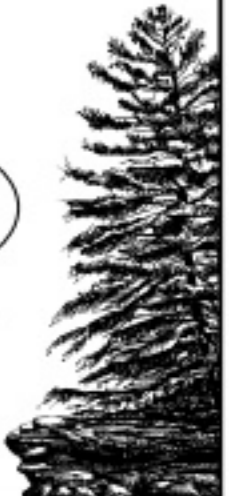




New Marlborough 5 Village News

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Clayton ♦ Hartsville ♦ Mill River ♦ New Marlborough ♦ Southfield

LATIN AMERICAN CONNECTIONS

New Marlborough Residents Bring Aid to Caribbean and Central American Nations



The Dominican Republic

By Scottie Mills

This January, I packed up 100 pounds of donated medical supplies and headed to the Dominican Republic with Intercultural Nursing, Inc. We are a group of nurses, nurse practitioners, medical interpreters, and nursing students who have been going for two-week medical missions to Hispaniola once or twice a year over the past two decades. On arrival, we head west to the mountains near the Haitian border, a five-hour trip. In past years, we numbered about two dozen, but this year we were twelve. During the Covid pandemic, we have not been bringing

Scottie communes with an elderly Dominican.

continued, page 2



Costa Rica

By Alek Zdziarski

Last December, two weeks before Christmas, I boarded a plane at Logan Airport bound for San José, Costa Rica, the culmination of a desire to experience life in Latin America first-hand. But first there was a good deal of preparation and a bit of good fortune that made the trip possible.

During my senior year of high school at Mount Everett in 2020, my class was invited to apply for the Catherine B. Miller Eagle Fund Award, created, in Mrs. Miller's words, for the student who "loves learning,

Alek lends a hand at a daycare center.

continued, page 2



Cuba

By Rachel Perera Weingeist

It doesn't take long to get to Cuba from any of our five villages, just three hours by plane from New York City, but given a culture and an economy so different from ours, it might as well be a million miles away.

Last month, before making something like my sixty-seventh trip to the island, I placed a message on Maggie's List. My outreach was simple: I let my neighbors and community know that I was making the trip and that any donated items they wished for me to take to Cuba would make a bigger impact on someone's life than they could imagine, I

Ileana with her cat Misha Photo by Rachel Perera Weingeist

continued, page 3

The Dominican Republic, continued

students. (Twice my granddaughter, Havana Larraz, has come on the trip. I think it was an amazing experience for her.)

During my career in medicine, I was a registered nurse, but most of my work on these trips has been as an interpreter. Situated at a home base typically somewhere in the mountains close to the Haitian border, we load up our truck each day with supplies, cram the group in the back of the truck, and travel to a different outlying community, sometimes an hour away. We have had quite a few adventures fording streams in the truck and getting stuck. One year, we even traveled to a distant mountain community, Catanamatia, where there was no road, so we packed mules and spent the night. On a regular clinic day we set up and organize a clinic, seeing about 100 people a day, some of them having walked a long distance to see us.

Home base for the last few years has been in the town of El Cercado. From there we ride out each day to a different underserved rural campo where we set up a clinic (sometimes in a school, a church, or even a home). These rides in the open air truck are amazingly beautiful, despite the often rugged roads and terrain. Beautiful green valleys, surrounded by mountains, flowering trees, children waving, running, and laughing, herds of goats or Brahman cows slowing down traffic. Quite a change from the gray January of the Berkshires!

At the clinics we treat mostly common ailments: aches and pains of agricultural workers, hypertension, colds and coughs, headaches, ear infections, rashes, sometimes scabies, parasites, ringworm. Even over-the-counter medications as simple as ibuprofen are very much appreciated by these patients, who have no money to buy them or transportation to get them.

Sometimes we see serious medical problems and have to refer the patient for follow-up. It is heart-breaking when a family arrives thinking that because we are “Americans” we can solve anything, including, for instance, a developmentally delayed child who can’t walk, a severely mentally ill teenage boy who has been thrown out of every school, an old man who is going blind. Occasionally we have been able to intervene in a crisis situation. Once a woman came to us with a ruptured appendix. We jumped in the back of the only pickup truck in the village and drove with her to the hospital an hour away. Her surgery saved her. She volunteered with us for years afterwards in gratitude.

The two most gratifying aspects of these service trips are exposing students and first-timers to the incredible cultural experience of being in rural Dominican Republic, and interacting with patients on such a personal level. I have found Dominicans to be very spiritual, generous when they have nothing, and affectionate people. And they love to dance!

Sometimes, for me, coming home provides a cultural shock in reverse. The response we get from our patients — when we listen respectfully to their stories, try to come up with a protocol or medication to make their lives a little more comfortable, then give them a heartfelt hug or handshake at the end of the visit — fills our hearts. Our team works well together in the tropical heat, and we don’t even mind the dusty roads, the cold showers, the occasional tarantula. A Presidente beer or a rum and pear juice and a little Bachata or Merengue at the end of the day fixes us right up! □

Costa Rica, continued

loves to perform in the educational world, loves a sense of adventure, and is committed to giving back to others and the community.” I also applied to volunteer with Maximo Nivel, an organization that funds programs in student and educational travel in Latin America. I knew I wanted to travel to a Spanish-speaking community and found the reviews and testimonials on the Maximo Nivel website inspiring.

I was excited to receive a personal letter from Mrs. Miller notifying me I was the recipient of the 2020 Catherine B. Miller Eagle Fund Award. Last June, I completed my freshman year at Edgewood College in Madison, Wisconsin, applied for my passport, began the process of planning my trip to Costa Rica, and received my passport a few days before I returned to Edgewood to begin my sophomore year. (I am currently majoring in psychology with a concentration in clinical counseling.

One day I wish to work in a school as an onboard psychologist.) My itinerary was set for a two-week trip during Christmas break.

Following an uneventful flight to San José, a Maximo Nivel volunteer took me to my host family’s residence in a small neighborhood on the outskirts of the capital. The next morning I was joined by Shalini from Oman, another volunteer staying with my host family, for a bus trip to the Maximo Nivel institute for orientation.

I learned that my volunteer work would include filling in a freshly dug irrigation ditch at a soccer park in a high-risk neighborhood, painting a mural on a cement block wall surrounding the playground at an orphanage, cleaning and painting the interior of a newly opened homeless shelter, and handing out holiday presents at a local daycare. I was also able to play soccer with the children at the daycare — something I wanted to do as

soon as I landed in Costa Rica. The children were very competitive! I ended my time in Costa Rica spending a day in a retirement home speaking with the residents, who were very happy to talk to us and hear all about our lives.

Filling the ditch in at the park took a lot of work — especially under the hot sun. To get me through the day I remembered why I was working: to make sure the kids in the neighborhood had a clean and safe place to play. The same incentive helped with painting the mural. I also went to salsa cooking classes put on by Maximo Nivel. And with that and by simply walking around the city I was exposed to the Costa Rican way of life. I learned, for example, that politeness and gratitude — such things as letting the elderly, women, and children get seats in the bus before anyone else — are ingrained

in Costa Rican behavior.

Maximo Nivel volunteers are allowed to spend weekends on their own, exploring the surrounding area and enjoying the delicious food. I spent most of my free time with two other volunteers, Juan (from Chile) and Dianna (from California), whom I met during orientation. They served as my translators, which helped me communicate with the locals and learn more about the country.

My experience in Costa Rica was an unforgettable one. Working with Maximo Nivel and seeing how an area of our world with much less material comfort than most of us in the United States have was eye-opening. Working together to support children and elderly citizens was inspiring. □

Cuba, continued

would shuttle those items to my community and “second family” in Havana. You see, when you make a friend in Cuba you are essentially integrated into a vast and wonderful new extended family. On the island, time has a different value, relationships are deep and the currency most valued.

Our five villages made a difference. Upon reading my appeal, our beloved librarian, Debora O’Brien, gathered a large assortment of clothing for kids ages two to eight. Because everything, including quality children’s clothing, is difficult to find and expensive beyond reach, children don’t just wear hand-me-downs. Items of clothing are passed down through as many users as possible, until the material becomes a new floor mop.

As a curator and cultural innovator, my introduction to Cuba was through professional projects. Art and culture have long been one of the only legal mechanisms for engagement with Cuba — made possible because of the success of a case brought before the Supreme Court by the recently deceased art attorney Alex Rosenberg. In 1999, I met Armando Mariño, a brilliant artist from Santiago, Cuba, who was in residence at Art Omi, an arts center in Ghent, New York. Inspired by his stories I started to imagine visiting the island to experience this creative cauldron. And so began a love affair with Cuban culture that continues to this day.

On my latest trip, a brief, one-week visit in the middle of January, my partner and I set off with four ridiculously oversized pieces of luggage. Airlines are familiar with the shortages on the island and are accustomed to bags bursting with items intended for Cubans. While Cuba X-rays everything that enters the island and has strict regulations banning sophisticated electronic equipment, customs officials at Havana’s José Martí Airport welcome visitors.

Cuba’s warm and welcoming people and its lush

tropical landscape belie the dire need for even the most basic supplies. For the visitor, however, there is an abundance of warm embraces, lasting relationships, sweet black coffee, and an unmatched creative vibrance. Cuban friends keep me abreast of the tragedies of the limited food supply and mass migration off island, but they also share the delights of new babies, and opportunities that will arise with the reopening of the United States embassy, for work.

Shortages of food staples and other products creates long lines for a chance at anything that might be available. Thirty eggs are all that my adopted Cuban mom’s entire pension of about \$11 a month will purchase. For a brief period, from about 2011 to 2017, some shortages eased, but the pandemic and a previous administration halted a lot of travel, confusing the perception of what was possible, and placed a virtual tourniquet on the life force of the economy, tourism.

During the January trip, we focused on the needs of three of my closest Cuban friends.

Yoandy, an architect I met through a professional collaboration with Ricardo Porro, designer of the National Art School complex in Havana, usually replies “nothing,” when asked what I can bring him, which is code for “we need so much.” This time, when pushed, he asked for Pilot Pens, which he uses for making sketches. I also packed clothing, makeup for a professional mom going back to work, and a bevy of toys: crayons, sketch paper, Ballerina Barbie dolls, baseball, soccer, and tennis balls, and craft supplies like pipe cleaners, English flashcards, chocolate, and beef jerky (a great source of protein). Lastly, a baseball bat and glove for Yoandy’s eight-year-old David, which, despite baseball being the national pastime in Cuba, are next to impossible to find, even on the black market.

My “Cuban mom,” Ileana, 83, is an economist who

joined Che Guevara and Fidel Castro in 1959 as an idealistic teenager. She believed in the early days of the Revolution. A great writer of letters and explainer of the absurd, one of her letters, to then-President Obama, was publicized with the re-opening of the mail systems between our two countries. Ileana desperately needed veterinary supplies both for her little Yorkies and for her cat, who was suffering from a skin affliction no one could cure. (They were supplied by Tina Dow, owner of the Great Barrington pet-supply store, BensDotter's.) She also needed a heating pad for an achy octogenarian shoulder. Finally, she said, she would enjoy a bit of chocolate, a hug, and some long visits on her front terrace.

The producer, Josué, my "Cuban brother," whom I met on the streets of Old Havana while shooting a segment for a cable news special in 2015, requested a soothing tea selection for his mom, who is fighting cancer. After an accidental litter of puppies, he also needed flea and tick medicines, as his apartment had become infested, with no relief for either the canine or the humans living there.

We forged a deep, new connection with William, an

ambitious, young surgeon, who will soon begin work at Brooklyn (New York) Hospital. The nationalized health-care system, though free to Cuban citizens, is tightly controlled by the government and plagued with inequities and shortages. Doctors, Cuba's largest export, are deployed globally to help with emergencies and fill gaps in health care systems in countries from Botswana to Brazil to Yemen. (William himself was sent to Italy during the peak of the pandemic.) His stories of his work in Cuba — he recently performed sixteen surgeries in a single day after an explosion in Havana — are intense.

Planning a purposeful journey to Cuba can seem labyrinthine, but with direct flights and Airbnb accommodations at every price point, travel to the island nation is easier than ever — and helping with someone's well-being can be life-changing, for both of you. If anyone from the community wants support in planning a fun and meaningful trip, I am I am happy to help, and you too can begin making a difference in the lives of our neighbors to the south, who will surely welcome you. □

PROTECTING HEADSTONES

For a decade or more, the New Marlborough Historical Society has spearheaded efforts to help restore New Marlborough's historic cemeteries, with particular focus on the oldest: New Marlborough Village Cemetery. This cemetery was gifted to the town in the 1770s by Thomas Strong, New Marlborough Congregational Church's first Reverend, but it was already the site of numerous earlier burials, with the earliest stone dated 1755. It has numerous Revolutionary War and Civil War veterans as well as the graves of the earliest settlers. Remarkably, it is still in use.

Previous efforts by the Society have focused on stone repair and cleaning, but a different threat to the cemetery has arisen in recent years. During the 1930s, white pine trees were allowed to grow in this cemetery. Now large trees, they have reached the end of their lifespan and are prone to dropping large branches during



A John W. Field Tree Service crane reaches toward the top of a white pine in New Marlborough Village Cemetery

photo by John Schreiber

storms, with the potential to damage historic headstones. In partnership with the Cemetery Commission and funded by donations, the New Marlborough Historical Society has employed John Field Tree Service to remove these trees. This month several very large white pine trees were taken down, using cranes and tree climbers to carefully avoid any damage to the stones beneath.

This was the second in a three-year project to eliminate the threat of aged white pines from damaging irreplaceable artifacts of our town's history. Donations, tax deductible, to support the restoration of our historic cemeteries may be sent to the New Marlborough Historical Society at P.O. Box 338, Southfield, MA 01259, or online at: newmarlboroughhistorical.org □

*John Schreiber, Vice President,
New Marlborough Historical Society*

Town Business Is Your Business SELECT BOARD



January 23: Chairman Mark Carson called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m. In addition to the three selectmen, the town administrator and the administrative secretary were present.

In an on-going effort, members of Construct, Inc. attended to negotiate a Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) agreement. Executive Director Jane Ralph noted that in research on PILOT agreements, she had found “little uniformity.” Such agreements, she added, tend to be with large organizations that use substantial community resources. Those made with service organizations take into account services provided. Construct, she pointed out, “will be providing affordable housing for residents, here in New Marlborough” and will not produce much income. She asked if the Board would be willing to accept 5 percent of assessed value or net rental, to begin when the project is operational and producing income — possibly as early as 2025. Ms. Enoch noted that annual taxes on the three properties, before the Construct purchase, were approximately \$20,000.

Chairman Carson asked if some housing can be set aside for Town employees. Ms. Wolfe explained the considerations and process for “local preference,” based on the rules that accompany state funding. “Local” is defined as a person who lives, works, or has a student who goes to school in town. Speaking on behalf of the Board, Tara White said they will “digest” and get back to Construct.

Police Chief Graham Frank, also present at the meeting to discuss officer pay, noted that New Marlborough officers are underpaid relative to those in surrounding towns. He added that, according a state police-reform law, police departments can no longer employ officers with only part-time training. All officers must now attend a bridge or full-time academy. Chief Frank assert-

ed that officer compensation should take into account their training level. He also noted \$3,000 grant payments to towns for each officer employed while they complete the Bridge Academy training.

The Chief said that discussion of his intention to hire officer Kadin Shafiroff would have to be postponed to a future meeting, since it was not on the agenda of this one. Finally, he announced he had instituted a Body Camera Policy and that officers are being trained.

Next, regarding the location of a future town hall, the Board agreed to a recommendation from the Town Hall Planning Committee to sign a memorandum of offer to purchase Les Trois Emme Winery from Mary Jane and J. Wayne Eline for \$1.1 million, conditioned on appropriate town approvals. The Elines have agreed to this price for the buildings plus four of the five acres that are in the real estate listing for \$1.2 million.

The next step is to negotiate a purchase and sale agreement within fourteen days. Though the Committee had originally suggested negotiating an option to purchase, which likely would have required a fee paid to the Elines to “hold” the property for Town purchase, the memorandum agreed to is simply a good-faith agreement to move forward with the purchase. While they proceed with this negotiation, the Committee will continue to consider renovation of the current Town Hall building.

Resident Deanna Mummert, attending the meeting, asked the Board if it was willing to appropriate additional funds, beyond those appropriated at its last meeting, to obtain construction estimates on the two options. Accurate, comparative estimates, she said, are necessary for town residents to support the unprecedented amount of money the project will cost. The

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Board indicated, however, that it is wary of exhausting the current town hall renovation budget in case funds are needed for unexpected repairs on the current building.

Next up was an inconclusive discussion of a local meal tax (7.5 percent) and room occupancy tax (up to 6 percent). The Board is considering asking voters at the Annual Town Meeting to decide if they wish to adopt these taxes. Peter Platt of the Old Inn on the Green, Michael Smith of Gedney Farm, and Josh Irwin of Cantina 229 were present to voice their opposition to such a proposal. These same taxes were rejected at the 2019 Annual Town Meeting.

Tara White noted that the tax is being reconsidered because an increase in the number of short-term rentals (STRs) has provided a significantly greater opportunity for revenue than was projected in 2019. Residents, she said, have communicated a desire to diversify revenue sources beyond real estate taxes and asserted that these taxes would largely be paid by people who do not live in town. Additionally, Mr. Carson noted that the tax would be a means to regulate the safety of the STRs. The police and fire chiefs, he said, have complained of an increase in use of town emergency services by STR guests. He also claimed that the tax targeting STRs would, by law, have to be paid on rooms at the Inn and Gedney Farm.

Mr. Irwin said that adding a local tax to those already charged by the state could result in meal costs that would lead to prospective customers saying, "Let's do something else instead." Adding another tax just doesn't feel fair, he said. Mr. Platt noted that towns that levy such taxes use the proceeds to promote tourism. New Marlborough does not do this. In the end, an informal delegation of three residents, Freddy Friedman, Marc Trachtenberg, and Josh Irwin, decided to talk with officials in Great Barrington to determine what they have done to regulate STRs.

Mr. Platt noted that towns that levy meal and room occupancy taxes use the proceeds to promote tourism.

Moving on to the looming deadline to apply for the 2023 Berkshire Regional Planning Commission's District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA) program, Ms. Enoch informed the Board that no department, board, or committee had proposed a project for DLTA. With no project ready for such assistance, the Board decided that it would not be applying this year.

Next, Ms. Enoch presented an analysis to assist the Board in establishing a cost of living adjustment (COLA) for Town employees. She described the impact of different percentage increases, the history of COLAs, as well as the Social Security COLA, which is frequently used as a reference point. With the Board requesting further information, no decision was made.

Ms. Enoch announced that a continuation of the Construct special permit hearing will be held February 1. Joint meetings with the Finance Committee to discuss the FY24 budget are planned for February 16 and 23. Mr. West requested that the appointment of Kadin Shafiroff as a police officer be put on the next meeting agenda. An executive session to discuss a Purchase and Sale Agreement for the winery property was scheduled for January 26 or 27.

After vendor and payroll warrants were signed and minutes of the January 9 meeting amended and approved, the meeting, now thirteen minutes into its third hour, was adjourned.

February 1: With Board members plus Town Administrator Mari Enoch and Administrative Secretary Michelle Castellano present in Town Hall — with Zoom available for others — the meeting was called to order at 5:00 p.m.

Ms. Enoch started things off by identifying three state grants and their purposes: a MassWorks grant for repair of Norfolk Road, a Department of Housing and Community Development grant with Construct for the Cassilis Farm housing project, and, from the Executive

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Office of Housing and Economic Development, a capital improvements grant for underutilized properties. The Board approved letters of interest for all three.

Discussion and signature of the Purchase and Sale Agreement for Les Trois Emme Winery was postponed until the Board can further discuss it with town counsel.

In town administrator updates, **Ms. Enoch informed the Board of an application for a modification to a special permit from Mepal Manor, LLC at 223 Stone Manor Drive, requesting to convert two medical rooms to bedrooms, increasing their bedroom count to fifteen.** The conversion would result in no additional square footage to the building. A hearing on the matter was scheduled for March 7 at 6:00 p.m.

In Board of Selectmen updates, Mark Carson reported that he had received an estimate of \$5,500 for surveying related to the Hartsville riverbank stabilization project. After some discussion, the Board determined that it needed clarification that this is for a property donation and not an easement, because grant funding requires a donation. Funding of the survey was put off to a future meeting.

Following the signing of payroll and vendor warrants and business licenses, the meeting was adjourned at 5:27 p.m.

February 6: Following an executive session to discuss strategy with town counsel with respect to a PILOT agreement, the meeting, both in person and via Zoom, was called to order at 6:14 p.m.

For the second week in a row, the Purchase and Sale Agreement for the winery property was passed over. Tara White, saying she had not yet reviewed discussions between attorneys and was not prepared to move forward, asked for the delay. Mark Carson and Bill West concurred.

The Board then moved on to hear updates from Senior Services Director Prudence Spaulding. She an-

nounced that the Southern Berkshire Public Health Collaborative will be at Town Hall on the third Tuesday of each month, 10:00 to 11:00 a.m., beginning February 21, with a nurse in attendance to conduct wellness clinics. These will include blood pressure, pulse rate, and oxygen level tests. The nurse will also administer flu vaccines and Pfizer bivalent boosters. There is no cost for vaccines, but the Collaborative asks that residents bring their insurance cards so that the companies can

be billed for those who have coverage. For homebound residents, in-home vaccine services are available.

After receiving guidance from the human resources manager, the Board appointed officer Kadin Shafiroff to temporary duty, as a part-time officer at a pay rate of \$21.62 per hour for non-physical duty, with the condition he receives a note from his doctor confirming he can perform such duties. The appointment

is effective immediately and valid through June 30.

For the second week in a row, the Board determined that more clarification was necessary before approving a quote and scope of work for surveying related to the Hartsville erosion project. Ms. White raised questions about the scope of the project, suggesting it is not the responsibility of the Town to protect riverbank on private property but to stabilize only that portion of the bank necessary to protect the nearby bridge. Mr. Carson agreed to get clarification.

Equipment previously voted as surplus was auctioned and bids awarded. The Board unanimously agreed to award bids for a firefighting deck gun for \$410, extraction tools for firefighters for \$901, and a floating portable fire pump for \$150.

In a continuation from previous meetings, the Board discussed a FY24 cost of living adjustment (COLA) for Town employees. As in past meetings, Ms. Enoch was asked to present her research. She began by asking that

The Public Health Collaborative will be at Town Hall on the third Tuesday of each month to conduct wellness clinics.



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the Board determine by what amount they would like to increase the ranges of pay per employee level and position. This will then become a guide to ensuring that, after a COLA is determined, all employees fall within their targeted range of pay. She suggested a 5 percent increase in the ranges and the Board agreed. Stipends will be considered separately.

Following the approval of minutes of three previous meetings, the meeting was adjourned at 7:36 p.m.

February 13: With Selectmen Tara White and Bill West, along with Town Administrator Mari Enoch and Administrative Secretary Michelle Castellano, present in Town Hall, Mr. Carson joined the meeting via Zoom.

From their discussion, it was clear that at an executive session the Board had proposed that Cassilis owner Construct, Inc. make a payment in lieu of taxes (PILOT) equivalent to a tax on the land only. Mr. Carson estimated this would be approximately \$2,450 per year, significantly less than the approximately \$20,000 levied on the property under former ownership. The PILOT at this amount would be for three years, the maximum amount of time for which the Board has the authority to negotiate contracts. Mr. Carson and Construct Executive Director Jane Ralph had yet to discuss this proposal, so no new decisions were made.

In the on-going exploration of the project to stabilize the Konkapot River bank in Hartsville, the Board decided a few more weeks are needed to clearly define the project and reach an agreement between the landowners, Trout Unlimited, and the Town. Mr. Carson said the cost exceeded his original estimate. Ms. White questioned the extent of the Town's obligation, one that originally was aimed at addressing the erosion threatening the Hartsville Mill River Road bridge on the north bank of the river. Mr. Carson urged his fellow selectmen to reserve judgment until they can see a

finished plan. He also advised they consider repair of the river bank to the south of the bridge to avoid risk of erosion and displacement that would threaten Adsit Crosby Road.

Returning to the on-going examination of a COLA increase for Town employees, the Board decided to propose a 3.5 percent cost-of-living increase and then adjust salaries and hourly rates that do not meet the Board's target of having everyone, at minimum, in the second from lowest quartile of pay range.

The Board then unanimously authorized Ms. Enoch to sign the contract with the Massachusetts Cultural Council for a grant to the New Marlborough Cultural Council of \$6,350 to disburse to local organizations via their annual grant process. It also approved, for submission to the Finance Committee, an FY24 budget request of \$9,000 for selectmen salaries.

In town administrator updates, Ms. Enoch said that, according to the Massachusetts Department of Transportation, weather allowing, work would begin on the Norfolk Road bridge during the week of February 27 and that the bridge will be closed starting March 6 for approximately 120 days. Traffic will be instructed to detour via Lumbert Cross Road. The Board requested that the Highway Superintendent and Tree Warden drive the detour to determine if tractor trailers will be able to pass, unencumbered, under tree limbs. River Road will remain closed during mud season and to trucks at all times. When completed, the bridge will have a new, paved deck and once again accommodate two lanes of traffic.

Following the signing of payroll and vendor warrants and a business license and approval of a set of minutes, the meeting was adjourned at 7:30 p.m. □

Michele McAuley

the Board decided to propose a 3.5 percent cost-of-living increase and then adjust salaries and hourly rates to not less than the second from lowest quartile of pay range.



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TOWN HALL PLANNING COMMITTEE

February 16: After three months of analyzing alternatives, the Town Hall Planning Committee entered a new phase of exploration. Having worked under time pressure weighing the purchase of Les Trois Emme winery against a costly rehabilitation of the current Town Hall, the Committee decided it needed to broaden its view. Prompted by interested residents with expertise and knowledge, the Committee is now considering the possibilities of constructing a new facility or converting part of a building on Tom Brazie's property, The Farm New Marlborough.

During the previous weekend, members of the Committee and the Select Board were invited to drop by The Farm New Marlborough for a new look at Robin Hall, a building situated at the former Kolburne School. In November, the Committee, following a state-required request for procurement (RFP) process, rejected a proposal from Mr. Brazie to repurpose Robin Hall as a town hall because it did not score as well as the winery property on the RFP. Marc Trachtenberg, who had considered buying the Kolburne property in 2017, led the tour and suggested that Robin Hall might, in fact, provide the most successful location for a new town hall.

Additionally, real estate broker Freddy Friedman has identified four pieces of land that he believed had potential for the location of a new building. Though the land parcels were not identified, Committee Chairman Richard Long said they are either owned by the Town or the owners are willing to sell.

The Committee's enthusiasm for the new possibilities was tempered with the realization that there is more work ahead. "This is real progress because we've gone from no options to a number of options that are potentially viable," said Committee member Bob Hartt. "Now we need to quantify," he added. "Now comes the hard work."

The evaluations will require differentiating among sometimes incomparable components, as well as specu-

lation about funding sources. Additionally, the Town's boards and committees are subject to commonwealth procurement laws that require adherence to certain procedures, such as a request for proposals and a scoring process. Then it will be the voters who will make the final determination through Town Meeting and election. Needing time for a thorough analysis, Committee members said they will not be ready to present a plan by the Annual Town Meeting on May 1.

With that, the Committee recognized it did not at present have a recommendation for the Select Board. The Board will move forward with its negotiation on a purchase and sale agreement with the winery owners. Consultant David Allard and architectural firm EDM will proceed with cost estimates for construction on the winery and the current Town Hall, respectively.

The next meeting of the Committee, scheduled for March 2, will likely take up cost estimates for winery conversion and Town Hall rehabilitation, exploration of public/private partnerships, visits to other town halls that were recently constructed or renovated, and planning and preparation for public hearings. □

Michele McAuley

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THE PLANNING BOARD

February 8: The Planning Board convened at 6:03 p.m. with a quorum consisting of Chairman Bob Hartt and members Jordan Archey and Christian Stovall. The meeting was also attended by two members of the public – Becky Wilkinson and Kenzie Fields — as well as Mike Parsons from the engineering firm of Kelly, Granger & Parsons.

The first order of business belonged to Mr. Parsons, who presented two Form A plans for division of properties, the first from John Miller, who is separating a nineteen-plus acre lot from the property he owns along both sides of the New Marlborough Hartsville Road. The other plan is also a division of one property into two, this one closer to Hartsville, on Arroyo Way. Owner Rick Mielke intends to give one parcel of thirty-three acres to his daughter and to put the other, 15.37-acre parcel up for sale. Since both plans fulfilled the acreage and road frontage requirements of a Form A, the Planning Board signed off on it and Mr. Parsons went on his way.

The single point of discussion for the remainder of the meeting was the issue of short-term rentals, i.e., Airbnb or Vrbo accommodations in New Marlborough. As in several recent meetings, Mr. Hartt introduced the topic by reiterating the stance of the Planning Board on the request it had received from the Select Board, via Tara White, to come up with a protective bylaw for the coming Annual Town Meeting. The feeling of the Planning Board, as he explained it, is that while the Select Board sees the burgeoning short-term rental market as a potential source of income for the Town in the form of fees and taxes, the Planning Board does not feel there is a situation, regulatory-wise, that needs fixing at this time. He continued to say, however, that for the sake of “due diligence,” the Planning Board is willing to look into what other small towns in the commonwealth are doing; To that end, he had compiled a number of existing or proposed bylaws from area towns, for the other members to sort through.

Becky Wilkinson brought up an article published in the January 24 issue of *The Berkshire Eagle* describing an effort by the Alford Planning Board to come up with regulations that would support the right of full-time Alford residents to augment their income through short-term

rentals, while at the same time maintaining the town’s character. This goal resonated with Ms. Archey, who said that, in terms of what the Planning Board should be aiming for, “people who live here should be prioritized.” She strongly opposed corporations or extremely rich individuals buying up properties for the express purpose of adding to the town’s short-term rental market.

Mr. Stovall agreed with Ms. Archey wholeheartedly, and Mr. Hartt thanked her for articulating the primary purpose to any bylaw that might evolve. Mr. Hartt, with the support of the other two members, then proceeded to enunciate the aims of the Board in regard to the issue: to make sure that people who are committed to living in New Marlborough are allowed to earn revenue through rentals; to protect property rights; to protect the rural character of the town; to ensure that safety measures are in place; and to safeguard against commercial-scale development. Mr. Hartt said that he would communicate these objectives to the Select Board.

As the meeting was concluding, Mrs. Wilkinson expressed her willingness to fill the position on the Board that Paul Marcel is no longer available to hold. Clearly pleased, Bob Hartt said he would ask the Select Board to make the appointment official for the span of months leading to the May elections, at which time Mrs. Wilkinson could run for the position if she chooses. And on that upbeat note, the meeting was adjourned at 7:10 p.m. □

Larry Burke

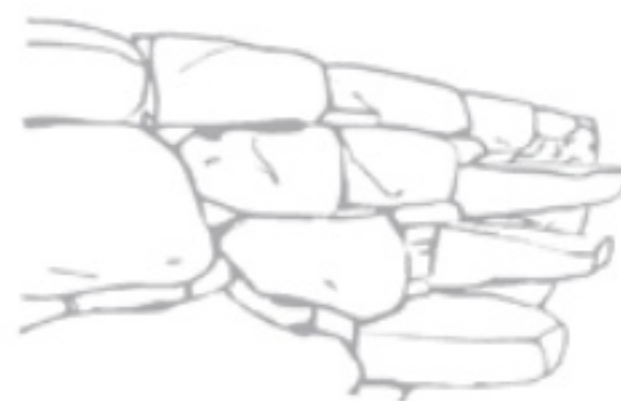
Wanted: Planning Board Recording Secretary

The New Marlborough Planning Board is seeking a recording secretary to publish the agendas and record the minutes of Planning Board meetings. From now to the end of April, the Planning Board will meet on the 2nd and 4th Wednesdays of each month. From May through August the Planning Board meets once a month on the 4th Wednesday of the month. The position pays \$50 per meeting. This is a great opportunity for a motivated high school student to gain experience in local governance (also looks good on a college application) or for any citizen who wants to contribute to the community. If interested, please respond to: planning@newmarlboroughma.gov.

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THE CONSERVATION COMMISSION

February 16: With Commission members Doug Hyde and Nanci Worthington present, Chairman John Schreiber called the meeting to order.

After approving last month's minutes, the Commission unanimously agreed to accept the withdrawal of a Request For Determination (RDA) from Construct, Inc. for work at Cassilis Farm on Hartsville New Marlborough Road.

Next Mike Parsons of Kelly, Granger, Parsons & Associates presented an RDA for his client, Susan Pfeiffer of Aberdeen Lane. The permit involves the construction of a single-family house, a driveway, a well, and a septic system. Since some of the work is within the 100-foot buffer to a resource area and roughly twenty-four trees are slated to be removed from the house site, the Commission asked that ten new native trees be planted at the top of the slope to the wetlands. In addition, the Commission asked that a silt fence be added to the proposed straw wattle fence location. With all in agreement, the RDA was given a negative determination, meaning no further permitting was necessary.

Linda and Mark Rossier of 222 Lake Road were both on hand to explain their need to cut down three trees threatening their Lake Buel cottage. Following their recent site visit, the Commission members agreed that removal of the indicated trees was prudent, and the RDA was given a negative determination. The Commission asked that three replacement trees be planted in a location chosen by the Rossiers.

Next, Bridghe McCracken of Helia Land Design presented an RDA for Maryann Roston of 764 East Hill Road. At issue is the removal of phragmites from a pond on the property. Referring to maps from Google Earth, Ms. McCracken showed the growth of the phragmites at certain locations on the rim of the pond. She explained that selective removal of the phragmites would inhibit further growth of the invasive. The

Commission asked to be allowed to observe the process. The RDA was given a negative determination.

Matt Puntin of SK Design Group addressed the Commission for his clients, Terry Lush and Kristen Mallory of Mill River Great Barrington Road, both of whom were present. Referring to comments made by Mark Stinson of the state Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), the Commission discussed the route of the proposed driveway and an associated culvert. They asked the applicant to consider moving the driveway farther from the wetlands. Mr. Puntin agreed to continue the hearing until the next meeting when the plans will be adjusted to satisfy the DEP's concerns.

Finally, the Commission asked Highway Superintendent Chuck Loring to revisit the bundled Notice of Intent issued to the town in 2019. Recent review by the DEP highlighted certain adjustments that needed to be made to the original permit. All agreed to continue the hearing until next month so that the changes requested by the DEP could be added to the permit.

Following a review of a special permit by Mepal Manor, the Commission agreed that nothing in the permit was jurisdictional. □

Martha Bryan

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Town Governance

Continuing a series on the men and women who serve on our Town boards and committees, a brief profile of . . .

TOWN CLERK KATHY CHRETIEN

By Joe Poindexter

If you are familiar with the direct, no-nonsense working style of Kathy Chretien, you might be surprised to learn that she once played the aggressively cheerful comedian, Rosie O'Donnell. The occasion was a town clerk training course in which attendees were asked to assume the persona of a celebrity and then defend certain clerking decisions during a mock board of appeals hearing. Kathy/Rosie, she recalls, was totally assertive in meeting the challenges of this test.

The course, sponsored by the New England Municipal Clerk Institute and Academy, is a three-week "boot camp" as Kathy calls it, spread over three summers. Kathy was awarded a certificate upon completion of the course in 2014 — plus one of her favorite items of clothing, a jacket emblazoned with the Institute's initials. It is, however, only one of the documents attesting to Kathy's clerking expertise. Last June she obtained her second certification, having completed courses provided by the Massachusetts City and Town Clerk Association.

Kathy is the daughter of Larry Davis, himself from a long line of Davises living in Mill River, and sister to Angel and brother Larry. She grew up on Hadsell Street, went to kindergarten in Monterey, grades 1 to 3 at New Marlborough Central, 4th grade in Ashley Falls, and then onto the Sheffield campus, graduating from Mount Everett High School in 1989. She has a daughter, Stephanie, 27, who lives in Pittsfield,



Kathy Chretien

photo by Joe Poindexter



Kathy became a Certified Municipal Clerk last year.

and a son Jordan, 24, living in Mill River.

Following early work in child care and at Friendly's in Great Barrington, Kathy signed on as an assistant to then-Town Clerk Margaret Smith in July 2001. This positioned her to take on the clerk position itself when Ms. Smith retired in 2008, and the town heartily concurred, voting her into office by a wide margin. She will be running for election to her fifth three-year term as town clerk this spring.

In addition to her clerking duties, Kathy also takes minutes at town meetings and serves as assistant tax collector, assistant treasurer, and secretary to the conservation commission.

Long-term experience — and continuous attention to state requirements — has given New Marlborough one of South County's most knowledgeable clerks. When surrounding towns need help, they call. Kathy now does after-hours consulting for Mount Washington and as an assistant town clerk for Alford. She has also assisted a new fellow clerk in Monterey.

There are myriad tricks of the trade, one of which escaped some of Kathy's predecessors. Record books kept in a safe in Town Hall contain notations of every birth, marriage, and death in our town going back to the 1700s. Those that were scribed in blue ink have all but faded away. They have since been preserved, but Kathy, taking note, does her record keeping in black ink. □

Thank You to Our Contributors:

Abigail Crine; Edward & Claire Stiepleman; Leonard & Hannah Golub; Henry Gaines;
Miladeen Wyman (who should have been listed in the December issue);
Eugene & Elizabeth Rosenberg; Shirley & Robert Anelli; Charles & Janice McSpirtt

Upcoming: Events Calendar for March, April, May

Through March 12: *If I Go First*, a play by Southfield resident Michael Brady, produced by Barrington Stage Company, Pittsfield, as part of its 10X10 New Play Festival

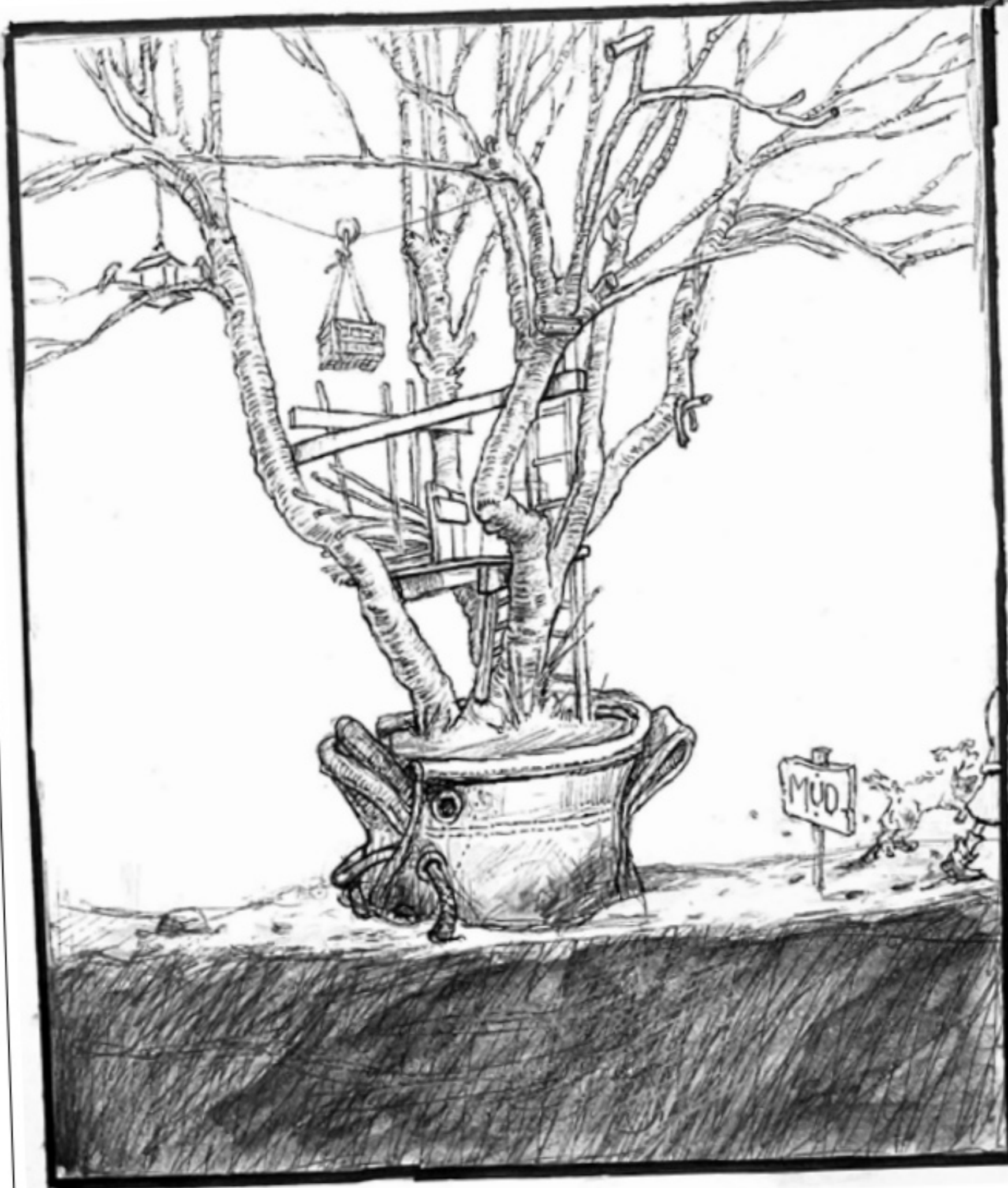
March 28: Town Caucus for nominees seeking election to Town boards and committees, 6:00 p.m., downstairs in the Town Hall — nominees have until 3:30 p.m., March 31, to have their nomination certified by the town clerk

April 14: Registration of voters with the town clerk, 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

April 22: Land Trust Road-side Clean-up, meet at the Goodnow Preserve at 9:45 a.m., choose your road, then stick around for a bit of lunch starting at noon

May 1: Annual Town Meeting, 7:00 p.m. at the Town Hall

May 8: Annual Town Election, noon to 7:00 p.m., Town Hall



Mud Season — Rising Above It Drawing by Shawn Fields

A CONVERSATION WITH BEN HARMS

By Clara Shapiro

I am standing on the porch of a New Marlborough village residence on a chilly day in January, listening for signs of life from within. The prospect of meeting a percussionist who has played for the Metropolitan Opera makes my heart tap out an irregular beat like an ill-played bongo. But, already, one of my assumptions about percussionists has been thwarted. I note that the subject of my quest, Ben Harms, has installed a doorbell rather than an enormous gong to announce visitors.

The door opens and I am greeted by Ben's wife, Lucy Bardo, a cellist and viola-da-gamba player, who greets me with warmth and leads me through to the glowing hearth of the kitchen. Although this is an interview with Ben, I do not remember, actually, when he appeared. Was he there in the vestibule when I was shedding my layers? Was he standing in the kitchen? Later I realized he reminded me a bit of his instrument, a steady heartbeat within the orchestra yet seldom calling attention to itself.

"I could keep a beat," he explained when asked about the origins of his percussion career — the first of many understatements in an interview that also included certain references within the percussionist trade, such as "ideophone" and "membranophone" that needed a bit of explanation.

Clara: What drew you to percussion? What was it that you liked about drumming?

Ben: My dad was a vocational drummer (and my first percussion teacher; he taught me how to do a roll on a snare drum). He played in dance bands his entire life, even though that was not his profession, so I was around drums from the very, very beginning. Well, I actually liked all kinds of music, and all instruments. I've played stringed instruments, I've played wind instruments, and so forth, so I didn't naturally gravitate to percussion.

What did happen, though, was that when I was a junior in high school I started taking violin lessons. The violin teacher was also the high school band director, and she recognized that I had a good sense of rhythm, so she asked me if I would like to play bass drum in the marching band. So that got me started being in the percussion section, because you don't march with a violin. And then it turned out that I do have a good sense of rhythm, and word got around that I could keep a beat, so I started being asked to join other ensembles. I started off on other instruments — ukulele, and then piano for years and years, and then I wanted to play violin, so I did many other things besides percussion.



The percussionist taps out rhythms on a tambourine

photos by Clara Shapiro

You've reminded me of a vivid memory I have with cymbals. My dad, as I said, was a dance band drummer. When I was about twelve, we were living in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, in a small house and there was a furnace room in the house, and somehow I just loved the sound of cymbals, not necessarily two of them crashing together, but just a single cymbal where you would hit it with a soft mallet and then I remember being in that room with different soft sticks, and just playing, and that sound wafting out.

C: Were there any other careers you considered, or did it just seem like destiny to become a musician?

B: Well, I did very well at it. Since I had already played piano, I knew the layout of a keyboard, so I could play xylophone and marimba, all these ideophones, as we call them.

C: Ideophones?

B: An ideophone — no, it's not for an idiot — is made of wood, like a xylophone or a marimba. That distinguishes it from another category of percussion, a membranophone, which has a skin.

C: I understand you make your own membranophones. How did you learn that skill?

B: It was a lot of trial and error, and just talking to people. A big part of it is learning where to get your materials. Just as a violin maker doesn't go out into the woods and cut down a spruce tree or a maple tree or something, he gets materials that are already pre-fabricated, and that's part of the job there. I find cylinders and hoops from companies in New Hampshire and Vermont. Skins for kettle drums and timpani come from a Jewish company in Ireland that makes them as parchment for Torahs. Other skins I get from Pakistan and the United States. And then

there was just trial-and-error, getting the membrane wrapped around a wooden hoop so you can put it on a drum in order to tighten it and loosen it. That's a skill that you learn by trial and error.

C: When did you discover your attraction to medieval and Renaissance music? Was that early on?

B: That came later, after I was finished with college and married Lucy. She was into early music, and I migrated there because I was a percussionist, and there's no written music from those old times, so you have to improvise. On membranophones, mostly, so I was in my twenties when I got into the early music. Eventually, Lucy and I formed Calliope, an early-music ensemble

There are lots of things I like about it. As a technician, as a performer, and especially as a percussionist, early music is a wide open field. You have the original melodies, and then you can improvise off it, just like jazz. I can establish a rhythm, a particular pattern, and then embellish on that, so the improvisation possibilities are just enormous.

C: Which do you prefer, playing in an orchestra like the Met or with a smaller ensemble like Calliope?

B: They are two different animals, of course. I think most musicians would prefer to have the bulk of their performing in a small ensemble, because there is greater freedom to express yourself. There may be twenty first violinists in the Met orchestra, and to be one of those violinists playing the same notes as the other nineteen, you have to subsume a lot of your own character and personality, not only to the section but also the conductor. The reality, however, is there's more work and more livelihood available in the larger ensembles, whether it's a Broadway pit, which might have twenty-five to thirty players, or the Met pit, which can have up to 120 players. So if you want to make a living, you end up quite often playing in an orchestra, and that's what I've done. Of course, in my case, percussion, there's only one person who's going to be playing the cymbals or playing the xylophone or whatever, so there is a certain amount of freedom in how you approach playing the instrument.

C: How long have you been with the Met?

B: I started in 1968, fifty-five years now that I've played at the Met. In recent years, it has turned into a part-time job, but I am still with the orchestra. Fortunately, I have a place in New York City where I can rest between performances. That'll happen tomorrow. I

play Aida in the afternoon, and then I play another opera that starts at eight. Between performances, I go to my place, a fifteen-block walk from Lincoln Center, for a rest. Since I don't have to play on Sunday, I'll get in my car and drive back. This week I'm only making the trip twice.

C: What kind of music do you like to listen to? Just casually, in the car.

B: You know, I've been thinking about that recently. Because I take these trips of two hours, two and a half hours, and at this point, I'm not listening to anything. See, one thing is that I've constantly got melodies going through my head. I think it's twenty-four-seven. For example, if I were going to play Aida tonight, there would be tunes from Aida going through my head — sometimes just rhythmic or melodic patterns. So I'm not bereft of music, even if I'm not listening to any in the car.

C: In the way that people often say music can bridge language gaps, do you think it can also bridge time periods? Does a song that appealed to people in the 1600s still have the capacity to be satisfying to a listener today?

B: I like to think so. Certainly it's clear that people in all eras have found music, of whatever kind, to be uplifting, to be joyous. You see Breughel paintings of people dancing, and I think that's just got to be reflective of real joy, no matter what the century. Then, too, there are slow, melodic, large chords going on that can bring a feeling of relaxation and satisfaction — tranquility to the soul. There have been poems written for ages relating how individuals have been impacted by listening to certain kinds of music. Nowadays, we have so many more influences than someone 400 years ago that we'd probably be responding in some ways differently. But I'm sure you've experienced this, sometimes you feel so joyful, you could jump up and down, you want to dance. I think that's probably universal.

As I depart, I see along one wall the red and brown spines of the tambourines tucked side-by-side on a bookshelf, and, in an adjoining room, what could well have been an exhibit in a museum of musical antiquities. Ben shows me his sturdy marimba. On a wall, like sonorous metal icicles, hangs a set of chimes. Ben tells me that a church was on the point of throwing them out when he offered to adopt them. There are also crumhorns, curvy cousins of the bagpipe. Finally, Ben plays a few notes on a hefty shawm, grandfather of the oboe and bassoon. It speaks, in true grandfatherly fashion, in a deafening voice. □



Ben plays a shawm, an early relative of the oboe.

NEIGHBORS



Adele Holman, a long-time part-time resident of Mill River, passed away on December 25 at the age of ninety-six. Professionally, she held a doctorate in social work; she practiced and taught family therapy and assessment in New Jersey and New York until her early 90s.

In 1971 she and her late husband, **Alex**, purchased the Congregational church in Mill River on the hill overlooking Town Hall and the village. They de-sanctified and then carefully converted the building to a residence. Living space was at the back of the building, in the former apse, but the sanctuary and vestibule remained untouched and provided space for many community events hosted by the Holmans. A local tradition in Mill River began in 1976 with ceremonial July 4 bell-ringing at 2:00 p.m. to celebrate the country's bicentennial. For twenty-five years thereafter, community members gathered to ring the bell; to actually pull the bell rope was a sought-after honor. (See July 2022 issue at NM5VN.org for more detail on Ringing the Bell.)

Both Adele and Alex were very active in cultural activities in the Berkshires and brought many musical and gallery events to the former sanctuary in Mill River, always seeking to share their space with friends and New Marlborough residents.

Jared McDade and his family, starting with his parents, had been friends of the Holmans for decades: My family first met Alex and Adele Holman in the early 1970s when my parents, **Thomas and Beatrice McDade**, presented themselves at "The Steeple" and welcomed the New Jersey couple to the area. Soon after the initial visit, Tom and Bea discovered that Adele was an informed and delightful conversationalist, well-read, and with a wide interest in people and all-things Berkshires.

One time, he and my mother brought along a rare gift — the mystery writer, P.D. James, who was visiting my family. Adele was delighted and had a long conversation with her about everything *but* mystery writing. A testament indeed to her ability to engage with many different personalities and on many different topics. Another talent was her writing ability: At my father's memorial service, held at the New Marlborough Meeting House, Adele composed a long poem in heroic couplets as a tribute to my father, and read it to the assembled crowd. We still have the long scroll today that she wrote out and illustrated with charming drawings.

My wife, **Terrill**, and I continued the friendship after my parents' passing and have many good memories of Adele's hospitality on holiday weekends and summer days when she set out a lunch table of vegetarian delights, iced tea, and lemonade. I also remember her energetic and extended walks up Sisson Hill Road to our house, a long and steady uphill trek, accompanied by her friend **Barbara Winters**. Adele and Barbara would be deep in conversation as they tackled the hill and always seemed quite surprised when, after a mile and a half climb, they came out around the turn by our barns and house, temporarily in an open and level area. They always stopped for a brief chat about what they had heard and seen on the hill, or about some interesting topic in the news, before continuing up the hill.

I have so many other memories of Adele as a good listener and wise counselor, of her love of classical music, and her unfailing interest in people and what makes them tick. She was a very special person who was part of the fabric of my life in Mill River for so many years, and it is difficult to believe that she is gone.

Gloria Levitas and her late husband, Mike, were also friends of the Holmans for many years. Gloria writes: When we met the Holmans, they had just moved into the church in Mill River. My husband, Mike, and I were impressed by the respectful way in which they had used the church apse to create a lovely two-bedroom home, leaving the rest of the church untouched. They rarely came in winter, but in the summer they came to stay, and always invited the townspeople in for a party. They rang the bells, and I remember pulling on the rope and exulting in the sonorous rumblings that resonated above.

Both of them were involved in the transformation and had, in fact,



Adele Holman

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done similar magic to another church in the area. To their credit, they were aware that transforming a church into a home often upset their neighbors, but both Mike and I believed that what they had done was good for the community: It saved the building and its history, celebrated it at least once a year, and prevented its demolition.

My first impression of Adele was WOW! She was extraordinarily beautiful and never seemed to age, remaining virtually without wrinkles until the last time I saw her, in her late eighties.

Alex was blind during the last years that we knew him, but the atmosphere in their house was never sad or grim. Alex was always cheerful, and Adele seemed totally matter-of-fact as she took care of his needs, explaining the food she put on his plate, describing how we looked, and almost unobtrusively moving objects on the table within his reach.

I admired both of them for their grace and ability to retain their balance and humor in the face of Alex's blindness. They were an unusual and loving couple, good friends to us (and to each other), and to the community as well. □

Compiled by Barbara Lowman: deeuell@yahoo.com

A MICHAEL BRADY WORK — ON STAGE

Playwright Michael Brady, a resident of Southfield, was one of ten authors selected for the twelfth annual 10X10 New Play Festival sponsored by the Barrington Stage Company (BCS). Participants submitted scripts for a strictly-enforced ten-minute production. The festival has become nationally known over its twelve years; hundreds of scripts in this format are submitted each year, of which ten are selected for production. Michael's drama, *If I Go First*, will be staged at BCS through March 12.



In *If I go First*, an elderly couple argues . . .



over the merits of moving into a hospice setting.



Playwright Michael Brady

Michael described the challenges of the ten-minute format: setting the scene, and presenting the conflict. "There has to be conflict," Michael says, "otherwise there's just a conversation with no structure. What's the point?"

If I Go First is one of seven plays in Michael's *Café Plays* series, conversations set in a café that has a history of its own, detailed in the play. The conflict is between an older husband and wife. The wife wants to go into a hospice setting, which the husband strongly opposes; she eventually convinces him. This play is the most serious production in this year's festival. Michael observes that the ten-minute format favors humorous situations, but in this case the topic is a very serious one. He noted that the audience was startled by the unexpected change in tone but was caught by the topic itself.

A participant in developmental theater activities in Berkshire County, Michael manages Berkshire Voices, a workshop sponsored by the Great Barrington Public Theatre for local playwrights. The group of fifteen playwrights, a larger group than usual, meets weekly via Zoom to discuss their work and offer suggestions and critiques to improve their writing. He also is a playwright mentor in BSC's Playwright Mentoring Project.

Beyond his mentoring activities, Michael has several ideas for future work. Stay tuned. □

Barbara Lowman

WILDLIFE NEIGHBORS

On February 3, as the temperature was just beginning to nosedive into negative numbers, **Larry Burke** spotted an **otter** in the remaining patch of open water on the pond by his home. As if sensing the approaching extreme cold, the otter was continuously diving and resurfacing to gulp down one snack after another – large bullfrog tadpoles and delicious crayfish. By the next morning, with temps near -20°, the pond was completely iced in and the well-nourished otter had moved on.

The unusually mild weather that followed in mid-February ushered in the early arrival of a number of birds that normally show up in March or even later. **Bluebirds** are evident in Mill River, according to **Dan Doern**. **Red-winged blackbirds** are showing up in large flocks, accompanied by **starlings** and **grackles**. Our steadfast winter birds are having to share the bird feeders with these party crashers!

On one of those temperate days, February 13, **Larry** stepped outside to discover a **titmouse** lying on its side



photo by Larry Burke

Above, an otter poking its head above the icy water

Right, a crayfish, claws extended, becomes the otter's tasty treat



just by the door. It had apparently flown into a window moments earlier, stunning itself... or worse. It was still warm, eyes open, and heart beating as Larry picked it up. Its legs were curled back under it, with its feet clenched – a bad sign that indicated a likely spinal injury. The titmouse sat quietly, motionlessly, in Larry's hand for ten or more minutes while he stroked its back and



photos by Larry Burke



An injured titmouse in hand... and in recovery

gave it words of encouragement, after which he set the bird on an outdoor table. Another ten or so minutes passed, and Larry checked in again, this time noticing the titmouse was able to turn its head this way and that, and, as he drew near, the little bird fluttered its wings and flew off – an unexpected survivor!

Clayton resident **Liz Goodman** has

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pped her techgame when it comes to capturing bird life photographically. She writes: "I set up my iPhone on a tripod very near the bird feeders, focus on what I want, and set it on Portrait Mode. Then I go inside and wait. There is a camera app on my Apple watch, which is synced to the phone. I can see a tiny picture on the dial of what the iPhone camera is framing. When I see a good moment, the watch allows me to take the picture." Clearly, Liz is getting some great results. (To see the amazingly rich color of the bluebirds, check out this page on the nm5vn.org website!) □

Compiled by Larry Burke; Send your wildlife sightings to Larry at larryjburke@gmail.com



photos by Liz Goodman

Right top, bluebirds, about to dine
Right, a red-bellied woodpecker, pausing over tray of meal worms

AN 'IRON BRIDGE' NO MORE

On March 6, the bridge at the head of Norfolk Road, long referred to as the "Iron Bridge" in recognition of its steel span, will temporarily close. Reduced to a single lane more than a decade ago because of rusting, the roadway will be replaced by a bridge of precast concrete. Following preparatory work starting around the first of the month, the closure is expected to last into July. According to Highway Superintendent Chuck Loring, the contractor has 120 days to complete the work.



The Iron Bridge, three weeks before its conversion to concrete photo by Joe Poindexter

During the closure, signage will direct drivers south on Norfolk Road to Canaan Southfield Road and then to a north turn onto Lumbert Cross Road, which, combined with a few yards of Hadsell Street, will bring traffic to Mill River Southfield Road. For drivers headed to New Marlborough village, a shorter route using River Road will be unavailable until River Road, to be closed during mud season, is reopened. □

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THE LOG

Police Department (selected entries)

- Jan. 1 4:07 p.m. An officer assists a Mill River resident in freeing two possums from a dry well into which they had fallen.
- Jan. 4 11:50 p.m. A vehicle hits a deer on Mill River Southfield Road.
- Jan. 6 5:00 p.m. An officer assists in locating and returning a lost dog to its Hartsville residence.
- Jan. 7 8:45 a.m. The Highway Department is notified of a large tree branch blocking the westbound lane of Mill River Southfield Road.
- 11:04 a.m. A caller reports that a security camera has observed an unknown vehicle parked in the driveway of his Southfield residence.
- Jan. 10 8:55 p.m. Tree down on Canaan Southfield Road.
- Jan. 12 11:27 a.m. Following a complaint of trespassing at a New Marlborough property, an officer instructs the trespasser to leave.
- Jan. 16 3:22 p.m. Following a call from a pedestrian on Norfolk Road, reporting that a passing motorist was yelling, an officer arrests a driver operating under the influence with an open container of alcohol in his vehicle.
- Jan. 17 9:56 a.m. An officer corrals a dog running loose on Hartsville Mill River Road.
- 10:30 a.m. A caller registers a complaint regarding a driver dangerously passing other cars and speeding through Mill River village.
- Jan. 20 12:31 a.m. National Grid is advised of a tree on wires on Norfolk Road.
- 7:36 a.m. A caller requests assistance with a vehicle that has slid off Mill River Great Barrington Road.
- 8:53 a.m. National Grid is notified of a tree on wires on South Sandisfield Road.
- Jan. 22 1:32 p.m. Following a stop on South Sandisfield Road, a tow is ordered for an uninsured, uninspected vehicle, whose registration had been revoked.
- 8:47 p.m. An officer assists a driver in moving his stalled vehicle off Hartsville New Marlborough Road.
- Jan. 23 10:41 a.m. A caller reports damage at her New Marlborough Village property from a pickup truck that slid off Hartsville New Marlborough Road onto her lawn and into a hedge.
- 4:32 p.m. A tow is ordered for a trailer tractor that has slid off Norfolk Road.
- 7:12 p.m. An officer is called to the scene of a minor accident in which a car collided with a guard rail on Hartsville New Marlborough Road.
- Jan. 24 7:45 a.m. A driver loses control of his vehicle and takes down a yield sign at the intersection of County and Mill River Great Barrington Roads.
- 4:52 p.m. Following an accident in which a car slid off Norfolk Road, an officer lends assistance as the car is towed back onto the roadway.
- Jan. 26 4:01 a.m. State police are asked to intercede following calls from both participants in an altercation at a Mill River residence.
- 5:01 a.m. National Grid is notified after a motorist reports that he collided with a tree on wires on Norfolk Road.
- 5:39 p.m. A party to an altercation at a Clayton residence is arrested.
- Jan. 27 8:37 a.m. A Mill River village resident reports that his dog, while being walked on a leash, was attacked by an unleashed dog.
- Jan. 31 6:00 a.m. A Southfield resident is arrested and taken into custody for possession of an unlicensed firearm and ammunition, a firearm on which the serial number has been defaced, and drugs with an intent to distribute.

Graham Frank, Chief of Police


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FIRE AND RESCUE

Jan. 4	1:00 a.m.	North Road	Medical Call	Jan. 19	10:22 p.m.	Stone Manor Drive	Medical Call
Jan. 5	11:18 a.m.	Mutual Aid to Sheffield	Medical Call	Jan. 20	7:20 p.m.	Rhoades and Bailey Road	Medical Call
Jan. 6	12:31 p.m.	Mutual Aid to Monterey	Medical Call	Jan. 20	8:10 p.m.	Mill River Southfield Road	Odor of Propane
Jan. 6	1:17 p.m.	Mutual Aid to Great Barrington	Medical Call	Jan. 22	3:37 p.m.	Mill River Southfield Road	Problem w/ Wood Stove
Jan. 6	3:34 p.m.	Mutual Aid to Great Barrington	Medical Call	Jan. 23	7:30 p.m.	Hartsville New Marlborough Road	MVA
Jan. 7	2:58 a.m.	Alum Hill Road	Medical Call	Jan. 23	10:04 p.m.	Hayes Hill Road	Medical Call
Jan. 11	9:04 a.m.	Lumbert Cross Road	Medical Call	Jan. 25	11:04 p.m.	Hartsville New Marlborough Road	Fire Alarm
Jan. 11	10:29 a.m.	Norfolk Road	CO Alarm	Jan. 26	5:11 a.m.	Norfolk Road	Tree on Wires
Jan. 13	12:02 a.m.	Mutual Aid to Great Barrington	Medical Call	Jan. 28	12:46 p.m.	Mutual Aid to Great Barrington	Medical Call
Jan. 13	5:39 p.m.	Mutual Aid to Great Barrington	Medical Call	Jan. 31	5:17 a.m.	Cross Road to Canaan Valley Road	Medical Call
Jan. 16	3:45 p.m.	Hotchkiss Road	Medical Call				
Jan. 18	8:45 p.m.	Shunpike Road	Medical Call				

Fire Company President David Smith

FIRE & RESCUE NEWS

Protection — and peace of mind — with a **KnoxBox**: Imagine that your fire alarm activates when you are not home, or that no one answers your door when New Marlborough Fire & Rescue arrives for a carbon monoxide or medical emergency alarm. We can hear your alarm sounding, but since your doors are locked, we can't immediately enter to investigate whether a fire has broken out or if someone has been overcome by toxic carbon monoxide or other medical emergency. Typically, a designated key holder will not arrive until well after the Fire & Rescue is on the scene, and our only choice is to forcibly open your door.

There is, however, an effective alternative: the KnoxBox, an unobtrusive, secure locked metal box mounted near your main door in which your house key or passcode will be stored. The KnoxBox allows Fire & Rescue immediate entry to search your house in the event of fire or to provide medical assistance. It is extremely secure and will not yield to repeated pounding with a sledge hammer. One model can be connected to activate your burglar alarm at the first sign of attempted tampering. The master key that opens your KnoxBox is kept in a key safe at the Fire House that records an electronic audit trail off the authorized person's name and the date and time whenever the key is removed. No one other than New Marlborough Fire & Rescue personnel have access to the master key, so you can trust that access to your home will be kept completely secure.

Information about KnoxBox models can be found at www.knoxbox.com/20074 or by calling 1-855-438-5669. You order directly from the Knox Company, not through the Fire Department. The cost of a basic residential model is approximately \$200, a relatively minor investment that is certainly less expensive than replacing a door or window damaged through forced entry, and one that provides peace of mind in the event of an emergency, as it will save considerable time. There are no additional monthly fees.

While the KnoxBox is recommended for every home, it is required, by a Town bylaw, for all homes and buildings with an alarm system connected to a monitoring company. New Marlborough Volunteer Fire & Rescue will respond to every alarm at any time of day regardless of whether or not you have a KnoxBox. However when seconds count this could make a big difference.

Should you have questions not answered on the KnoxBox website, feel free to leave a message for Fire & Rescue at 413-229-8100, or email New Marlborough Assistant Fire Chief Bob Dvorchik at rdvorchik@yahoo.com. □

Bob Dvorchik



KnoxBox



NEW MARLBOROUGH LAND TRUST

On January 28, one of the few beautiful days this winter that had snow cover, about ten of us ventured out on the trails at Steepletop to learn from our resident naturalist, Tes Reed, about tracking animal prints. Our two-and-a-half hour journey took us through the beautiful swamp on the property and allowed us to better understand the nature of the animals around us.



JOIN US!

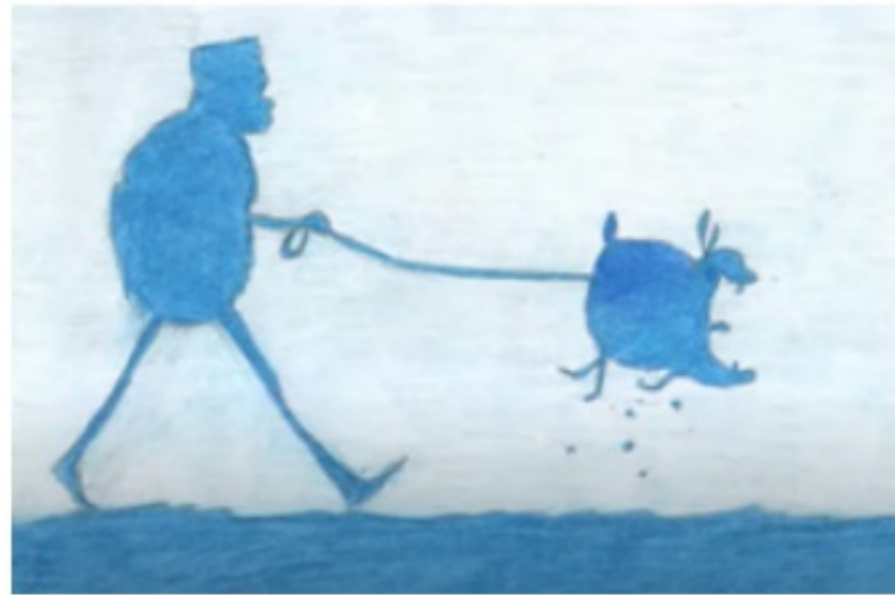
Our next event: **The Annual Spring Roadside Clean-up.** Scheduled so as to have mud season behind us, we will meet Saturday, April 22, Earth Day, 9:45 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.. Please gather at the Goodnow Preserve at 9:45 a.m. to select your clean-up area and gather your gloves and garbage bags. Last year we collected more than fifty bags of trash — and some unique items.

Starting at noon following the clean-up, a bit of lunch will be available to volunteers. We look forward to seeing you. □

Sylvia Eggenberger, Executive Director

LEASH LAW

Leash your dog — It's the (by) law: We have received an increasing number of reports of runaway dogs, particularly on Land Trust properties. A Town bylaw makes clear that whenever a dog is on public property it must be leashed. "No owner or keeper of a dog," it says "shall permit such dog beyond the confines of the property of the owner or keeper unless such dog is on a leash and under physical control of said owner or keeper."



The bylaw addresses a number of potential problems with unleashed dogs. Some people are uncomfortable with dogs and could panic if rapidly approached on a hiking trail by an unknown canine. This, in turn, may result in the dog becoming excited or scared and injuring the hiker. Similarly, dog fights can result when

an unleashed dog approaches a non-social, leashed dog, a danger not only to the dogs but to owners attempting to separate them. Additionally, we have had instances where dogs have chased deer, a violation of Mass General Laws Ch 131/82. During coyote hunting season (this year, January 2 to March 8) a call designed to lure coyotes

may mistakenly be answered by an unleashed dog — with tragic consequences.

The Animal Control officer is empowered to fine violators of the town's leash law \$25 for a first offense and \$35 for subsequent offenses. But the comfort of others and the safety of your pet should be reason enough for observance of the leash law. □

Graham Frank, Animal Control Officer



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RECIPE OF THE MONTH

In 1928, Herbert Hoover supposedly promised “a chicken in every pot.” Well, the chicken is in fact a very versatile bird, and now we are privileged to have access to great chickens and sausages from our local farmers. This warming and delicious stew has become an instant family favorite. Make it for a weeknight meal, or serve it to company on the weekend. It can be prepared a day in advance and leftovers are delicious the next day.

Marjorie Shapiro



SAVORY SAUSAGE AND CHICKEN STEW

Serves: 6 Cooking and preparation time: About one hour

Ingredients

- | | |
|--|--|
| 4 tbsp olive oil | 1 tsp oregano |
| 2 pounds boneless chicken thighs, cut into 1" pieces | 2 rosemary sprigs, leaves minced |
| 3 Italian sausages, hot or mild, casings removed, and cut into 1" pieces | pinch red pepper flakes |
| 1 small onion, chopped | 3 large garlic cloves, peeled and minced |
| 1 large green pepper, seeded and sliced into ½-inch pieces | 2 tbsp tomato paste |
| 3 medium carrots, peeled and sliced into 1" pieces | 28 ounce can crushed tomatoes |
| pinch of Kosher salt | 1 cup dry red wine
(save the rest to drink with dinner) |
| pinch of pepper | 1 cup chicken broth |
| | 3 tbsp chopped parsley for garnish |

Preparation

- In a large Dutch oven, heat the olive oil over medium high heat.
- Season the chicken with salt and pepper.
- Add the chicken and sausages to the Dutch oven when the oil is hot, and brown for about seven minutes (the sausages may fall apart; don't worry about this).
- Remove the chicken and sausages to a plate.
- Add more oil to the Dutch oven if needed, and, when shimmering, add the onion, green pepper, carrots, salt, pepper, oregano, rosemary and red pepper flakes.
- Cook until softened, probably about 7 minutes or so.
- Add the garlic and cook for a few minutes until fragrant.
- Add the tomato paste and stir to incorporate.
- Add the crushed tomatoes, the wine and broth. Stir to incorporate.
- Bring to a boil, reduce to a simmer, cover the pot, and cook for at least 1½ hours until the chicken is no longer pink and registers about 170 degrees on an instant read thermometer.
- Serve over polenta.
- Garnish with parsley.

School News

CAREER PATHWAYS

By Jane Burke

Mount Everett Early College High School students are being prepared for careers, using the pathways approach rather than the more familiar offerings of the vocational high school. In this model, students take traditional academic courses in addition to those specific to their career interest. Led by Technology Director Chris Thompson, Mount Everett's technology pathway, as it is called, is soon to become a state-approved Innovation Pathway. It will include coursework and internships to prepare students for careers in advanced manufacturing and information technology.

The Maker's Space at Mount Everett is the hub for students interested in technology. It is the brainchild of volunteers Tim Newman of New Marlborough and retired Southern District technology director Paul O'Brien, who in 2013 offered to create an after-school program where students could learn engineering skills at no cost to the district. With superintendent approval, the two converted a donated garage space, stocked with tools and materials, also donated, into a well-equipped high-tech classroom. With the help of a 2015 \$10,000 grant from SABIC, a Saudi chemical manufacturing com-



Ben, Sophie, and Tatum displaying their robots
photos by Jane Burke



Tatum explains game field tasks.

pany with a plant in Pittsfield, a classroom in Mount Everett was transformed into the state-of-the-art maker's space used today.

On a recent visit, the classroom was buzzing with activity. Tenth grader Tatum Oates of Southfield and ninth graders Ben Vella of Monterey and Sophie Del Mastro of Lee stopped in to talk about the VEX (an acronym for Vulnerability Exploitability Exchange) Robotics class and the after-school club that comprises the Southern Berkshire Regional School District robotics team. All three were new to Mount Everett and enthusiastic about the unique opportunities they encountered there. Sophie said, "I have enjoyed the close knit community. I love working as a problem-solving team, each of us contributing either to the programming, the design of the robot, or the building process." Tatum commented, "When I was younger I did engineering projects on my own, but now I am learning so much with the one-on-one attention from Mr. Thompson." "I love problem solving," said Ben. The two ninth graders were enthusiastic about being offered courses in 3D printing and the programming language, Python. They mentioned they are happy to have access to seven different technology electives as freshmen.

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In a further enrichment of the technology program at Mount Everett, middle schoolers were for the first time this year invited to join the school's VEX Robotics team. Mentoring with older students on the creation of effective robots gives the 6th to 8th graders a valuable head start in understanding technology subject matter.

Three upperclass members of the Sea and Air Robotics class were present to test launch a rocket they had designed and built for a national competition on April 4. Bringing the rocket to a ballfield and donning protective goggles, they stood behind a fence and hit the launch button. The rocket shot up out of sight leaving a cloud of smoke. They retrieved it and saw that the parachutes and nose cone were intact. Noting the altitude, path, and descent of the rocket's flight, teacher Chris Thompson gave this test launch an A-plus. (Later in the course, these students will build underwater and air drones.)

Senior Mike Fass of Southfield took a break from his on-line class in Cyber Security to observe the launch and talk about his experiences. He was very enthusiastic about the many courses he has taken during four years on the technology pathway, especially his mastery of coding through courses offered by the on-line Cisco Networking Academy. Students using this resource can



Checking rocket before launch



Checking retrieved rocket

become certified in coding using Python. "The discipline of learning coding languages," said Mike, "is really good for your brain. I really enjoy the problem solving involved in mastering them. I have gotten a lot of individual attention and have done group work with other students on projects." He has also taken courses in competition VEX robotics and Sea and Air Robotics, and he has enjoyed mentoring younger students. Confident he will be successful in a technology career, he is headed to Berkshire Community College, "as a next step in learning about what field to choose."

The technology pathway seems to be providing students with all-important career tools. Perhaps even more important, it is teaching its participants the skills of collaboration and the rewards of working as a team. □



Mike Fass

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Adult Nonfiction

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The Escape Artist: the Man Who Broke Out of Auschwitz to Warn the World, by Jonathan Freeland
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Dinner in One: Exceptional & Easy One-Pan Meals, by Melissa Clark

Children's Fiction

Doggo and Pupper Save the World, by Katherine Applegate
Last Kids on Earth, Series by Max Brallier
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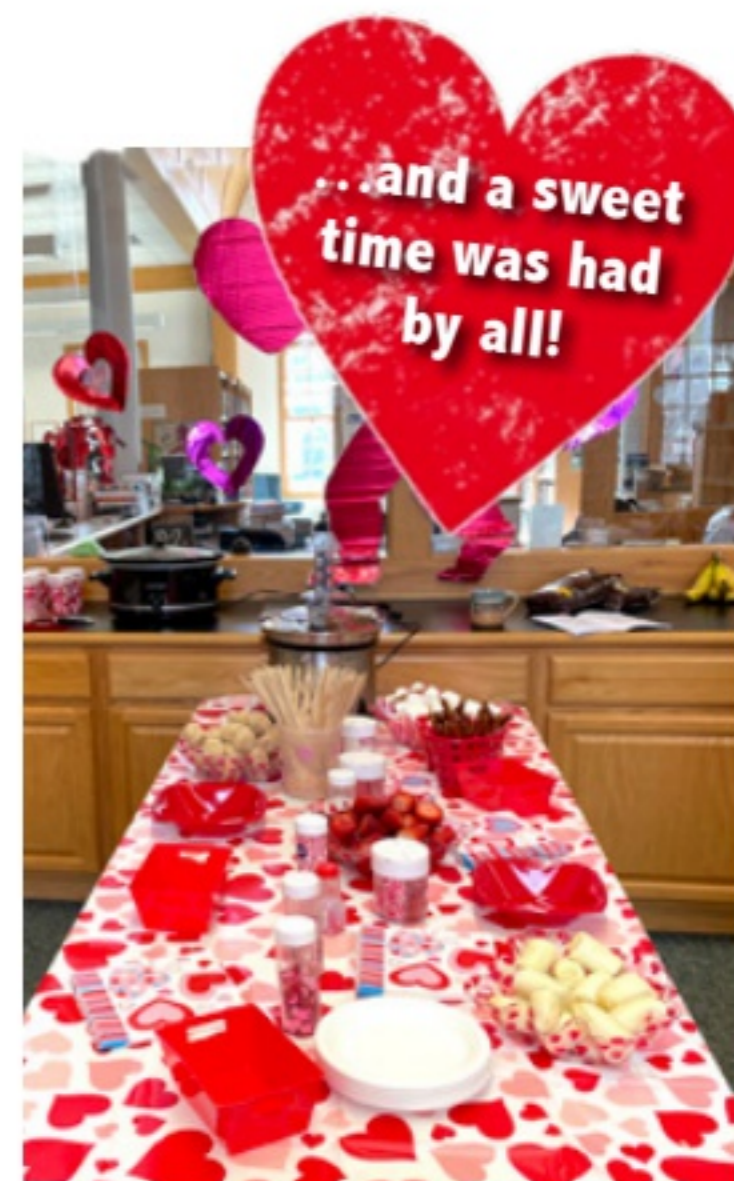
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Happy St. Patrick's!



Thanks to everyone who helped make our chocolate celebration a huge success!!



Left, Gwendolyn Evans and Freya Lush enjoying dipping strawberries and marshmallows in the chocolate fountain, then having fun making valentine crafts.

Above, Emma-Lyn Schieb enjoying a chocolate covered marshmallow. Right, Bennett Brazie - chocolate shopping is so exhausting!



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 September - April, 2nd and 4th Wednesdays
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Conservation Commission: Last Saturday of the month at 9:00 a.m.
Board of Assessors: Monday through Thursday, 8:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
Fire Department training: Every Tuesday at 7:00 p.m. at the fire station
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Animal Control Officer: Graham Frank, (413) 229-8161
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All copy must be submitted no later than March 16.
 For advertising, contact Barbara Lowman, tel: 229-2369
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