Falls fire chief John Zellman said he could not mandate that

staff take the vaccine, but believed nearly all full-timers would do so. "I just tried to educate them and let them make their own decision," he told the *Reporter*.

Zellman, who also serves as the town's emergency management director, said that the plan to use the airport as a vaccination center might be considered again "down the road."

Gill police chief Chris Redmond and fire chief Gene Beaubien are also encouraging staff to register for the vaccine. Their departments, like most in small towns in the area, rely heavily on part-time staff. Redmond noted that some of his officers would be receiving the vaccines at other places of employment.

Leverett police chief Scott Minckler, who also now serves as the chief for Wendell, said he believed that "probably 95%" of his full and part-time staff would be vaccinated.

As for long-term care facilities in the region, including nursing homes, FRCOG's Walker said they were "deep into" the vaccination process, which began in December.

We contacted Christine Looby, spokesperson for Trinity Senior Communities, which currently owns both the Farren Care Center in Montague City and Mount Saint Vincent Care Center in Holyoke, which will be consolidated later this winter in the latter facility. Looby said she did not yet have statistics on the number of staff and patients vaccinated, but that 95% had elected to take the shots, which will be administered by CVS.

**NOTES FROM THE WENDELL SELECTBOARD****Moldy Crawlspace, Land Conservation, Town Dogs**

By JOSH HEINEMANN

An observer from afar – a distant galaxy, for example – might have expected the Wendell selectboard to have a brief cursory meeting on December 23, with holidays coming so soon after. Board members could then go home and settle in. But almost a year into COVID isolation, board members were already home (or at least with reasonably good fortune) and settled somewhere for the evening, facing no cold drive home.

But any plans for an evening of that sort was contradicted by their agenda, which called for a full meeting. They met with town engineer Jim Slavas, Mount Grace Land Trust land stewardship coordinator Fletcher Harrington, assessor Anna Seeger, and Leverett police officer Meghan Gallo.

Slavas was there to talk about two separate topics, and was connected as the meeting opened. He first answered, as well as he could, questions about the town's computer network, its security, and the town's hardware and software needs.

The town is preparing to submit a Community Compact grant application in the fall. Slavas said he was willing to do some work on it, but it would be better for someone younger to keep track of the town's information technology needs, and to carry that work further into the future.

He said that so far the town's computers have been updated and connected to each other as needed and on an *ad hoc* basis. The network's security is uncertain.

Answering a question from selectboard chair Dan Keller, Slavas said the last assessment he remembered was in a three-year-old email. Keller said that if he could dig up the study, the board could take it from there, and update it as needed.

Town Hall Work

The second topic that Slavas addressed was insulating the town hall floor. That project was broken into sections to keep the annual cost

down. The first step was to make the crawlspace under the floor accessible for someone to spray foam insulation between the floor joists. Tom Chaisson removed dirt from the crawlspace until there was enough room. The lowered ground was then covered with a plastic vapor barrier, and sand was put on the vapor barrier to hold it down. Slavas said the vapor seal is not perfect, and that there are openings around the floor's supports.

The original estimate for insulating was done only for the main room's floor, not under the kitchen and stage. It would make sense to insulate those areas as well, but Slavas said they are hard to reach. Access from under the main floor is tight, and access from outside the building is constrained because the property line is so close to the building.

Before the old ducts were replaced, hot air leaking from them helped dry the crawlspace. New insulated ducts are saving energy costs, but are not helping keep mold away.

Slavas said that the mold should be eliminated before the insulation is installed, and recommended an ozone generator to do that. Unlike surface treatments, ozone penetrates and kills mold in wood's interior. The town can either buy an ozone generator or hire the work, and after allowing time for the ozone to degenerate into oxygen, the foam can be applied. Ozone treatment would have to be coordinated with Good Neighbors, because at the concentrations needed to kill mold ozone is toxic to humans as well.

The energy code calls for six inches of foam, but Slavas recommended four, because the code is for residences, and the town hall is an event space. The cost of foam is based on square feet covered one inch thick, the equivalent of board-foot. Foam will also form a seal under the floor, keeping mold and drafts away from the subfloor.

Conservation

Selectboard member Laurie DiDonato recused herself from the discussion with Fletcher Harrington. Harrington sought the selectboard's

approval of a conservation restriction (CR) on 25 acres of land including McAvoy's Pond, its surrounding wetlands, and upland forest that are owned by Laurie and Ray DiDonato.

The state has already reviewed the proposal, and Mount Grace will assume responsibility for stewardship of the land. The area covered does not include the area on which the fire department is seeking an easement to install a new dry hydrant.

Keller and selectboard member Gillian Budine voted to approve the conservation restriction.

Control & Surveillance

The selectboard appointed Meghan Gallo as Wendell's animal control officer (ACO) for the remainder of FY'20. The town coordinator will mail her an appointment slip, and Gallo will arrange getting sworn in with town clerk Anna Wetherby. Through the COVID isolation the town's former clerk, Gretchen Smith, arranged swearing in by telephone.

Wendell's longtime dog officer Maggie Houghton said she will continue to help, especially with loose dogs, because she knows the town dogs. She can also help Gallo with the town's roads.

Gallo's ACO training is on hold because of COVID isolation.

Gallo told board members about the grant with which the Leverett police, who now cover Wendell, plan to get body cameras. The cameras would download to a computer that only the police chief can view.

Keller's first reaction was to think the cameras "are a bit high tech to jump into," but Budine said she thought they can clarify muddled situations, and protect both officers and the community.

Keller changed his early reaction, and agreed that the cameras can protect the town as well.

Gallo reported that Leverett police officer William Kimball changed the radar speed indicator north of the town center so it shows the actual speed of an approaching vehicle, and no longer ceilings out at 35 miles per hour.

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LEVERETT from page A1

that her counterparts in other towns had recommended MIIA as a good option for exploring savings. She and the board spoke well of their experience with MIIA in other town business.

Town resident Josh Nugent and others thanked the board and McGinnis for their efforts. Nugent warned about engaging in a “sunk cost” fallacy, where people feel compelled to stay on a path they’ve begun. “It’s okay to switch paths,” he said.

In the end, the projected savings to the town of roughly \$15,000 – a fraction of its overall health insurance costs – did not seem worth the risk of the unknowns involved. “It’s very complicated,” Tirrell said, acknowledging the difficulty in comparing plans. “There are a lot of little parts. It’s very confusing.”

The board decided to drop the matter, but it was suggested that it be taken up again next year, with more time for research and analysis. “I think we should all put our energy into demanding national healthcare,” said Shively, getting in the last words of the grueling 45-minute discussion.

Highways and Byways

The board approved the purchase of four stop signs to be placed at Depot and Long Hill Road in response to requests from citizens to do something about the dangerous intersection. Resident Kip Fonsch spoke of two recent close accident calls he’d had, and cited support among fellow residents for increasing safety at the location. Fonsch said that while he doesn’t know of a serious accident there yet, it would be “foolhardy to think” it would stay that way.

Board member Tom Hankinson and police chief Scott Minckler reported that they had met at the intersection with highway superintendent Matt Boucher to discuss a solution, and decided on the four-way stop sign idea. Julie Shively commented that if it didn’t work out, the issue could be revisited.

Tammy Downs presented a request to the board to have Putney Road plowed by the town even though it is a private road, due to the person currently plowing it getting older, and a possible need for the town to use it to respond to emergencies.

The request was denied. McGinnis said she believed a town meeting vote was required for such a move, and she and Shively pointed out that this kind of benefit was rarely given. Hankinson noted that multiple groups of residents use private roads, and often informally divide

up the cost of plowing among themselves.

One resident participating remotely described private roads as “classist,” and not in the interest of a full and active democracy in Leverett.

Police Department

The board approved a request from police chief Scott Minckler to spend grant money on the purchase of body cameras for the department. The chief said the cameras were requested by officers a year and a half ago, and the timing was now right. Scott said he had never used them in the past, but it was a different age, and he sees it as a move to protect citizens, the police, and the town. State police, Boston police, and other local departments are currently conducting trial runs with cameras, and Minckler said they may become mandated in the future.

Questions were raised about policies regarding the film collected, and the chief said that newly-hired officer Steven Gould will be in charge of maintaining the system. An already-approved policy concerning their use will be made available for viewing.

Minckler also reported that Gould was in town, has been passing all required tests and checks, and has begun a one- to two-week training period.

The board amended the memo of understanding on shared policing with the town of Wendell, aligning its dates with the end of the towns’ fiscal year on June 30, at which time a permanent agreement should be ready.

The memo was amended to remove a clause requiring Wendell police officers to join the Leverett police department. Minckler said the change was requested by Wendell’s single officer, who does not want to wear a uniform.

Shively asked how the change was going. “Nothing but good feedback,” Minckler reported, though the 6’3” officer also said he was looked at like he had eight heads when he walked into the Wendell Country Store. “They can’t see me smile [under a mask], so that doesn’t help,” added the chief, whose smile was visible on camera.

Minckler also provided an update on the search for town resident Richard Drury, who was last seen December 12 or 13. Minckler reported that the official physical search has been suspended, and said residents could keep looking, but not to park near Drury’s home.

The chief said the initial search was conducted with 55 trained searchers, police, fire, and highway department personnel and included drones, dogs, helicopters, and ATVs. The official effort has turned toward looking for a paper trail, and is ongoing.

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Police Department

Mary Flanders Aicardi of the UMass Collins Center for Public Management presented a draft community profile for Erving, to be used in recruiting candidates for the police chief position. Following the departure of chief Christopher Blair in August, Robert Holst has been serving as active chief.

The board approved the draft, which stated that the department’s mission is “to strive to create and preserve a feeling of safety and security within the community acting as partners with the community.”

Advertising for the chief position started January 5, and applications are due by January 27. The new chief could be hired by the end of February or early March.

The board also appointed Gregory Moretti and Brandon Bryant as patrol officers for one year, conditional on their passing criminal offender record information (CORI) checks, health examinations, drug screens, and psychological examinations. The start date for the new officers was set at February 1, or sooner if all checks and examinations are completed. The new officers will attend the state police academy when classes are available.

Sludge Dryer Project

The board met jointly with the fin com to discuss two proposed sludge dryers at POTW#2, a wastewater treatment plant owned by the town but operated by Erving Paper Company subsidiary ERSECO. Jacob Smith asked for the fin com’s opinions on whether the town should agree that ERSECO can own the dryers, and whether it should change its state revolving fund (SRF) loan application from the sludge dryer installation to a force sewer main project on Arch Street.

The October special town meeting authorized the town to borrow up to \$17.9 million from the SRF for the sludge dryer project. At that meeting, Erving Industries chief executive officer Morris Housen told

voters that the company had reduced the scope of the project to \$10 million, and that the company would pick up the cost of the \$5 million dryers if the town borrowed \$5 million for their installation infrastructure.

By December, however, the plan had changed: ERSECO said it would borrow to pay for both the dryers and infrastructure, and retain ownership of the dryers until the loan for their purchase is paid off.

“If [town counsel] Michael Leon is satisfied, it’s okay for them to own the dryers,” fin com member Daniel Hammock said.

Jacob Smith said that he agreed, as long as ERSECO paid for the dryers. Fin com member Debra Smith asked when the town would get a “100% firm plan” from ERSECO.

“It troubles me,” said fin com chair Benjamin Fellows, “if the town takes the loan [for the infrastructure], but Erving Paper Mill has ownership of the dryers.”

Debra Smith recommended giving ERSECO a deadline to present a final plan, so the town could decide whether to shift its SRF application from the sludge dryers to the Arch Street force main.

The board agreed to giving ERSECO until the third week in January to provide a final plan, allowing time for review by town counsel, the board, and the fin com before making any changes to the SRF application.

Department Budget Requests

The board of health requested \$61,271 for FY’22, an increase of \$2,762 over this year, based on increased costs for the public health nurse and health agent. The BOH said its goal for next year is to “continue to address the abandoned and dilapidated structures in town through the Receivership Program.” COVID-19 costs will be covered by state and federal grant programs.

The Council on Aging and senior/community center requested \$131,184, an increase of \$3,132, based on increased telephone and internet costs. Senior center director Paula Betters

said that closing the center due to COVID-19 and losing its cook has been a challenge. However, Betters said meals were now prepared at the center and delivered to homes or picked up at the center. She said she has also been able to provide wellness checks and services to seniors by telephone or virtually.

Library director Natane Halasz told the board and fin com that the \$4,442 increase over this year to \$175,549 for FY’22 was primarily for security monitoring and sprinkler system monitoring.

Halasz said that although the new library building is open by appointment only, residents have been using the curbside pickup and locker service to borrow library materials. Library trustees chair Mackensy Bailey noted that there is a vacant library trustee position, and interested citizens should contact Daniel Hammock or Halasz.

The request for the recreation commission and park maintenance increased by \$25,066 over this year, to \$126,781. According to commission administrator Breta Petraccia, the additional funds are for additional maintenance costs at parks, for summer program director and assistant director wages, based on revised state standards, and for increased software costs. She added that the commission plans to redesign and expand the Park Street playground, and explore alternatives to team sports.

The historical commission request for FY’22 was \$3,000, level funded with FY’21.

The budget request for town events and ceremonial flags was increased by \$1,000 over this year. Town administrator Bryan Smith said the town decided to buy better-quality flags after previous ones weathered too quickly.

Other Business

The board approved a \$98,500 proposal from Tighe & Bond, Inc. for engineering services for construction of a force sewer main and pump station at the former International Paper Mill property. The project, with a to-

tal cost of \$493,000, is funded entirely by a state MassWorks grant.

Tighe & Bond will provide preliminary and final design work, prepare permit applications, and administer and oversee construction.

The board approved a proposal from Weston & Sampson to design an office space and dry storage shed for the public works department, for a cost not to exceed \$30,000.

At its December 21 meeting, the board had voted to sign an Emergency Management Performance Grant application for \$2,700 for buying protective body armor for emergency medical personnel. Although in the past the EMPG was used for the town’s reverse-911 program, fire chief Philip Wonkka said that he wanted the department to stay current with new federal guidelines regarding emergency medical response at active threat situations. He said the grant would pay for two suits of body armor and ballistic helmets.

“I have some concerns about it,” said Bem-bury, “but I see the need.” He added that he felt it was important to have policies and procedures in place for use of the armor.

Bryan Smith suggested that the board and fin com consider \$5,000 worth of funding for public art installations in future budgets. Hammock said public art was “a good topic to explore, a great idea.”

Bem-bury said the board should set up a time for future discussion of the idea. Fin com chair Benjamin Fellows said he “would like to think of it more.” He joked that, under the program, the town could install a statue of selectboard chair Jacob Smith, who replied he would begin a “just say no” campaign to oppose such a statue.

The board ended the January 4 meeting with an executive session, citing Massachusetts General Law Chapter 30A, Section 21(a)(3): “to discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining or litigation if an open meeting may have detrimental effect on the bargaining or litigating position of the public body.”



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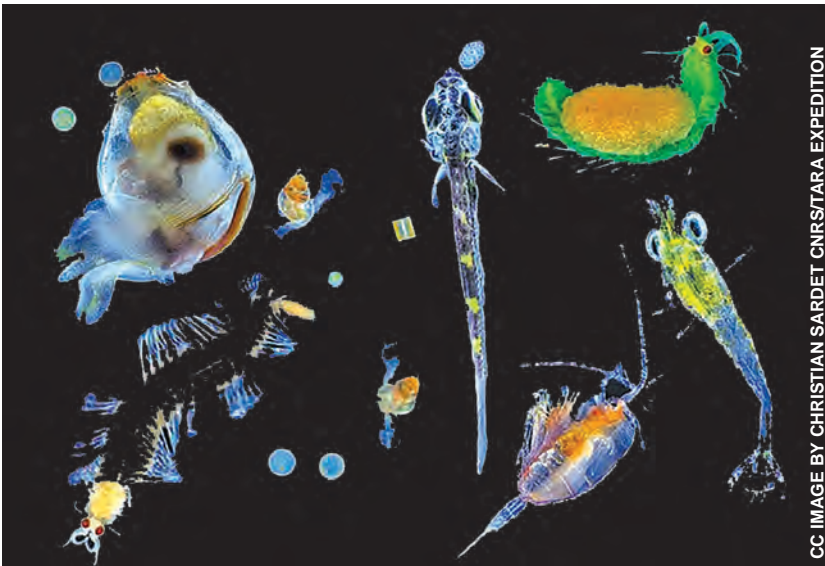
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— Lisa McLoughlin, editor

Plankton: Not Just for Whales!



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An assortment of plankton.

By LISA McLOUGHLIN

NORTHFIELD — Plankton famously feed whales, the largest creatures in the sea. Baleen whales (whales without teeth) filter water for food and eat plankton. These include the endangered Atlantic Right Whales (*Eubalaena glacialis*) which we have in Massachusetts. There are only about 400 of them left, since they have been the “right” whales to hunt for so long. Baleen whales are estimated to consume about 4% of their body weight — something like 5,600 pounds — every day during their summer feeding period. They store food as blubber to be used up during their mating season.

Scientists in the UK have used Continuous Plankton Recorders (CPRs) to collect data on plankton since 1931. A CPR is a water-filtering housing about a meter long, towed behind a ship whose captain volunteers to have this scientific device attached by cable during a voyage. This is the longest-running citizen science project, and it has collected 250,000 samples from 7,000,000 nautical miles (nm) of ocean travel. For every 10 nm it filters three cubic meters of water and stores the plankton between sheets of silk inside the tube, preserving them in formaldehyde.

Plankton, the basis of ecosystems at sea, come in two forms: plantlike phytoplankton, which use photosynthesis to produce oxygen, and animal zooplankton, which include jellyfish and fish larva.

Plankton produce half the oxygen in Earth’s atmosphere, and form a huge carbon sink. They absorb ten gigatons of carbon per

year from the atmosphere into their shells when they bloom each spring. When these short-lived creatures die, they sink to the bottom of the ocean, where their shells remain intact for approximately 1,000 years.

The plankton data shows how the ocean’s health varies in time and space, as the amount of plankton is related to other attributes such as the water temperature. It can also predict where fish are or will be due to the prevalence of plankton; it can track pathogens that make fish and the people who eat them sick; it can measure the pH (acidity or alkalinity) of seawater. It can also be used to identify the locations of native and invasive plankton, as well as micro- and macro-plastics — the first full plastic bag was caught in the sampling equipment in 1965.

Importantly, these data add up to show the localized and global effects of climate change as, for example, warm-water plankton move farther north in response to global warming. According to the website *cprsurvey.org*, “[t]he results have included the globally first documented studies of large-scale ecological regime shifts, biogeographic, phenological and trans-arctic migrations in the marine environment in response to climate change.... [Our data are] used by scientists, policy makers and environmental managers across the world.”

But, partly due to the nature of their research being outside national borders, this project’s funding has been severely cut. Presently, they remunerate the crew of the ships helping them with boxes of chocolate and sports magazines.

All data collected from 1931 to present is available for free online at www.cprsurvey.org.

Forests, Climate Change, And Energy Infrastructure

By LISA McLOUGHLIN

NORTHFIELD — Road, energy, and mining projects encroach into the core of our remaining global forests, and may push them past the tipping point of no return. These megaprojects do two things. First, they remove many trees. Second, they create transportation infrastructure that opens the previously protected interior of the forest to other projects.

The combined tree loss endangers our ability to counter climate change, as these projects’ deforestation is of even more concern than that caused by farming. That’s a huge conclusion, given that a piece of Amazon forest the size of Switzerland was cleared for farming in 2018.

Many of these forested lands were homes to Indigenous people living in concert with their natural environment. The displacement of these humans and the loss of their traditional environmental knowledge is inestimable. In the US, this kind of destruction was made easier when the Trump administration ended the requirement that federal agencies consider the indirect environmental impacts of new infrastructure, previously regulated under the National Environmental Policy Act. Like most changes loosening environmental regulations, this disproportionately affects low-income and Black, Indigenous, and people of color communities.

An Ongoing Problem

Once transportation infrastructure is in place, the entire forest is at risk from development such as building dams and mining operations. Mines are especially worrisome, since 1,500 mines — half of all large mines worldwide — are now located in forests.

This is a global problem, and affects some of the last global forests in South America, southeast Asia, and central Africa. A report by the New York Declaration on Forests Assessment Partners, a coalition of 25 research and conservation organizations, explains that in 2014, 50 countries and 50 of the world’s biggest companies backed a declaration pledging to cut deforestation by 50% by 2020 and end the de-

struction of forests by 2030.

So far, this plan is not on track, and is even losing ground: deforestation is actually increasing. While some regulations have been planned, they have not been implemented, and there is no real oversight. Few companies involved will even talk about what they’ve attempted to accomplish.

Closer to Home

But you don’t have to travel to a large global forest to see the effects of infrastructure build-out on intact forests. In western Massachusetts we are crisscrossed by many major power line corridors, most of which have been clear-cut by Eversource

added to the problem by having the same overpowering impact on the landscape as power lines do.”

And the effects are only growing, with energy sprawl being the largest driver of land use change in the United States, according to experts. By 2040, energy infrastructure in the US alone will take up as much land as Texas.

Since agricultural and forest soils are major carbon sinks, it’s important that even renewable energy projects planned for these natural spaces be highly scrutinized. It’s easy to see how solar panels on roofs and over parking lots help decrease global warming by providing us with renewable energy (and shade). It’s also



SUBMITTED PHOTO

A power line corridor.

last year to the edges of their 300-foot right-of-ways. We’ve also seen this clearing happen along smaller power line corridors, for example along Route 63 in Northfield. Hundred-year-old maples and other venerable trees doing real work against climate change were cut down so they won’t drop their limbs on the power lines in a storm.

These measures, ostensibly taken to prevent tree-line interaction, may not even be effective. Any disturbance in the forest affects all the trees around it, as they grow together, leaning — if not literally, then figuratively — on one another’s strengths. Removing trees that have adapted to being on the edge of a clearing, and putting the burden of standing unprotected on the next line of trees, subjects them to new stresses and reduces their ability to stay intact and upright.

Besides the questionable efficacy of cutting down the closest tree to protect power lines, the Massachusetts Historical Commission has labelled energy infrastructure buildout to be a major problem in preserving landscape-scale historic views. According to a Commission report on preservation in the Connecticut River Valley, “In cutting swaths across the region, power lines not only threaten archaeological sites, but also drastically alter the scale and setting of the existing landscape.... Within the last two decades, gas pipelines and telecommunications relay towers have

easy to see how fossil fuel mines that replace forests increase global warming, both by providing fossil fuels to burn, and by themselves requiring trees to be cut down.

Solar panels replacing carbon-absorbing trees, or changing land use from agriculture to energy production are a more complex calculation. We need to take into consideration not only the green energy produced, but also, the loss of the carbon-absorbing services the forest or field was providing. Not to mention the effect on our landscape.

The many benefits of forests need to be included when assessing all kinds of energy projects that replace them.

Forests have value in reducing climate change, as well as protecting animal habitat and water. They are also important for recreational activities, including those that improve our mental and physical health. Forests reduce the transmission of noise, and deforestation is linked to the spread of zoonotic diseases like coronavirus.

Forests are essential to our well-being, and should not be disposed of lightly. The typical New England forest sequesters 82 metric tons of carbon per acre every year. If cleared — for any reason — that’s a lot of carbon offset to make up for.

Disclosure: Lisa McLoughlin is on the Northfield Historical Commission, whose mandate includes protecting historic landscapes.

January 2021 Moon Calendar

Last Quarter
Wednesday, January 6

New Moon
Wednesday, January 13

First Quarter
Wednesday, January 20

Full Moon
Thursday, January 28

Newly discovered wrinkle ridges show that the moon has an active surface.

NASA PHOTO

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BOOKSHOP from page A1

We are selling the books online, but we want it to feel like it’s a storefront. We want it to feel like you go to the webpage and see featured books and featured collections and it feels kind of like walking in and seeing a shelf display, a particular subject or particular author.

A lot of people are selling books online and they just go on Amazon or they sell on other third-party marketplaces. There are also local bookstores that have a website, but in some cases the website doesn’t even have their inventory; you have to call them to ask if they have titles. In other cases the stuff they have online is not stuff they have in stock, which is the opposite extreme...

MR: *Were there models or examples you were looking at as you were trying to figure out how to make this particular idea work? I’m really interested by this idea of a “local internet business.”*

AR: With the pandemic, basically every local business has set up a website and started taking orders... Rise Above [Bakery] in Greenfield has started taking orders online, after the pandemic, and doing pickup.

For me, the Sunderland Farm Collaborative was the main one, in terms of having a cooperative do delivery and pickup... They just set up a website, and it’s great, because you can order from a bunch of different farms and they coordinate everything. You might get some produce from Kitchen Garden Farm and some mushrooms from Mycoterra. To me it seemed like an interesting model of what a local online business can be like.

If we can get it working and there’s interest, we want to properly incorporate as a worker-owned cooperative.... The one we were looking at was from the Mondragon in Spain – it’s in the Basque country, which is kind of Spain, kind of not – it’s sort of the model for worker-owned cooperatives.

With books in particular, rent is a huge barrier. If you think about local bookstores, like World Eye Bookshop in Greenfield for example, which had that big space on Main Street – they’ve been there for years and they had to move down the street to a much smaller space where they can’t stock even half the inventory that they had at the other store. I looked at that space on Main Street when they moved, and Cohn & Company wanted \$2,500 a month for that space. It’s a big space, but you’ve got to sell a lot of books to even just cover that rent.

So the pandemic has kind of exposed that, too: Is it really worth it to pay all this rent when it’s possible to reach customers through the internet at a fraction of the cost? The cost for maintaining this website is like \$40 a month.

MR: *How are you managing the physical inventory? Is your whole stock just kept in your living space?*

AR: Yeah, we have over 600 books in my basement and in my attic. They’re split: the used books are in the basement, and the new books are in the attic. We don’t have to shelve them, so they’re just organized in bins, and it’s been working so far to have that setup. Obviously we can’t stock tens of thousands of books in my house – maybe we could, I don’t know – but that feels like a manageable number to have in stock.

And we also place orders with our distributors, and publishers and suppliers we have a deal with. One of those distributors, Ingram, does direct-to-home shipping, so instead of us warehousing the books, we can just have a distributor mail books directly to the customer.

MR: *I was imagining you probably learn about a lot of interesting stuff through the orders.*

AR: Exactly. That’s the most fun for me. I’ve been doing a lot of special orders for people, and I’ve been finding out about tons of books.

The inventory that we started with was mostly my personal collection of books, just from years and years of buying books. I wanted us to have at least 500 books in stock that we could deliver to people. But more and more, people are making these special requests, so I’m finding out not only about specific books, but really cool publishers that I didn’t know about – so when we buy books, I’m getting books from those publishers and those authors now in addition to the ones requested.

Part of the vision for the store as well is for it to be cooperative with the customers, where the inventory is determined in part by the people who are using the store, the kind of books that they like and are interested in.

MR: *Would you mind explaining a little bit about this wording that you’re using on the website, “anti-profit”?*

AR: “Anti-profit” means, in this context, that rather than trying to grow profits, accumulate profits, we’re actively trying to dispense with them, to get rid of them. The business needs to be sustainable, which means we have to continue to have a pool of money to buy books, so what we do is the profit that comes from books that we’ve bought in advance – stuff that we have invested in because we think they’re cool books – the net profit from the sales of those books stays in the business.

But the profits that come to us from the special orders, where someone has already paid for the book upfront, we don’t keep those

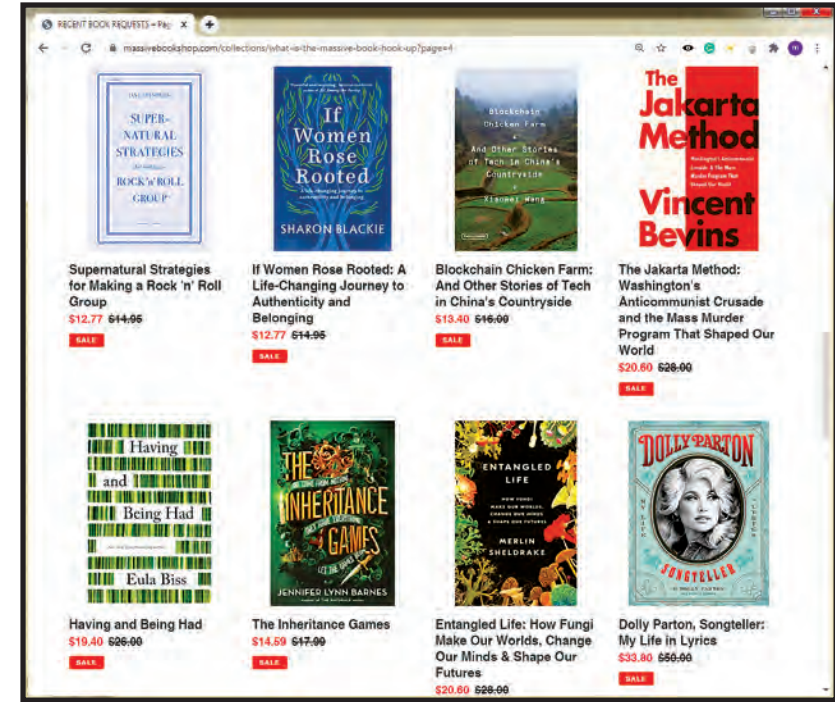
because we don’t feel like we’re entitled to them. We didn’t even know about the book; we didn’t do any work to actually go get the book or convince somebody to buy it. They’re just telling us about this book, and in some cases when we do that direct-to-home delivery through the distributor, we don’t even pack and ship the book.

The profits from those sales all go towards our friends, the community projects. We have two right now: Great Falls Books Through Bars and Touch the Sky.

We don’t accept donations, this isn’t charity, we don’t think of the projects we support as charity projects. So we need a word other than “non-profit,” and “anti-profit” sort of encapsulates our orientation towards profit-seeking of the traditional capitalist variety.

MR: *How did those [community partnerships] come together? Are there different types of community relationships and interfaces you’d like to build?*

AR: I wanted to do something with these profits that I didn’t feel entitled to. Great Falls Books Through Bars made sense as our first partner, and I just emailed them and said “this is what we’re doing, we want to support you.” But that has already changed. They have this book wishlist of in-demand but rarely donated books for prisoners,



Recent book requests by local readers through its “Massive Book Hook-Up” determine much of the inventory the shop makes available on the site.

and I realized it would actually be very easy for us to post that listing to our site. We just set this up this month, and people have bought 11 books to donate that they wouldn’t have had, and probably didn’t even know GFBTB wanted these books. As far as I’m concerned, that’s been wildly successful – I think it’s amazing that we can donate those books, and there will be more.

So in terms of where these partnerships can go, it’s a totally open question. If an organization or group has an idea, then really anything is possible. Hannah, from Looky Here in Greenfield, reached out to us about this [Josef] Albers book and we just bought a bunch of them. That’s more of a focused-around-a-single-title sort of partnership.

Touch the Sky I found out about through this food distro that I’m part of that’s been organized by Pioneer Valley Workers Center.

MR: *Is anyone making money for their labor through this, or are you kind of just redirecting the flows of books and resources?*

AR: I’m not getting paid for my labor, and neither is Jamie.... The

PUBLIC MEETING NOTICE

MONTAGUE CONSERVATION COMMISSION

In accordance with the Mass. Wetlands Protection Act, M.G.L. Ch. 131, Sec. 40, the Montague Conservation Commission will hold a remote public meeting to review the following Request for Determination of Applicability at 6:30 p.m. on **Thursday, January 14, 2021**: RDA #2021-01 filed by Charles E. Bell to determine whether a planned single family house is subject to the Wetlands or Riverfront Protection Acts. The property is located off Meadow Road and is identified as Assessor’s Map 50 Lot 2.

Members of the public may participate in the public meeting by using the following information:

Log in: <https://zoom.us/j/99439761561> • Passcode: 715390
Call in (audio only): 1 646 558 8656 • Meeting ID: 994 3976 1561

Mark Fairbrother, *Chair*

labor question is an interesting one, because obviously people need to make a living wage in order to survive, most people. And it’s important to ensure people are making a living. At the same time, selling your labor puts you in a certain kind of relation to a business, and also to other people.

If I were just trying to make my living off this, I would have to sell the books for more money; I would have to charge considerably more than what I pay to get the books in the first place. That puts you in a kind of relation that is, as a small business owner, pretty predatory actually: you’re just feeding off the goodwill of the community in order to survive. And I don’t want

page, that’s stuff that I picked out because I think it’s cool.

But the point is less to make it a priority than to give people the experience of being in a bookstore, because something I miss is being able to walk into a store and just browse and come upon a display or something that I didn’t know that I wanted.... as opposed to being just a search bar, where you just search for a book and it’s either there or it’s not.

There’s potential for anyone to do it, anyone who has a specific interest or wants to curate a list – I think that it would be really cool to bring more people into the lists. Like I said, making it a cooperative thing, where people can participate without investing a ton of capital themselves and without like, doing this for a job, but they can still participate in crafting these collections.

MR: *What’s the problem with Amazon?*

AR: We have a great book on this subject called *The Cost of Free Shipping*. That book answers your question, I think. It’s interesting with books, because publishers do not like Amazon because Amazon sells books at a loss. They sell them super, super cheap, and publishers can’t compete with that, and bookstores obviously can’t compete....

But if you’re asking me what my problem with Amazon is, it’s more about the way they actually make their money, which is not by selling books, but by collecting data and selling cloud-computing services to the military and all the things that are described in this book.

MR: *What are the different ways that the community can support Massive Bookshop and vice versa, and what are the different contact points you want people to know about?*

AR: Well, people can support the bookshop by using it, and that also supports these community organizations, so that’s the most obvious way to do it. It helps to make the business what it is by bringing books in; the books that are requested become part of our inventory.

If there are community groups, mutual aid projects, that people are part of that need support, they should reach out to us as well and tell us how we can support them, and we can talk about that together. The principle that undergirds all of this is the cooperative principle. Anyone who can think of any way to cooperate with this, or through this, is great. We’re open to it, and also open to being creative – because we don’t know what we’re doing. [Laughs.]



... And let’s not forget these brick-and-mortar bookstores that enrich the towns and villages of Franklin County! Best to call ahead:

Federal Street Books, Greenfield. Private shopping by appt.; curbside pickup for online orders. federalstreetbooks.com; (413) 772-6564.

World Eye Bookshop, Greenfield. (413) 772-2186.

Roundabout Books, Greenfield. Taking special orders for pickup. roundaboutbookstore.com; (413) 773-0820.

The Montague Bookmill, Montague. “Taking a Covid/winter break until early spring.” montaguebookmill.com; (413) 367-9206.

Boswell’s Books, Shelburne Falls. boswellsbooks.net; (413) 625-9362.

Nancy L. Dole Books & Ephemera, Shelburne Falls. (413) 625-9850.

Shelburne Falls Booksellers, Shelburne Falls. “Trying to maintain our usual hours.” shelburnefallsbooks.com; (617) 504-7215.

Schoen Books, Deerfield. schoenbooks.com; (413) 665-0066.

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NOTES FROM THE GILL SELECTBOARD

Taxes, Grants, Whack-A-Mole

By JERRI HIGGINS

Gill’s selectboard met Monday evening and voted on tax rates, received updates from the emergency management team, and considered town administrator projects, among other business.

It was the first meeting the board held through the Zoom video platform. Selectboard chair Randy Crochier remarked that it was the first time he had seen most people’s faces in several months. The town purchased a Zoom license for a year, and will make the meeting recordings available for viewing through Montague Community Television.

Board of assessors chair William Tomb led the tax classification hearing, with administrative assistant Lynda Hodsdon Mayo and board of assessors members Pamela Lester and Tim Storrow also attending.

“We are asking the selectboard to accept a residential factor of 1, which effectively applies the same tax rate to all classes in the town of Gill,” said Tomb.

Gill’s anticipated tax rate of \$17.29 per thousand for FY’21 was calculated based on “last year’s levy limit plus an automatic 2.5% increase, which is allowed by law, plus any new growth that we have,” explained Tomb, who also noted that any excluded debt the town had would then be added to that total.

The previous year’s levy limit was \$2,946,234, making the 2.5% increase \$73,656, plus new growth totaling \$36,544, for a new levy limit of \$3,056,434. Adding Gill’s excluded debt of \$36,236 brings the maximum allowable levy to \$3,092,670.

The assessors recommended an actual levy of \$2,917,731.31, resulting in an excess levy of \$174,938.69 and a four-cent increase in the anticipated tax rate. The rate was accepted and approved unanimously. In a second motion, an open space

discount and residential and commercial exemptions were officially voted down; Gill does not have an open space classification, and the commercial exemption was unnecessary given the single tax rate.

Town Administration

The COVID-19 pandemic has made an already demanding job more challenging for town administrator Ray Purington, who told the selectboard he has been absorbed in “administrative whack-a-mole.” “Many days a project pops up out of nowhere, and I have to bash on it for a while until it goes away,” he said, “and the next day a different project pops up, and I bash on that one.”

Overall, Purington said he believes the backlog is already easing up, as getting through the tax assessment work “frees up a little more thought time for some of these other projects that have been hanging on.”

“Ray does a lot for all of us, and for a lot of the boards in town,” said Crochier, “and I am not asking him to give up any of that, but to ask us for help more where he can.”

Emergency Management

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act funding deadline was extended to December 31, 2021.

“That will open up roughly \$60,000 of CARES Act money that we have still unallocated,” said Purington, “which would give us some needed funds for managing a proper response throughout this new year.”

Gill’s emergency management team told the selectboard that the COVID-19 vaccine will be offered to Franklin County first responders between Monday, January 11 and Friday, January 15, at the John Zon Community Center in Greenfield.

Fire chief Gene Beaubien told the selectboard that the replacement of Engine #2 in 2018 meant that the

department has not been able to purchase new turnout gear since then. Beaubien said that he and deputy chief William Kimball are working to prioritize their requests for a state firefighter grant, due on January 15, as well as for a new FEMA grant.

Beaubien noted that several of the department’s fire hoses and supply-line need updating, but said that his department will not be able to replace all that is needed at once. “We need to start planning for it,” he said. “It is not built into the budget, but it is something that should be bought every few years.”

Selectboard member Greg Snedeker agreed. “This is a good year, in terms of doing a five-year capital outlook, to be thinking about what your departments need with the Northfield Mount Hermon pledge for the next five years,” he said, “so keep this in the back of your mind.”

Snedeker also discussed having all town department annual reports “uploaded into the cloud” while also having backup copies printed.

A third full-time police officer, officially for COVID-19 related coverage, was extended for two months.

Other Business

Snedeker updated the selectboard on the six-town regionalization planning board, saying that \$500,000 of state grant money is again available, with the state “very interested in having us move forward.”

The group will continue gathering information “into the educational program benefits and costs, as well as more in-depth study into the finances of a combined district,” he said. A consultant report on the plan will be available online.

A letter to the state Division of Conservation Services in support of the updated open space and recreation plan, which Gill’s open space update committee collaborated on with FRCOG, was approved.

MOODY from page A1

selectboard chair Alex Meisner.

Meisner is reaching the end of his first three-year term and plans to run for re-election. Asked if he’s been following the news regarding construction at “0” Highland Avenue he said, “Only what I’ve seen on NextDoor and in the papers. I don’t have a solid opinion yet but I question the motives of why [the Moody Center] is doing this, and will continue to question them until I have an educated opinion.”

Meisner became acquainted with Moody Center brass two years ago when they rolled out plans to convert 76 acres of property in the Pierson Road neighborhood into an “upscale” campground.

Named Idyllwood after a figment of Christian Arnold’s imagination, the “glampground” would include a dozen A-frames and 27 campsites nestled around dead timber and prickly overgrowth. Planning board member Homer Stavelly called it “a hotel in pieces.”

Original plans for Idyllwood included alcohol sales but Moody Center President Emmitt Mitchell withdrew the request, saying he was a Baptist and didn’t drink. “Others can bring it,” he said. “Catholics have different standards [than Baptists].”

Indeed, Dwight Moody abhorred alcohol, calling it a “great evil.”

“I am a total abstainer,” Moody said in his biography. “I have never touched liquor and never intend to do so.”

And yet the Moody Center had no problem with its guests sitting around the campfire swatting mosquitoes and getting blitzed.

According to the minutes of a September 26, 2019 planning board meeting, Meisner asked Mitchell whether the campground project was about money, or about Northfield.

A former banker, real estate agent, and car dealer, Mitchell became top dog of the Moody Center in 2016 and draws \$145,000 a year, according to *nonprofitlight.com*. He told Meisner the purpose of Idyllwood was to “introduce D. L. Moody’s heritage and make it the highest level experience. It says that a guy like me can rent a tent for a weekend with my family and tell friends about it and come back.”

And that, Mitchell presumed, would have the traffic backed up on I-91.

Meisner remembered the moment well. “I had questions with the campground and felt I was being BS’d,” he said. “First the campground and now this [housing development]. I want to know more. I want to know the motives of the players, and do what’s best for Northfield.”

In November, James Spencer notified East Northfield abutters that if his housing project proceeds according to plan, construction would begin in 2021.

When this year? The planning board would have 65 days to schedule a public hearing after the developers submit their special permit application. After the public hearing, the planning board would have 90 days to make a decision.


A worst case scenario would have excavators, backhoe loaders, and cement trucks chugging up Pine and Moody streets onto Highland Avenue by as early as May.

Before they break ground, the Moody Center might consider what United Airlines CEO Scott Kirby told the Wall Street Journal about speculative construction ventures: “I bet I get 50 emails a day that say, ‘Build it and they will come.’ In the real world, if you build it and they don’t come, you go bankrupt.”

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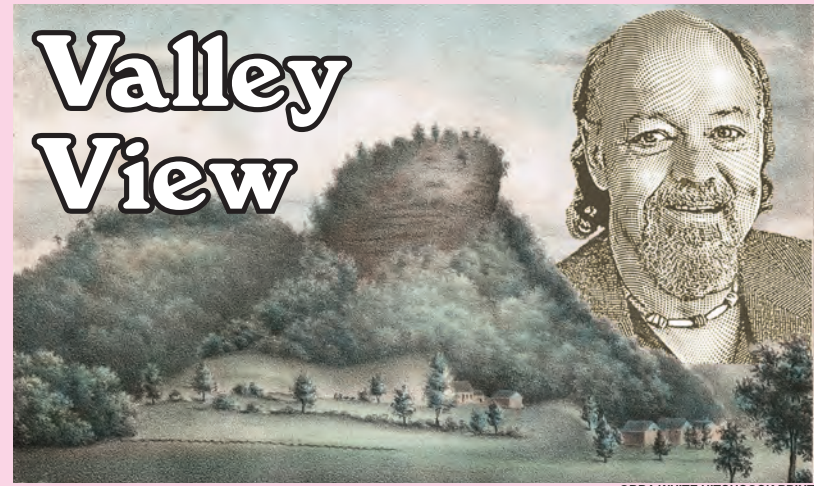
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FEATURES@MONTAGUEREPORTER.ORG OF THE MONTAGUE REPORTER JANUARY 7, 2021



By GARY SANDERSON

GREENFIELD – Winters were busy during my South Deerfield childhood, in the days before smartphones, smart TVs, PlayStation, Xbox and 24/7 cable television. Frankly, we did just fine, thank you, without the modern devices that today keep kids sedentary indoors.

The village itself was much different, too, with much more of a small-town atmosphere, Billy Rotkiewicz’s Frontier Pharmacy at the center, across from the downtown common. He filled prescriptions and held court while his waitressing crew was busy serving ham and eggs and homefries, hamburgers, hotdogs and French fries, ice cream cones, frappes and sundaes. All the latest small-town news and scandal, and even a little prankster mischief, passed through the place daily.

There were many winter activities to keep a young boy active. We skated Bloody Brook, skied Boro’s Hill, slid down Gorey’s Hill on toboggans and flying saucers, built forts in the massive snow piles along the western perimeter of the high school parking lot, and played basketball on Phil Bill’s driveway or, better still, along the edges of varsity practices in the high school gym. All of it contributed to good health, fitness, and rosy red cheeks.

Skating required clearing frozen Bloody Brook with shovels after each snowstorm. We’d lug our skates and shovels down to the Pleasant Street bridge and clear off an elevated shelf on which to lace up our skates and leave our boots. Eventually, we’d clear a mile-long skating lane from Yazwinski Farm to the culverts tunneling under Route 5 & 10 behind Urkiel’s house. This chore was performed by skating in unison with the shovels out in front of us like little snowplows, widening the path as the day progressed.

We loved to horse around under the bridges on North Main Street, Pleasant Street, and Conway Road. At the bulbous spots, such as the small ponds above the bridges and the natural little aneurysms here and there, we’d clear out miniature, banked, rectangular hockey rinks with makeshift goals at each end. When the air was cold and the ice was right, it

kept us busy and out of mischief. Well, sort of. Mischief was never far away from my gang. Somehow we amused ourselves without handheld contraptions, video games, and Comcast.

I don’t know why our favorite sliding place was called Gorey’s Hill. Probably because the Milton and Helen Gorey family lived nearby at the end of Eastern Ave. The hill actually abutted Sonny Boron’s backyard across the street from Gorey’s. On a good day, you could ride a toboggan all the way into the ditch carrying Sugarloaf Brook under Cross Street near Bucky Kuzdeba’s driveway. We learned to be careful when the snow was fast and runs reached that ditch. Covered by snow down there was a metal pipe marking a property corner, a hazard that ripped many a nylon parka and even drew occasional ribcage blood over the years.

The top of Gorey’s Hill, south of Frost’s home tucked into a quiet wooded terrace overlooking Cross Street, was just a stone’s throw from the base of the three-season Indian trail we often climbed to the North Sugarloaf cave, sometimes more than once a day. I doubt that townie kids use that trail, the cave, or Gorey’s Hill today. Recently, facing that western face of North Sugarloaf from my mother’s driveway, I remarked to my wife that it was hard to imagine once scaling that ancient, embedded vertical footpath with ease. I wouldn’t even attempt it today. Too steep. My old, battered legs ain’t what they used to be.

Just getting to Gorey’s Hill was a project. It involved pulling an eight-foot Adirondack toboggan and a flying saucer or two on a route from Pleasant Street to North Main Street to Braeburn Road to Graves Street to Cross Street and up the hill. After snowstorms, the path from the base of the hill to the elevated launching pad became easier to travel the more you used it, great exercise any way you cut it. Likely too much work for Computer-Age kids.

I don’t recall why we’d choose on some days to instead ski at Boro’s Hill, a quarter-mile due east of the Bloody Brook Monument. That too was a project. It entailed carrying cumbersome skis, poles, see **VALLEY VIEW** page B4

Above: Nina Rossi’s illustration is based on a lithograph of an Orra Hitchcock (1796-1863) drawing in the Carnegie Library artifact loft, labeled “Turner’s Falls,” along with a hand-drawn sketch of the same print by an artist with the initials “J.D.B.”

ArtBeat

by Trish Crapo

Remembering Hallmark

TURNERS FALLS – The other morning, reading the *New York Times* cooking section – my favorite section, especially during the rocky news cycles of the past four years – I caught the name of the photographer who’d taken the photo accompanying the “Mulling-Spice Cake with Cream Cheese Frosting” recipe I’d been eyeing. Heami Lee, the outline said. That made me smile, because Heami Lee is a young woman I went to school with at Hallmark Institute of Photography in Turners Falls back in 2007 and 2008.

I don’t know for sure how old Heami was back then, but I was 49, and she was more the age of one of my daughters. She might have been 20. But Hallmark’s ten-month program, with its relentless, pile-it-on approach, was a quick leveler. We were thrown into small groups right away, photographing each other to produce individual assignments with quick deadlines. Most of us, rather than becoming competitive, joined forces and helped each other out.

It’s really too bad that Hallmark went down in the tawdry flames of former president George Rosa III’s \$2.6 million embezzlement – the details of which you can easily find online – because in spite of its many flaws, including what I still firmly believe was its misguided “boot-camp” philosophy, it was an amazing place to learn photography.

As students, we had access to cutting edge equipment and technology, to presentations by some of the most famous photographers working in the business, and, daily, to the minds of some amazing, talented instructors. Most of the instructors during my time were local photographers, and most are still in the area. After I left, the school’s emphasis leaned more toward star status instructors, and a lot of the teachers I’d worked with lost their jobs well before the school closed, with



The author, Trish Crapo, photographing in the woods near her Leyden home in the winter of 2008, while a student at the Hallmark Institute of Photography.

only ten enrolled students, in 2016.

My class was the last to start with film before shooting with digital cameras, although we didn’t do our own developing, as students had done back when George Rosa II started the school in 1975. Shooting with film made us visually discerning in a way I think was useful. Digital gave us permission to experiment with wilder abandon. My notebooks from that time are filled with practical tips from commercial studios, like “Mashed potatoes = fake ice cream (real ice cream melts too fast under lights),” or “Cereal in white glue instead of milk (won’t get soggy).” Now and then I scribbled more metaphorical questions, such as: “Is it arrogant to think we

see **ARTBEAT** B6

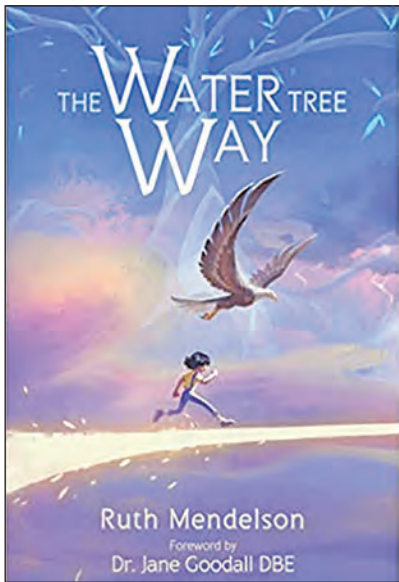
BOOK REVIEW

Ruth Mendelson, *The Water Tree Way* (ThoughtO Vac Press, 2020)

By LEE WICKS

MONTAGUE CENTER – How I wish I could have snuggled in with my granddaughter to read *The Water Tree Way* by part-time Wendell resident Ruth Mendelson. It is a perfect story for a nine-year-old and a grandmother to share: it’s sophisticated enough to satisfy anyone who loves the story of a quest, and its page-turning plot appeals to everyone’s inner child.

With an introduction by renowned primatologist Jane Goodall, this reader was already prepared for a story that would encourage environmental sensitivity. The surprise came in the inspired blending of fantasy and reality. In *The Water Tree Way*, a young girl’s great adventure includes talking trees, blue leaves that morph into birds, a wise stem that refuses to let go of its magic leaf until the girl, Jai (pronounced “Jay”) is ready for her adventure, and more.



These magical creatures are used in service to the narrative as Jai sets out and soon realizes the meaning of commitment, courage, resiliency, positive thinking, self-confidence, self-respect, and discipline, as well as a realization of the love inherent in all interconnected creatures. When she finally

arrives in the Land of the Drum, it is as though Jai has entered the beating heart of the universe.

These lofty ideas are folded in with a great deal of wit, and some of the places that Jai visits will be all too familiar to adult readers. How about the Bureau of Lost Ideas, a depository of all the good ideas that never come to fruition because of phrases such as “You can’t do that” or “I’ll do it tomorrow”? At the Bureau of Lost Ideas, people with a hearing problem are those who have been listening to the wrong advice, either from others or from within. At the Bureau they can have their ears cleaned by a red vacuum that sucks out the negative thoughts.

Jai finds the Bureau of Lost Ideas after escaping the Land of the Lost, a fetid, swampy, slimy place where people’s dreams have died. A pesky, but wise, mosquito guides her out, but not before biting her many times to get her attention – because she is

see **REVIEW** B3



“WALTZ”

Are you looking for a smart, adorable, *and* interactive pet? Well, look no further than me!

A rat’s average lifespan is about two years, and I promise we’ll be your best friend until the end. When you come to visit, watch out – if you poke your finger into our cage I may think it is something yummy and nibble away.

Most housing sold at pet stores is too small for rats. They spend most of their lives inside their cage. Your housing must be 3’ x 2’ x 2’ or larger.

Adoption fee for one rat is \$12, each additional adopted at the same time has a discounted adoption fee of \$8. Rats are a social species, and the company of their own kind is critical to their health and well being.

Interested in adopting? Animals at Dakin are available only in Springfield currently. Contact adoption staff at springfield@dakinhumane.org and include your name and phone number. For more information, call (413) 781-4000 or visit www.dakinhumane.org.



By MISHEL IXCHEL

TURNERS FALLS – Like a glutton, I love to pile up a lot of things on my January plate. And by things, I mean commitments, whether it’s a new routine, a new practice, or a new workshop. I juggle all of these and more, and even though these days I feel physically tired and a little worn down, my inner creator simply thrives from this sweep of newness.

I can’t help it – it’s culturally wired in me to give myself an upgrade soon after the clock strikes twelve. I get swept up by it all, only to end up shipwrecked sometime around the end of February. New routine out the window, a bunch of unfinished projects lying around untouched.

Though, if I’m really honest, I can trace this pattern beyond January: it’s like starting a new journal and thinking, *I am going to practice writing beautifully on each and every page*, only for it to end up halfway full of chicken scribbles and unintelligible notes. Or getting a new book that I can’t wait to dive into, only to see it collect dust amidst other books that I never finished. Or starting an eating protocol, or exercise regime. It’s all sparkly and delightful, invigorating, and just right.

Can’t really seem to always follow through on things. Anyone else relate? I mean, what the... ?

This morning while listening to a

Metal Catharsis

podcast, I heard the host say something similar to the above, while adding that traditionally, in pagan times, this dark time of the year was used to slow down, to digest, to be in the darkness of the fertile soil. It wouldn’t really be until March or April that our little seeds would then germinate. So while it’s great to want to start all these things, I realize that perhaps all I need to do right now is create the space for them in the coming months.

And in the meantime, slow down, be still, and listen.

This year, knowing full well what my pitfall is, I’m marching on nevertheless with my list of January resolutions. All while embracing the darkness that surrounds us, taking time to be still and listen, so that I’m not just going and doing until I’m resolutioned-blue-in-the-face. This means that I’ve come up with ways to make myself stop, breathe, move my body, and also, be still. And I have even added them to the calendar. Some of these practices are simple: drink more water, gaze out the window, meditate in the morning, wrap up the week every Sunday night with one hour of devoted time to slowing down.

Other practices, however, are on the other end of the spectrum. We’ve started doing this wild thing at the house where we have pillow fights while listening to heavy metal. It’s kind of the perfect activity for all of us. My five-year-old is going through a fighting stage, complete with foam swords and shields, and my partner is really into metal, while I just delight in bouncing, shaking, and moving stale energy out of the body. Never in a million

years did I think I’d be bonding with my kid and boyfriend in a metal pillow mosh pit, wearing metal expressions on our faces, stopping the fight on occasion to dance to parts of the song.

I’ve always avoided metal, mainly because I feel like I’m in a state of panic when listening to it. And now, cooped up in an apartment, having just ended the craziest year since recollection, pillow fighting to metal has become cathartic. I always feel so good afterwards, and we all have amazing laughs.

And then I remember from my studies and training: jumping and shaking for anywhere between three to six minutes is powerful medicine. And we’ve stumbled upon the best combination to get us all doing just that. Every time my kid wants to pillow fight, he adds, “And with rocking music.”

“You know it, baby,” I respond, and hand over the phone to my partner, who knows the genre better than I.

The other day he chose a song, picked up his pillow and got ready to wham, while my kid and I looked at each other and shook our heads. “No, harder,” I said, shocking myself that I was asking for a more intense metal song, and that my kid fully agreed with me. My partner shook his head and muttered, “What have I done?”

Ecuadorian-born and New York City bred, Mishel Ixchel is mama to a five-year-old, and currently resides in Turners Falls where she practices and teaches the art of sacred self-care. You can find her on Instagram @indiemamadiaries.

Senior Center Activities

JANUARY 11 THROUGH 15

GILL and MONTAGUE

The Gill Montague Senior Center is closed and will reopen when advised by state and local authorities that it is safe to do so. This measure is taken not lightly but with the utmost concern for the most vulnerable in our community.

The Council on Aging staff will be available for referrals and information from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., Mondays through Thursdays, at (413) 863-9357 by telephone, and coa@montague-ma.gov by email.

ERVING

Erving Senior Center director Paula Betters writes that the Center is closed until further notice:

“All programs are canceled or postponed. With that said, I will be here or at least checking my messages daily. I want anyone to call me and leave a message if they have any questions or concerns regarding food or other services. I

will call them back and if we can help with services of any kind we will do so. I am working with other agencies so we can be sure to keep our seniors healthy & safe.”

Paula can be reached at at (413) 423-3649 or paula-betters@erv-ing-ma.gov.

LEVERETT

Leverett senior activities are currently canceled. Further updates are being distributed via TTY telephone and email. For more information, contact the Leverett COA at (413) 548-1022 x 5, or coa@leverett.ma.us.

WENDELL

Wendell senior activities have been canceled. The Wendell Senior Center is closed. The Senior Health Rides program is also suspended until advisories change. For more information, call Nancy Spittle at (978) 544-6760.

Local Supermarket Senior Accommodations

Supermarkets in Massachusetts are now required to provide special hours for seniors and immunocompromised shoppers. Call ahead – this information is accurate as of November 30; hours and accommodations are still changing.

Big Y:	Senior hours from 7 to 8 a.m.	(413) 772-0435
Foster’s:	Senior hours from 7 to 8 a.m.	(413) 773-1100
Green Fields Market:	Senior hours from 8 to 9 a.m. Monday-Saturday and 10 to 11 a.m. on Sunday. Curbside pickup available. Order by 8 p.m.; order ready for pickup between 1 and 5 the following day. Delivery also available.	(413) 773-9567
McCusker’s Market:	Curbside pickup only 10 to 11 a.m. Order between 12 and 1 p.m. for pickup the following day. Email pickup@franklincommunity.coop	(413) 625-2548
Stop and Shop:	Senior hours from 6 to 8 a.m.	(413) 774-6096

LOOKING BACK: 10 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Here’s the way it was on January 6, 2011: News from the Montague Reporter’s archive.

A Solar Shower for the Wastewater Treatment Plant

The town of Montague has purchased the components of a new solar hot water system for the town’s water pollution control facility (WPCF), and the energy committee is also looking at possibilities for installing solar photovoltaics on the new police station roof.

Town planner Walter Ramsey said three flat solar panels and an 80 gallon tank for the solar shower were purchased from the Greenfield Solar Store, using funds from a Clean Energy Choice grant of \$4,350 awarded to the town in 2009. The shower will be installed at the WPCF in spring.

The energy committee determined the WPCF would be the town building most suited to the solar installation because it uses more hot water than other town buildings. Workers at the facility are tasked with producing clean effluent by treating the sanitary and industrial sewage from the villages of Turners Falls, Montague City, Montague Center and Lake Pleasant. Hot showers for the workers are a necessity at the end of the day when things go well, and more frequently when the day’s events are troublesome.

Superintendent Bob Trombley said the collectors for the solar shower will be mounted on the roof of the administration building, which houses the potable water system. The panels will pre-heat the water that feeds the existing oil-fired hot water boiler. Trombley figures the facility uses about 150 or more gallons of hot water daily. He expects to decrease oil usage in winter and heat primarily with solar in the warmer seasons.

Low Power Jumps Through Key Hoop

Some very good news emerged in the waning hours

of the 111th Congress for those who have been following the Low Power FM Radio story for the past few years.

Montague Community Cable, Inc. (MCCI), the organization that owns Montague Community Television, has been waiting and hoping to build a community radio station since 2001.

Although the organization was awarded a construction permit from the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in 2005, it was blocked from building the station in 2007 due to the proximity on the dial of another station (WGAI, now a WFCR repeater) under the so-called Third Adjacency law. The 2005 building permit has since expired.

Early last month, demonstrators gathered in front of the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) clad in clown suits and jumping with hula-hoops demanding that the NAB stop making local communities “jump through hoops” to get their Low Power FM (LPFM) licenses. A great deal of media attention followed, the NAB relented, and mysterious holds in the Senate disappeared.

Just a few days before adjourning for the holidays, the US Senate handed communities across the country a great New Year’s present by joining the House to strike down the Third Adjacency law. Now Montague has an opportunity to finally get a Low Power FM station.

The LPFM committee will soon be reconvening to put together a strategy. Two alternatives would be to either wait for the next LPFM application window and re-apply, or ask US Rep. John Olver to sponsor an act of Congress directing the FCC to honor MCCI’s expired permit, essentially grandfathering in and approving our request for modification back in 2006.

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REVIEW from page B1

still a little girl who sometimes fails to listen, and she did not read all the instructions in the manual she was given before setting out on her journey. (My granddaughter would have giggled at that part.)

On her way to these distant lands, Jai walks on a beam of light, falls from the sky, chats with a rock, makes friends with a tiny blade of grass, and witnesses the ravages of war and revenge as fields of lovely flowers lay waste to one another in futile competition. Towards the end of the book, the author weaves all the experiences together as Jai finds the Land of the Drum and her particular drum that sings just to her.

A wise elder says, “There is an inner music, Jai. Not only music you can play out loud, but music that you and all of us, all beings, are naturally a part of, even without trying. Everyone and everything has music hidden deep inside them. But to hear it one’s ears must be properly tuned.”

Jai is an appealing little girl who questions everything along the way and resists settling for easy answers. She is instructed to listen to her heart, and to understand that some people are stuck in False Time and can become unstuck with help. Even at the end, the reader knows that Jai will struggle; life will not be perfect, but she’s been given the tools she needs

to survive and achieve her goals.

Jai’s journey might have taken days or just a few hours; at one point I wondered if it was a dream like Dorothy’s in *The Wizard of Oz*. It doesn’t matter. She returns home to her father’s open arms, to her classmates, and to the water tree grove where her quest began. She experiences some wonderful surprises that I will not reveal.

I was ready for more. Surely Jai has more adventures ahead. I hope there will be a sequel.

This is Ruth Mendelson’s first book, but she is no stranger to the creative arts, and it’s not surprising that her book is infused with musical references. A *New York Times* Critics’ Pick and Emmy nominee, she has been composing scores for film, HBO, National Geographic, Discovery Channel, Disney, Animal Planet, PBS, CBS, NBC, and more. She was the first woman in the history of the Berklee College of Music to teach in the film scoring department, where she designs and teaches master classes in documentary and dramatic film scoring. And she is currently collaborating with Dr. Jane Goodall on a variety of projects. To learn more about Ruth go to ruthmendelson.com.

The Water Tree Way is available at www.amazon.com, World Eye Books in Greenfield, and the Wendell Country Store.



REHABILITATION

Fred Homer of Williamsville, VT

By MELISSA WLOSTOSKI

GREENFIELD – After I was finally able to get a hold of Mike Clark, a wildlife rehabilitator who works with birds of prey that I very much wanted to talk to, I was given the contact info for another such individual who it was also thought I would be interested in talking to: Fred Homer of Williamsville, Vermont.

Homer said he has been doing wildlife rehabilitation for 35 years at the Vermont Institute for Natural Science. “The place has been around for the same amount of time,” he said. “We moved here about 37 years ago. [It] started shortly after we moved here.” That is what he mentioned in connection with coming to Vermont, starting to work at the Institute, and doing this work for as long as he has.

Similar to Clark, he’s doing helping birds now. “In the past I have done chickadees, groundhogs, weasels, and fishers,” he said, about other animals he used to take care of. He apparently has “a lot of people bringing him birds to help.”

This past summer was a busy one for that. “Summertime is busier than winter,” he said.

One bird was a Red-shouldered Hawk. Helping that one apparently went very well. “I raised that bird from a baby,” he added. “It’s at the Vermont Institute of Natural Science, where it’s practicing flying, so it can be released.”

Homer believes he’s well known for doing this work. “After 35 years of doing this, people know who to bring injured birds to,” he said. “Last month, 18 birds came to me.” At the time of our interview, he mentioned that “two birds were brought to me today.”

Homer pays for everything the place does. He works with a veterinarian named Dr. Svec, who has been doing this work for as long as he has. My interview with him wasn’t the first one he has done. Wendy O’Connell interviewed him once, for “a Brattleboro TV station.” Like Clark, he has done a number of presentations connected to his work locally, including at the library and the elementary school.

If you want to know more about this Institute, you can go to the website: vinsweb.org. Or even go to the place itself: you can drive to 149 Natures Way, Quechee, Vermont from wherever you are from.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE MONTAGUE POLICE LOG

Hand Licker; Shovel Shirkers; Butt Thief; Car Dog; Laundry Brawl; Female Janitor; All-Terrain Vehicles

Monday, 12/21

7:36 a.m. Officer pursuing vehicle with a headlight out operating erratically on Industrial Boulevard and passing vehicles on Millers Falls Road. 911 call reporting that a vehicle going at an estimated 100 mph struck a snowbank and left the scene; last seen crossing bridge into Gill; bumper and plate left behind. MSP in pursuit of vehicle on I-91 southbound. Deerfield PD has operator in custody. Arrest made; details redacted.

Tuesday, 12/22

2:39 p.m. Caller reports that she observed a female hand something to a male on Fourth Street, lick her hand, and then go back inside her apartment. Caller suspects activity is drug-related. Units advised.

7:24 p.m. Report of truck vs. tree accident on East Chestnut Hill Road. Driver is in the residence with a head injury. AMR conferred; Shelburne Control and MPD units advised.

7:50 p.m. Report of hit-and-run accident with heavy rear bumper damage on Avenue A. Report taken.

Wednesday, 12/23

11:20 a.m. Report of two houses with unshoveled sidewalks between 7 Millers Falls Road and Scotty’s Store.

12:44 p.m. Report of suspicious blue Subaru in Hillcrest Elementary School parking lot for past 10-15 minutes; ongoing issue. Officer spoke with vehicle operator and advised.

3:56 p.m. Caller from East Main Street states that someone stole a large jar of cigarette butts from his apartment; requested video surveillance footage from agency that runs apartment building.

Thursday, 12/24

12:29 p.m. Motor vehicle accident with injuries at Avenue A and First Street. AMR and TF Ambulance each transporting one patient.

10:40 p.m. 911 caller who appears intoxicated reports that a female named Christy is accusing him of stealing her marijuana. Male party located outside of apartment building. He is being compliant and walking back to his apartment across the street.

Friday, 12/25

3:34 p.m. Caller from Elev-

enth Street states that a dark-colored, four-door pickup truck crashed into her house, backed up, and left. Minor damage to some siding on the house. Report taken.

6:45 p.m. Caller from Keith Street states that a female driver with a male passenger are driving around the neighborhood in a dark-colored Toyota truck checking parked vehicles with a flashlight. Area checked; unable to locate.

11:01 p.m. Caller states vehicle was driving at high rate of speed all over Avenue A, up on the sidewalk and across the yellow line. Vehicle turned up Seventh Street then turned at the church and came to a stop on X Street; caller stopped on Ninth Street. Officer spoke with operator, who says he came from Hadley; no signs of impairment; no smell on breath. Party is at residence where he is staying tonight.

Saturday, 12/26

6:11 a.m. 911 hangup call. Upon callback, spoke with a party who stated she was trying to use her new drone app and hit the wrong button; all is well.

8:26 a.m. Caller from Second Street states that some packages were taken from his vehicle on December 24. Report taken.

12:56 p.m. 911 caller from Avenue A reporting disturbance in the apartment above him. Verbal argument; parties separated. Peace restored.

10:34 p.m. 911 call reporting male party pounding on door of a Fifth Street residence stating he is going to beat the resident up if he doesn’t quiet down. Involved male called 911 stating that party is being belligerent and won’t stop banging on the door and threatening him. Units advised. Peace restored.

Sunday, 12/27

9:33 a.m. Walk-in reporting empty upright canoe in water near Cabot Station. TFFD en route to check area of Rock Dam. 1:46 p.m. Vehicle into barrier on Greenfield Road; no obvious injuries, but airbag deployment and leaking fluid. DPW advised of bridge damage.

3:33 p.m. Laundromat

owner reporting illegal dumping in alleyway behind business.

3:54 p.m. Anonymous report of gunshots at the end of West Mineral Road. Units advised.

4:10 p.m. Shelburne Control took a 911 open line. Spoke with female on callback who advised accidental dial on her new Apple watch. Confirmed misdial.

Monday, 12/28

8:22 a.m. Report of unattended dog in a vehicle parked on Avenue A. Officer located vehicle; advised dog inside is not shivering and does not appear to be in any distress. Vehicle plates are expired and registered to a different vehicle. Officer attempting to contact registered owner. Animal control officer will attempt to contact dog owner.

12:57 p.m. Officer out on Meadow Road serving town bylaw notice for unshoveled sidewalk to owner of property on G Street.

8:09 p.m. Caller states that he called earlier today about an unattended dog in a vehicle on Avenue A; states dog is still inside the vehicle and has not been tended to all day. Officer made contact with male who advised he is staying in a residence there for the night and that the dog isn’t allowed in the building. Dog has food, water, and a source of heat. Dog is checked on periodically.

8:46 p.m. Report of unattended dog in vehicle in Avenue A parking lot. Advised caller dog was just checked on and is OK.

11:39 p.m. Report of someone ringing caller’s doorbell on Seventh Street and then running off. Area checked; unable to locate. Units will remain in area.

Tuesday, 12/29

2:30 p.m. Walk-in reporting that she struck another vehicle at Powertown Apartments. Officer spoke with reporting party, who advised no damage to either vehicle; requests to have on record.

5:50 p.m. 911 caller states that two older women inside the Third Street Laundry “jumped” his friend and assaulted him. The women are now sitting in a blue Toyota Camry. One of the involved females also called to say

there were teenagers inside the laundromat being rude and threatening her and her friend. Incident under investigation. Officer will attempt to view camera footage from the laundromat to better understand what transpired.

Wednesday, 12/30

2:42 p.m. Caller from Unity Street advises that yesterday several youths were in the area of his residence and one of them came onto the lawn and destroyed a Black Lives Matter sign. Youths ran off after caller attempted to confront them. Advised caller this would be logged and to call when in progress should it happen again.

9:10 p.m. Motorist reporting injured deer along southbound lane on Montague City Road. Vehicle towed; deer taken by a family member.

Thursday, 12/31

9:13 a.m. Caller states that someone broke into the annex building on Power Street and did some damage inside. Report taken.

Friday, 1/1/21

4:07 p.m. Report of red Mazda Miata doing donuts in the Randall Wood Drive cul-de-sac. Caller states this is an ongoing issue. Unable to locate.

4:41 p.m. 911 open line from Avenue A; can hear three parties arguing in background. Heard one party mention calling 911. Made contact with caller, who would like a male party removed from her residence. Officer reports all verbal; parties advised of options.

10:08 p.m. Report of suspicious green Buick with a headlight out that is driving around downtown Turners making frequent stops. Caller disconnected before giving any other information. Referred to an officer.

Saturday, 1/2

8 a.m. Caller from West Main Street requesting removal of female who lives across the street and refuses to leave the caller’s property. Caller advises female used to have an arrangement with the former owner to park on the property. Caller states she offered the female the same agreement, but she would have to agree to the

see MPD page B4

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The Montague Reporter Podcast

MPD from page B3

terms; states female refused, but continues to park there. Situation mediated; landlord/tenant issue involving several parties. Advised of options. 10:59 a.m. Caller from Chestnut Street reports that someone stole her blue trash bin and all the trash inside. Caller advises all of her neighbor's trash is still there; she called several trash collection companies, and they all advised that they did not pick up her trash. Advised of options. 3:09 p.m. Female janitor accidentally pressed the emergency call button in the elevator at Colle Opera House. Negative signs of distress. Caller

gone upon officer's arrival. Building secure. 4:51 p.m. Motorist reporting older male party whose vehicle is stuck in a snowbank on South Lyman Street. Caller reports the male party does not have a cell phone and is attempting to dig himself out. Officer advised. Male party has somebody coming to help him; does not need police assistance at this time. Sunday, 1/3 4:16 p.m. Caller from Turners Falls Road states multiple ATV riders tore up her yard while riding. Caller's neighbor confronted the riders before advising the caller. Property is posted no trespassing. MPD officer also reporting damage

to her property from the same ATVs. While responding to another call, officer observed the ATV owners in their driveway and attempted to advise them of possible charges. Caller called back stating the ATVs are riding on her property at this time. ATVs fleeing into the woods. Officer made contact with owner of ATVs and advised of damage as well as possible charges if activity continues. Another party called stating that the ATVs that were being questioned earlier also did damage to his property and he would like the owners to take care of it.



VALLEY VIEW from page B1

and boots while breaking a path through deep snow to the base of the mountain. Once there, the work only increased. We'd pack the slope manually on side-by-side ascensions, short-stepping our way to the top, our skis perpendicular to the ski trail. The short downhill runs were our reward. Then we'd trudge back up to the top sideways, widening the trail as we went. When the skiing surface finally widened to our desires, we'd stop packing and climb to the top-facing straight uphill with our skis opened in Vs.

Seems I recall giving Yazwinski's Hill a try or two for a change of scenery, but Boro's was taller, steeper and wider. Remember, those were the days before the Kelleher Drive and Captain Lathrop Drive developments. Back then, open land interrupted by slim tree lines extended all the way from Hillside Road to Graves Street. Although there's still a fair amount of open land on that fertile plain today, it has shrunk considerably, not nearly as much as the open land of my childhood between Eastern Avenue and the Little League Field at the base of Mount Sugarloaf.

Building snow forts also required physical labor. We used shovels and gardening tools to hollow out snow banks into a series of igloo-like chambers connected by short tunnels we'd crawl through. Where was my claustrophobia back then? We'd dig out a door at each end, openings we were extra careful to hide when we left them unoccupied. We'd do so by filling in the openings with large snowballs we'd smooth with our hands, then kicking loose snow over the patches and roughing them up to hide any discernible manmade lines. We didn't want to expose our

secret hideouts to vandalism by kids passing through from other neighborhoods.

It worked. Never were our snow forts discovered and destroyed. Eventually they'd just disappear with snowmelt as the winter waned. Fun while it lasted. These days, we rarely get enough snow accumulation for such forts, no matter what the climate-change deniers tell you.

Lastly, of course, there was basketball, our winter mainstay, especially for those of us who lived near the high school. Maybe we were pests, but the coaches running varsity practice put up with us shooting baskets at side hoops away from the action.

The boys' coaches were less tolerant than legendary girls' coach Vi Goodnow, who gave us far more sideline liberty. That, I never forgot. I remained loyal to Vi to the bitter end, when I was covering her teams as sports editor of the local newspaper. She deserved respect as the force behind western Massachusetts girls' athletics as we know it today. Yes, the lady from Buckland wearing the plaid, pleated skirt was a pioneer – a dedicated trailblazer who hated to lose, and seldom did in the early days, before men started coaching girls' teams to level the playing field a bit.

Shooting baskets along the edges was only a small part of our basketball routine during my grammar school years. With the statute of limitations long ago passed, I can now admit we soon learned how to spring open the double doors on the northeast side of the gym. All it took was a quick, powerful outward pull on the two exterior door handles in the middle to spring the doors open. Bingo! Free reign to the gyms.

For such clandestine efforts, we

rarely dared to occupy the big gym with fold-up bleachers because we could be seen from outside. Instead, we played in what we called the small gym, which became secondary in the late 1950s. Located in the basement of the original, two-story Deerfield High School building, it was far from regulation size, but more than sufficient for neighborhood boys seeking an indoor winter court. If we heard someone enter the building, we'd scurry to grab our basketballs and loose clothes and flee up the stairs and out the front doors facing North Main Street.

Never once did we get caught. Slippery little devils, we lived nearby, had refugees, knew every escape route, and could move fast.

On pleasant winter evenings after school, we had permission to use the garage hoop above Mr. and Mrs. A. Phillips Bill's North Main Street driveway. I feel privileged to have known Phil Bill, an eccentric math prodigy who by age 18 had graduated from Dartmouth College and was teaching math at Deerfield Academy. Teacher by day, he morphed at night into a gin-fueled human computer for the Gordon E. Ainsworth & Associates surveying company. Wife Kay was a homemaker known to high school students as a substitute teacher.

Usually, six of us would play rotating, two-on-two games to 20 until suppertime, when Mrs. Bill would often approach us from the side door to tell us it was time to wrap it up. Mr. Bill was working, and getting a little cranky. We'd finish our last game and head home for supper.

By the time I was in junior high school, my parents had bought the house next door to the Bills, where my 91-year-old mother lives today, isolated in this lonely pandemic.

Today's South Deerfield village is a far different place with a larger cast of characters. There's no devilish Billy Rotkiewicz stirring things up at Frontier Pharmacy, no "Pistol Pete" Kuchieski patrolling the streets, no skating on Bloody Brook, sliding on Gorey's Hill or skiing on Boro's Hill, no basketball high-school-gym break-ins, and no Tanqueray-soaked human computers getting cranky while on suppertime overload.

Current residents have no time to ponder what they're missing. Not now, anyway. Too busy frantically searching for that PS5 everyone has to have and cannot find anywhere – a fruitless pursuit that's driving them crazy.



PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT

House Fire: Don't Do It

Chief Walter Tibbetts, president of the Franklin County Fire Chiefs' Association, wants residents to *Keep Warm, Keep Safe* this winter. "Here in Franklin County the power goes out frequently in storms, and many people rely on heating with wood or pellets," he says. Nearly 40% of all residential fires in Franklin County were caused by heating equipment. And in 2019, the leading cause of fire fatalities in the county was heating."

"Get your heating systems inspected," he adds, "and learn to use them safely, especially those new to heating with wood or pellets."

In 2019 there were 570 fire incidents involving chimneys, fireplaces, and woodstoves in Massachusetts. These fires caused one fire service death, three civilian injuries two firefighter injuries, and resulted in \$2 million in property losses.

Most chimney fires occur because of a build-up of creosote, a tarry byproduct of burning wood. Have your chimney flue cleaned before

each heating season, and burn only dry, well-seasoned, hardwood.

"Working smoke and carbon monoxide alarms do save lives," Tibbetts says. "They provide early warning of danger and are the most important ways to prevent fatal fires and CO poisoning." Of the house fires in Franklin County last year, only 52% had working smoke alarms.

"Test your smoke alarms monthly and replace them after ten years," says state fire marshal Peter J. Ostroskey. "Replace battery powered alarms with ones that have a 10-year sealed battery."

Franklin County fire departments want their residents to have a safe and happy holiday season and winter. "Heating with wood and pellets is a major way of life in Franklin County," says Tibbetts. "There is nothing like a crackling fire on a cold winter evening, but please think 'safety first' when heating your home."

For more information, go to www.mass.gov/keepwarmkeepsafe.

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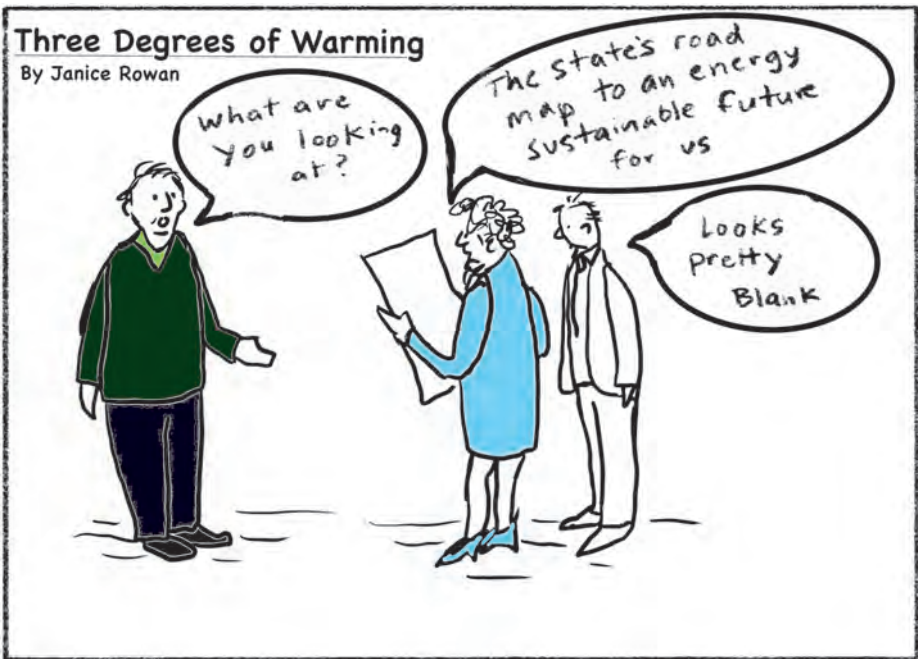
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ARTBEAT from page B1
can patch the world with beauty?”

The days were crammed with studio shoots, and editing software and business classes, starting at 8 a.m. and running, if I’m not mistaken, until 5 p.m. Toward the end of the program, as assignments piled up and final portfolio deadlines loomed, I’d often pop down to the Voo at the end of the day for a glass of wine and some wings, then return to the studios or computer labs to work some more. It’s fair to say I barely saw my family.

I had wanted to go to Hallmark so I could add photography to my already tried-and-true skill of writing. As I told photo-journalism instructor John Nordell, I wanted to create stories about people doing good in the world. I had strong aspirations, but I was not technically adept. I really struggled. Equally difficult as photography’s technical side were the intimate aspects of taking someone’s portrait. I felt pushed outside my comfort zone on multiple levels, all of the time.

Near the middle of one notebook that’s primarily filled with jottings about exposures and advice about creating a blog (“Don’t whine on the Web. Don’t have an explosion of content and then nothing...”), I found this sudden explosion of raw feeling:

“I don’t know if we get stronger, so much as we get stringier. Stretched to breaking and still bouncing back. But there are cracks in the elastic. Little cracks. The

next thing you know, you’re sitting in someone’s office, weeping. And not someone you’ve paid to watch you weep. Someone you’d meant to impress with more admirable parts of yourself. The good parts, the strong parts.”

I’m embarrassed, but not ashamed, to say I wept at Hallmark on more than one occasion. So did others, by the way, but the first time took me completely by surprise. We were working in small groups, learning to use a Q-flash, a bulky piece of equipment that attached to the hot shoe on your camera and looked like something a 1940s crime photographer would’ve used. I’d checked this abomination out of the equipment room weekend after weekend, marked out specific distances on my basement floor with masking tape, and tried to master it. But there was just some obstacle in my mind that kept me from understanding.

I don’t remember how it came to be that I was crying that first time, but I do remember my instructor, Christina Sheppard, stepping forward calmly and kindly.

“You can understand this,” she said. And it was the tone of her voice, even more than the technical information she went on to convey, that got me through it.

I cried in John Nordell’s office, and in Paul Teeling’s. I cried in administrator Tammy Murphy’s office, insisting that I needed to withdraw and defer my attendance to another year. You see, I had some big backstory going on. In



In commercial studio classes, we learned how to properly light silverware (harder than you might think), among other skills necessary for creating good product shots.

the time between my acceptance at Hallmark and the start of classes, my sister Susan’s breast cancer had returned and worsened. Being at Hallmark, with its crazy load of classes and assignments to be done in our “spare” time, meant I couldn’t regularly take her to che-

mo and doctor’s appointments in Boston, as I had done the first time around. I got some instructors to agree that I could get notes from their classes from another student so I could miss one day a week. And while this eased my mind about being able to help Susan, it

increased my sense of overload.

I graduated from Hallmark in June. Susan died in November. One part of me will always regret that I didn’t withdraw and take care of her. Another part of me can’t help but see the threads of so many good things that proceeded directly from my Hallmark experience. Nearly ten years of work for *The Greenfield Recorder*, including freelance spot news and sports photography, as well as a poetry column and later an arts column, grew out of asking senior photographer Paul Franz if I could shadow him for a day to fulfill a Hallmark assignment. The writers and artists I’ve met through those columns, and now through *The Montague Reporter*, form a fantastically diverse creative community that buoys me through hard times.

My final portfolio was not the strongest, the most unusual, or the edgiest in my class by any means. But it was solid. I remember that spring I showed the final prints to Susan, who I knew resented how much of my time Hallmark took. An artist and painter herself, she went through the 11 by 14 prints slowly, looking at each one: the portraits and the product shots, the photo-journalism assignments. As it often was with her, I couldn’t tell what she was thinking from her expression. Her mouth was set in a line. She put the prints back in their black hinged-lid box and closed it.

“It’s good work, Trish,” she said.

That was praise enough for me.



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