

The Montague Reporter

YEAR 19 – NO. 13

also serving Irving, Gill, Leverett and Wendell

\$1

EDITOR@MONTAGUEREPORTER.ORG

THE VOICE OF THE VILLAGES

FEBRUARY 4, 2021

Gill-Montague Pushes School Reopening Date To February 22

By MIKE JACKSON

GILL-MONTAGUE – School superintendent Brian Beck notified families on Wednesday that the date for the district’s adoption of a “full hybrid” learning model, in which all students will be allowed to return to school buildings two days a week, will be pushed back from February 8 to Monday, February 22, the first day after the vacation week.

Beck’s memorandum cited staffing shortages, as well as a delay in receiving an updated air ventilation report, as factors in the decision. Beck was unavailable to respond for further comment before press time.

The district has been in remote learning since last spring. A small group of high-priority students see **SCHOOLS** page A4

WAITING THROUGH WINTER



Reader Jackie Lucchesi shared this photograph, looking out over Barton Cove from the Hill in Turners Falls.

MONTAGUE SELECTBOARD

Town Buildings Might Reopen; Slow Progress On Vaccination

By JEFF SINGLETON

The Montague selectboard meeting of January 29 was once again dominated by COVID-19 discussions, as the board reacted to “constantly changing” state policies and new metrics on the number of positive cases over the past two weeks. The board decided to reopen town buildings and services, with the exception of the Gill-Montague senior center, unless the case count increases enough to return the town to the state’s “red zone.”

Working with the Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG), the town affirmed its decision to allocate its allotment of vaccines to the John Zon Community Center in Greenfield, but left open the possibility that it will begin administering shots to older residents at town hall later in the month.

Town administrator Steve Ellis began the discussion of reopening town hall by noting that Montague’s case count had been steadily declining for the past month. He also said some town employees had expressed “great urgency and desire” to open town buildings while others, including the treasurer/tax collector’s office, had urged in a letter

see **MONTAGUE** page A7

LEVERETT SELECTBOARD

Departments Aim For Slow Growth; One More Officer Will Get Vaccine

By GEORGE BRACE

Budget hearings took up most of Leverett’s February 2 selectboard meeting, with representatives from several town departments presenting drafts of their annual budget proposals for discussion. All the proposals stayed within the 1.5 percent cap on growth requested by the board and finance committee, and contained no major changes.

The board also heard an update on the town’s joint policing project with Wendell, the vaccination status of the police, and an overview of problems in making changes to the town’s IT and phone systems.

Representatives from the highway department, transfer station, and library were on hand to explain changes from the previous year’s budgets and answer questions. After months of dealing with uncertainties due to COVID-19 and the economy, all involved seemed to have accepted that additional care in budgeting and the need for prudence were a given, and were proceeding on that basis.

Highway superintendent Matthew Boucher brought up the idea of hiring a tech school student for

see **LEVERETT** page A8

Downtown Residents Hit With Steep Towing Fees

By MIKE JACKSON

TURNERS FALLS – Ten cars were towed Tuesday morning from municipal lots in downtown Turners Falls to Goly’s Garage in Greenfield, at the request of Montague police department, in order to allow the highway department to remove snow from the lots.

“Normally, they do the parking lots the day after the storm,” said

Ralph Rau of Rau’s Sunoco, which usually assists the town with towing for snow removal. “Because they did it [Tuesday], I was plowing myself, so I said ‘nah, I can’t do it,’ and that’s why they went to Greenfield.”

Bands of snow continued to move through on Tuesday.

According to acting sergeant Peter Lapachinski, Rau’s has right of first refusal under a contract with

see **TOWING** page A5

Sandy Lane Bus Barn: FRTA Back On Track

By MIKE JACKSON

FRANKLIN COUNTY – After long delays, the Franklin Regional Transportation Authority (FRTA) has announced that progress is again underway toward the construction of a new storage and maintenance garage on Sandy Lane in Turners Falls for its fleet of buses.

“All the stars are lining up,” Montague town administrator Steve Ellis reportedly told transit agency officials at a meeting last week.

“You will be in good hands.”

The hands in question are those of Helene Karl Architects of Groton, Massachusetts and Colliers Project Leaders USA of Madison, Wisconsin. Both firms were responsible for the recent construction of Montague’s new public works facility on Turners Falls Road, which came in under cost, and according to FRTA assistant administrator Michael Perreault both are on board to build a new bus barn right around

see **FRTA** page A5

Dakin Reassessing Care For Pets During Pandemic

By SARAH ROBERTSON

LEVERETT – After its regular operations were upended by the pandemic, the Dakin Humane Society closed their Leverett location last March and made changes to the ways it serves pets throughout the Valley.

Dakin is expanding pet food aid, veterinary clinics, temporary shelters, and other services to keep pets out of shelters for good, according to executive director Carmine DiCenso. The organization saw the

number of animals surrendered to them fall by about 50% during the pandemic as shelters shifted to emergency-only intakes.

“Before, primarily it was just taking animals from community members,” DiCenso told the Reporter. “Now it’s more about how to keep animals and people together, and we’ve realized that with support services, that’s the best option for everyone.”

The Dakin Humane Society has two locations, a main office and

see **DAKIN** page A6



Dakin’s Leverett facility has been closed since last March.

DISPATCH

Farmland Threatened By Solar Development

By CHIP AINSWORTH

NORTHFIELD – It won’t be long before a handful of Northfielders living on Pine Meadow Road will be sacrificed for the greater good of fatter wallets. Two weeks ago Chris Kalinowski was admiring a view of the sod fields from his bedroom window. In a few months he might be wondering how his house wound up in New Jersey.

On February 18 at 4 p.m., the Northfield planning board will hold a formal public hearing to discuss the deal between a Boston developer and a prominent Northfield landowner to put three solar fields on about 80 acres of fertile land near the Connecticut River.

Anyone who wants to speak against it will have that day – and that day only – to air their concerns via Zoom and put their questions

in writing.

The day and time were moved up at the request of BlueWave Solar and Bonnie and Gene L’Etoile of Four Star Farms, who’ve been feeling a cold wind blowing since word got out they’re willing to despoil an agricultural treasure for the sake of money, the other kind of green.

Kalinowski and his neighbor Melissa Gamache didn’t know where to go when they heard about the project. Kalinowski spoke to selectboard chair Alex Meisner, who invited them to address the selectboard on January 26.

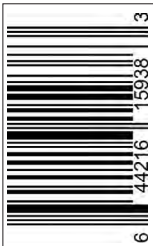
“Directly across from my house is where they want to put the entrance,” he told Meisner and Bea Jacques. (Third member Heath Cummings was *en route* from Boston.) “It will always be the main entrance and exit for this industrial-sized solar park,

see **DISPATCH** page A4

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The Montague Reporter

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Rules is Rules

Jim McGovern usually keeps a pretty low profile relative to the power he wields in Washington. The Worcester native turned political lifer skated into our county back in 2012. Massachusetts had lost a Congressional district after the last Census, and John Olver’s 1st District was effectively eliminated.

Olver decided to retire, and two reps shifted their districts dramatically westward: McGovern, who had formerly represented towns from Worcester down the Rhode Island border, and Richie Neal, whose turf had stretched from Springfield nearly as far east across the top of Connecticut.

Western Massachusetts’ two reps have repeatedly defended the seats they were largely redistricted into, and they now just so happen to chair two of the most powerful committees in the US House: Neal, the Ways and Means Committee, and McGovern the Committee on Rules.

Rules is a key legislative choke-point, and it is fascinating to watch a politician with the progressive bona fides of McGovern somehow evade popular conservative ire, or even recognition, in that seat.

This is a man who cut his political teeth working on George McGovern’s (no relation) 1972 presidential bid, and has kept that iconic liberal’s opposition to war and hunger central to his own career.

He went on to work as a staffer for Rep. Joe Moakley, and helped lead the Moakley Commission, whose reporting on atrocities in El Salvador prompted the end of US military aid to that country.

Moakley chaired the Rules Committee from 1989 to 1995; McGovern was first elected to Congress in 1996. On his deathbed, Moakley reportedly recommended McGovern for the position as chair. He finally got the job two years ago.

Last October he was stacking wood at the Montague Wood Bank, but on Wednesday he was in the national spotlight during a high-profile Rules Committee hearing on whether to strip newly elected Georgia Republican and far-right conspiracy theorist Marjorie Taylor Greene of her assignments to the House Budget and Education and Labor Committees.

“We have never had a hearing like this one before,” McGovern began. “That’s for two reasons. The first reason is that we have never had a member like this before. She has encouraged violence against

members of this institution, going so far as agreeing with the comment that advocated for putting a bullet in the head of the Speaker of the House of Representatives.

“That was part of a larger pattern of endorsing violence. This is *truly sick* stuff. Congresswoman Greene has also promoted appalling things, from implying that 9/11 is a hoax, saying school shootings were ‘false flag operations,’ and spreading anti-Semitic conspiracy theories – including one about a Jewish space laser being the cause of wildfires in California. I mean, this is *unbelievable*.

“The second reason is that the full Congress has never had to take this step. When something like this has happened in the past, leadership on both sides always did the right thing.”

McGovern came out swinging, and despite his statements of hope that the effort would be bipartisan, the hearing descended into rancor.

“I personally believe that the gentlewoman from Georgia should resign, or be expelled from this place,” McGovern acknowledged after Republican members voiced a series of complaints over procedure and warnings about precedent.

“But at a minimum, she ought not to be on the committees.”

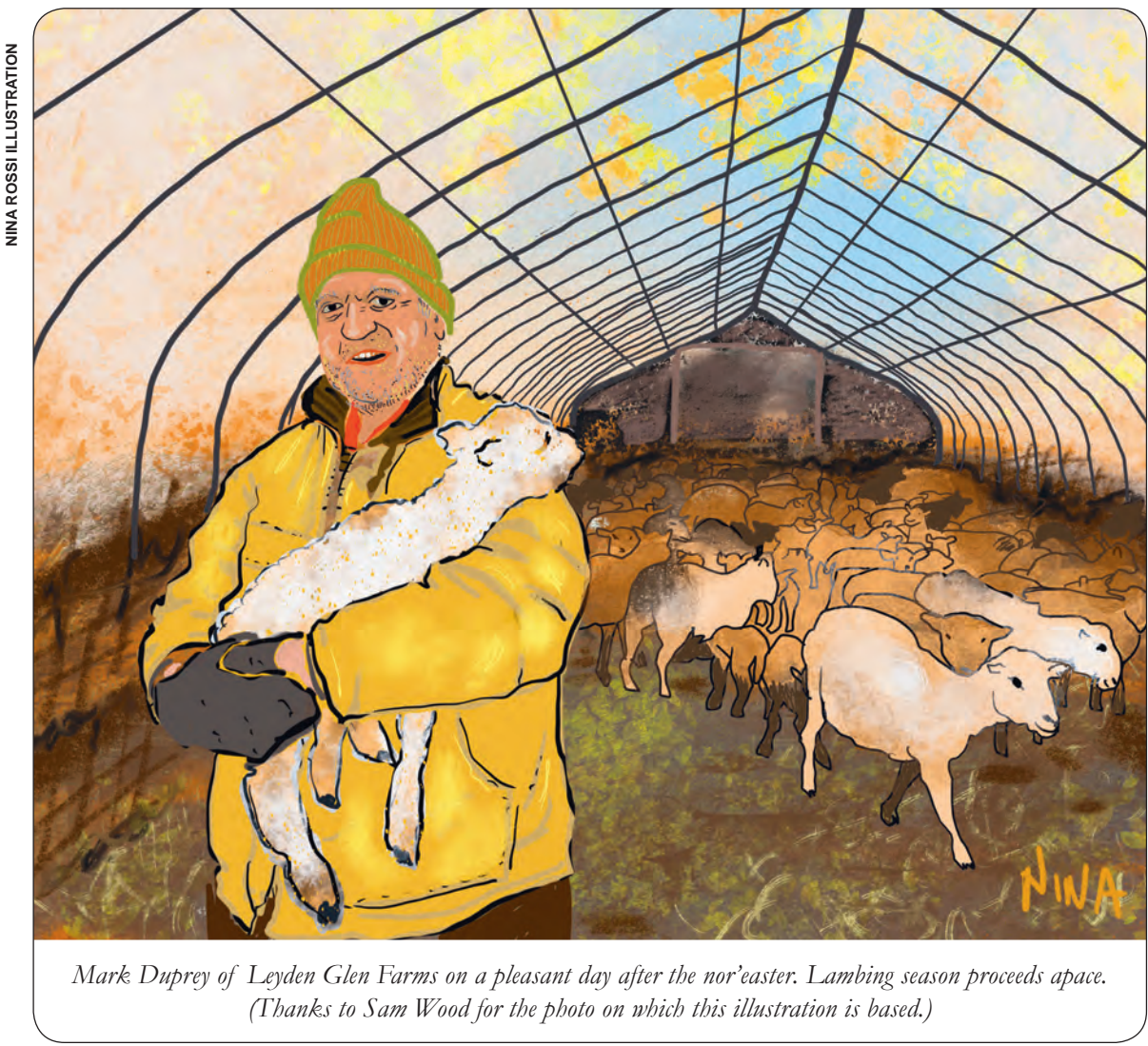
“She’s fundraising for this stuff as we speak,” he added.

“It seems to be a show trial, plain and simple,” Congressman Brian Babin (R-TX) argued. “The action that you are preparing to take will shatter our institutional norms and precedents.... This is her first month on the job. She deserves the opportunity to do her duties, to let her employers – her constituents, that is – decide next year whether to hire her again.”

Babin, apparently with his own “employers” foremost in mind, then attempted to submit an amendment replacing Marjorie Taylor Greene’s name with “Ilhan Omar.”

“We don’t normally make non-germane amendments in order – we never do,” McGovern admonished him. “I don’t really know the gentleman, but I would just say it is clear we don’t share the same values. And it is really amazing to me that you would come before this committee and present what you just presented, and not at all be bothered by a single thing that Ms. Taylor Greene has said, including advocating for the assassination of members of Congress.”

The approval by the Rules



Mark Duprey of Leyden Glen Farms on a pleasant day after the nor’easter. Lambing season proceeds apace. (Thanks to Sam Wood for the photo on which this illustration is based.)

Committee was consequential, sending the measure to a floor vote on Thursday. By the time you are reading this, that vote may already have been taken.

But it may, indeed, have been a precedent-setting hearing. The 117th Congress rides on the knife’s edge of history, and all this early shuffling to stake out the party’s positions is a preparation for bruising partisan legislative warfare to come

And to think our own adopted Rep is right up there, opening and shutting valves at this epochal juridico-legal turning point.

This is a Congress that on its fourth day was breached by a vanguard of street-fighting Proud Boys and Looney-Tunes Oathkeepers, citizens whose brains have spent the better part of the last decade stewing in a bath of alt-facts requisitioned by outfits like Breitbart and NewsMax. The fault running through consensus reality has worked its way into the body’s membership itself.

This is also a Congress, unfortunately, that has its work cut out for it, and must go to great lengths to get America through the rest of the COVID-19 pandemic in one piece. The revelation that a number of Republican members of Congress, sequestered in a basement chamber for protection during the attack, refused to wear face masks – and in so doing actually *infected* fellow members with the virus – provides a pretty dire indication of how that will go.

Dealing with the cognitive dissonance of their failed raid on the Capitol atop the dissonance of Trump’s electoral loss, the American right is now convincing itself that *anti-fa* actually led the January 6 riot. If one of their unhinged partisans manages to take the routine stochastic terrorism to its endpoint and assassinates an elected official, it will only result in the same reflexive conspiracy theorizing rather than sober reflection.

Kicking these people out isn’t partisan maneuvering – it’s basic self defense. Stay safe, Jim!

Letters to the Editors

Ride-Sharing Program

I’m writing to make sure folks in the *Reporter’s* coverage area are aware of the ride-sharing program put forth by the FRTA. It’s called FRTA Access. We are able to run it from a state grant, and use existing FRTA vehicles to allow residents to call and request rides.

Between 6:30 a.m. and 7 p.m., Mondays through Fridays, they will come to where you are and take you where you want to go; there are not set routes. All you have to do is give them three dollars if it is a short trip in one zone and four dollars if it is a longer trip between zones. Booking additional passengers on the same trip are a mere \$1.50 or \$2 more respectively.

The zones are as follows: Zone

1, Greenfield, Montague, Deerfield, Whately, Gill, Leyden, and Erving; Zone 2: Orange, New Salem, Wendell, Warwick, and Erving; Zone 3: downtown Shelburne Falls and the Charlemont Park & Ride; and Zone 4: Athol Hospital, Athol Market Basket, and the Athol YMCA.

You can download their app from frita.org, email them FRTAaccess@gmail.com, or call them on the telephone at (413) 773-8090 ext. 103.

Please let them know if you have questions. They are very nice people, and would genuinely like to help you get where you need to go.

Elizabeth Irving
Montague Planning Board,
FRCOG Representative

Others Are To Blame

Regarding complicated situations like Railroad Salvage, it’s often helpful to list the commonly accepted facts.

1. Solutions Consulting Group LLC had Jeanne Golrick as member/manager, and the party responsible for LLC matters.
2. Solutions bought a part of the parcel known as Railroad Salvage.
3. Solutions didn’t pay its town

property taxes.

4. And was subsequently involuntarily dissolved by Court Order.
5. Jeanne of the family Golrick left town.

I presume she used town and state roads to help her on her way.

Best regards,

Robert J. Steinberg
Montague Center

Complaint

An acquaintance passed on a digital version of your latest edition and as I was scrolling through it I noticed some interesting articles, good local color and other items, such as the poetry, that I enjoyed pausing to read.

Then I came to the *Sex Matters* column. It was pretty disgusting, even just skimming over it. Advo-

cating porn, too. Pretty low-life and for an industry that preys on young people and breaks up families seemed extremely out of place in a supposed publication that would appeal to the general public.

Really!? I will read no more!

Cindy Montanaro
Westfield

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LARKIN-ROSSI ILLUSTRATION

By NINA ROSSI

Most of the Greenfield Winter Carnival has moved to a virtual format this year, but **ice carving** will still be happening in downtown Greenfield this Friday, February 5. Check out the Ice Walk Map at greenfield-recreation.com for locations. Wear a mask and practice social distancing when viewing the sculptures.

There are other opportunities to participate in virtual fun and games such as a jigsaw puzzle contest, take-home craft kits, a virtual Sleigh Bell Run and more during the Carnival weekend of February 5 through 7.

Do you like chocolate? The Arms Library and Mo's Fudge Factor in Shelburne Falls are collaborating on a virtual program featuring the **history of chocolate and chocolate sampling**. An interactive discussion and sampling takes place this Friday, February 5 at 6:30 p.m.

The program includes some history, some geography, and some food science, as well as a few recipes to try at home. Chocolate dates back to Mesoamerica where it was very different from the delicious confection we know today. The program will be virtual, but will include tasting samples that can be picked up at Mo's or at Arms Library. There is no charge for the samples, as a library supporter has donated for that.

Call the Arms Library at (413) 625-0306 for more information and to RSVP, and Mo's Fudge Factor for their hours at (413) 625-6645. You may also email armslibrary@gmail.com. An email with Zoom information will be sent to those who wish to participate.

Artspace in Greenfield is happy to announce that **new art, music,**

and writing courses are now available on their new and improved website. Some of the new courses on the docket this spring include creative writing, cartooning and illustration, bookmaking, and ceramic tile making. All of the classes will be held online. Artspace also offers individual music classes. Check it all out on artspacegreenfield.com.

Pioneer Valley Habitat for Humanity is pleased to announce that Backyard ADUs of Western Massachusetts has been selected as the **2020 Small Home Hero Award** winner. Backyard ADUs of Easthampton has advocated for small-lot zoning since its inception, and built its first small homes using energy-efficient modular construction.

Backyard ADU have also been successful during the challenges of 2020 by advocating for long-term changes to zoning, putting pressure to lower the cost of quality housing, and helping simplify new home construction to make it more accessible to more people.

Explore some projects completed by this small-home builder on their website, backyardadus.com.

Silverthorne Theater Company is holding a **Short & Sweet (tiny) New Play Festival** on February 12 through 14, at 7:30 p.m. each night. Twelve actors and fifteen short plays have been chosen from over 400 pieces submitted from as far away as New Zealand. Audience members will be able to vote on their favorites at the end of each night, and the top eight winners will be streamed again.

Buy a pass for all three nights, or purchase tickets for individual nights, by going to silverthorne-theater.org.

The Brattleboro Museum & Art Center and the Retreat Farm have organized an **Artful Ice Shanty Design and Build Competition** this winter. Over a dozen artistic and ingenious ice shanties will be on view at the Retreat Farm in Brattleboro from February 13 to 28. Visitors may check them out anytime dawn to dusk and also explore the trails at the Retreat Farm, which are free to use to the public.

The design competition will include a light-hearted awards ceremony on Sunday, February 14 from noon to 1. Masks and social distancing are required on the grounds of the Retreat Farm, but the exhibit is free of charge.

We haven't heard from the folks over at the Great Falls Discovery Center for quite a while, and they remain closed during this continuing pandemic. Dawn Marvin Ward of the Friends of the Discovery Center group has sent notice of a free nature program they have scheduled over Zoom on February 18 at 7 p.m.

Called **Discover the Owls of New England**, the program will be presented by Peter Christoph, who delivers "stunning photographs of his favorite owls combined with stories that entertain, educate and inspire the audience," according to Dawn. You'll learn the secrets he uses to find and photograph these same owls in the wild in their natural habitat.

He'll wrap up the wildlife program with beautiful images of a vagrant migrant – a rare visitor to this area called the Great Gray Owl. Email friendsofgydc@gmail.com to get the Zoom link.

Community art space Looky Here is accepting **submissions for a community art show** opening March 12 at their space at 28 Chapman Street in Greenfield. All mediums are welcome, and there is no fee to submit.

Send photos and dimensions of your piece to lookyheregreenfield@gmail.com by February 19 to be considered. Visit [\[greenfield.com\]\(http://greenfield.com\) to learn more.](http://lookyhere-</p>
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The Greenfield Farmers Market is **seeking a new market manager** for this year. The job is part-time, year-round, with up to 15 hours a week in season and up to 20 hours a month off season.

Help maintain this popular Saturday market by organizing events, volunteers, music, and create the market's social media, marketing, and advertising presence. Email greenfieldfmjobs@gmail.com to find out about applying.

We often run announcements from the MassHire Franklin Hampshire Career Center. This time, the center is **looking to hire a workshop facilitator** for their own team.

The right candidate will be able to design and deliver job search and work readiness workshops to job seekers. Subjects include resume and cover letter writing, interview skills, online job search, and digital and financial literacy. Bilingual capacity preferred, with strong communication and presentation skills. Full job description at masshirefh-careers.org/come-work-for-us/.

Need help with your taxes? You may get free help if you are low- to moderate-income-eligible through the VITA Free Tax Filing program. VITA is virtual this year, and phone lines are now open to schedule appointments for taxpayers who live in Franklin and Hampshire counties or the North Quabbin region. A team of IRS certified volunteers is available. Once taxpayers have completed the fast and easy intake process, their taxes will be prepared remotely. This method of free tax preparation is secure, efficient, and accurate.

To learn more about this program and to schedule an intake call, visit the Community Action website at www.communityaction.us/taxes and complete the form at the bottom of the page. You can also reach VITA directly by phone at (413) 376-1136.

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GUEST EDITORIAL

By KATIE NOLAN

WENDELL – On Wednesday, January 27, when the window opened for people over 75 years of age to make appointments for COVID-19 vaccinations, I went to the mass.gov website, which was unfriendly to navigate – for instance, it directed users to click on an icon that wasn't on the page. According to the mass.gov map, there were only two nearby locations making appointments: Greenfield CVS and the University of Massachusetts-Amherst.

On that Wednesday and Thursday, I spent a frustrating amount of time going to appointment websites with no luck. On some websites, I had to fill in information on screen after screen, only to end up at a final screen saying "No vaccine available."

Frustrated? I was angry and cursing Charlie Baker – "Wasn't his background in health administration#!?" I emailed state representative Susannah Whipps, who answered immediately that she was meeting with the Department of Public Health that very day to discuss the difficult rollout of Tier 2 vaccinations.

I have moderate computer skills and decent internet, but was I feeling helpless. Then, I got a call from Wendell board of health chair Barbara Craddock, asking if I would volunteer to help her and former selectboard member Christine Heard

with calls to Wendell citizens over 75 to register them for February 3 and February 6 drive-in vaccination appointments at Mahar Regional High School in Orange.

Appointments to the drive-in Mahar clinic are available to 75 year or older residents of Orange, Wendell, and New Salem. Orange health agent Matt Fortier organized with a consortium of fourteen towns "along the Route 122 corridor" to obtain the vaccine doses; the state will supply only large amounts of doses, and doesn't want to deal with small towns individually. The Mahar drive-in clinic will use a subset of the consortium's vaccines.

Matt knew that the health agent in Rutland had obtained a vaccine freezer, and contacted him about collaborating. Matt said he organized flu clinics in December, which were practice for the COVID-19 clinics. "I will host as many vaccine clinics as I can," Matt said. He said the entire effort rests on the work of volunteers, "people helping, out of the goodness of their hearts."

Barbara gave me a list of names and telephone numbers – finding the telephone numbers took some sleuthing – and instructions on how to use the PrepMod scheduling program. The scheduling worked easily with PrepMod.

One of the people on my list is Wendell's oldest resident. Her grandson answered my call and was tremendously relieved to get an appointment – he had been trying for two days to find

one through the mass.gov system. One man told me he had heard vaccinations were available, but had no idea how to search for an appointment.

Christine Heard emailed, "The people I called were so impressed that they were called and that this clinic was set up for them." A 78-year-old friend in New Salem, who doesn't have internet, was delighted when he got a call from New Salem board of health member Cam Dunbar and made an appointment. And, of course, I made an appointment for myself.

Barbara said that over 100 people got appointments in one day. Wendell council on aging chair Nancy Spittle emailed Barbara that, when she heard about all the appointments, "I was so proud of our little towns, and of the hard work of people like you and Jen [Potee, chair of the New Salem board of health], so grateful to live where we live, I started to tear up, driving along."

And we can be proud of the Commonwealth, also, for learning from this rocky rollout. As of this week, the mass.gov website seems much easier to navigate. You can enter your zip code and get a list of vaccination sites within 10, 20, or 50 miles. And now there is a second vaccination site in Greenfield, at Big Y.

Katie Nolan lives in Wendell, where she serves as town moderator, on the community garden committee, and on the Council on Aging.

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Week of February 8
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DISPATCH from page A1

right in the middle of a residential neighborhood. God forbid, what will happen if a kid gets in there? Kids are kids. They get into mischief."

Kalinowski's house is on a bluff, and Gamache's is below, on a side street. "My house will face Proposed Array A," Gamache said. "We enjoy the view immensely. My grandchildren look out the picture window and see the tractors all the time mowing the grass."

The L'Etoiles wrote an open letter that envisioned a bucolic setting of goats grazing between the ten-foot high stanchions, but Gamache said she foresees a palette "of noise, smell, and solar panels with farm animals under them."

The project's fate is in the hands of the planning board and its all-powerful chair, but the selectboard acknowledged the valuable prime agricultural land the town stands to lose. Cummings called it some of the best farmland in the country. Jacques one-upped him and called it "the best in the world."

Meisner admitted he'd campaigned on solar power but was beginning to see a dirty side to clean energy. "It is a controversial energy supplement," he said. "It has to be done very carefully in a community like this."

Every growing season the rich earth gives us carmine-red strawberries, sweet corn, and asparagus. Cyclists along the bike trail go past the bright green sod fields owned by the L'Etoiles.

Northfield zoning ordinances put development ahead of preservation, and committees formed to provide pushback are meek and silent. This is a recipe for rampant development, given the Northfield planning board's proclivity to rubber stamp anything that might turn an ROI.

The L'Etoiles proudly say much of their property is protected from development, but much of it isn't. Five years ago they signed the Massachusetts Agricultural Covenant in exchange for interest-free taxpayer money. It includes a caveat: "The Premises shall remain active in agriculture use [and] *no part thereof shall be abandoned*, except in accordance with a [management plan] approved by the conservation district."

If the project is approved, they will be required to breach the Covenant and return the money to the state. They purchased Big Pine Meadow Farm 35 years ago, renamed it, worked it, and now want to cash in on it. In their open letter they wrote they had been approached sev-

eral times previously by solar developers: "We rebuffed them all."

Apparently all those rebuffs got to be too much and they struck a deal with BlueWave Solar, which has an office in the Prudential Building. BlueWave is different, say the L'Etoiles, because it uses "a different type of solar development that has a vastly reduced impact on the land."

These solar arrays require half the panels per acre, are higher off the ground, and aren't burrowed into concrete. These "dual use" arrays allow grass to grow and goats to graze.

According to Renewable Energy World of Orlando, the first array of this kind in Massachusetts was installed in Monson by SunBug Solar. "It's a good compromise between the need for innovation and respecting the land," said property owner Nate Tassinari. "Plus, it's my backyard. I want it to be both functional and beautiful!"

Nothing like a dressed-up quote with an exclamation point to get the heart pumping.

The L'Etoiles say they know a farmer who will lease their land to graze sheep and goats, and argue that's enough to maintain agricultural viability. Opponents will argue it's not enough, and that it would breach the Covenant.

According to the UMass Agricultural Extension staff, "A general challenge with these type of projects is that it is really an experiment."

The solar energy industry has enjoyed a long and mostly justified honeymoon with an eco-conscious public, but developers are exploiting the myth that all solar energy is good energy.

The solar energy fields proposed for Pine Meadow Road will have 26,000 movable panels to follow the sun. They are noisy and ugly.

"Every morning when we open our blinds we will look at a massive industrial-sized solar array," said Kalinowski. "Do you want to see solar farms all around our town? Is this what Northfield wants? This is industrial. It's not Northfield."

Sadly there are people who wouldn't mind seeing it become Northfield.

Parents Riled at School Committee

Columnists enjoy writing stories that have a clear-cut villain, but in the saga between sixth-grade parents and the Pioneer Valley Regional School Committee, there are no villains.

In December it voted to move the sixth grade from Bernardston and Northfield elementary

schools to Pioneer Valley Regional School. Parents on both sides of the river were outraged. Not only would their children be deprived the full term of their elementary school experience, they'd be thrust into a new environment in an age of COVID.

"My son is in the fifth grade, and after a year of moderate isolation, I want to see him return to the people and places he knows at his elementary school," said Caitlin Sheridan, who lives in Northfield. "My daughter is in the third grade. I don't care if she gets sent up to Pioneer in a few years — make the move then, if they want."

Parents and their supporters are zeroing in on committee member Mike Townsley of Bernardston. "I have one vote," he said. "I'm not spearheading anything. I'm trying to help provide a better education for the kids."

"There's no cabal," said committee member Jim Bell of Bernardston. "We're not meeting in a dark room at Mike Townsley's house. We're open to further investigation."

Townsley ran for the school committee four years ago after the district fell into a \$400,000 deficit. The shortfall resulted in state oversight, and Townsley said he and others on the board have worked hard to get it out of the hole. "We're providing a better education with the dollars that are provided us," he said. "We're already seeing smaller classes. My goal is to improve education at PVRS."

His detractors don't want it on the backs of the sixth graders, and at last look an online petition had garnered over 275 votes. "I've been told that many of those names are from outside the district," said Townsley. "Are we going to let people from outside the district tell us what to do?"

Parents spoke at last month's school committee meeting. When they were finished, Michele Giarusso of Leyden made a motion to reconsider and changed her vote to no, resulting in a 6-6 tie.

"It's a moot point," said Townsley. "A tie vote reverts back to the vote that passed. The initiative is moving forward, and it will save the district money and create a true middle school system."

The school committee's annual budget was drawn up to include sixth graders at Pioneer. Townsley said it would be released shortly and hinted that people would be pleased with the bottom line. The state's overseer will have the final call, however, and having him send it back to committee would probably be the parents' best hope.



NOTES FROM THE MONTAGUE TOWN CLERK

Nomination Papers Now Available For Montague Town Election

By DEB BOURBEAU

Nomination papers for the Annual Town Election, Tuesday, May 18, are now available at the Town Clerk's office until Monday, March 29. They must be returned no later than Wednesday, March 31 by 5 p.m.

Potential town wide offices need to obtain 36 signatures of registered voters from the "town at large" to be placed on the ballot. Potential town meeting members need to obtain 10 signatures from registered voters of their "home precinct" to be placed on the ballot.

Open offices are as follows:

- Selectboard, Moderator, Board of Health, and Parks & Recreation: all have one seat open, each for a 3-year term.
- Assessors have two seats open: one seat open for a 3-year term, and one seat open for a 1-year term.
- Library Trustees have four seats open: three seats open each for a 3-year term, and one seat open for a 2-year term.

TF Fire District Nomination Papers Available

Nomination papers for the Annual Turners Falls Fire District Election are now available to all district residents from the District Office located at 226 Millers Falls Road until Monday, March 8. Papers must be returned no later than Wednesday, March 10.

All potential candidates need to obtain 30 signatures from registered voters of the Turners Falls Fire District. The annual election will be held on Tuesday, April 27 at the District Office.

Open offices are as follows:

- Prudential Committee, for a 3-year term
- Water Commissioner, for a 3-year term

The District Office is currently closed to the public due to COVID-19, and therefore nomination papers may be obtained by making an appointment Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., by calling 863-4542 or by emailing accountant@turnersfallsfiredistrict.org.

SCHOOLS from page A1

returned for face-to-face learning and support last November, but left after a positive COVID-19 test on campus; weeks later an outbreak spread throughout Franklin County.

The countywide case count is now down below December levels, but still above November's. The first group returned on January 25, and the administration and school committee hoped to offer the hybrid model to all families beginning next week.

"Newly emerging staffing issues will prevent the district from being able to safely bring a larger number of students back to campus next week," Beck wrote.

"We have filled a number of positions, but some critical positions remain unfilled. In addition, recent necessary medical leaves and the need for some staff to unexpectedly quarantine have prevented us from being able to fully staff our schools for next week."

Additionally, the superintendent wrote, an expected final report from contractor Jamrog HVAC measuring air filtration improvements in the buildings after months of repair work has not been submitted.

"I will not go back on that assurance to the community to be transparent about that progress," Beck wrote. "While we expect that report in the next day or so, that is beyond our deadline for decision making around moving to hybrid."

See next week's Montague Reporter for more in-depth coverage of the Gill-Montague Regional School District.



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FRTA from page A1

the corner off Turnpike Road, on a short street known as Sandy Lane.

The good news has been slow in arriving. FRTA’s existing bus barn is, by all accounts, not in good shape. Located on Deerfield Road in Greenfield, it is leased from the Greenfield Montague Transportation Area, a spectral entity that dates to the heyday of the electric streetcar. All parties would prefer to end the arrangement and dissolve the GMTA, but no viable plan has been devised for the facility’s relocation.

An initial new site in Greenfield fell through over concerns about the extent of its environmental contamination. Meanwhile, the garage was damaged by a 2014 fire. The Montague site emerged as a likely candidate. It was approved for sale by town meeting in 2014.

In late 2017, with a \$20 million design in hand from STV Architects, FRTA applied for a “Bus & Bus Facilities Infrastructure Investment Program” grant from the US Department of Transportation it hoped would cover the majority of the project’s cost. It was offered \$6 million. Since that time FRTA has been scrambling to scale down the plans and negotiate for more funding.

Jeff Singleton, who regularly reports for the *Montague Reporter* and also serves as the town of Montague’s alternate representative to the FRTA advisory board, attended last Wednesday’s Zoom meeting and shared his notes on Perreault’s presentation.

“FRTA was able to negotiate a design for a project of \$9.5 to \$10 million of ‘federal funds obligated for

this summer,’” Singleton reported. “There may be more contingency costs.”

According to Montague town planner Walter Ramsey, FRTA must negotiate a purchase and sale for the town-owned parcel in order to submit development permits, and receive a site plan approval from the planning board. “I think we are looking to do both in March/April,” he wrote.

The parcel in question is located south of Turnpike Road, behind Judd Wire. Montague had initially hoped the bus barn construction would include funding for electricity and sidewalks to be installed along Sandy Lane, which currently serves as the access road to the town transfer station and two large solar arrays.

“Both Walter and Steve Ellis said we need to keep Judd Wire in the loop on the timeline and design for the project, since they are in the process of buying the Sandy Lane parking lot which is just to the east of the proposed facility,” reported Singleton.

He added that an inquiry from the Franklin Regional Council of Governments about the installation of electric vehicle charging stations at the barn, part of a potential shift to an electric bus fleet, was met with a mixed response.

“[FRTA administrator] Tina Cote said she believed that the DOT is issuing an RFP for an analysis of electric buses,” he said, but Perreault indicated that the charging stations had been removed during efforts to reduce project costs after the original design failed to receive adequate funding.



TOWING from page A1

the town. After they declined the job, the department called other contractors.

Lapachinski told the *Reporter* that the department was notified about 14 cars, but four must have been moved by their owners before being towed. “That’s still a lot for us,” he said. “Sometimes it gets up to seven or eight.”

The cars were towed to Goly’s Garage by sister company Byrne Towing. The *Reporter* reviewed an impound invoice for \$231.60, paid in cash by one Third Street resident on Wednesday in exchange for the release of his vehicle.

The invoice included \$108 for towing, \$70 for storage, \$3.60 for mileage, and an extra \$50 itemized as “Admin fee/gate.”

“It’s a flagrant display of the way that privatized companies that offer services that a town can’t provide are able to gouge working people,” said the vehicle’s owner, Daniel Kaufman.

“I’m working on four projects at once,” he added. “I couldn’t get a ride over to Greenfield until the second day.” According to the invoice, Kaufman’s car was released 28 hours and 54 minutes after it was registered as impounded.

Montague prohibits on-street parking from 1 to 5 a.m. from December through March, and offers free overnight parking in seven designated lots in downtown Turners Falls. Signage in each lot indicates the hours of potential snow removal – Mondays through Thursdays, between 7 to 9 a.m. in the Third Street lot, between 9 and 11 a.m. at Fourth Street, and so on – but with no public notification system in place, ambiguity persists as to which days the removal work will take place.

According to regional weather reporter and enthusiast Dave Hayes, a.k.a. Dave Hayes the Weather Nut, heavy snow had continued into Tuesday morning.

“Sometime between 7 and 8am UTC (or 2 and 3 a.m. EST) is when the bulk of the steady snow exited northwest of Turners Falls, MA,” Hayes told the *Reporter* after reviewing recorded radar data from the National Climate Data Center. “There might have been a few oth-

er snow showers that came through after that and dusted the ground.”

Historically, the highway department has chosen the day after snow has stopped to clear the lots, but no public mechanism exists in Montague to verify that a discrete snow event has come to an end.

“We received a call about a landlord that also advised tenants that they didn’t have to move their cars, so that may have contributed to a portion of it,” said Lapachinski. “I wish that we could put out a reminder text, or something.... I don’t know what they can do to alleviate the confusion.”

Vehicles left in the public lots at posted times are subject to “involuntary trespass” towing rates, which are regulated under state law MGL Ch.159 §6B. The statute sets a limit of \$35 “per twenty-four hour period” to be charged for vehicle storage.

It also grants town selectboards the authority to set local maximum rates that may be charged for towing.

In towns such as Montague, which have not set any local cap on the towing rate, the limit defaults to a statewide maximum established by the Department of Public Utilities (DPU). Under 220 CMR 272.03, that rate is \$108. The regulation further allows a surcharge of \$3.60 per mile after the first five

miles, round trip.

“Once you’re towing to a different town, and a tow shop is charging an exorbitant fee by adding ‘administrative’ fees to what’s supposed to be mandated by the state, it’s a complete miscarriage of justice,” said Kaufman. “I think it’s a parasitic relationship that these private companies have – they’re doing what should be a public service. Maybe as a revenue stream they can offer some kind of marginal fine, but the towns should be moving these cars.”

According to a 2012 bulletin released by the Transportation Oversight Division director Brian Cristy, neither the statute nor the code grant the DPU jurisdiction over additional fees. “[T]he issue of gate or yard fees,” Cristy wrote, “may be addressed by contract or other means between the carrier and others.”

In 2016, during a hearing over raising the state’s maximum towing rate from \$90 to \$108, the Automobile Insurers Bureau of Massachusetts (AIB) lodged a formal protest about the practice.

“The Department’s allowance for carriers to charge separately for other services that might be provided in involuntary towing is not necessary or compatible with common ratemaking methodology,” the AIB testified. “A carrier’s imposition of



Though five cars were towed from the Third Street municipal parking lot, several were left in place, and not all snow was removed.

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separate charges for the same services which form the towing rate constitutes duplicative compensation which is not warranted by the statute or common sense.”

The DPU brushed aside this complaint, repeating its position that such “various ancillary charges” were not under its jurisdiction.

“While the Department sets maximum rates allowed to be charged for towing services, tow companies are encouraged to charge a lower rate,” it responded

in its final order in 2017.

“For example, in many municipalities, police-ordered towing is subject to a contract rate based on bids, or on a negotiated rate between the municipality and the tow operator doing business in a municipality... The Department encourages municipal efforts to reduce towing costs to the general public.”

MGL Ch. 159 § 6B requires all parties towing under the statute to submit an annual financial statement. A 2019 public documents request by Data for Justice, a project of the ACLU of Massachusetts, resulted in the publication of the records released by the DPU.

A review of the 2017 filings shows that Rau’s Sunoco Service performed 184 police-ordered tows in 2017 for a total of \$25,937 in revenue, or a cumulative average of \$141 per tow. The documents did not include a comparable filing for Byrne’s Towing.

Rau declined to discuss his rates with the *Reporter*, but opened up on the topic of gate fees.

“Basically it’s opening a gate to let a car out,” he said. “I never thought that was fair. That’s kind of ridiculous to me.”

Multiple attempts to reach highway superintendent Tom Bergeron on Wednesday were unsuccessful, and town administrator Steve Ellis explained that he did not have time to offer comment.



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NOTES FROM THE GILL SELECTBOARD

Culverts, Burn Permits, Committees, Recusals, And Assessments...

By JERRI HIGGINS

Monday night’s snowstorm did not cancel the Gill selectboard, as town administrator Ray Purington noted might have happened prior to the ubiquitous video and teleconferencing in use during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The selectboard discussed their top three regionalization service and planning project ideas for the FRCOG’s 2021 District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA) program, which is due by this Friday, February 5.

Purington told the selectboard that he plans to differentiate Gill’s top three town priorities from its top three regional priorities. “I do not know that they want that distinction, but I am going to make it anyway,” he said.

Selectboard chair Randy Crochier recused himself from the discussion due to his work as a health agent at FRCOG’s Cooperative Public Health Service.

“I sent the request form out to all the departments and all the committees looking for any suggested projects, but I had only one response back,” Purington told the board. “Highway superintendent John Miner would like us to request funding to do a culvert assessment.”

Purington explained that the assessment would identify any culverts that might be at greater risk with the rising intensity and frequency of storms due to climate change. He also said that a “handy tool” that would come out of the assessment would be a town culvert location map.

“I was going to ask about road assessments, and if we want to tie that in with the culvert assessment,” added selectboard member John Ward.

Purington said he is hesitant to task Miner with two assessment projects, because the DLTA funding has a December 31 project completion deadline. “With past work on the DLTA,” he said, “we usually do not find out until late March what we can be working on – and it is amazing how fast those nine months can go.”

Purington offered that the selectboard could ask for culvert assessment funding through DLTA, and try to use Community Compact funding for the road assessments, if the highway department determines that inspecting the roads would not require too much personnel time.

The three top priorities for Gill are FirstLight relicensing assistance, culvert assessment, and road assessments. The regional top three priorities are COVID-19 vaccination assistance, FirstLight relicensing assistance, and a local officials’ workshop.

Selectboard members Greg Snedeker and John Ward accepted Purington’s recommendations.

The intermunicipal agreement renewal for Gill’s continued participation in the Cooperative Public Health Service was also

approved by Snedeker and Ward, with Crochier again abstaining due to his position.

Six-Town School District

Snedeker told the selectboard that he and Alan Genovese, the six-town regional planning board chair, had submitted a grant proposal to the Department of Education and Secondary Education (DESE) last week, hoping to secure another round of consultation funding to continue the board’s work on the programming and financial projections of a combined school district comprising the current Pioneer Valley Regional and Gill-Montague Regional school districts.

“Do you think DESE would prefer to see the two districts merge as a cost saver, or as a way to sustain education?” Crochier asked.

“There may be a lot of programmatic incentives, but not necessarily financial incentives,” Snedeker replied.

“Programmatically, there are a lot of reasons [to merge the two districts],” he explained, telling the board that in his own experience as a teacher, it is difficult to run meaningful programs when a high school has fewer than 200 students. Snedeker said that extra-curriculars – “things like teams, music, bands, and ensembles” – especially suffer.

Snedeker highlighted potential financial losses under a combined school district. “If the two districts merge, Gill-Montague Regional would possibly lose its state aid and go into ‘hold harmless’ as a larger district,” he said, “but it does sound like we are losing that state aid already, I just do not know how much. That is one of the things that we are also going to look into in the grant.”

Another goal of the six-town regional planning board is to meet with state legislators, and those in the highest positions at DESE, to discuss the financial risks in combining the two school districts.

Other Business

Gill’s personnel committee has been reviewing the town assessor’s request to increase the assessor’s clerk position from 20 to 30 hours per week, and asked the selectboard for more time to complete their work. The town’s personnel policy handbook gives a deadline of February 1 for the personnel committee to make a request, or make its recommendation to the selectboard. The selectboard unanimously approved the personnel committee’s request for a March 1 extension.

A public service announcement came from fire chief Gene Beaubien, who said that the Franklin County dispatcher (Shelburne Control) is requesting that all county residents use the dispatch’s online system at www.fcburnpermits.com for burn permits, if possible, to keep their lines open for emergency calls.

DAKIN from page A1

shelter in Springfield and a smaller secondary shelter in Leverett. The Springfield office is still operating as a shelter and clinic on an appointment-only basis. In the ten months since the Leverett shelter at 163 Montague Road closed, rumors have spread that the location could close for good.

“I can tell you that it’s definitely just a rumor at this point that it’s closing, but it does not shock me that that rumor might spread, because we’ve been closed longer than anticipated,” DiCenso said. “At this point we don’t know what is going to happen.”

The nonprofit shelters, treats, and fosters more than 20,000 animals each year. When the pandemic shutdown began they sent many of the animals from their shelters to stay in the homes of foster families. By the end of March, 139 animals were being cared for by fosters, DiCenso said.

“We had a really active base of fosters,” DiCenso said. “We were in a good position; we didn’t have to recruit.”

The need for pet food rose sharply in 2020, DiCenso said. Dakin distributed 130,000 pounds of pet food to local food banks last year, when in a typical year they usually send less than 30,000 pounds. Dakin sends about 430 pounds of pet food to the Franklin County Survival Center each month; the food is purchased through a combination of grants and donations to the shelter.

Last month they began a twice-weekly curbside clinic in Springfield for pets with minor injuries, various illnesses, or in need of testing.

“An issue might be detected at our Clinic that’s in its initial stages, but with treatment and attention, a pet can stay healthy and by your side for a longer period of time,” Dicenso said in a press release. “It’s hard for pets with non-urgent issues to be seen quickly, but Clinic PLUS can help people experience the joy of pet companionship for as long as possible.”

Dakin is New England’s largest provider of pet spaying and neutering services, according to the organization’s website, having performed more than 98,000 operations since 2009. After shutting down the service in March, they opened the operating rooms again over the summer. Dakin’s Leverett location has no surgical suite so they cannot perform spay and neuter operations, but they can host vaccine clinics and functions as a shelter for a variety of animals.

“The most honest answer is we are evaluating everything we do, and Leverett is obviously a part of what we do,” DiCenso said. “I can tell you there’s no active plant to close it. Nothing has been put in front of the board [of directors].”

Today Dakin has 48 staff members working remotely and from the Springfield office, according to DiCenso. They lost 10 employees at the beginning of the pandemic to temporary layoffs, lack of work, and employees leaving due to lack of childcare and other factors.



“We’ve been closed longer than anticipated,” executive director Carmine DiCenso said of Dakin’s Leverett facility. “It does not shock me that that rumor might spread.”

“We still consider ourselves in pandemic operation mode,” DiCenso said.

In recent years animal shelters in New England have seen a decrease in the number of animals they take in for adoption, according to DiCenso. “These are the days we dreamed of,” he said. “We’re finding that we can’t keep animals on our website, as soon as they’re there they get adopted.” Rabbits, guinea pigs, rats, and mice are slower to adopt, he added.

DiCenso was working for the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals in 2008 when the economic crisis caused the number of animals being surrendered to shelters to rise. He said Dakin staff are anticipating a similar scenario if foreclosures and evictions caused by the pandemic force more people to surrender their pets to shelters. Temporary sheltering services could be one answer to that issue.

“A housing crisis coming down the pipeline... and with that will be an uptick in the need to shelter more animals,” DiCenso said. “We’re kind of keeping watch of those trends.”

Regardless of any possible changes on the horizon, DiCenso said, the organization hopes to maintain a presence in Franklin County is a goal of the organization. “That’s definitely important to us,” he said. “We definitely consider ourselves serving the entire Pioneer Valley.”



NOTES FROM THE ERVING SELECTBOARD

Masks On; ERSECO Can Own Dryers

By KATIE NOLAN

On Monday night, the Erving selectboard approved a policy requiring town employees to wear a face covering at all times while working for the town. The policy also encourages town employees to voluntarily seek COVID-19 vaccination, “for those it is medically safe to do so.”

Fire chief Phil Wonkka reported that there are three local sites for COVID-19 vaccinations for people over 75 years of age: two in Greenfield, and one at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. He said the state wants to “push” elder citizens to use “super sites” in Springfield for vaccinations.

According to Wonkka, state senator Jo Comerford has been advocating with the state Department of Public Health for more local vaccination locations. Wonkka said that senior center director Paula Betters has been contacting those over 75 to help with scheduling vaccinations. The board asked town administrator Bryan Smith to add di-

rect links to local vaccination sites on the town website.

The board approved allowing Erving Industries to retain ownership of two new sludge dryers proposed for POTW#2, the town-owned wastewater treatment plant that is operated by the Erving Industries’ subsidiary ERSECO. Although a special town meeting in October approved borrowing from the state revolving loan fund to pay for the dryers and installation, under the current plan, Erving Industries will pay for the dryers and installation and no town money will be used. Once Erving Industries has paid the loan, ownership of the dryers would revert to the town.

Town administrator Bryan Smith reported that the police chief screening committee will be interviewing candidates next week. He said they expect to provide recommendations to the board by February 15. The board expects to interview final candidates the week of February 22, most likely at a meeting separate from the regular Monday selectboard meeting.

The board reviewed and made several revisions to a proposed memorandum of understanding (MOU) between Erving and Northfield for ambulance service from Northfield Emergency medical service for the western section of Erving. Wonkka told the board that the Northfield selectboard had signed the MOU last week.

The Erving board wanted several changes, including setting March 1 as the final date for renegotiation of the fee for each fiscal year and naming the ambulance service area as the western service area of Erving, rather than the “Millers Falls” section of Erving or “Ervingside.”

The start date for the agreement is July 1, 2021, but Wonkka said Northfield EMS could replace the current AMR ambulance service as soon as the MOU is signed.

The board approved a proposal for \$500 from Tiny Town Marketing to develop new town logo designs, taking into consideration public feedback about the initial design, which featured the French King Bridge.

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MONTAGUE from page A1

that the town “exercise more caution and wait.”

Head librarian Linda Hickman, who attended Monday’s meeting and has been one of the more outspoken department heads favoring reopening, sent the following email to the *Reporter*:

“We have many library users of all walks of life who rely heavily on browsing to select books and DVDs. Curbside is not working for them. The staff spend a lot of frustrating (on both ends) time on the phone offering suggestions, many of which miss the mark. We have been the sole source of internet connectivity for many older and/or limited income residents.”

All board members and health director Daniel Wasiuk agreed that the town should reopen its buildings the following week, but the discussion bogged down over what metric should be used to finalize that decision. Selectboard chair Rich Kuklewicz said that 25 COVID-19 cases in two weeks should be the “cutoff point,” but that was the town’s most recent case count, and the town could return into the red zone when the state metrics are released this Thursday, February 4.

In the end the board approved a motion to open town offices next week, pending a review of the case count next Monday. If the town case count is 24 or fewer, town offices will reopen according to the protocols used last summer: limited access during limited hours, primarily by appointment, with mask wearing and social distancing required.

The Carnegie Library may take a few additional days to reopen, and the status of the branch libraries was not discussed at the meeting. Access to the senior center will continue to be limited.

Ellis encouraged the press to emphasize that the town still hopes to limit in-person use of town services: “Please emphasize that in-person visits are encouraged for business that cannot be handled by dropping off a check or a form. We will continue to take those through the mail slot wherever possible and mail receipts, dog licenses, or other things as necessary to the transaction.”

Shots for Seniors

The selectboard also continued its discussion of the local effort to vaccinate the first “Phase 2” residents, those over the age of 75. The town learned last week that it would receive 100 doses a week from the state to vaccinate residents of Montague, Gill, Erving, and Wendell, but its proposed location in the town hall basement is not ready; the board somewhat reluctantly agreed to send the first doses, along with staff support, for a collaborative regional effort at the John Zon Center in Greenfield for the time being.

Late last week, according to Ellis, the state told local officials that it favored larger regional vaccination centers, casting Montague’s promised 100 weekly doses into doubt. Ellis said the town might experience a “loss of doses” if it tried to administer them at a small local site.

Tracy Rogers, emergency preparedness program manager at FRCOG, said that based on her informal conversations with officials at the state Department of Public Health, “they may be sending more vaccines to the larger centralized sites, and that means less at the local level.”

Greenfield health director Jennifer Hoffman said the city “wanted 100% to collaborate with Montague.” She said that the Greenfield site had been vaccinating 150 people per day and that it “could definitely be 250, easy,” with staff assistance from other towns. The main problem is the area at the site needs to be expanded for people waiting for appointments and for the 20 minutes of required monitoring afterwards.

The Montague board seemed much more comfortable with the Greenfield collaboration than the previous week, and even offered to share the town’s refrigerator for vaccines purchased with federal CARES Act money.

Hoffman said she hoped the John Zon Center would be open next week for Phase 2 residents over 75, but did not give information on when and how they should register. Vaccinations are now available for this group at the CVS in Greenfield and at the Campus Center at UMass Amherst, as well as sites in Holyoke and the Springfield area. However, the number of appointments is limited, and slots are quickly filled. Information and links to registering are on the Department of Public Health website.

The ability to register for a vaccination appointment relies heavily on having a good computer and being adept at using it. Most of the vaccine “hotlines” direct people to websites. Rogers said FRCOG is working in conjunction with area Councils on Aging and LifePath, an organization that has been coordinating the vaccination of home healthcare workers, to develop the capacity to “answer phones and help people register over the phone.”

FRCOG community services director Phoebe Walker provided a phone number, (413) 829-9285 ext. 2375, for residents without internet access, who need help with registering, who need a ride to a vaccination site, or who are unable to leave home to get vaccinated.

Stay tuned: the situation changes every day.

Virtual Meeting Approaches

The selectboard made progress

on preparing for a virtual special town meeting, scheduled for Thursday, February 25 at 6:30 p.m. “Practice sessions” to train town meeting members and iron out potential kinks in the technology will be held on February 18 at 6:30 p.m. and February 20 at 10 a.m.

The board officially responded to a request from meeting moderator Chris Collins that it was necessary to hold a virtual meeting under state law Chapter 92 (2020), and approved a \$6,330 contract with Options Technologies for a voting system for the meeting, which will be held as a Zoom webinar. The contract provides for staff training and technical assistance at the meeting as well as the two practice sessions. It also includes a “request to speak system that goes beyond the limitations of the ‘hand raise’ function in Zoom.”

Then the board approved a preliminary warrant for the town meeting itself, although it did not discuss or endorse specific articles.

Four of the 11 articles deal with the purchase of the property of Pioneer Aviation, which provides fuel, maintenance, and storage for the town-owned airport, as well as the construction of a new hanger and an increase in this year’s airport budget. Two other articles will fund major improvements at the water pollution control facility.

Other articles include an appropriation to fund the Chestnut Hill Loop bridge, which is primarily being financed by a state small bridge grant; to increase the town information technology budget; to increase the stipend of the emergency management director; and to seal and paint the Unity Park basketball court.

Virtual Tech Support

The board discussed a proposal from current IT consultant Horace Moody, who is scheduled to leave in the spring, to continue to provide IT support remotely for the remainder of this fiscal year, and perhaps the next. Last week Moody had proposed that the town hire a full time IT staff member, but opposition to that idea caused him to reconsider.

Ellis said that while Moody dealt with hardware issues on site, software problems, which constitute the vast majority “in normal times,” could be handled remotely, and he could then subcontract for the on-site work. Ellis argued that this would lead to greater continuity of support and called it “a best case scenario for the town.”

Ellis said Moody had not produced an exact cost for his services, which would need to be put out to bid.

The board did not take a vote on the issue.

Other Business

The board executed a contract

with the state for the 2020 Community Development Block Grant, which will include funding for playground improvements at Hillcrest Elementary School and the sidewalk and planters in front of the town-owned Shea Theater.

The board also executed contracts with FRCOG and Chris Sawyer-Lauçanno for a senior center roofing project.

Ellis told the board at AJ Virgilio Construction, Inc. of Westfield has low bid on Chestnut Hill Loop Bridge but their credentials were still being vetted by the project’s design firm.

Following a resignation on the community engagement police review committee, the board reduced the number of members, and the required quorum, of the committee by one.

Ellis announced that the town would be receiving a cannabis “im-

pact fee” of \$198,883 from the firm 253 Pharmacy, which operates cultivation and retail facilities, for the calendar year 2020. Ellis said the funds will go directly into a “cannabis impact fee stabilization account,” and that the selectboard will need to put some “time and thought” soon into establishing the town’s priorities for the use of that money.

Town executive assistant Wendy Bogusz reported that the town’s population estimate for the purposes of state alcohol licensing was 8,673. She was unsure why this number was so much higher than the US Census estimate, which is projected to be under 8,400 for 2020. Ellis speculated that the state alcohol commission may have included people projected to be taking vacations in Montague.

The next selectboard meeting will be held February 8.



LOOKING BACK:
10 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Here’s the way it was on February 3, 2011: News from the Montague Reporter’s archive.

Barn Collapses
In Montague Center

The massive post and beam barn at the historic Squire Ward house, built in the 1830s at 27 Center Street, survived a brush with fire seven years ago only to collapse under the weight of ice and snow Wednesday, at about 12:45 p.m.

Owner Dean Garvin said he had heard “popping noises all day” coming from the barn, and kept his children from playing near the structure. “We went in early this morning to get the ladders out,” to bust up ice dams on the roof of the main house, Garvin said, expressing relief that no one had been hurt in the collapse.

Michael Muller, who lives across the street, said the sound of the barn collapsing was like an avalanche of snow collapsing off a roof.

Countywide Public Health
Initiative in the Works

A more coordinated and regional approach to the delivery of town public health services has been proposed for Franklin County, after a year of study by health officials from some of the county’s larger towns, including Montague.

Still in the conceptual phase, the proposal, originating with the Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG), envisions shared, trained public health agents handling the more technical or legal matters that come before participating boards of health (for example, septic system, camp and restaurant inspections, infectious disease control, and housing court issues) while elected health board members would focus on the policy and human relations side of public health in their towns.

Phoebe Walker, FRCOG’s di-

rector of community services, said grant funds from the federal Center for Disease Control are available for further planning and development of the regional public health initiative. The money is administered by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health.

Prondecki Wins Pizza
Contest – Hands Down

Who makes the best pizza around? According to four judges at the Greenfield Savings Bank’s pizza tasting contest on Friday, there is no doubt about it.

Among the six pizza parlors who entered pizza pies in the contest there was one clear winner – Mike Prondecki of the Franklin Grocery in Ervingside.

“It’s unanimous,” said police chief Ray Zukowski, one of the judges.

“By a long shot,” added Turn It Up owner Patrick Pezzati, who lived in Italy for 15 years and knows his pizza pies. “It tasted handmade!”

Well, it is. Prondecki said he bakes his hand tossed pizza in the brick oven he installed at the Franklin Grocery and Package Store eight years ago.

“My sauce is quite elaborate,” he added. But he wasn’t giving away any trade secrets. “I use nine herbs and spices,” along with a mix of whole milk mozzarella, parmesan and romano cheeses. “All the ingredients are up to snuff – the best!”

And the judges, including RiverCulture’s Lisa Davol and Ed Reil of Reil’s Cleaning Service, agreed.

Christina’s, also in Ervingside, was a strong runner up.

Greenfield Savings Bank held the pizza contest Friday to kick off their month of giving away a free Bialetti pizza baking stone kit – with serving rack, pizza cutter, and recipes – to anyone who opens up a new checking account.



RiverCulture Announces
Signage Incentive Program

TURNERS FALLS – RiverCulture and the Montague Planning and Conservation Department announce a pilot program to encourage business owners in the Turners Falls Cultural District to invest in signage that is “consistent with the community’s goal of a vibrant and welcoming downtown” according to a recent press release.

New and existing brick and mortar businesses in downtown Turners Falls are eligible for reimbursement of up to \$250 toward the cost of design, fabri-

cation, and installation of permanent signage. Signs must comply with the program guidelines and be approved prior to fabrication in order to be eligible for reimbursement. Applications are accepted on a rolling basis and are available on the town website, www.montague-ma.gov, and the RiverCulture website, www.turnersfallsriverculture.org

For more information on the Signage Incentive Program, contact Suzanne LoManto at (413) 863-3200 ext. 115, or email riverculture@montague-ma.gov.

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Brick House Seeks Business Manager!

TURNERS FALLS – The Brick House Community Resource Center, which supports individual, family, and community well-being through focusing on youth development, leadership development, economic development, and education, is seeking a part-time Business Manager.

The position, at 12 hours a week, comes with paid time off and a health reimbursement account. A minimum of 5 years of experience involving financial reporting and/or grant management is required, and a CPA with 2-3 years of experience in the nonprofit sector is preferred. To review the full job listing, check out brickhousecommunity.org/get-involved/employment-opportunities/. Resumes and cover letters may be sent to cwhiteway@brickhouseccr.org, with “Business Manager” in the subject.

LEVERETT from page A1

part-time work, saying that having someone to perform simpler tasks would free up full-time workers for more important jobs.

Board member Tom Hankinson agreed that it would be good for the department to make a connection with a tech school, and noted that the school offers other programs which might be of mutual benefit as well.

Chair Julie Shively and fin com member Ann Delano commented that they liked the idea in principle, but said that cost considerations needed to be looked at more carefully before it could be approved.

New library director Misha Storm said there were no major changes to the library’s budget, but commented on several library topics.

Storm said the library’s “Blind Date With a Book” Valentine’s Day promotion was proving popular. A form on the library’s website, www.leverettlibrary.org, allows readers to let the library pick out a book for them, which they can pick up along with some chocolate or similarly romantic item.

Storm also commented that the library’s curbside pickup was very popular, and that she thought the library would likely be a good place for an electric-car charging station if the town ends up with one through a grant program.

Police Department

The board was notified that one of the two remaining full-time police officers who had not previously committed to getting the COVID-19 vaccine has agreed to do so, and that the other had not yet made that decision. The board took no action, noting that further efforts were being made to convince the remaining officer to get vaccinated voluntarily.

Shively commented on difficulties in getting grant help from the state with drafting a more permanent joint policing contract with Wendell, but said work is proceeding.

Resident Aaron Buford asked about the purpose behind a proposed “on-ramp” provision, which would allow additional towns to join the newly-forming police district more easily.

Shively said the idea is being looked at due to the state phasing out support for part-time police, which, along with rising costs, is likely to necessitate further changes in the way policing is organized in small towns. She suggested that there may be a movement toward more police regionalization, and the on-ramp provision is for future concerns, not current planning. Shively said the goals for regionalization would be cost savings, and greater efficiency.

Delano added, “We’re not looking to be more policed.”

IN LOVING MEMORY OF
GABRIEL LEE MASON
2/5/84 – 3/25/08

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VOIP SNAFU

Town administrator Marjorie McGinnis reported that initial work on swapping the town’s phones over to a “voice over internet protocol” (VOIP) system was frustrating, and “did not go smooth.”

McGinnis provided a list of known challenges due to the current system being somewhat of a patchwork created over many years, which may not have been adequately addressed by the contractor in original proposals. She outlined possible problems with the contractor doing the work, and said she had been conferring with multiple residents on how to proceed, but also wanted guidance from the board.

Members of the finance committee also weighed in, and it was decided to continue with the project, but look into a variety of options for completing it.

Other Business

The selectboard considered a request from the elementary school to move an antique bell collection in order to make space. Several options were discussed, including removing the bells from their cases so children could play with them and moving them to a new location. It was noted that their value as antiques should be taken into consideration in whatever was decided.

Shively warned there would be difficulties in selling them, if people wanted to do that, due to the fact they were a gift to the town.

Dates for the annual budget hearing and town meeting were not set, but sentiment was in favor of sticking with the traditional dates of mid-March for the budget hearing and early April for town meeting, seeing how things look, and making changes if necessary.



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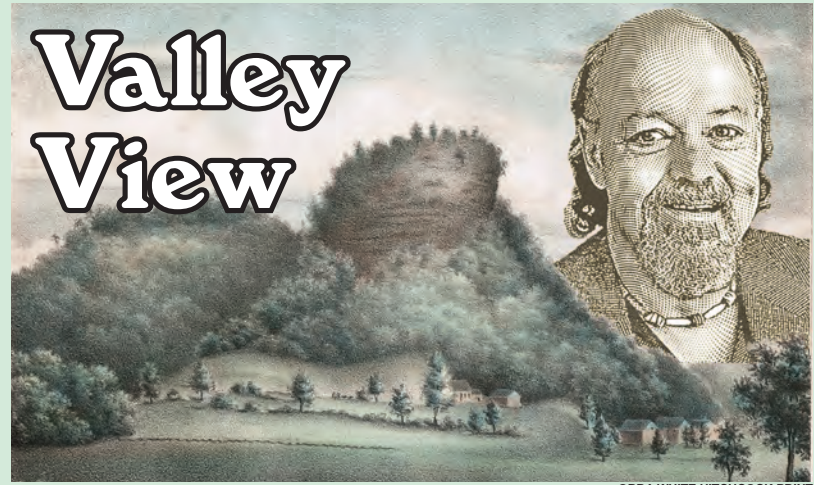
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BARRY SCOTT PHOTO

FEATURES@MONTAGUEREPORTER.ORG OF THE MONTAGUE REPORTER FEBRUARY 4, 2021



By GARY SANDERSON

GREENFIELD – An attached woodshed is a grand luxury appreciated by few in these days of pellet stoves and those natural-gas, faux fireplaces that bring ambiance and warmth behind a glass-faced firebox with ornamental, fire-charred, ceramic fire logs “burning” inside.

By definition an attached woodshed is a roofed structure joined to a dwelling with interior entry that spares occupants the inconvenience of stepping outdoors to fetch fuel for the fire. Yes, it’s true that such “outbuildings” and the route to them are typically unheated. But that’s just a minor inconvenience compared to an outdoor wood crib or stacked pile that entails shoveling and slippery footing through icy winters.

Into my woodshed I have over 23 years thrown in 161 cords of wood dumped in front of its five-foot-wide sliding door. Call me traditional. I heat my old home primarily with wood, and do truly appreciate the convenience of such a functional space for wood storage. A slate-roofed ell extending north about 35 feet from the back of the kitchen, the route to it takes me through a shed between a water heater and cast-iron cookware pantry.

The dimensions of our woodshed are 21 by 15 feet, including an old 10-by-4 coal bin along the south end, it butting up to an enclosed 18-by-3 walkway to a plastered, 50-square-foot, four-hole privy at the rear. Imagine that, back in the day, you didn’t even need to step outside or shovel a winter path to a cold, breezy backyard outhouse. All it took was a short, cool 35-foot walk out the back kitchen door.

Though the privy hasn’t been used in 100 years, it’s still there for posterity, I guess. A blast from the past. A conversation piece. The next homeowner will probably either remove it or convert the entire ell into modern, heated living space after installing a new furnace and upgrading 35 or 40 drafty windows with something modern, air-tight and efficient. Not us. We’re retired.

I’d hate to compute the number of miles I’ve walked between that woodshed and our soapstone woodstove, which has never skipped a beat. What I know is that

the distance from the stove-side wood cradle to the pantry door is 15 feet. It’s then another 13 feet through the shed to the woodshed door. From that threshold to the back door leading outside alongside the privy, it’s 21 feet. So, that adds up to a round trip of 75 to 80 feet, the second half loaded down with a heaping armload of heavy cordwood piled head-high on my right arm. The daily chore keeps my blood circulating, my legs moving, and my forearms and biceps just active enough to prevent winter rigor mortis from setting in. Chalk it up as good, old-fashioned country living.

My annual heating season lasts about seven months. The daily trips to the woodshed represent only a sliver of the labor required to heat with wood. I don’t cut my own wood. I buy it cut, split and delivered, seven cords a year. My work begins after the vendor dumps a load in front of the sliding, five-foot woodshed door. I must then throw it inside, forming one massive pile cascading down from the outhouse hallway’s wall and another lesser mound of smaller fireplace logs in the nook between the outhouse and back door. By May, most of it is burned.

The most strenuous work is throwing the wood into the woodshed and raking up the aftermath debris from the backyard. But there is still much work to do after the wood’s inside. I perform weekly sorting and reorganization chores, piling totally dry pieces in one pile and heavier, semi-seasoned chunks in another. That done, it’s easy to keep a good mix coming in for placement in the stove-side cradle, where the heat of the stove drives out moisture from damp pieces.

Additional daily chores inside include removing ash into a coal hod each morning and sweeping up debris on the floor every time you replenish the wood supply. Once a week, I empty the coal hod into a pile outside next to the brook. It’s a routine I’ve performed for most of my adult life, 23 years at my present Greenfield address.

Yeah, yeah, I know I’m getting old and that it’d be easier to heat with oil, cheaper and more responsible to go solar. But I love dry wood heat, a luxury that can be visited when chilled and see **VALLEY VIEW** page B2

Above: Reader Barry Scott shared this photograph of geese and swans swimming at Barton Cove as the river freezes.

Unearthing the Archives

Part XV:
David James and the Bridge of Names

By CHARLOTTE KOHLMANN

LAKE PLEASANT – “Now that the Bridge of Names is gone, it really has separated the two sides of Lake Pleasant. I understand how it felt when there was no bridge existing at all between 1960 and 1975,”

says David James, a writer, historian, practicing Spiritualist, and the solitary post office worker for the village of Lake Pleasant. “It is this immense unifier and connector for everyone in the village.”

On October 7, 2020, the Bridge of Names was extremely damaged

by trees that snapped from a dangerous wind storm which hit the bridge, its pavilion, and abutments. It was originally built in 1975, funded and organized by the villagers and the Lake Pleasant Village Association, some of whom are still presently living in the area and dealing with the recent damages. There have been two previous iterations of the bridge that traversed this steep ravine and connected “the highlands” – the west section of the village – to “the bluffs,” or east section. Neither of them was called the Bridge of Names, nor were they lined with wooden pickets routed with the names of beloved people, pets, and celebrities. The pickets were a fundraiser tactic for the 1975 construction.

I recently met with David James, masked and six feet apart, abiding to COVID-19 safety precautions. We sat on his ornamented wind-chimed porch overlooking a yard

see **UNEARTHING** page B5



Two people sit next to the Rutter Memorial Bridge’s west entrance, circa 1900. Postcard image courtesy of the Western Mass History Collective.

ArtBeat

by Trish Crapo

A Gift to the Grieving

ASHFIELD – Ashfield artist Robert Markey had long been wondering what he could do to help others during the pandemic.

“Others were doing such good things,” Markey said. “I wondered, what could I, as an artist, do?”

About a month ago he came up with an idea that makes generous use of his artistic knowledge and skills to create portraits of loved ones lost to COVID-19. The portraits are roughly 12 by 16 inches and done with oils on canvas. There is no charge for the paintings; Markey considers them his gift to those who are grieving.

So far, he’s done four portraits, and has been able to arrange pickups for them. If they had to be shipped someplace far away, “a little help with postage would be nice but not necessary,” he writes on his Facebook page, which is the best place to find him and connect about a portrait.

The process begins with someone sending Markey a couple of high resolution digital images of their loved one, and also “some information about the person so that when I’m painting, I know who they are,” Markey says.



JULIE ORFIER PHOTO

Ashfield artist Robert Markey in his studio. Lately, Markey has used his talents to paint portraits of people who have died from COVID-19 as gifts to their loved ones.

It makes him feel good to be painting the portraits, and to know of all the good these people have done in their lives, he says. But he was nervous when he completed the

first one and arranged to have the woman who’d requested it come to his studio to pick it up.

“What if she didn’t like it?” he

see **ARTBEAT** page B8



“EUGENE”

Hero needed! Eugene’s previous home describes him as social, lovable, playful, and vocal. He is spending time as an office assistant at Dakin and has quickly made himself at home, sitting on laps and asking for pets. He loves children and has a history of playing well with them. He would prefer a home with no other animals, as they tend to stress him out. Don’t miss out on this friendly and cute cat!

Eugene has specific litterbox needs. When you bring this cat

home he will need to be set up in a room by himself. This cat will go home with a behavior plan that you will need to follow in order for him to use the litterbox reliably.

Interested in adopting this special guy? 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.

A Valentine’s Day Reflection

By LEE WICKS

MONTAGUE CENTER – When I still worked, there was That Woman, in every office, the one who got roses delivered to her desk on Valentine’s Day and said disingenuous things like “he didn’t have to” or “I never expected this at all.” Hah, who did she think she was kidding?

Every woman I know who’s in a heterosexual relationship expects some token of love from her guy on Valentine’s Day. In the past, I’ve been something of a curmudgeon on the subject. The expectations. The opportunity for hurt. Roses grown with so many pesticides that the farm workers wear protective clothing; all that chocolate, pounds gained – *for what?* One day in which love has become commercialized should not be regarded as proof of love, I thought.

This year I feel differently. If two people have been cooped up together since March and they still like each other, and aren’t planning a divorce, and don’t often wish the other would disappear, then Valentine’s Day is a cause for celebration.

Men don’t know this, but a lot of married women imagine themselves alone. I know a woman who dearly loved her husband about sixty percent of the time, which is actually not bad. One year on Valentine’s Day, he took her out to their favorite restaurant, and although she would have welcomed a little more imagination, she was pleased – though when deconstructed, there’s no such thing as a husband taking his wife out if they are both working, earning equal salaries, and sharing bank accounts. It just means he made the reservations.

Service was slow, and they were both famished when their meals arrived. Her husband cut a piece of meat and didn’t chew it well. Suddenly, he was waving his hands in the air as a waiter hurried across the room. And in that instant, she thought he would die, and she had a vision of a small, clean, quiet apartment all her own, without any wet towels on the bathroom floor or



TRISH CRAPO IMAGE

piles of mail with the junk all mixed in with important stuff.

When the waiter grabbed her husband from behind and forced a slimy gray piece of meat out of his throat to land on the white tablecloth, she experienced an intense feeling of loss, followed by a powerful renewal of love. Later, they had the best sex they’d had in years.

She shared this story at work on the day after Valentine’s Day, and we doubled over with laughter, because along with wanting the flowers and chocolate and the house and children, that image of a private uncluttered space shines like a mirage in the desert – or it did before the isolation caused by this pandemic made it so hard to be living alone.

I don’t know how I’d do it without my husband, my buddy, and the shopper who found all the sources we need for curbside pick-up or home delivery. We have a great collection of masks, thanks to him. We’re eligible for the vaccine soon; we’ve come through with only one fight that I remember. We’re good.

This year when I learned that anything can happen makes me wonder why I’ve always waited for

the romantic Valentine’s Day gesture and never realized that I might also express love and appreciation. The only thing stopping me from buying a nice bottle of wine or surprising my husband with tickets to a performance was a set of very old rules. Sometimes I feel that women like me, born in the 1940s, can educate ourselves into all kinds of success but we can never quite banish the teenage girl inside who is waiting for an invitation to the prom or hoping for someone to ask her to go steady. It takes a long time to grow out of this. Maybe it takes a pandemic.

Last year Roy and I ate at our favorite restaurant not knowing it would be more than a year before we’d be there again. This year we’ll be home, of course. Roy will choose the wine. I will cook something wonderful. Our local co-op has flowers that are sustainably grown, and they deliver. This time I’ll call and place the order.

Lee Wicks lives in Montague Massachusetts. Last spring, she published Muriel and the Grocer’s Daughter, a memoir.

Senior Center Activities FEBRUARY 8 THROUGH 12

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@erving-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 Center is open for a foot care clinic the first-Wednesday of each month. Call Katie Nolan at (978) 544-2306 for information or appointments. Otherwise, there are no activities. The Senior Health Rides 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

VALLEY VIEW from page B1

abandoned for cooler space when warmed to satisfaction.

Keeping a good, hot fire is no less of an art than maintaining an organized, functional woodshed. It seems I’m always sorting through wood in various stages of seasoning to produce optimal, hot, steady fires that limit creosote buildup in the chimney. Hot fires over 400 degrees Fahrenheit produce far less creosote than slow, smoldering fires registering less than 300 degrees on the stovetop thermometer.

You have to live with slow, dampered-down overnight fires when sleeping, but there’s an art to that, too. That’s where big, bone-dry all-nighter logs come in handy. I separate them out daily and keep them handy in the woodshed. Placed on red-hot coals before retiring for the night, these large, heavy chunks – preferably high-BTU woods like oak, hickory, black locust, or rock maple – are reduced to hot embers that easily revive a morning fire. Just open the damper, triangulate three hardwood logs seasoned grey

and dry, and wait for the flames to joyfully dance. From that point on, an attentive firekeeper can effortlessly maintain an efficient fire by paying attention, never allowing it to burn down too low.

Focus pays dividends. Neglect causes problems.

Complicating matters this winter has been the right Achilles tendon I ruptured while pheasant hunting two days before Thanksgiving in a dense swamp. The first two weeks were the toughest. Hobbled and unsure of the extent of my injury, I continued to lug wood from the woodshed daily, being extra careful not to take a misstep. I had good and bad days before finally getting to a doctor two weeks after the injury and returning with a protective walking boot.

Although the imbalance of the boot’s three- to four-inch heel lift took some getting used to, it compressed my Achilles to promote healing and, better still, soothed my re-injury anxiety. I learned to cope with the awkward device and became more and more mobile as the

days progressed. By week seven of the boot, I was able to start removing a layered lift a week until all four were gone.

Now, though still wearing the boot, my foot is flatter and walking is much easier. Through the whole ordeal, I’ve managed to cut that mountain of woodshed cordwood in half without further injury – a miracle in its own right. Through experimentation, the boot gave me more and more confidence and reduced my peril.

So, I guess you could say I got through it without catastrophe. Another of life’s unexpected misfortunes mostly in the rearview. What can you do but grin and bear it?

Uh-oh. My wife has bad news. The dishwasher didn’t drain after a sub-zero overnight. Must be the hose that drains through the dishwasher is frozen. Shoot! I thought the installer took care of that. Oh well. Never a dull winter moment in an old New England home.

Gotta go. Where the hell did I put that old brown hair dryer?



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Montague Community Television News

Lots New Up On MCTV

By HANNAH BROOKMAN

TURNERS FALLS – This week, MCTV uploaded “Fourth at Unity Park Turners (1951),” courtesy of the Montague Historical Society. The highly saturated, grainy film reveals the festivities of a Fourth of July in the ‘50s. See the little girls in little caps, water skis and firetrucks, speedboats and music boats, and some of the town’s old bridges.

The Montague Historical Society is collecting old home movies to digitize for their collection. Be in touch if you have any film to contribute!

The Turners Falls High School basketball season began this week with some great games. Both the Varsity and Junior Varsity Girls teams were filmed playing against Athol on Thursday. It is inspiring and heartwarming to see these young athletes play so well, while masked, and without their friends and family to cheer them on.

The TFHS film class is also featured on MCTV this week. These shorts give us a glimpse into the lives of these at-home learners, their stuffed animals, pets, and friends.

While many shops remain closed to the public, some shopkeepers are using videos to engage with the community. Kathryn Swanson of Swanson’s Fabric has created a TV show in collaboration with MCTV, called “Fabric’sCool.” This show not only advertises the available fabric collection, but also educates the viewer on fabric identification and care. New episodes of “Fabric’sCool” air at 11:30 on Friday mornings.

The usual committee meetings are up to date, with new Zoom recordings from the finance committee, the police advisory committees, the Gill-Montague regional school committee, the airport commission, and the selectboard.

MCTV is always available to assist in local video production. Cameras, tripods, and lighting equipment are available for check-out, and filming and editing assistance can be provided.

The MCTV board is looking for new members, specifically someone interested in filling the role of treasurer. The station is also looking to hire a producer to make Spanish-language content. Please email infomontaguetcv@gmail.com

Hearts for Heroes: Luminary Night

By MELISSA WLOSTOSKI

DEERFIELD – It seems it was decided to have an event honoring Deerfield’s community spirit, and families who are doing their best due to the worldwide situation, by lighting up walkways and driveways with what they called “luminaries” at 5 p.m on Valentine’s Day. This was thought to be a way to thank the people who have altered their lifestyles in the world we live in now.

You can make a luminary by filling red paper or heart cutout bags or milk jugs with sand and a votive light, and place them along driveways and walkways. When I heard about this, it sounded just like something I would like doing an article on.

Sue Antonellis, the person at the Deerfield Recreation Department behind “Luminary Night,” told me that this will be the first time doing this event. “I have been doing my job for 22 years,” she said.

I got an idea from her about how many of these luminaries are going to be there on that night. “I handed out over 1,200 luminary bags,” Sue told me at the time of our interview. She also told me that

she has still 50 left, and “will be ordering more.”

The bags are white, and have a variety of hearts cut out of them. “Three different styles,” to be exact are to be featured. “They are going to be all over town in Old Deerfield and South Deerfield,” Sue said.

Local businesses of the area are also involved. Sue said “I think I will,” in connection with doing it again in the future. It has been very well received by people, in her eyes – the community is very supportive of this event.

She also mentioned, “I hope they feel this has helped bring the community together in these trying times.”

I personally believe that all of the lighted luminaries will look very cool in the unique setup of Old Deerfield. I say that because they will also be around old buildings, and that is bound to look rather different from how they might look around modern houses. That is just what I am picturing there.

I got some of the info related to this event off a flyer. It encourages people to drive around town and toot their horns as a sign of support to all those who decorated. That sounds like a good idea!

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE MONTAGUE POLICE LOG

Details Needed; Idling Trains; Bad Stoplights; Vet Mishap; Omegle Doxxing; Millers Knockout

Tuesday, 1/26

8:13 a.m. Report of breaking and entering on Fourth Street that occurred at 3:51 this morning. Caller identified possibly involved party based on surveillance footage. Report taken.

12:52 p.m. Officer requesting unit to shut down Payne Gang crew working without a detail on Montague City Road. Officer spoke with crew; they will be wrapping up in five minutes. Advised to call for a detail if they are going to work.

1:31 p.m. 911 caller reporting that she backed into one of the maintenance vehicles in the Sunrise Terrace parking lot. Caller advises she already notified maintenance; no damage to maintenance vehicle, but damage to caller’s vehicle. Advised of options.

2:26 p.m. Report of what appears to be a rabid raccoon behind Service-Net housing on Central Street. Officer advised parties of options and to leave the animal alone.

4:27 p.m. Caller advising that the crosswalk light at Third Street and Avenue A is not working properly. DPW advised.

11:11 p.m. 911 caller states that there is a truck off the road into the trees near the airport; advises operator is out of the vehicle. TFFD notified. Second 911 call from vehicle operator stating he went off the road, airbag did deploy, denies any injuries. States he was trying to pass someone and flew off the road. Rau’s on scene. Courtesy transport to French King Bowling Alley.

Wednesday, 1/27

11:05 a.m. Officer spoke with Verizon lineman crew working without a detail on Crocker Avenue; advised to contact MPD for which streets require a detail.

3:24 p.m. Caller advises her neighbor has had her TV turned up too loud for three days; requesting an officer ask her to

turn it down. Officer unable to make contact with resident but spoke with her daughter outside, who advised she would relay the message.

9:31 p.m. Caller from Lake Pleasant Road inquiring when the train will be out of the area. Per Pan Am, train should be moved within an hour. Caller advised.

10:32 p.m. Caller from Park Villa Drive states that the stop light at the intersection near Food City is not functioning properly. Officer reports lights are cycling but not properly. Message left for DPW.

Thursday, 1/28

12:27 a.m. Loud music complaint from Park Villa Drive. Ongoing issue. Officers unable to hear any noise. Spoke to caller.

7:52 a.m. Report of lights/crosswalk signal not working properly at Third Street and Avenue A. DPW advised.

12:55 p.m. Dog hit by car on Millers Falls Road near Hillside Road; dog reportedly belongs to vet’s office and is in the care of the owner now; not believed to be injured. Caller proceeded a short distance down the road to the parking lot at 253 Pharmacy and advises there is damage to her vehicle. Report taken. Officer advises the vet does not own the dog but was watching the dog.

8:09 p.m. Caller from Gunn Road would like to speak to an officer about suspicious activity in the area; provided plate number of involved vehicle. Vehicle came back to a known solar salesperson. Caller advised of this, but also told to call when vehicle is in area.

Friday, 1/29

3:10 p.m. Caller from Fifth Street would like an officer to respond after a neighbor threatened her. Situation mediated; advised of options. There was an incident of harassment but nothing that rose to the level of an actual threat.

Saturday, 1/30

8:13 p.m. GPD received a 911 call from Powertown Apartments where a male party said “I think he’s overdosing,” then hung up. Spoke to male party, who stated he did not call or know the person who said he did.

2:33 p.m. 911 caller from Wentworth Congregate Housing states that there is a female inside the building who is not supposed to be there. Unable to locate female inside building. A couple of residents stated that she was there earlier but left in a pickup truck.

9:32 p.m. Caller states that she is at her girlfriend’s house in Turners Falls, reporting that someone has “doxxed” her IP address. When asked to clarify what this means, she stated that her IP address has been leaked. Caller believes that someone stole her IP address and is making threats against her on an app called Omegle; believes the male party is about 23 years old. Caller is afraid for her little sister who is at home in Greenfield. Officer advised and responding.

7:08 p.m. 911 caller states that her ex-boyfriend is making threats to go to her coworker’s house in Greenfield due to text messages between the caller and the coworker. Caller transferred to GPD; called back to request an officer to her residence because she is afraid her ex might show up there. Officer advised caller of options. Officer off on Turnpike Road with male party. Tow requested; courtesy transport provided to operator’s residence in Erving. Officer confiscated plates and advised caller he can pick them up at the station when his registration has been renewed.

Vehicle owner called to say he has renewed his registration online and is wondering if the receipt is enough to get the vehicle back. Ran plate, and it is still showing as expired. Advised caller to try back in morning to see if it is showing as active. Caller called back in morning to see if vehicle is active yet; ran plate again and it does show as active. Advised caller to stop at station first and get plates before going to pick up vehicle. Plates returned.

Sunday, 1/31

2:26 a.m. Caller from Franklin Street stating that he had two big bags of cans on his bike in his wagon and they are gone. Caller states it looks like someone took his bike and wagon then brought the bike back, as it is in a different spot than where he left it. Caller requesting an officer call prior to responding sometime in the morning. Officer advised; will be on lookout for someone with bags of cans.

4:26 p.m. Anonymous caller states that a named male was outside an apart-

ment building on East Main Street making sexually inappropriate gestures to motorists. Caller states one motorist got out of his car and punched the male until he was unconscious. While on the line the male regained consciousness and entered his residence. AMR and TFFD advised. Gill PD off with vehicle in question. Second anonymous caller reporting that a few minutes ago he witnessed attacked male getting kicked and punched. Officer states that cameras need to be reviewed tomorrow by the day shift before any charges are applied.

5:42 p.m. Officer requesting DPW be notified that there is an ice formation in the road on Turnpike Road from melt and runoff. DPW advised and responding.

7:08 p.m. 911 caller states that her ex-boyfriend is making threats to go to her coworker’s house in Greenfield due to text messages between the caller and the coworker. Caller transferred to GPD; called back to request an officer to her residence because she is afraid her ex might show up there. Officer advised caller of options. Officer off on Turnpike Road with male party. Tow requested; courtesy transport provided to operator’s residence in Erving. Officer confiscated plates and advised caller he can pick them up at the station when his registration has been renewed. Vehicle owner called to say he has renewed his registration online and is wondering if the receipt is enough to get the vehicle back. Ran plate, and it is still showing as expired. Advised caller to try back in morning to see if it is showing as active. Caller called back in morning to see if vehicle is active yet; ran plate again and it does show as active. Advised caller to stop at station first and get plates before going to pick up vehicle. Plates returned.

PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT

Writers: LAVA Center Launches Fiction Critique Group

GREENFIELD – The LAVA Center launches an online Fiction Critique Group on Monday, February 22. The group is designed for writers who might have been working in isolation over this past year and are eager to process their ideas with others in the community.

The group will meet via Zoom on the fourth Monday of each month. It will be led by Karen Shapiro Miller, a local science and science fiction writer, whose work has been published in a variety of venues, including NASA websites, *Northeast Magazine*, and the *Montague Reporter*. Miller also brings to

her leadership role many years as a professional editor, teacher, and publisher.

“In this group, we’ll critique, share tips and resources, and maybe even do occasional exercises,” said Miller. “The goal is for us to support each other in producing excellent, publishable fiction.”

“Writers get energy, and ideas, by discussing and working through their drafts with each other,” says Jan Maher, LAVA founder and author of two prize-winning novels. “We have intended from the beginning of the LAVA Center to support the writing community by hosting writing groups, but COVID

complicated our plans, requiring us to drastically scale back what we’ve been able to do in person. With this group, we’re hoping to get that community energy going again.”

Miller added, “Writing is an isolating profession, and has been even more so during the COVID crisis. This is an opportunity for writers to come together to break that isolation by making connections with others who are working with the intention of seeking publication.”

The group is part of LAVA’s Monday evening programming, which includes a Poets and Writers Virtual Café, an Online

Playwrights Circle and a Book Club. “The Critique Group is the newest addition to our Monday nights,” says Maher. “We think it fills a critical gap for local writers.”

For more information about the critique group, or to apply, email karen@localaccess.org. Your request to join should include approximately 10 pages of your finished or in-progress fiction.

The LAVA Center is an arts incubator, black box theater, and community space in Greenfield, MA. It is located on the first floor of 324 Main Street and online at localaccess.org.

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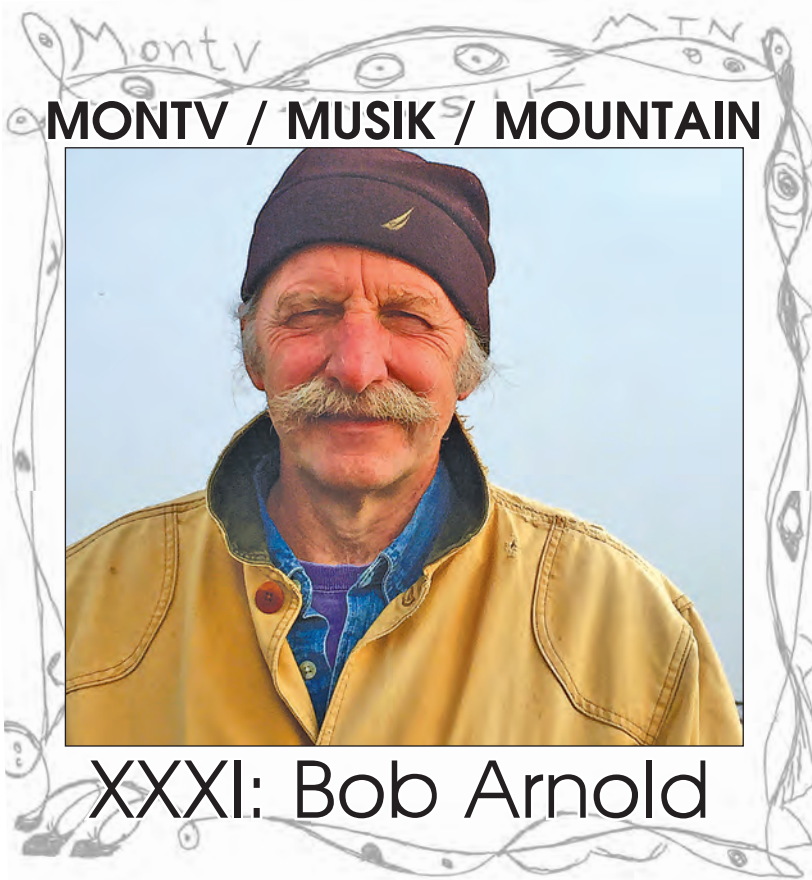
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Interview by J. BURKETT

TURNERS FALLS – Bob Arnold is a world-renowned poet, writer, book publisher, builder, and music lover. He lives in southern Vermont. Check out his website: lighthousepoetry.com. “I’m answering all of these questions with music playing,” Bob wrote to me. “I’ll make note as to what is playing as I’m answering by noting the artist and song between parentheses.” So, “NP” means Now Playing...

MMM: *What are some of your favorite musics as a youth? Did you play any instruments back then?*
BA: (NP: Thurston Harris, “Little Bitty Pretty One”) To keep things centered, I’ll stay mainly on the American side of music. My music youth goes back to the 1950s and 1960s – so you can imagine how I went from nursery rhymes, to an Irish mother humming throughout the house, Ricky Nelson on television each week and an old barbershop friend who told me about Sam Cooke when his song came on the radio. (NP: Sam Cooke, “Good Times”)
The radio was always on, and for kids, the transistor radio was it. The radio went everywhere with us. Suddenly President Kennedy was gunned down in 1963, the Beatles arrived in the United States a few months later in 1964, and now I’m looking at a strange tousled-haired guy in black shades by the name of Bob Dylan and he isn’t just musical, but literary, and fully inventive. Even playful.

An interview with Dylan will take me to Jack Kerouac and all the Beats, Rimbaud, Blake, and Woody Guthrie. Who needed teachers? (NP: JJ Cale, “Train to Nowhere”)
West Coast America captured my attention in music much more than anything happening on the East Coast in rock and roll, which was taking over the airwaves; even Dylan was moving out of folk music with it – when not re-inventing it – his sort of blues rhapsodic rock. Combined with the Vietnam War, Civil Rights, Black Panthers and rebellion.
He was holding me to the East Coast, as was Thoreau and eventually the Band, but out West was that tribal trill of psychedelic wonder, the expansive lust of the old Beat movement grown into the Hippies, the Dead’s rumble love beads, the Sierra Range, Robinson Jeffers and

his own poetry music of the Pacific coast. (NP: Portishead, “Roads”)
When the Beatles arrived and then the Rolling Stones, in 1964, I couldn’t grow my hair longer (yet) because I was in a conservative family, so I picked up playing the drums. My father had a Gene Krupa-style kit – huge bass drum, bottomless tom-tom, chatty snare, small riding cymbal and the hi-hat. He gave me pointers and then I simply listened to Ringo and Charlie Watts incessantly. Later Max Roach, Joe Morello, and big bands. The neighborhood kids formed a garage band with me and we were terrible but joyous which is of course the definition of rock and roll – you get better at it or fade away.
But really the first music for me were tools. I was brought up in a family lumber business, so from age ten to nineteen when I was drafted into the Vietnam War I was in the family of lumber, workers, tools. All lean hardened but generous guys, really. The hammer knock-knock, the handsaw rip, power tool whine, the flat slap of lumber planks. All of this would go into my attraction to the drum, and a few years later decades of work with stone – laying up stone walls, stone caches, stairways, a stone building. Stone is like a drum.

“The hammer knock-knock, the handsaw rip, power tool whine, the flag slap of lumber planks. All of this would go into my attraction to the drum, and a few years later decades of work with stone.”

Fortunately I paid attention all those teenage years working on carpentry crews so I could make a living when I pushed up into the forest of Vermont to live. (NP: Carter Family, “Wildwood Flower”)
MMM: *What are some musicians you have written about? And your favorite books about music?*
BA: I have been writing about music with books and cinema since 1971. Almost everyone I’ll mention in this interview I have fit into my writing – including your work, Josh – usually short pieces but woven with the whole of these three arts.
There are shelves and shelves

of music books I love, too many to list, but if I think of a few it would be: Woody Guthrie’s *Bound For Glory* – the ultimate wanderer, before Jack Kerouac – then Kerouac’s *Mexico City Blues* (242 Choruses); *The Blues Line* by Eric Sackheim – blues lyrics were poem!
My composer friend Peter Garland’s magnificent book on the music of Jaime de Angulo, *The Music of the Indians of Northern California*; Philip Blackburn’s massive study on Harry Partch, *Enclosure*; Alan Lomax, *Folk Songs of North America*, which lines up nicely with Sackheim’s book; and Carson Arnold’s *If I Been Through These Windows* – a teenager’s operatic army of music reviews, reveries, correspondence, interviews real and invented, completely selfless, bumping along full-faced into the sun across the frontier. I hope we don’t lose that experiment.
(NP: Elmore James, “Fine Little Mama,” a great sense of tools and earth-toned in this song.)

MMM: *Any favorite contemporary musicians/albums? All time faves?*
BA: Otis Gibbs. His podcast. Priceless. I always like it when a Laura Marling song comes on. Forever Dylan, Coltrane, Monk, Los Lobos. Eilen Jewell’s perfect minute-and-a-half song “Bang Bang Bang” gets me dancing, Kendra Smith singing Richard Farina’s “Bold Marauder,” Devendra Banhart’s songs to corn meal and suffering. Gillian Welch. Patti Smith’s version of “Babe, I’m Going To Leave You.” Tom Jones performing “Burning Hell” with two masterful rugrats on drums and guitar who wouldn’t be allowed a mile near his glitzy stage in the old days.
Too many to list. Etta James, “I’d Rather Go Blind” always gets me. Young John Lee Hooker singing “No Shoes” is still contemporary to me.
(NP: Saint-Saëns, “Carnival of the Animals: Aquarium”)

MMM: *Did you buy the Harry Smith anthology back in the day? Any thoughts about Harry? (There is a new release of b-sides of the records, by the way.)*
BA: Harry Smith’s masterpiece anthology was released the year I was born. Dylan was eleven years old. He wouldn’t start mining into this goldmine for a few more years, and I wouldn’t come to Harry Smith’s music first, but last – I was delving into his cinema and even before that his love for Pacific Northwest Indian lore, being born and raised in that fertile region of the Pacific Northwest that would also bring forth Gary Snyder, Philip Whalen, also Richard Brautigan. Morris Graves. Robert Sund. All poets, artists, and if read with the ears open: musicians.
Harry Smith died the age I am now, and thank goodness before he died the bigshots gave him a prestigious award. Even a diehard outsider wants to be loved. Harry Smith is what makes a wobbly word like Americana as vast as the prairies. (NP: Lars Hollmer, “Starlep Signs”)
MMM: Have you been to any shows in the past few years? Or watched any online sets?
BA: Been to no shows. I can’t remember the last one. Maybe a busker in the shelter of a church doorway with a banjo and a grin. My kind of concert.

But wait! I do remember a fairly recent concert with Arlo Guthrie and his family, and what a sight having all the stage filled with such tribal persuasion. It took me back to 1967 or so when I first saw him play a solo set at Woody’s Bar. That may have been the first time I heard “Alice’s Restaurant.” He was very young and I was younger.
I watch online shows from time to time. I caught the Civil Rights documentary *Freedom On My Mind* the other night on TCM, filled with fight, intimacy, and spirituals.
I enjoyed Billy Joe Shaver being interviewed by Norm Macdonald... Tom Waits performing his “Chicago” with a pickup band including David Hidalgo was tight and true... and any footage with Billie Holiday and Lester Young I’ll always watch. Lean quality. (NP: Sidney Bechet, “All of Me”)

“I believe Leon Russell was in the house band, girl dancers everywhere. Teenyboppers stuffed and sparkled the audience, all with free tickets, and my future wife was in the front row...”

MMM: *Any period of time you would like to go back to, to see music... or any musician in particular?*
BA: I can think of three. In your time machine I’d like to go back and hear Kenneth Patchen read his poetry to a jazz accompaniment; I wouldn’t mind at all heading back almost forty years and seeing again Townes Van Zandt, an arm’s length from him on stage and he sang every song with his eyes closed. Three hours. (NP: Joni Mitchell, “Cactus Tree”)
Finally, and mostly, I’d liked to be swept back to 1964, Santa Monica, California and the second set of “The T.A.M.I. Show.” The show was two days, deliriously fresh bands like the Stones, Smokey Robinson, The Supremes, Chuck Berry, Marvin Gaye, and a James Brown set I still haven’t recovered from and don’t want to.
I believe Leon Russell was in the house band, girl dancers everywhere. Teenyboppers stuffed and sparkled the audience, all with free tickets, and my future wife was in the front row, whipping off her jacket and strangling it as the Stones – bad boys up & down – came forth with Bobby Womack’s rocket propulsion “It’s All Over Now.” This was in October 1964.
I wasn’t there but believe it or not, and I still don’t, nor know how, but a mere two months later in December, at my little northern Berkshire hills town movie theater, the film of “The T.A.M.I. Show” was already showing, and little did I know I was looking at my wife Susan as a 14-year-old. No girls in my hometown acted like her. Let’s go back.
(NP: Gram Parsons, “In My Hour of Darkness”)

MMM: *Any thoughts on any of the Ken Burns music series?*
BA: I like them all, despite the flaws and deadwood here and there. His country music film may be his best music film to date, but again back to the drum, the stone, the

earth – he has to sink deeper down into the groove. His other documentaries can be fascinating.
I wish Nat Hentoff had the Burns contacts – we might have seen some astonishing jazz in that large realm Burns dominates. Regardless, Hentoff was a wonder in the many smaller events he created. Burns should really get down to a film on the Blues, where our wretched history and music meets. (NP: Wooden Shjips, “Ruins”)

MMM: *Any all time favorites? Or Vermont musicians that you would see a lot?*
BA: I made friends with and published Allan Block, father to Rory Block. Allan was over in New Hampshire and would come to Vermont to play fiddle and spoons. Dudley Laufman is another old friend – storyteller, poet, square dancer, fiddler, real McCoy.
Susan and I went to a small venue where MV&EE held forth up on an upper floor of an old Brattleboro building where the last time I was up there, thirty years earlier, it was a bookstore. I talked to Margaret MacArthur once at a village tag sale. We were both dicking over a vintage foldout stool. Sorry to say I never got to hear her play.
I met and heard Jesse Winchester play one show. He lived in Vermont long enough to write the glorious “Yankee Lady.” (NP: Allison Moorer, “Blood”)

MMM: *And you knew Robbie Basho, correct? And corresponded with him? (The new documentary is great, by the way.)*
BA: I had been searching and finding for years through the late ‘60s and ‘70s Robbie Basho’s albums in dollar bins. Same place I found Townes Van Zandt, Fahey, Andy Warhol’s album cover art.
I wrote Robbie in Berkeley where he lived in the ‘70s, probably sent him one or two of my poetry books and he graciously returned with copies of his LPs, and his own poetry, always handwritten, like the letters. *Visions of the Country* really caught me at that time – again, an artist channeling the western landscape, and like many of those artists on the West Coast — it was primal, and required a rhythm of heart and soul, the truest intelligence.
This takes us back to Harry Smith, Harry Partch, John Cage (an Angeleno), and even the Mothers and Captain Beefheart. Raw oceans.

After some years of correspondence and exchanges, Robbie and I would meet when he came to play a concert in Shelburne Falls/Buckland, Mass. I was building a house then along a river that ran straight down to those two towns. Early 1980s. Robbie was already in hobbled health. He came as one more troubadour.
The scattering of letters to me from Robbie are now in my archive at the University of Vermont. (NP: Bill Withers, “Ain’t No Sunshine”)
MMM: *Do you feel like musicianship in general these days is up to par with the past?*
BA: I don’t think there is any past present or future with music. It’s always been with us. Threading and weaving and woven and holes to be filled. Never to leave us. Bird calls. Thanks, Josh.
(NP: Johnny Cash, “Further On (Up the Road)”)

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UNEARTHING from page B1

adorned with a statue of Saint Anthony, the patron saint of miracles relating to lost people, things, and spiritual possessions; and of Anubis, the ancient Egyptian jackal-headed feline god of death and the afterlife. Lining the edges of his porch were cement tiles with words like “peace and compassion” and other dovish expressions inscribed with a fingertip.

“The wind force was like a river channel not more than 40 yards wide. It immediately knocked out the bridge and electrical power,” says James. “I was sitting on my porch when it got destroyed.”

Over 132 years ago, James’ view from his porch would have been that of Frank Bickford, who lived on the same plot of land. Bickford was the builder of the first pedestrian bridge erected in 1888. It stood until 1925, and Bickford would have witnessed and heard the downfall of the bridge that succeeded his own. Bickford also constructed the 600-seat temple destroyed in 1955 by a teenaged arsonist.

In 1907 another fire ravaged the village and burned down over 130 cottages, the dance pavilion, and the original Lake Pleasant Hotel. According to Henry Aaron Budington, a Spiritualist from the early establishment who was vital in the making of Lake Pleasant into a religious resort, the Bickford bridge saved the highlands from being left with merely charcoaled tree stumps.

In Budington’s book published in 1907, titled *History of the New England Spiritualist Campmeeting Association at Lake Pleasant, Massachusetts*, he mentions how “the fire finally was checked by the digging of trenches at the bridge... had the bridge been burned, the fire would have swept the Highlands and destroyed the Temple” (Budington, page 75).

The fire did sweep across and destroy Mr. Bickford’s cottage, and so Frank and his wife Anna rebuilt a new home on their property. Years later, it would be inhabited by Sarah Shattuck and Louise Shattuck, the Bickfords’ daughter and granddaughter.

Louise was a third-generation Lake Pleasant Spiritualist, artist, occult writer, dog breeder, and poet who befriended David James after he interviewed her for a Greenfield Recorder newspaper article on the Bridge of Names back in 2000. Their friendship blossomed into the co-authorship of their book, *Spirit And Spa: A Portrait of the Body, Mind And Soul Of A 133-year-old Spiritualist Community In Lake*



Distant figures hanging onto the first bridge's abutments, built over the ravine by Frank Bickford at Lake Pleasant. Circa 1890. Image courtesy the Western Mass History Collective: Chris Clawson and Ed Gregory.

Pleasant, Massachusetts (Delta House, 2003). Louise later sold her family property to David James, who has lived there ever since.

David James considers himself to be the last Spiritualist of Lake Pleasant. He is a former treasurer for the oldest continuously existing Spiritualist center in the US, called the National Spiritual Alliance, headquartered in “the Bluffs” of Lake Pleasant. He is still an active member.

“I had never heard of the village when a friend told me about it,” says James. “I wasn’t a Spiritualist at the time. It was the late spring of 2000. All I saw driving up from Millers Falls Road past the bridge during my strange introduction to this place, were very thick woods, and all of a sudden, these immensely packed houses.

“It was totally quiet,” he continues. “Everything about it felt eerie – I was fascinated.”

Perhaps the “thick woods” and “immensely packed houses” are what keep the village and its tranquility from parting with one another. Maybe this parcel of land tucked away in the swarming cedars and pines has always maintained this calming sensibility. It possibly could justify the draw it had on the early Spiritualist community who first pitched their tents there back in 1874 for a Victorian summer oasis by the lake.

Henry Aaron Budington de-

scribes the early summer Spiritualist retreat of the late 19th century in his book this way: “campers cooked under the pine trees.... The trees were ornamented with dippers, kettles, teapots, towels and dish cloths. The bed ticks were filled with straw, some placing them on the ground, others upon rude bedsteads made of pine boards. The novelty was so great that hundreds of people from the surrounding towns came to see...”

He continues, “street speaking was frequent; many of the speakers and mediums holding forth in front of their tents to a gaping and astonished crowd. The enthusiasm was catching and the grove resounded with harangues. Twice a day the Fitchburg Band gave open air concerts. Dances were enjoyed each week afternoon and evening by both young and old people. (No dancing has ever been permitted on Sunday, notwithstanding statements to the contrary have been made by prejudiced people).” (Budington, page 5.)

During the peak of Spiritualism between its rise in the 1840s to the 1920s in America, thousands of people would flock to Lake Pleasant each year to seek Spiritualist religious guidance. There they would attend seances, listen to speeches regarding mediumship, and spend time in the company of like-minded healers who believed that the living and the dead communicate and souls

never die, but only grow.

The Spiritualists also believed in the abolition of slavery, socialism, women’s rights and dress reform, marriage reform, children’s rights, religious freedom, and labor reform. Perhaps western Massachusetts’s natural healing spirit is what continues to attract particular fringe members and major peaceful movements of society to settle down.

But all of this had dissipated as villagers left the area and properties were being passed down to secular hands.

The Bridge of Names fundraising is still under way. If you would like to donate and help support the community in reaching their goal of \$50,000 for the new bridge, you can visit their GoFundMe page: www.gofundme.com/f/gofundmecombridgeofnames

Unlike Lake Pleasant, Lily Dale, New York still thrives as one of the modern wellsprings for this religious community. Around 20,000 visitors come to Lily Dale each year to be spiritually healed or, for those with a physical ailment, to contact a psychic doctor. One could only imagine if Lake Pleasant was thriving just as much as Lily Dale in the current era.

Between 1888, 1929, 1975, and

2020, there has been a median of 44 years between the soon-to-be four bridges. Each variation of the bridge has connected the two parts as if they were the “two worlds” of the flesh and the spirit for over 132 years.

David James is the one and only post officer for the village, a most spiritual government job located in the house called “Two Worlds.” (The Spiritualists named each cottage in their community.) Individuals living in Lake Pleasant only receive and send mail through the post office, which has been a tradition since 1887. Not only is the post office located in “Two Worlds,” but the bridge has allowed access for the “highlander” residents to get there.

I recently spoke with the Lake Pleasant Village Association president Matt Atwood, who mentioned that a contractor for the new Bridge of Names construction has been chosen. They are now working to confirm a timeline for when the construction will take place. The trees that damaged the bridge from the October 2020 windstorm were saved, alongside the reusable pickets from the site.

“The trees that caused part of the destruction will be used for the rebuild and be put back into the bridge,” says Atwood. “That is going to save us a lot of money, because the contractors agreed to use the wood.”

As for the pavilion, Lake Pleasant community members will rebuild it together. They have the local knowledge and experience to complete this part of the project on their own. Pickets that adorn the bridge and its entry walkways are also available for \$30 a 16-letter picket; purchasing a picket will help with the rebuilding goals. Those interested in purchasing a picket can contact Atwood at matt.atwood@gmail.com.

Local resident picket-router expert Pat Otto made up to 27 pickets a day and made close to 2,000 pickets, working 25 years on the job as his late wife, Kathleen Otto, assisted. He never accepted money for his work, and if he did, he would donate his earnings back into the bridge maintenance funds.

“I like it here ‘cause it’s quiet – no big stores, everyone is friendly around here. It’s like family,” said Pat Otto when we spoke over the phone. “It looks so strange, when you peer down Lake Pleasant Road and say ‘wow, that lakeview was never there.”

Whenever the new picket router is on the job, Pat will be there if they need anything, and “always in spirit,” he says.



PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT

A Theatrical Video Game

FRANKLIN COUNTY – Staged as a live performance, the live theatrical video game called *Stagehand* will invite audience members to join the show from home via Zoom to experience an intimate adventure. Eggtooth Productions, the Academy of Music Theatre of Northampton, and the Shea Theatre of Turners Falls present this second iteration of the show by popular demand. The show takes place on Zoom on February 18, 19, 20 and 25, 26 and 27 at 7 and 9 p.m. each night.

Participants will join the show through the eyes of Charlie, a stagehand helping to run a late-night rehearsal of several ghost scenes from the play *Hamlet*. As they’ll quickly learn, audience comments and choices can be “heard” by Charlie – and may influence what Charlie opts to do next, making this immersive show similar

to a first-person video game in style.

“We are exploring how to create interactive theater through the pandemic medium of Zoom,” director John Bechtold offered. “What stories are possible when you leverage the immediacy of interactive theater and real theater venues with the powers of a virtual connection? We hope that theater lovers, gamers, and brave adventurers will come on this adventure with us.”

“In our first experiment, John and the crew figured out the technology to deliver this immersive experience,” producer Linda McNerney explained. “That was a Herculean task, and we feel like we’ve got that part down. Now we get to dig into the story, the characters, and the deepening magic of the whole thing.”

Tickets are available to “pods” of anywhere

from one to six participants per pod. Friends are encouraged to purchase a pod ticket so they can attend together and share the magic. In addition, they also offer a limited number of \$10 individual tickets for the “wildcard pod” where patrons with individual tickets will be placed together, making this show an interesting way to meet people while social distancing.

Tickets are \$40 per pod. Invite your friends, enjoy a cocktail or mocktail at home, and immerse yourself in what the producers call “a magical, mystical, intimate otherworldly experience.” Be sure to have access to a computer with microphone, camera and speakers, and have a basic understanding of Zoom. Good internet connections are required and audience members should be 14 years and older. For information and tickets, go to www.sheatheater.org.

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NatureCulture: The Science Page



Contributions to NatureCulture are welcome. What are you interested in? Would you like to write about birds, weather, science of any kind? We need your input. Send articles for consideration to: science@montaguereporter.org. Thank you!
— Lisa McLoughlin, editor

Neanderthals: Smarter Than We Thought

By LISA McLOUGHLIN

NORTHFIELD — Neanderthals lived as long as 430,000 years ago and died off 30,000 years ago. They are our closest evolutionary ancestors, and although the label is often used as an insult, growing research shows them to be smarter than we used to think. All humans are known to have some Neanderthal DNA. This now includes human beings indigenous to sub-Saharan Africa, who until this year were thought to be purely *Homo sapiens* (modern Humans).

New research from Princeton University has now found Neanderthal DNA in sub-African people, about 0.3%, whereas people from Europe have 1 to 5%, although you may suspect a few people you know to have more. It used to be thought that our common ancestor, *Homo heidelbergensis*, left what is now the African continent about 600,000 years ago and divided into Neanderthals in the west and Denisovans in the east, while those in Africa evolved into *Homo sapiens* who then re-met their differently-evolved cousins when they themselves migrated northward.

Now, with this new find of Neanderthal DNA in sub-Saharan African people, it is thought that the Neanderthals or the *Homo sapiens* they intermixed with in Europe wandered back to Africa after leaving, bringing their DNA with them.

Neanderthals mostly look like humans and have brains similar to ours but bigger (yes, bigger), with thick brows and broad feet. Neanderthal fossil footprints found in western France in the 1960s and excavated in 2012 showed they may have been taller than we thought — around 5’9” maximum. These 257 footprints support the assertion Neanderthals lived in multi-generational social groups, and other research suggests they lived more in forests than tundra and could sprint, not just jog along.

Remains found at 20 sites across Europe, including ones discovered in France over 100 years ago and re-analyzed in 2013 and ones newly discovered in a South African cave in 2018, suggest Neanderthals buried their dead. Some reports suggest they did this with ritual, as a Neanderthal child’s grave was found in Spain with fire pits dug around it, and horns placed inside each pit.



CC PHOTO BY JEFF WALKER

Neanderthal cave art at Le Moustier.

Neanderthals did art. They are the ones who put cave art — handprints, animal shapes — in the ancient caves of Europe, the oldest of which found so far is 65,000 years old in Spain. Neanderthal artifacts found in Croatia at the turn of the last century and re-examined in 2014, including an eagle talon dated at 130,000 years old, are thought to have been jewelry with purely decorative purposes. In Spain, 115,000-year-old colored and decorated seashells have been found.

Neanderthals were also practical. They built fires, and are known to have made tools. New research from University of Colorado Boulder has found 100,000-year-old shells from Italian caves that had been made into tools, mostly scrapers. Only Neanderthals were in Europe at that time. Careful analysis of the shells showed they were alive when picked up, and not worn by wave action and without barnacles, so it was concluded the Neanderthals could only have gotten the shells by diving down one to three meters to get them. This is backed up by research showing Neanderthal skeletons with a bony ear growth that occurs from repeated cold water or wind exposure.

We may not be to blame for the Neanderthals’ extinction. While anthropologists used to believe they went extinct solely because we *Homo sapiens* “replaced” them by outsmarting them, this theory is mostly based on timing because they died out 30,000 years ago, about the same time we arrived in Europe.

We are no longer so sure about this narrative. It could be that we helped in the process by fragmenting the Neanderthal populations as we moved into their territories,

but new research from Eindhoven University of Technology suggests that there weren’t many Neanderthals left by the time humans invaded what is now Europe — only somewhere between 10,000 and 70,000 individuals.

They may have died out from inbreeding caused by difficulties finding a mate, plus having too few individuals to sustain their food and childcare needs. They also might just have interbred so successfully with *Homo sapiens* that we can no longer tell each other apart.

Neanderthals are not the only human relatives. In 2008 Denisovan DNA was found in a fossilized finger bone, and scientists reconstructed skeletons of these ancient beings as looking Neanderthal-ish but with very wide heads and protruding jaws. The bone was 40,000 years old, but there’s not enough information on this branch of species to know the extent of where and when they lived.

There are other new species occasionally found around the world. For example, a new species of human, *Homo luzonensis*, was found last year in a cave in the Philippines. The fossils are between 50,000 and 67,000 years old. The species was about four feet tall and good at climbing trees. It is unknown how the individuals arrived on an island never connected to the mainland by a land bridge.

The discovery of new species are confusing to anthropologists and archaeologists trying to figure out where and when humans came from, especially if they have difficulty (as with *Homo luzonensis*) fitting the species into a common family tree.

How Does Soil Store Carbon?

By LISA McLOUGHLIN

NORTHFIELD — Carbon is an element upon which life on Earth is based. There’s nothing inherently wrong with carbon — we have lots of it on Earth. Where we get into trouble is with *carbon dioxide*.

When people say “carbon storage” in the sense of climate change, they really mean storing the gas carbon dioxide, which is a molecule that has one carbon atom and two oxygen atoms. Carbon dioxide is what animals including humans breathe out (emit), and trees breathe in.

Another thing that emits carbon dioxide is burning fossil fuels. Since the industrial revolution (late 1700s) we have burned fossil fuels which were storing lots of really old carbon. Currently the US Energy Information Administration estimates that 75% of all human-made greenhouse gas emissions are made up of carbon dioxide. These are released from fossil fuels when they burn, and that’s why we have too much carbon, which contributes to global warming.

Next term: *soil*. Soil is not dirt. Dirt is soil without any living organisms — it’s just the mineral parts of soil. (Picture beach sand.) Soil contains life (picture farm, garden, or forest soil), and because life on earth is carbon-based, soil contains carbon.

Some of the carbon is brought there by dying plants and animals. Carbon in soil near the surface, unless being stored in a living plant or animal, is quickly exchanged — it may go into the atmosphere. But in a healthy soil, much carbon sinks deeper in.

For example, in a New England forest, the leaves cover over the soil, then slowly decompose to become part of it. The springy, healthy forest soil is storing carbon within it. In fact, according to Dr. Tony D’Amato from University of Vermont and Dr. Paul Catanzaro from University of Massachusetts, out of the entire forest, most of the carbon is being stored in the soil: about 71% of forest carbon is stored in the soil, 18% in the live trees, 7% in the leaf litter, 3% in dead wood, and less than 1% in the understory plants. A northern hardwood forest stores 160,000 pounds of carbon per acre; about 113,600 pounds of that is in the soil.

This ability for living soil to store carbon farther down, and for the top layer to exchange it into plants that either store it longer-term in trees, or that then get eaten by animals that use it, is just one reason a healthy forest is great for the climate. The professors conclude that the most important thing to remember in forest management is to “Keep Forests as Forests.”



McLOUGHLIN PHOTO

A healthy northern forest.

Dark Skies Essential for Human Health

By LISA McLOUGHLIN

NORTHFIELD — As earthlings, humans have developed in rhythm with our planet’s light and dark cycle. This circadian rhythm interacts with our bodies by changing our hormone levels, and in other ways still not completely understood.

Having light in your bedroom interferes with this day and night rhythm, as does working nights. One-third of US adults get less than the recommended amount of sleep, which is seven hours or more. In Massachusetts, the percentage was 35% in 2014 overall, with Franklin County being on the lower end of that from 30 to 33%.

Overall, more men than women

(36% vs. 34%) lack sleep, with the highest percentage being those aged 45 to 54, at 40% lacking sleep. The percentages also vary by race and ethnicity, with American Indian/Alaska Natives’ percentages reaching 50%, while whites sleep more with only 32% being short on sleep.

Some of the effects of short sleep are: a decrease in your body’s ability to create melatonin, which is needed for sleep; an increase in type 2 diabetes, stroke, reproductive problems, cancers, heart disease, obesity, arthritis, mood disorders, and depression.

Darkness in your bedroom can help you sleep longer and help improve your health.

February 2021 Moon Calendar

Last Quarter

Thursday, February 4

New Moon

Thursday, February 11

First Quarter

Friday, February 19

Full Moon

Saturday, February 27

The moon orbiting our Earth.
NASA PHOTO

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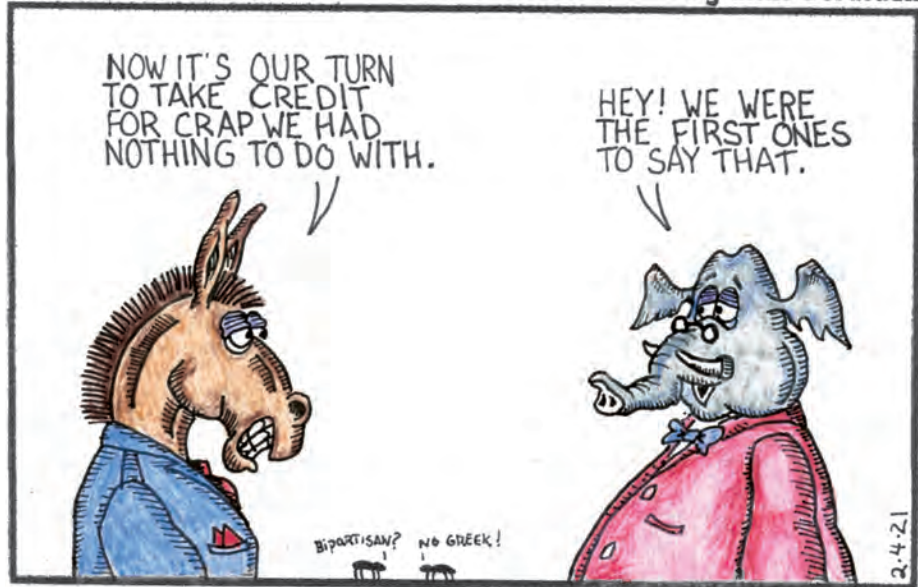
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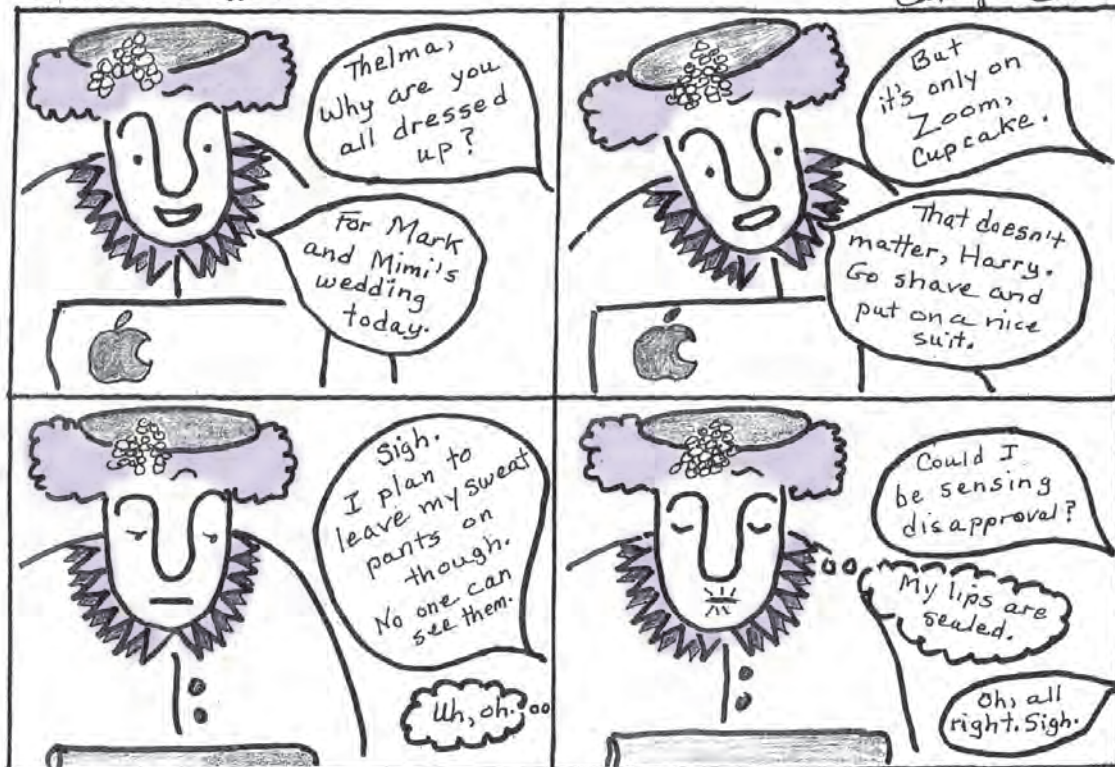
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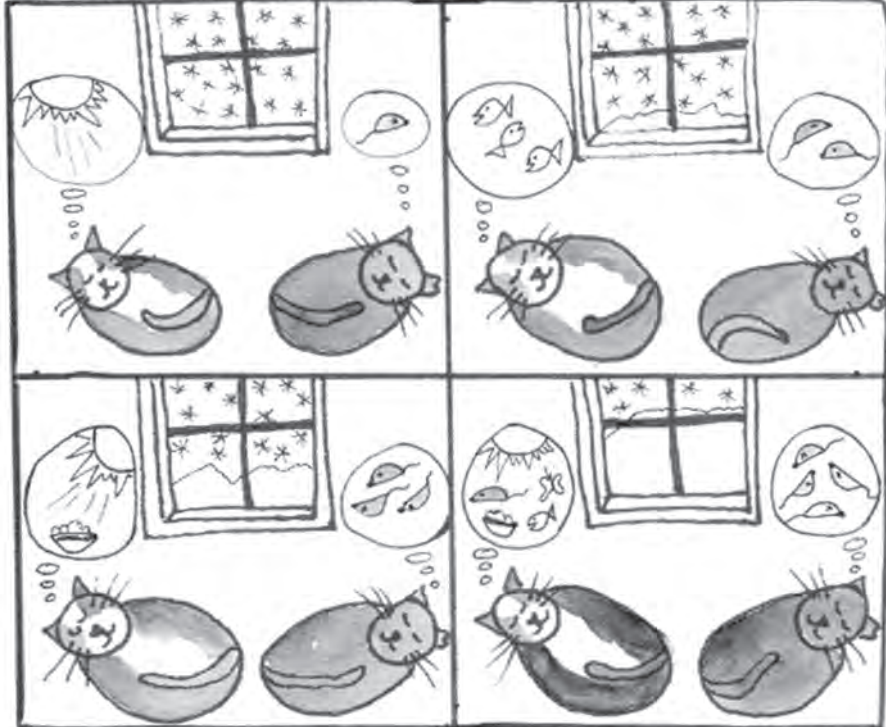
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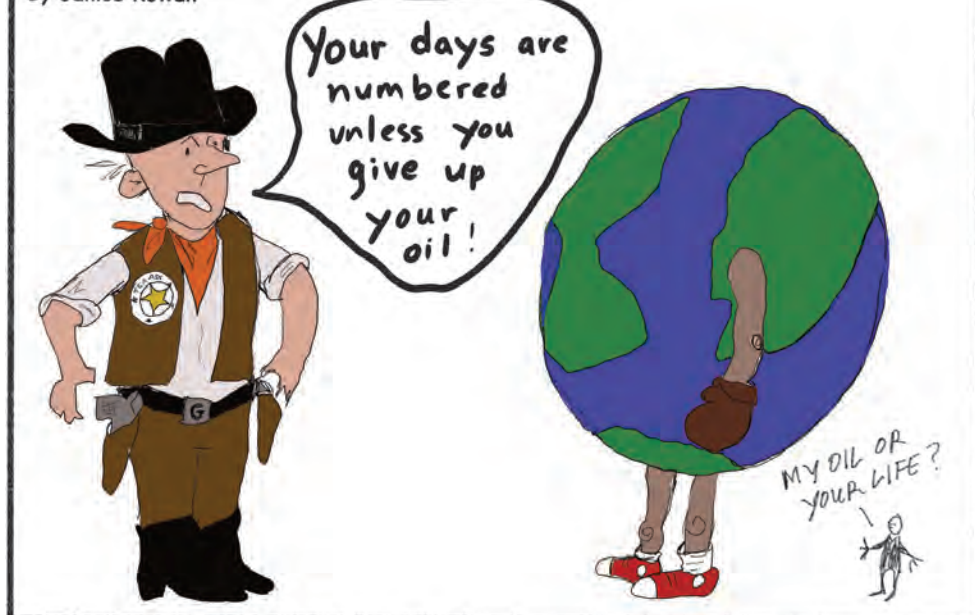
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ARTBEAT from page B1

asks, recalling his fears that day. “What if she looked at it and thought it was just okay?”

Markey needn’t have worried: the woman broke into grateful tears when she saw the portrait. And another woman who picked up her portrait in Greenfield also cried.

Working from photographs to make portraits is nothing new to Markey. His exhibit *Safe?* consisted of portraits of Cambodian



“Zoe” and “Mickey,” two portraits that Ashfield artist Robert Markey has created as gifts to those who have lost loved ones to COVID-19.

street kids that Markey painted from photographs his wife, Julie Orfirer, took while the couple were involved in a mosaic project there. The exhibit, which showed at various museums and galleries in our area, including at Stoneleigh Burnham School in 2013, was meant to call awareness to the vulnerability of children all over the world to sex trafficking.

One of the differences in this project is that Markey has never even briefly met the people he’s painting. Yet the testaments of those who love them creates a connection, he says. And it means a lot to be able to give some comfort during this difficult time.

A multi-faceted visual artist who creates paintings, drawings, mosaics, and sculptures, and is also a musician known in our area for his sitar concerts, Markey’s impulse to help others has always been a driving force in his art. He’s led mural or mosaic projects in far-flung locations such as Brazil, Nepal, and Cambodia. Closer by, he’s worked with the Recovery Center in Northampton and with refugees in West Springfield, just to name a few of his projects.

On the back of the Pushkin building in Greenfield, you can see a mosaic he created with former inmates from the Franklin County House of Corrections, part of an ongoing project with the Transition from Jail to Community Task Force. In 2020, he had planned to create an indoor mural with kids at the Children’s Advocacy Center in Greenfield, and to travel to Senegal, Brazil, and Sri Lanka.

“Everything’s been canceled,” Markey says,



disappointment softening his tone.

Markey’s drawing and painting classes at the Franklin County House of Corrections have been canceled as well. Markey had been teaching one class for men and one for women.

“It was amazing,” he says. “They did some beautiful work.”

A show of the inmates’ art that Markey had planned to mount in Greenfield was also canceled.

“It’s hard for me not to work with people,” Markey says. “It’s my life. It’s what I do.”

Thus, the current portraits, in addition to benefiting those who receive them, help

him too.

“They give me something to do in the studio,” he says, and they help to ease his sense of isolation.

The day I spoke with him, Markey had just received his first vaccination for COVID-19 the day before and hoped that it was a sign of a gradual return to normal. He’s already begun planning an outdoor chalk art project with the Transition from Jail to Community Task Force, and he’s hopeful it can move forward.

“I’m trying to be positive in thinking about how it’s going to get okay. Hopefully by summer, I’m assuming, there will at least be outdoor concerts.”

After a pause, he adds, “Once this is over, there’s going to be so much music out there!”

See some of Markey’s work: Markey will be creating an ice sculpture in front of Greenfield Gallery on Main Street for this year’s Winter Carnival. He’ll also be creating an ice dragon with Peter Vacchina at the Berkshire Museum in Pittsfield on February 19, as part of that city’s 10x10 Upstreet Arts Festival.

In Springfield, find Markey’s mosaic murals at these locations: dancers on Dwight Street; a jazz band on Court Square; motorcycles on Stearns Square; and breakdancers on Worthington Street.

Visit his website, robertmarkey.com, or find him on Facebook.



PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT

Poet’s Seat Poetry Contest Seeks Entries

GREENFIELD – The Friends of the Greenfield Public Library are seeking poems for the 30th annual Poet’s Seat Poetry Contest, which is open to all Franklin County residents and students who attend schools located in Franklin County. This contest has been sponsored by the Friends of the Greenfield Public Library annually since 1991. You may submit up to three poems to the contest by March 17.

The competition is held in honor of 19th century poet Frederick Goddard Tuckerman. Tuckerman lived in Greenfield from 1847 until his death

in 1873 and was considered by his contemporaries – Emerson, Thoreau, and Tennyson – to be a gifted poet. A graduate of Harvard Law School, he shunned law in favor of botany and writing poetry. Although he never achieved wide public acclaim, his poems are often included in anthologies of noted American poets.

Awards will be given in three categories: first, second, and third place in the adult and the four top poems in the youth division – ages 12 to 18 (divided into 12 to 14 and 15 to 18 for judging). Details about this year’s Poet’s Seat awards ceremony and poetry reading will be determined later in the spring.

The adult first prize winner will receive stewardship of the Poet’s Seat chair, with their name on a plaque listing all the previous winners, as well as a handcrafted Poet’s Platter, and a gift certificate to a local bookstore. All other winners will receive a handcrafted mug along with a gift certificate to a local bookstore.

Here are the submission rules: submit up to three poems. Number the pages of multi-page poems. Indicate “Adult” or “Young Poet.” Young Poets need to include their

age on the front of the sheet, in the lower right-hand corner.


There should be no identifying information on the front of the sheet and no staples. On the reverse side of each poem, write your name, address, telephone number and email address. If submitting electronically, put this identifying information on a second page.

Poems will not be returned. Submit either on white paper, printed clearly in ink or typed in plain typeface – no markers, please – or electronically. If mailed or hand-delivered, include a self-addressed

stamped envelope for notification of receipt of entry; otherwise notification will be via email. Only unpublished poems may be submitted. Previous first-place winners may not submit poems, though top-placing youth poets may re-submit when they enter a new age category.

Entries must be postmarked by March 17. Mail to Poet’s Seat Poetry Contest, Greenfield Public Library, 402 Main St., Greenfield, MA 01301 or submit electronically to librarian@greenfieldpubliclibrary.org. For more information, contact: dfinnell199@comcast.net.

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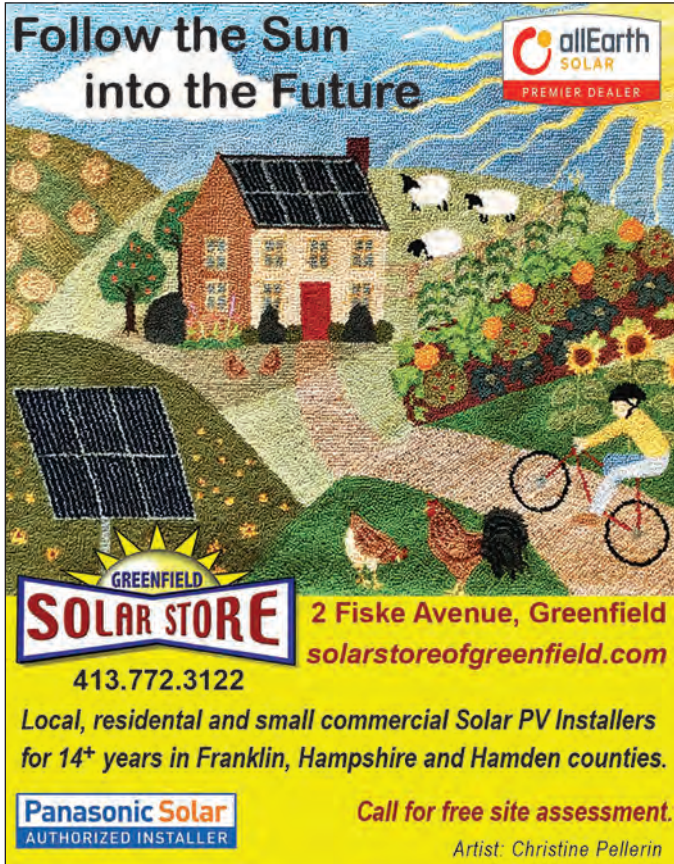


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