



# New Marlborough 5 Village News

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Clayton • Hartsville • Mill River • New Marlborough • Southfield



## SAVING LIVES WORLDWIDE — FROM NEW MARLBOROUGH

By Barry R. Shapiro

There's a certain disconnect when a software developer buys a country home without a high-speed internet connection.

"This was supposed to be a weekend house for us," says Glenn Marcus about the home across from the Southfield Store, he and his husband, Antonio 'Zee' Nunes da Silva, purchased about three years ago. "We didn't think the lack of broadband would be an issue because we thought that the town would be getting high speed internet soon. Obviously, that hasn't happened, and, although we consider ourselves lucky to have a DSL connection, it is very slow, and we need to run around the house and shut down every device that is not in use in order for our DSL to work at all."

This inconvenience, shared by so many other residents, morphed into a critical problem when Mr. Marcus moved into his home full-time last June and then became involved in a critical effort to save lives affected by Covid-19.

"I am one of a group of volunteers working with Mount Sinai Health System in New York City to develop a mobile application capable of handling the huge surge of Covid patients," says Mr. Marcus. "Mount Sinai saw that they wouldn't have the staff, beds, ventilators, or first responders to deal with the surge and determined to address this concern by scaling up a remote patient monitoring program. This program started in mid-March as the hospital system was being overwhelmed with patients. The mobile application, which the patient downloads to a mobile phone or iPad, allows them to be effectively monitored from home as if they were in the hospital, and not have to take up a hospital bed. Using a pulse oximeter, which fits on the end of a finger and is a reliable indicator of Covid-19 symptoms, patients can enter their temperature, pulse and oxygen levels into our mobile application and have the trends and results reviewed by hospital staff, so they can have a video visit with the patient and tell the patient if they need to come in for treatment or seek other care."



photo courtesy of Glenn Marcus

Glenn Marcus on his Southfield front porch

Mr. Marcus grows animated as he discusses the profound effect the mobile app has had on the lives of the patients and the medical staff.

"I've been working on this since March 28 when a contact, knowing of my background in developing mobile applications, reached out to me," he says. "It used to be that patients were told that if they didn't feel well, they needed to come back to the hospital. That's now not the case. If the numbers take a turn for the worse, the hospital can be right on it. We've worked hard to make the application handle more patients and be user friendly for both the patient and the medical professional. Over 600 patients are being monitored from home right now, and over 1,000 have gone through the program. The original application couldn't handle those kinds of numbers. It's very exciting."

The platform uses technology originally developed for stroke patients by

*continued*

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Glenn Marcus, *continued*

Christopher Kellner, MD, and David Putrino, PhD, co-directors of Mount Sinai's Precision Recovery Platform. When the Covid-19 outbreak began, Drs. Kellner and Putrino quickly repurposed it to address the large number of patients with confirmed or suspected Covid-19 whose symptoms are not severe enough to need hospitalization.

"Technology has a massive role to play in this major health-care crisis," says Dr. Kellner, an assistant professor of Neurosurgery at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai and director of the Intracerebral Hemorrhage Program. "And with remote monitoring of Covid-19, we can save hospital resources for the patients who need them most, but also quickly triage patients if and when they begin to show more severe symptoms while they are being monitored at home."

According to Mr. Marcus, now that the Mount Sinai application is scaling well, other health care systems have been contacted to determine if they need it. "Our plan has always been to offer the Mount Sinai solution to other hot zones at no cost and to provide support through our volunteer working group," he says.

The entirely volunteer working group of which Glenn Marcus is a part has nine core members and twenty-seven others (health, tech, and marketing personnel) working virtually around the world. This group has daily calls with Mount Sinai to discuss the current status and even raised \$35,000 when the hospital needed to acquire more pulse oximeters.

All of this internet-reliant work was problematic for someone with the limited bandwidth of a DSL connection that couldn't come close to handling videoconferencing and the large files so essential to the work of Glenn Marcus. In frustration, he mentioned the problem to his neighbor and friend, Tim Newman.

"Tim has been phenomenal in trying to help me," he said. Mr. Newman reached out to state Senator Adam Hinds and Representative Smitty Pignatelli. "In the end," says Mr. Marcus, "I found the Massachusetts Broadband Institute to be aggressively obstructionist, and I couldn't reach an accord to tap into the high-speed Middle Mile controlled by them which runs past my house." Happily, Mill River resident Marc Trachtenberg learned of the problem and, with the support of the Board of Selectmen, figured out a way of directing the

hotspot signal from the fire house to the Marcus-da Silva residence a few hundred yards to the north with the installation of antennas at either end.

The cost of the antennas to transmit and to receive the signal from the fire house, each about \$400, will be paid by Mr. Marcus, and those with a line of sight to the fire house, willing to make a similar investment, may also be able to connect to the hotspot. "None of this [the enhanced signal to his house] will cost the Town anything," says Mr. Marcus, "and I will be able to work on the Mount Sinai project so much more effectively."

Mr. Marcus, 50, is a native of the Canarsie section of Brooklyn, where he went to high school before getting his degree from the State University at Stony Brook on Long Island. He began his career working as a programmer living in Brooklyn, San Francisco, Boston, and, Sao Paulo, Brazil.

"I met my husband in New York, where he was an art director. We moved to Brazil in 2000, which I enjoyed tremendously, even though my Portuguese is terrible. The lifestyle and food there are awesome. I can work anywhere in the world and my company, Cliq Consulting has partners and freelancers working with and for me in Germany, Sao Paulo, South Africa, and Ukraine. My team is virtual, and some of my freelancers I've never met in person!" Cliq's clients have included Merriam-Webster, Liberty Mutual, Expedia, and Condé Nast. When he is not also waging war on Covid-19, he spends time with his two Shih Tzus, Zack and Zoe (residents may have seen them being walked outside their home, off leash but remarkably obedient).

Appropriately, perhaps, for someone with so many things going on in his life, Glenn Marcus enjoys juggling. "Juggling has always been a fun pastime. I started when I was a kid and continued through college. I have used it as a team-building activity at the various companies where I have worked."

"We are thrilled to be living here," he adds. "Everyone has been so supportive and has wanted to help to make our work possible. It says a lot about our great community." □



Glenn Marcus, right, and his husband, Antonio 'Zee' Nunes da Silva, with Zack and Zoe

photo courtesy of Glenn Marcus



# SOCIAL DISTANCING, COLD WAR STYLE

By Larry Burke

A month or so back, I received an email from Martin Langeveld, who had been manager of the Flying Cloud Inn back in the late '70s, and who had gone on to become, among other things, editor of *The Berkshire Eagle*. Though he and his wife, Beverly, now live in southern Vermont, Martin still has a soft spot in his heart for New Marlborough and Flying Cloud, which brings me back to that email: Martin had come across an article from May 16, 1959 by freelance reporter John W. P. Mooney, which details the existence of a rather extraordinary structure here in our town. The article is entitled "Hiding From the Bomb," and this is how it begins:

*NEW MARLBORO – Should the Southern Berkshire area ever be blanketed by radioactive fallout, the staff and guests of Flying Cloud Ranch here might be the only people to survive.*

*Flying Cloud is the site of the only private underground bomb shelter in Southwestern Massachusetts. Harry W. Rittgers, proprietor of the resort, said this may be the only one of its type in New England.*

The article goes on to describe Harry Rittgers's background (retired Commander in the U.S. Naval Reserve) and the intelligence briefing on the lethal effects of nuclear fallout he had sat in on some years earlier. The prospect of an attack on major American cities, and the resulting fallout that would be pushed over New England by the prevailing winds, prompted Mr. Rittgers to acquire the makings of an army surplus Quonset hut, which he set about assembling in the fall of 1951. The *Eagle* article describes the structure in detail: "The shelter is 50 feet long, 14 feet wide and 7 feet high at the center. Mr. Rittgers estimates it could shelter about 50 persons if necessary. The walls are thick, corrugated steel. The building is buried under more than three feet of earth and sod. Two ventilators poke their way through the mound of earth to furnish fresh air to those inside. Underground cables running from a generator on the property supply power for electric lights within the shelter. A wood stove will furnish heat and a means of cooking food. Food and water supplies will be stored in the building."



From the May 16, 1959 edition of *The Berkshire Eagle*



The Flying Cloud bomb shelter as it appears in 2020  
photo by Larry Burke

Food and water supplies will be stored in the building."



Harry Rittgers' bomb shelter under construction in 1951 photo from Flying Cloud archives

Susan Sellev, who lives in Monterey now but grew up in New Marlborough village in the 1950s, remembers the bomb shelter very well. It was kind of a given, she recalls, that if the Russians were to drop the big one, everyone in the village was welcome to race up the hill to Flying Cloud and, to use a term we hear quite a bit these days, "shelter in place" inside Harry and Louise Rittgers's bunker for the next three months or so.

Happily for all of us, Harry's fears of a nuclear winter did not come to pass (at least not yet), and the bomb shelter became, over the ensuing decades, a repository for broken toilet bowls, beat-up screen doors and windows, abandoned bicycles, and all sorts of random bric-a-brac. In one respect, though, the building has served as a shelter – not for humans but for generations of four-legged critters who find it to be a cozy den during the winter months.

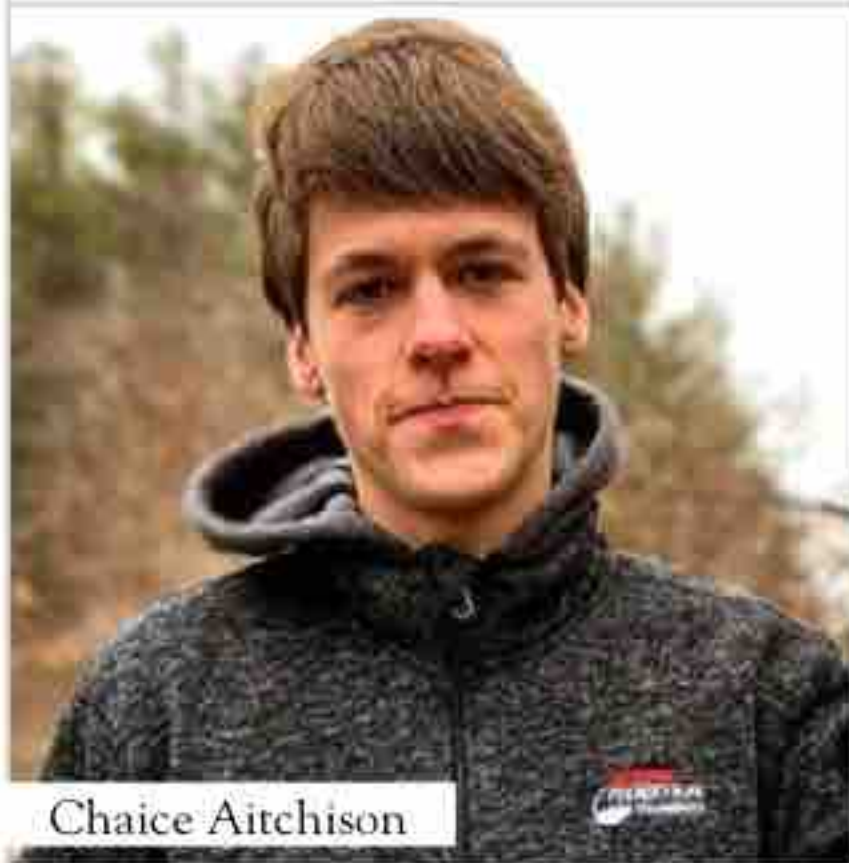
Mr. Mooney's article proceeds at great length to paint a grim picture of life following a nuclear attack, including a vivid description of what radiation poisoning does to the human body. His writing is very much a reflection of that time – the Red Scare, the Cold War, Duck and Cover. It is a bit of a time capsule in itself, much the same as Harry Rittgers's bomb shelter. And now, more than half a century later, the story resonates again. □

Larry Burke

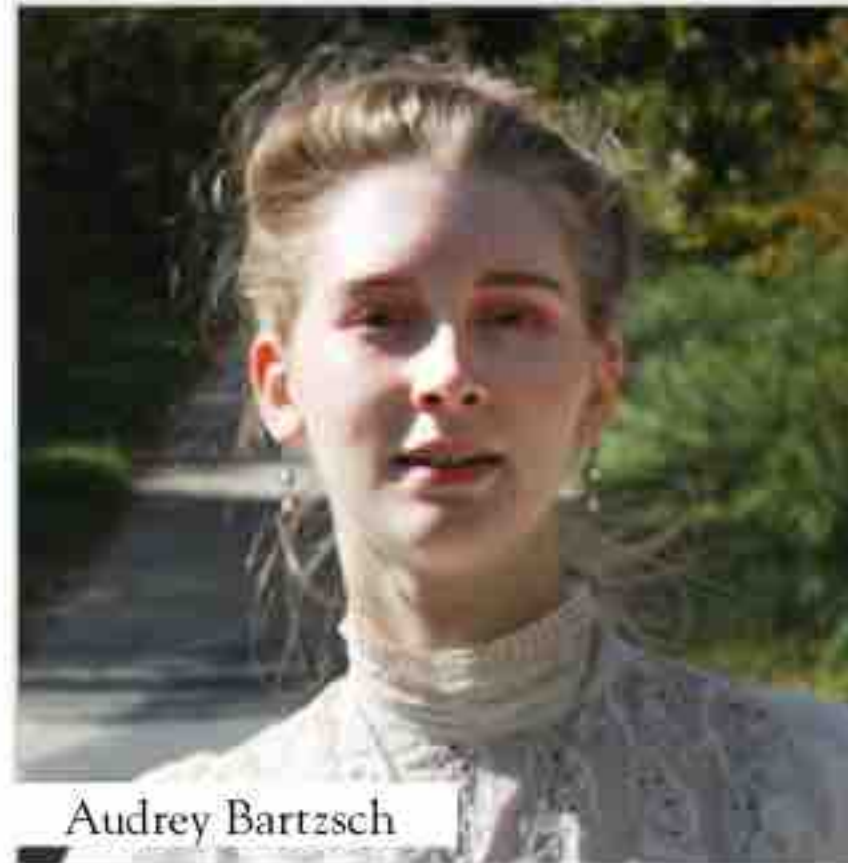


# A UNIQUE GRADUATION YEAR

By Jane Burke



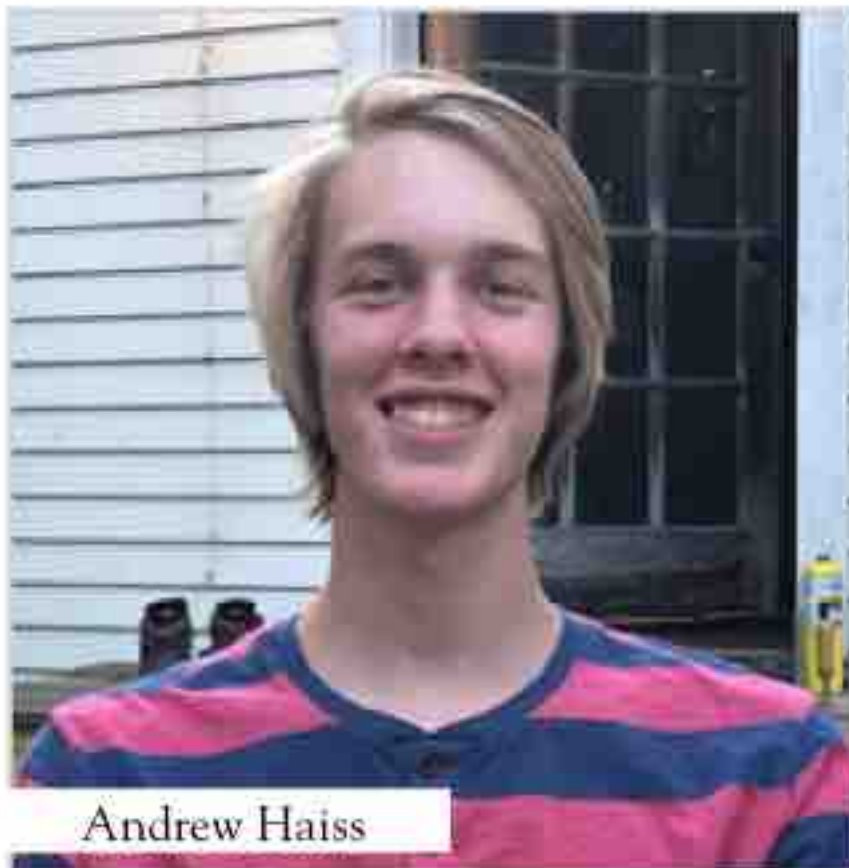
Chaice Aitchison



Audrey Bartzsch



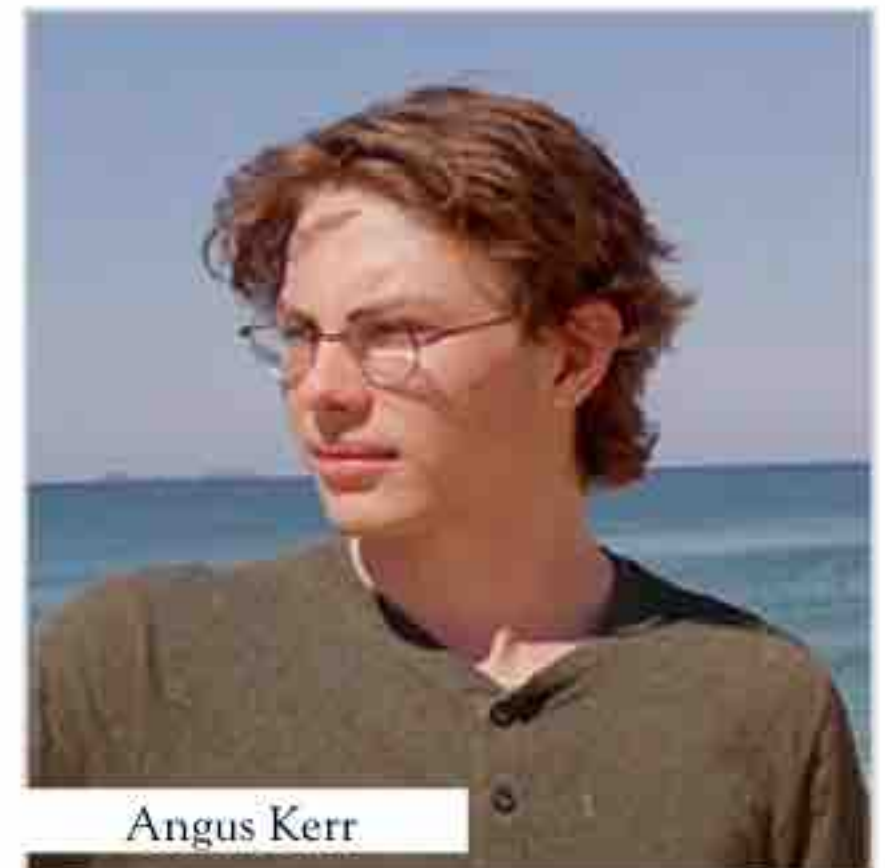
Jacob Duquette



Andrew Haiss



Mercedes Holst-Grubbe



Angus Kerr

The fifty-five members of the Mount Everett class of 2020 are graduating under unprecedented circumstances. Their senior year camaraderie ended abruptly on March 13 when all Southern Berkshire Regional School District schools were closed. Seven of the eleven seniors from New Marlborough have been together since their days at New Marlborough Central School. Although they have had to deal with missing their social lives and the milestones of prom, senior trip, and the drama of a graduation ceremony at Tanglewood, most students have risen above these disappointments. In addition to completing school assignments remotely, many students have used their free time to take jobs in the community to keep themselves occupied.

Catching up with New Marlborough's graduating seniors through emails, phone calls, and Facebook posts was challenging, but it was rewarding to learn about their future plans:

**CHAICE AITCHISON** has been studying the stock market and will be taking a day-trading course through Warrior Trading, based in Great Barrington.

**AUDREY BARTZSCH** will take a gap year. She intends to enroll in an associate's degree program in library science and then go on to a bachelor's degree in anthropology.

**JACOB DUQUETTE**, unsure of what career he will eventually pursue, will likely start with carpentry, which he enjoys.

**ANDREW HAISS** will be attending Queens College in New York City, where he intends to major in economics.

**MERCEDES HOLST-GRUBBE** plans to attend Berkshire Community College to complete her prerequisites in nursing and then go on the University of Massachusetts at Amherst for a Bachelor of Science in Nursing.

**ANGUS KERR** is excited about entering the prestigious Politics, Psychology, Law and Economics Course at the University of Amsterdam in the Netherlands.

**LAYNIE MULLEN** will be attending the University of Vermont to study Medical Radiation Sciences with a concentration of radiation therapy.

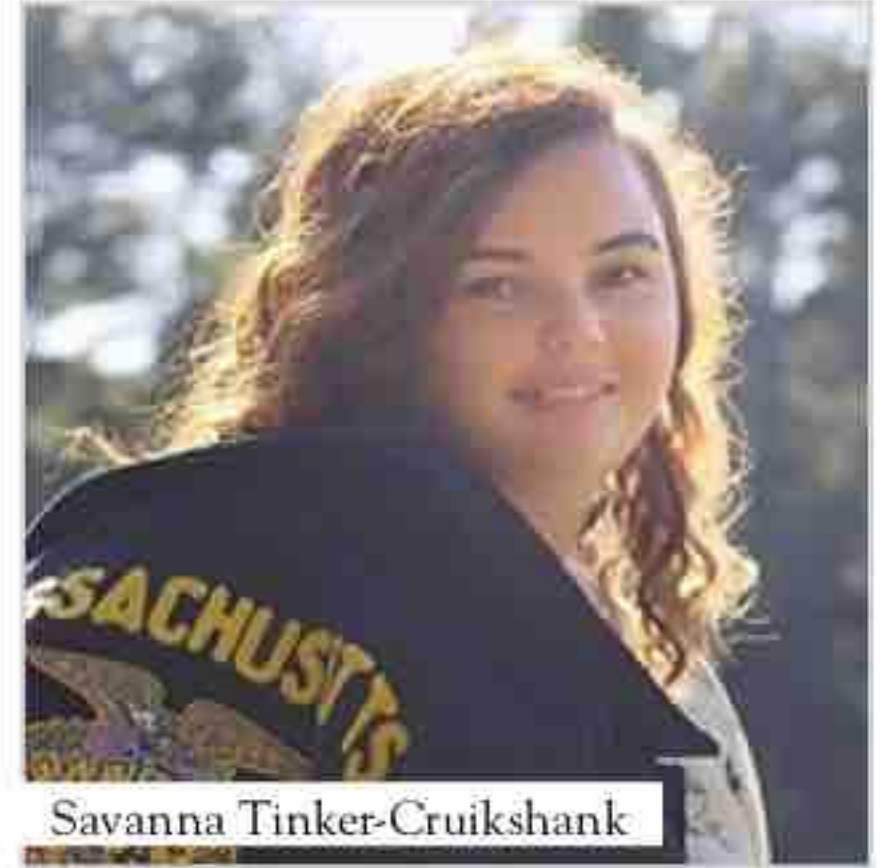




Laynie Mullen



Mary Shalaby



Savanna Tinker-Cruikshank



Brandon Wilson



Sofia Giumarro

**MARY SHALABY** is going to Syracuse University to study economics and also plans to become involved in theatre and performance opportunities.

**SAVANNA TINKER-CRUIKSHANK**, a leader in Future Farmers of America, will enter the Northwestern Connecticut Community College Veterinary Technology program in the fall.

**BRANDON WILSON** will enlist in the military in preparation for his goal to become a Massachusetts State Trooper.

Last, but certainly not least, **SOFIA GIUMARRO**, who won the Superintendent's Award and was named Valedictorian, will attend Williams College, where she intends to study French. Asked about a

career choice, Sofia said she expects to discover that through her college experiences.

As the school year ended, the seniors' wish for an in-person graduation ceremony was finally granted. High School Principal Jesse Carpenter announced at the May 21 School Committee meeting that the Town of Sheffield had approved a plan for a socially distanced outdoor graduation ceremony Saturday, June 6, at 10:00 a.m. Attendance will be limited to four tickets per family. The audience will sit in defined spaces ten feet apart, masks will be required, and precautions will be taken to ensure the safety of all attending. Rain dates are June 7, 13, and 14. □

## What's Your Opinion?

We would love to hear from you on what you think of the articles that appear in the *New Marlborough 5 Village News* — what you like, sure, but also how we might better report the assets and liabilities of our town.

Please send your comments to us at [5villagenews@gmail.com](mailto:5villagenews@gmail.com).

And don't forget that you can always view the *5 Village News* online at [nm5vn.org](http://nm5vn.org).



## Town Business Is Your Business

### BOARD OF SELECTMEN



**April 21:** The meeting, with all three selectmen present by phone, opened with a discussion of the job performance of Town Treasurer Marylin Fracasso. Ms. Fracasso, who was appointed to the position four years ago, was being evaluated following a ninety-day probationary period, which was an extension of a six-month probation that started in May 2019. Selectman Richard Long, in summarizing a review of Ms. Fracasso's performance conducted with Town Administrator Mari Enoch, said, "Our assessment is that Marylin is not performing to the level expected of a town treasurer."

Mr. Long detailed a list of duties in which he and Ms. Enoch found errors or a failure of timely filing. These included processing of the payroll, electronic transfers, tax receipts, "and, most critically," said Mr. Long, "timely bank reconciliations." He and Ms. Enoch concluded that "the position of treasurer is inappropriate to Marylin's skill set." **In her defense, Ms. Fracasso, who also attended the meeting by phone, said she had been given insufficient training in the completion of reconciliations and that a consultant hired to review the Town's accounting procedures "said I could not do it on your timeline. It takes a lot of steps."** Later she added, "I don't see how you can hold that against me. I don't have enough time in my eighteen hours [work week] to do it. What is going on in New Marlborough? We all make mistakes."

Eventually, Chairman Nat Yohalem put forth a motion, seconded by Mr. Long, that Ms. Fracasso be terminated as treasurer, and that she be paid to the end of the week plus two weeks of additional pay. Tara White, claiming that "this decision has been made by Mari, Richard, and Nat," stated that she would abstain


from a vote on the motion. It passed two to zero. Ms. Fracasso had two days to ask for a hearing, which would be held within ten days. (She did not do so.)

Later in the meeting, Mr. Yohalem declared that Kathy Chretien, who in addition to being town clerk is also assistant treasurer, would handle the payroll and take in receipts. Then, addressing Ms. Enoch, who is Monterey's tax collector, he said, "Mari, you are the only game in town. We need you to handle the other treasurer duties." Ms. Enoch said she would.

Moving on to the Town Caucus, Ms. Enoch said she has been in regular communication with the lieutenant governor, who opined that, given social distancing, **it will be difficult for towns to hold to current caucus, town meeting, and town election schedules.** Caucus votes cannot be made via absentee ballots. The selectmen agreed to delay a decision on scheduling until they received further guidance from the state.

In a clarification, the Board agreed that any Town employee, not just those in Town Hall, who worked during the day and a half in early March that Town Hall was being sanitized would be entitled to comp time. It did so reluctantly and only because the Town's employee policy does not distinguish between work performed during weather-related stoppages and a deliberate closing of Town Hall. The motion specified that any comp time earned be taken in the next two weeks.

Ms. Enoch addressed the importance of the U.S. Census. With the library, which provided computer access and advice for filling out the census form, closed, she urged the selectmen to remind New Marlborough residents to register with the census. Ms. White said



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that the School Consolidation Committee would meet later in the week to pursue the hiring of a facilitator. Mr. Long said that a core sampling report on the Route 57 repair project was due from engineers in the first week of May. Ms. White said that Maxymillian, Inc., the construction outfit that is rebuilding the Umpachene Falls Road bridge, is reconsidering its request to use the park for temporary storage of soil. It is concerned that soil could wash into the river.

Then, after agreeing to reconvene the morning of April 24 to clear up a daunting backlog of minutes of past meetings, this meeting adjourned.

*Joe Poindexter*

**April 27:** The Board, with all three members again participating by phone, returned to the subject of the Town Caucus, scheduled for Tuesday, May 19, and how best to hold it in the face of the pandemic. Reminding the meeting it takes a quorum of twenty-five people just to start the caucus, Chairman Yohalem said it was unclear to him whether that number of people could safely be in a room together — adding even if they could, “I for one wouldn’t be one of them.”

Instead, he suggested holding the caucus outside, say in the Town Hall parking lot, with people remaining in their cars, or alternatively, as others suggested, in the parking lot at New Marlborough Central School, where traffic flow might be easier. Either way, he said, we would need a police presence to direct traffic and make sure cars are appropriately spaced, and then work out a way of checking in registered voters when they arrive and handing out and collecting ballots. **A microphone and speakers may be needed, he added, since, unlike at a Town election, people are permitted to electioneer at the caucus.**

Mr. Yohalem suggested that Town Clerk Kathy

Chretien check with other town clerks to find out whether it’s permissible to hold the caucus out of doors in a parking lot. If an outdoor meeting is deemed to be legal, the Board agreed it would make sense to set a rain date, which the Board did for May 20.

Town resident Tom Stalker has filed yet another Open Meeting Law complaint with the state Attorney General’s office, one of a series, according to Mr. Yohalem, he has filed over the past few years. This one targets Cable Advisory Committee Chairman Steve Klein, charging that Mr. Klein changed the dial-in number for a March 27 conference call twenty-four hours before the meeting was to be held. The complaint goes on to say that even though he posted the new call-in numbers on Maggie’s list, that wasn’t good enough because anyone who was unaware of the change was not able to participate in the meeting. He also claimed Mr. Klein failed to notify the town clerk of the change.

He concluded the complaint by stating that “the Town needs to work with Mr. Klein to be sure he reads and understands the Open Meeting Law and why he needs to post his meetings properly.”

For his part, Mr. Klein responded in a written statement submitted to the Board that the meeting was one of the first to be held under “virtual” circumstances necessitated by the coronavirus outbreak, and that when he realized the original call-in number had a very limited number of lines available, he upgraded the service, at his own expense, to accommodate additional participants and to be able to record the call. Further, as there was less than the required forty-eight hours to make such a change, he did notify the town clerk, posted the change with the new numbers on Maggie’s list, and distributed the numbers to the other members of the Committee.

*The Town is part of a multi-town, county-based consortium that is able to take advantage of a reduced electricity rate*



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As he noted, once the call began, attendance on the call justified the change and that the few members of the public with difficulty dialing in were directly advised of the new number. "I know of no one who missed the call due to the change in numbers," he said. He concluded by saying that, as someone who volunteers a significant amount of time and energy to Town affairs – in addition to chairing the CAC he is also chairman of the Town's Finance Committee and a member of Human Resources Committee — he is well aware of the requirements of the Open Meeting Law and doesn't need remedial training on the subject.

Mr. Yohalem said that, as chairman of the Board of Selectmen, which created the Cable Advisory Committee and appointed its members, he would be happy to file a response to the complaint with the AG's office and include Mr. Klein's statement with it. "That hopefully that will put an end to it," he added.

Under town administrator updates, Ms. Enoch announced the Town is obligated to put the Power Supply Aggregate Plan out for public review and that the plan is now available for viewing on the Town website. She said the public comment period is open for three weeks. Under the plan, New Marlborough is part of a multi-town, county-based consortium that is able to take advantage of reduced electricity rates through a bulk purchasing agreement negotiated by Colonial Power Group. Consumers located within the Town's borders are automatically enrolled in the program unless they choose to opt out. The Town has been a member of the consortium since 2014.

Ms. Enoch also reported the state has turned down the Town's request to extend the deadline beyond June 30 for completing the Municipal Vulnerability Planning Study. As she noted, the Town has been working with

BSC Group on the study, one of the components of which is to hold public brainstorming sessions. But since social distancing now prevents actual meetings, BSC is establishing a website, including an online survey, to provide input for the study. As Ms. Enoch noted, "We need a lot of input from former Town officials. There's a lot knowledge in the town and we really need to tap into it."

And finally "for some good news," she said, Berkshire Health Group, a self-funded insurance group providing health insurance for the Town's employees, has voted once again to grant its member towns a one-month premium holiday, meaning that for the month of June neither the Town nor its employees will be billed for health insurance. She noted this is for active employees only and that this year it may also apply to the

dental plan.

*Peter Schuyten*

***Berkshire Health Group has voted once again to grant its member towns a one-month premium holiday.***

**April 29:** A special Wednesday morning meeting (via teleconference), devoted primarily to the FY21 budget, dove right into the issue of salary increases for Town employees. Town Administrator Mari Enoch, who had furnished the selectmen with a spreadsheet detailing the recommendations of the Human Resources Committee (HRC), said that the Finance Committee had recommended an across-the-board increase of 2 percent for all hourly-wage Town employees. HRC countered with a somewhat more nuanced approach: It suggested a basic wage increase of 1.6 percent, but in instances where the resulting wage fell below that of employees in comparable jobs in surrounding towns, the New Marlborough wage would be raised to the low end of the range paid elsewhere.

Selectman Richard Long, who is chair of the HRC, said that using this formula would place the average



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wage increase somewhat above 2 percent. Later in the meeting, Mr. Yohalem asked, "If someone is not performing at a minimum level, should we pay them at the minimum level?" Mr. Long replied, "We need to accept the integrity of the [HR] report as a whole, which looks at positions rather than individuals. If someone is not performing at a minimum level, they should be put on probation."

Moving on, Selectman Tara White noted that the Finance Committee, with the retirement of Prue Spaulding, now had no one to take minutes and was otherwise without needed clerical assistance. The Board asked that her recommendation that the budget reflect the cost of such help be forwarded to the Finance Committee. Similarly, the Board elected to defer to the Finance Committee a request from the Planning Board for a stipend of \$1,550 per member to attend conferences.

**Three Town employees are under contract. Police Chief Graham Frank's three-year contract is not up for renewal until next year. Mari Enoch, as town administrator, and Chuck Loring, as highway superintendent and fire chief, have one-year contracts.** Citing the need for a review of these contracts, Mr. Yohalem said that a selectman needs to sit down with — or, more likely, conduct a phone conference — with Ms. Enoch and Mr. Loring. His offer to do so was accepted by the other two selectmen, with Mr. Long noting that Ms. Enoch routinely puts in more hours than are called for in her job description. Ms. White asked that the findings of the reviews be presented to the Board in written form.

An increase in Town Hall expenses is foreseen to cover such things as regular cleaning, the potential need for gloves and masks, and probable changes in the physical set-up, such as shields between work spaces.

*An increase in Town Hall expenses is foreseen to cover such things as regular cleaning, the potential need for gloves and masks, and probable changes in the physical set-up.*

Ms. Enoch agreed to gather the views of the Town Hall staff as soon as they were able to convene.

Highway Department capital budget requests of \$105,000 for roads and bridges and \$80,000 for gravel to repair dirt roads were referred to the Finance Committee. The Highway Department is also asking for \$75,000 for a new roller.

A 5.7 percent boost in the Police Department budget includes a wage increase for officers and the addition of five hours a week of clerical help. When Ms. Enoch explained that, at present, clerical tasks are handled by Chief Frank, Mr. Long asked, rhetorically, "Do you want the police chief to do it, or do you want him out and about doing real police work?" With the duties of the animal control officer being assumed by Chief Frank, the Board observed that the ACO's salary of \$3,711 would have to be

folded into his contract. The Police Department is also requesting \$50,000 to replace the older of its two cruisers. Mr. Long said he would like to see written justifications for capital expenditures from both the Highway and the Police Departments.

The Board then turned its attention to the Transfer Station, which, even with a transition to dual-stream recycling, will see expenses far outstrip permit income. In the current fiscal year, sale of some 400 permits at \$125 each covered less than two-thirds of the \$80,000 cost to run the Transfer Station. As Mr. Yohalem observed, an increase of \$50 dollars would still leave the operation in the red. "The Transfer Station is a huge bargain," said Mr. Long. "The permit is definitely due for an increase," said Mr. Yohalem, who rued the fact that the Board had not gradually increased the sticker price in past years.

Raising the price, it was pointed out, could exacerbate other problems: people using the Transfer Station without a permit or loading up with the garbage of an unpermitted neighbor. To discourage such ruses, said Ms. Enoch, Monterey requires every resident who does not buy a sticker to provide proof that they employ a private company for curbside pickup.

Finally, Ms. Enoch pointed out a possible discrepancy in the contract with CVE North America, the solar energy company that is installing an array of panels off Knight Road. The contract calls for seeding the area with a ground cover that discourages invasive species. The state, however, recommends a ground cover that encourages pollination. The contract, said Mr. Yohalem, would need to be revisited.

Joe Poindexter

**Southfield**  
Lawn Service

Bill Ruane  
Billruane303@gmail.com  
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**May 4:** The meeting got underway with an explanation by Board of Health Agent Scott McFarland, who had joined the phone-in, of what was required under Governor Charlie Baker's face mask edict, which was to take effect May 6. The order, said Mr. McFarland, requires that a person wear a mask whenever he or she is inside a public building or within six feet of people when outside. He suggested that everyone keep a mask in their car and that disposable masks can be reused, but that masks that can be washed are preferable. Ms. White noted the good work of a town resident who has offered to make masks for Town Hall employees. **Mr. McFarland said that the police chief can issue a warning or fine a person up to \$300 who persistently violates the order.**

Mr. McFarland and Town Clerk Kathy Chretien then offered ideas as to how the Town Caucus could be held outside Town Hall while practicing social distancing. The Board recommended that cars enter at south end of the Town Hall parking lot, exit at the north end, and that two policeman be on duty to help direct traffic. To help lower risk, Mr. McFarland recommended everyone be masked and gloved and that younger people with no pre-existing conditions be recruited to greet voters. He also recommended that voters who are ill be asked not to attend the caucus. Mr. Long volunteered to write up a set of procedures for the caucus in the time for the Board's next meeting.

Next, Mr. Yohalem and Mr. Long, with Ms. White abstaining, voted for an immediate increase in the pay of the assistant treasurer from \$18.93 to \$19.80 per hour, which is at the bottom of the pay range for this position in surrounding towns. The Board then agreed that social distancing would not be possible at a Memorial Day ceremony and voted to suspend all festivities this year.

*The Town has been awarded a DC Heritage Tree Grant of \$5,000, which will be used to trim and cable two heritage elms.*

Following a discussion with Tom Scanlon, the town auditor who had called in to the meeting, the Board decided the bank record reconciliation planned for May will be postponed until August, after a new treasurer has had some time on the job. At that time, the auditors will help get free cash certified by the state, as they did late last year. Ms. Enoch is working to reconcile the books until a new treasurer is hired. The position is being advertised in *The Shoppers Guide* and on the Town website.

The Board then moved on to a request by CVE North America regarding the cover crop surrounding its solar panel installation on Knight Road. Its contract with the Town states the cover crop will be regularly mowed and plantings would deter invasive species. **The company informed the Town it would like to change to a cover crop proposed by the University of Massachusetts that promotes pollination.** The company would plant this new crop in the fall. The building inspector, Town Administrator Mari Enoch reported, saw no problem with the revised plan, nor did the Board.

The Board agreed to postpone discussion of an increase in fees for use of the Transfer Station until it could consult with Solid Waste Coordinator Freddy Friedman on the matter. Similarly, the Board put off a decision on whether to continue to pay for increased speeds to two of the town's three Broadband hotspots (the state is paying for the third) until it has reports on how much they are being used. Terminating a service must be given thirty days advance notice.

Finally, Ms. White said that the Town has been awarded a DC Heritage Tree Grant of \$5,000, which will be used to trim and cable two heritage elms, one located by the New Marlborough Village Green and the other next to the bridge at the head of Norfolk Road. The Board voted unanimously to authorize Ms. Enoch to sign for the grant and thanked the authors, Sharon Fleck, Nate Redman, and tree service contractor John Field for their work in obtaining the grant.

*Sandra Fusco Walker*

**May 7:** The Board held an 11:00 a.m. working session to discuss proposed capital expenses for the police and highway departments for the FY21 budget. In addition to the three selectmen, Police Chief Graham Frank and Highway Superintendent Chuck Loring were on the phone, as was Town Administrator Mari Enoch, Finance Committee Chair Steve Klein, and Finance Committee member Sandra Fusco Walker.

For the Police Department, there was only one item

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on the list, a new cruiser with a quoted price of \$50,000. As Chief Frank explained, the primary cruiser for patrol purposes is currently a 2016 Ford Police Interceptor model with 83,000 miles on it, which is beginning to show signs of wear and tear: problems with the brakes, the radio, and the electrical system. These required that the cruiser be taken out of service for repairs for what he estimated was a total of two to three weeks during the past year.

**The backup cruiser, he said, is a 2012 model with 143,000 miles on it, and it's also showing its age.** As he said, it's a reasonable vehicle to drive but no longer one to rely on for emergency response. If a new cruiser is approved, Chief Frank would propose donating the 2012 cruiser to the Cemetery Commission, where it would replace an even earlier cruiser, which is no longer able to pass inspection. And he would move the 2016 cruiser into a backup role. The selectmen supported the request but asked that it first be presented to the Finance Committee for vetting and approval.

Next up was Highway Superintendent Loring with five capital requests for consideration. The big ticket items included a new ten-wheeler Mack truck and a roller for the Town's dirt roads. He quoted an all-in price of \$245,000 for the truck, which included a \$30,000 trade-in allowance for the existing ten-wheeler. Although this equipment is basically in good shape, he said, it is a 2009 model with 80,000 hard miles on it with a warranty that has expired.

As for the roller, he said he is looking to purchase a used model with 300 to 400 hours on it at a price he expected would be around \$75,000. The existing roller, he said, was purchased used in 2005 and has become unreliable, mainly due to electrical issues. Parts for it, he said are hard to find because it is foreign-made and no longer supported in the United States.

Mr. Loring is also asking for a radio repeater at \$8,000 to extend the range of the Department's internal radios, a camera surveillance system for the Highway Department yard at \$4,000, and an \$8,000 fuel tracking system that could be used to monitor fuel use by both highway and fire department vehicles.

Following extensive questioning, the Board deferred a decision on the Highway capital requests until it hears the Finance Committee's recommendations. **Finance Committee Chair Steve Klein, who was monitoring the discussion by phone, was already voicing skepticism** about the large truck request, raising questions about how it would be financed and whether it is a prudent investment in the current

fiscal environment. "It's an enormous expense, that's a given," he said, "and it would have to be financed, I believe, with debt, requiring a vote [by the Town], and would have a debt service obligation going forward that would need to be covered in a budget that we're already looking at cutting significantly from requested levels."

The next item on the agenda was to discuss renewal of the Internet hotspots set up outside the library, fire station and Town Hall. Initially, the Town signed up for two months of increased bandwidth at the three

hotspot locations through the end of May, paying \$3,000 for two of them, getting the third one for free through August via the Massachusetts Broadband Institute.

According to a usage report, the fire house hotspot is getting twice as much usage as the other two locations combined, a fact attributed to the number of homes and businesses located near the fire station that are likely taking

advantage of the augmented bandwidth. Going forward, as Mr. Yohalem noted, the Board will get another report on usage through May 15 and will have until the end of May to determine whether to renew for July. In the meantime, at Ms. Walker's suggestion, Town Administrator Enoch will check whether service cancellations can be made during the month rather at the end with usage billed on a pro rata basis. Ms. Enoch will also draft a reserve fund request on behalf of the Board for \$3,000 for Finance Committee approval to pay for June.

*Peter Schuyten*

**May 11:** With all three selectmen — plus Moderator Barry Shapiro, Town Administrator Mari Enoch and Administrative Secretary Sharon Fleck — present by phone conference, the Board invited Mr. Shapiro to review the challenges that would be posed by holding the Annual Town Meeting, now scheduled for June 22. Mr. Shapiro, who has been asked to join a state task force to look at best practices throughout the commonwealth, said that many towns are considering holding their meetings outdoors and planning an abbreviated warrant to limit their duration. **The Board agreed to Mr. Shapiro's request that an advisory group be formed to consider the issues and make recommendations on how safely to run a meeting,** appointed Mr. Shapiro as its chairman, and asked that it include the town clerk, members of the Police and Fire Departments, the Board of Health, and a selectman or the town administrator. Ms. White volunteered to represent the selectmen.

The Board reviewed Mr. Long's memo on holding the Town Caucus in the Town Hall parking lot. When

***"It's an enormous expense, that's a given, and it would have to be financed, I believe, with debt."***



they recommended that the speaker system be tested in a dry run, **Mr. Shapiro suggested investigating the use of an FM transmitter**, which would allow those in attendance to hear the proceedings through their car radios. Mr. Long said he would look into it. For the town election itself, the Board it would consult the town clerk and the town attorney on the possibility of mailing ballots to every eligible voter.

While the Board has yet to receive a report on usage at the three hotspots around town, the library, Town Hall, and the fire house, it voted to request that the Finance Committee dip into the Reserve Fund for \$3,024.52, a fee that would keep all three hotspots humming through June.

Without a recommendation from Solid Waste Coordinator Freddy Friedman, the Board voted to delay the sale of Transfer Station stickers to June 1 and then peg the charge at an undiscounted \$150 (the price for the fiscal year ending June 30 was \$125 unless the permit was purchased after August 1). Mr. Yohalem asked Ms. Enoch to notify Ms. Chretien and Transfer Station crew chief Alvin Stalker of the changes.

Mr. Long led a protracted discussion of Town employee pay with a summary of findings of the Human Resources (HR) Committee report. Following interviews with employees and supervisors, the group's consultant established seven pay grades for Town workers. Mr. Long said that increasing what New Marlborough pays its employees to the bottom of the pay range of workers doing similar work in surrounding towns and giving all employees a 1.6 percent raise over present pay would cost the Town an additional \$27,194 in FY21.

A second pay consideration took into account employees performing work beyond that defined in their job descriptions. Mr. Long cited a Highway Department worker with mechanical skills, who does repair work that otherwise would have to be sent to an outside shop. **The HR report recommended a stipend of \$1,800 when the position is filled by an employee with this particular set of skills.** To Ms. White's observation that the amount of the stipend should be determined by the time spent on work outside the job description, Mr. Long recommended the institution of time sheets that distinguished between different levels of work.

Mr. Yohalem once again raised the issue of job performance as an element of pay policy. And Mr. Long, joined by Ms. White, once gain emphasized the need to keep job description and job performance separate, and added that the HR study was recommending raises

based simply on satisfactory job performance.

Focusing on the FY21 budget, Mr. Yohalem expressed concern that setting salaries in the present climate of uncertainty is extremely difficult, noting that the town has been advised that state aid will be reduced and that the school district budget is still an unknown. To bring matters to a conclusion, Mr. Long made a motion to adopt the HR recommendation by approving an increase of wages for employees that would bring them up to the minimums of their positions in nearby towns, then add a 1.6 percent across-the-board increase, and to pay a stipend not to exceed \$1800 for the Highway Department laborer doing mechanic work as determined by the highway superintendent. With Ms. White, a Town employee, abstaining, the motion passed. □

Sandra Fusco Walker

*Following interviews with employees and supervisors, the group's consultant established seven pay grades for Town workers.*

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# VIEW FROM THE BOARD

## The Certainty of Uncertainty

Lately, Board members and the town administrator have been attending virtual meetings of the Finance Committee, the School Finance Committee, and the school superintendent's Roundtable Group. These meetings have, among other things, exposed the many fiscal uncertainties resulting from the pandemic.

Let's explore the two most basic ones.

First is the question of when and where we hold our Annual Town Meeting. The main purpose of the meeting, which is presently scheduled for June 22, is to adopt a budget for the coming fiscal year beginning July 1. The state recently ruled that any town that has failed to adopt a budget by June 30 can essentially operate on its existing budget. Expenses would be limited to this year's expenses, meaning that salaries and expenses could be raised only if a corresponding reduction were found elsewhere. The annual meeting date could be rescheduled. Not the best way to run a town – month to month – but doable.

Where should we hold the meeting? Indoors means the firehouse or in the Mount Everett High School auditorium in Sheffield. Can we fit up to 200 people sitting six feet apart in the firehouse? No. Would Mount Everett be safe? What about entrances, bathrooms, and access to microphones? The logistics of an outdoor meeting could also pose problems: enforcing the six-foot rule, for instance, or hearing the proceedings, even amplified by a microphone, on a windy day.

Second, there is the budget itself. The largest budget item is the school assessment, and that is still up in the air. The Southern Berkshire Regional School District (SBRSD) expects to receive less this coming year from the state. It does not yet know if classes will be held in the Sheffield, Egremont, or New Marlborough school buildings, online, or both. Should the Egremont and New Marlborough schools close? Closing, even

temporarily, could result in a large cost savings.

SBRSD will, at least temporarily, run on a monthly basis. Yet, there are union and transportation contracts that call for increased costs in the coming fiscal year. Can they be renegotiated? Facing a loss of state income and increased costs, the projected school district assessment to our Town may change.

We, too, have uncertainties in our budget. Will real estate taxes be paid on time? How much will excise tax income decrease? It's based on the value of cars, and people are not buying new cars. Will building permits be issued for new homes or additions? We expect state aid to decrease, but by how much? With a potential loss of income, where do we cut expenses?

These two issues — assuring the safety of those attending an annual town meeting and getting a firm grip on the amount of the school district assessment — are the driving forces determining when and where to hold the Annual Town Meeting. We wish we had the answers, but we don't. It's too uncertain. □

Nat Yohalem

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## PLANNING BOARD

### Issue Number One: the Board Itself

The May 13 meeting of the Planning Board convened via phone conferencing at 7:02 p.m. with all four members – Chairman Daniel Doern, Mark Carson, Eric Schaefer, and Bob Hartt – plus Selectman Tara White participating in the call. With no engineers presenting plans, the Board moved directly to approval of minutes of the April 15 meeting, with minor corrections, as well as the notes of the January 18 public hearing on the marijuana bylaw, as compiled by Bob Hartt.

The first new bit of business had to do with the Town Caucus, scheduled for May 19, and the possible candidates for the Planning Board. With Chairman Doern's prompting, Mark Carson said he had submitted his name for the two-year position, and Bob Hartt agreed to have his name written in at the caucus for the five-year position. That would leave three positions still open (since the Planning Board's full complement is five). Eric Schaefer will not be continuing on the Board, as he and his family are moving to the outskirts of Boston. Dan Doern made the sad fact known to his colleagues that he is facing serious medical issues and needs to step down from the Board. He added that he will be happy to rejoin once his health problems are resolved, but that could be awhile.

So the upshot of this discussion on the caucus is that there could be just two members on the Planning Board come late June. Mark Carson asked Tara White how, in that event, the Planning Board would be able to conduct its business without a quorum. Ms. White replied that she would check with town counsel on that. Mr. Doern added that it might be possible for the Board of Selectmen to fill out the Planning Board by appointing new members, as has happened in the past, most recently with the appointment of Bob Hartt in November of last year. (To add another wrinkle to the quickly declining membership of the Planning Board, at the end of this meeting, Mark Carson informed the participants of the

teleconference that he was planning to “throw his hat in the ring” to be named as a nominee for selectman at the Town Caucus. If he is elected, he would then resign his position on the Planning Board, potentially leaving Bob Hartt as the sole member!)

Moving on to another topic, the marijuana bylaw, Chairman Doern said that he hoped to be able to present a statement at the Annual Town Meeting on June 22 — a refresher on what has transpired in New Marlborough vis-à-vis legal cannabis and a brief rundown of the main points of the proposed bylaw. Tara White then informed Mr. Doern that this would be unlikely, since there are so many questions yet to be answered about how the Annual Town Meeting will be staged. She said it is possible that the meeting might be pushed to July, but if the Town is able to go ahead with the June 22 date, the warrant would be limited just to “the money articles.” In this case, consideration of the marijuana bylaw might have to wait until sometime in the fall. Dan Doern took this news in stride, saying, “Well, we’ll stay tuned!”

The meeting wound up quickly after that, with adjournment at 7:50 p.m. □

Larry Burke



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# CAUCUS RESULTS

The 2020 New Marlborough Caucus went off like clockwork, despite seemingly insurmountable obstacles: It couldn't be held indoors and voters were not allowed to congregate. The answer: a drive-in caucus in the Town Hall parking lot with three lines of precisely spaced cars, each of whose occupants was furnished a ballot and a bright yellow voting card to be displayed out car windows. The ballots were collected in a plastic bin, whose top had been specially slotted, as the cars exited the lot. The entire caucus, with a record number of participants, eighty-three, took just an hour and five minutes from start to finish. Here are the vote tabulations. □

Joe Poindexter

Moderator, one year — Barry Shapiro .....	68
Selectman, three years — Mark Carson .....	53
Finance Committee, three years — Steven Klein.....	53
Finance Committee, three years — Robert Miller.....	10
Town Clerk, three years — Katherine Chretien.....	73
Board of Assessors, three years — Freddy Friedman .	30
Tree Warden, one year — Matthew Wright.....	36
Planning Board, five years — Robert Hartt .....	47
Library Trustee, three years — Sally Turner .....	54
Board of Health, three years — Larry Davis III .....	33
Cemetery Commissioner, three years — Tara White..	37



Socially distanced voters



photos by Sandra Fusco Walker

Tara White checks in registered voters.

## Broadband Update



### THE END OF THE BEGINNING

At a well-attended conference call meeting of the Town's Cable Advisory Committee on May 14, Chair Steve Klein delivered some major news: Charter Communications has finally received all pole licenses from Verizon, signifying the end of the make-ready stage of the installation of broadband. Charter trucks will soon appear around town doing what residents have longed to see — stringing cable.

“We are delighted to have reached this point,” said Mr. Klein. “Spectrum (the name under which Charter provides service) is doing a quality control review of all poles and will deliver a wiring plan to us in early June. Stringing the cable will take about nine to ten months from that point, and then we expect that the town will be lit in four quadrants, one at a time.”

Spectrum expects to hold a kick-off meeting with the town's residents in the next few months and to provide subscription information as it gets closer to completing

the project and wiring residences. Residents will be able to select from high speed internet, telephone, and cable or any combination.

Pricing will mirror the same national pricing that Spectrum charges elsewhere, although there may well be some discounted promotional pricing for new subscribers. Mr. Klein noted that current pricing can be found on the Spectrum website. According to the website, pricing for the so-called “triple play” — internet, television, and phone — in western Massachusetts runs between \$100 (for 125 channels of TV) to \$145 (for 200 channels). All three tiers deliver 100 Mbps of broadband.

So, in addition to the return of leaves to trees, residents will now see another welcome sign this summer— fiber-optic cable on poles. A major milestone on a very long and twisting road.

Stay tuned. □

Barry R. Shapiro



# MEMORIAL DAY – A LOOK BACK

The main street of Mill River was mostly quiet on the morning of May 25. With the exception of a five-village drive-by gallantly organized by New Marlborough Fire and Rescue, which included its own vehicles and those from surrounding towns, there was no Memorial Day observance this year — no marching band, no chorus, no presentation of corsages to our veterans, no salute to the fallen. In the face of that absence, I have gone back through my files of photographs from past Memorial Day celebrations, and here is a selection. The years covered are from 2008 through 2018. Some of the young children seen here are now graduating from high school. And some of the older members of our community are no longer with us. Memorial Day is meant to be a reflective time, a time of remembrance, so I hope these photos will serve in some small way to reconnect our readers with the special quality of our annual gathering by the library, and to think of those who are deserving of our nation's thanks. □

Larry Burke



Memorial Day 2020: Fire and Rescue vehicles pass through New Marlborough village.



photos by Larry Burke



## PANDEMIC SCORECARD

Going into the third month of social distancing, New Marlborough residents are settling into a stride more suited to the marathon ahead than the 100-yard dash that some at the head of our national government had originally predicted.

In the summer of 2020, the sound of music will be muted. In addition to the cancellation of seasonal offerings at Tanglewood, Norfolk, and Music Mountain, the board of the New Marlborough Village Association has voted to cancel its slate of Music and More performances. An October 4 Simon Winchester interview with with New York Times Supreme Court columnist Linda Greenhouse is still scheduled, but only virtually — to be streamed to our computers.

The New Marlborough Historical Society has postponed what was to have been a slate of four First Friday programs, including a look back at the many schoolhouses once scattered around town and a somewhat zany Konkapot Boys Film Festival, to 2021.

New Marlborough townspeople, have stepped up their community involvement. To cite just one outstanding example: face masks. As this issue goes to press, Ginny Hyde and Fredrika Wilgren each have sewn and donated hundreds of masks to Town employees and neighbors. Ginny's masks are available free at the Mill Rover General Store.

And not everything is contracting. Travis Brecher's sourdough bread bakery, recently incorporated as Creature Bread. LLC, has, according to Mr. Brecher, "grown during the lockdown." He is now baking 200 to 300 loaves a week and moved his operation to a commercial oven in a separate building on the property.

With many residents limiting their exposure to public food markets, Jackie Bergman's Farm Country Soup is flourishing. And, thanks to the pandemic, she is "finally getting back in touch with what I love doing." That would be the resumption of a newsletter that accompanies her weekly menu of soups. The Memorial Day edition asks that we honor "the earth that ... needs our gratitude and caring stewardship."

Gedney Farm is "restless to re-open," says co-owner Mike Smith. The restaurant hopes to start serving meals with outdoor seating, pending a go-ahead from the state, on June 10. With its wedding business essentially closed down, Gedney's restaurant will this summer be open to the public on Saturdays and maybe Sundays. Surrounded by fifty acres of rolling farmland, the restaurant plans to set up tables in remote corners of the property where diners, says Mr. Smith, can enjoy a unique combination of "an evening meal, open space, and peace of mind."

Meanwhile, The Old Inn, Southfield Store, and Cantina 229, with their takeout businesses helping to meet payroll, await word from the Massachusetts Reopening Advisory Board on when they can resume restaurant activities. □

*Joe Poindexter*





## THE BRIGHT SIDE OF SURREALISM

### A New Show of Ann Getsinger Paintings



*Lullaby of Birdbath*

The times are, indeed, surreal. A gloomy overcast of uncertainty, a narrowing of increasingly untenable choices seems to closing in on us. So, what better time for evidence that surrealism can also be bright and poetic, illuminate oddly charming relationships, challenge us to see not divisions but connections among the disparate things around us? That is the message of a brilliantly colorful show of new paintings by New Marlborough artist Ann Getsinger, scheduled to open June 6 at the Stockbridge Station Gallery. (As it happens, Ann's 2009 painting, the thirty-foot long, ten-part work called "Panoptica," is reproduced in the June issue of *Orion*.)

Ann calls the present show "Imaginarium," a word that she describes as "a mixture of real and surreal and imaginative nature" (but can also summon up the iridescent hues of tropical fish in an aquarium). New Marlborough residents will recognize such local references as Umpachene Falls and the Southfield Store, but most of the images are drawn from Ann's interest in the richness of nature's shapes, colors, and textures: flower blossoms, shells, antlers, whorls of orange peel. One of the oil on linen paintings

depicts an otter, (Ann says it is almost life-size), staring straight at the viewer.

As this issue of the *5 Village News* went to press, the gallery, located just south of Stockbridge village off Route 7, had not settled on a strategy for viewing the show, which will run until July 12. It might limit the number of visitors at any one time to allow for social distancing or it might elect to show the paintings online only. Meanwhile, readers wishing to preview the show will find the paintings reproduced at [stockbridgestationgallery.com](http://stockbridgestationgallery.com). □



*Joe Poindexter Southfield Store*



*Sylvanus*



*Otter*



# NEIGHBORS



One more tribute, this one from **Bradford Wagstaff**, to the long-time New Marlborough resident, who died last month in Cornwall, England.

**Remembering Nick Hardcastle:** Getting Nick to laugh was easy. And we laughed most of the time — frequently when describing a sighting of the imaginary owner of the farm, who we assumed would be selling ice cream or something to a passerby. Or he wanted more rent.

Very little was taken seriously, and we were accustomed to Nick's boys Asa and Evan playing around while we were milking, normally hearing them having fun, but this time they were screaming. We ran out the door to see them both lodged up to their butts in manure that we had temporarily piled in the courtyard while our manure system was down.

One of the highlights of milking cows with Nick was when Jim Leahy, the vet, came to do pregnancy tests. He brought jokes by the dozens to accompany bowel evacuations for the cows to be tested, and then he would give advice on proper husbandry. And of course our wives provided regular treats, serious lunches, and situational comedy.

While we relished much during our milking days, for me, it was the laughter that stood out. Making hay with Nick was exhausting. He never stopped heaving bales, regardless of how sunburned or tired. We'd then laugh at how unfair the baler was when it quit working before we had finished.

We milked forty-eight head until the bank wouldn't lend us any more money to plant corn. That was it for me, but working with a spirit like Nick was a privilege and unforgettable. □

compiled by Barbara Lowman: [deeuell@yahoo.com](mailto:deeuell@yahoo.com)



Brad Wagstaff and Leslie Miller and their border collie, Molly, with Nick in 1983

photos courtesy of Bradford Wagstaff



Nick pours a celebratory toast.

## OUR WILDLIFE NEIGHBORS



photo by Paul Clark

A bobcat with attitude

Wintery temperatures, along with rainy or snowy intervals, held on grudgingly into mid-May, but notwithstanding, our furry and feathered friends started to show up in numbers all over town, as the following reports reveal.

On April 30, **Paul Clark**, who was visited last year by a bobcat at his home in Mill River, wrote, "Here's another cat, a year and a pandemic later – this guy has been terrorizing the chickens and is fearless. **Sam (Mercier, Paul's son-in-law)**, who is rebuilding the creek stone wall by the road, chased him moments before I took the pic. He claimed he got within inches of him. If he'd caught him, I can't imagine a good outcome for Sam..."

One day later, May 1, **Scottie Mills** wrote to say, "**Scott (MacKenzie)** had a family of **red foxes** in his front yard and enjoyed watching the kits play, and then one morning when he went out to check, there was a **bobcat** waiting by the hole. He hasn't seen the foxes since. We are hoping most of them moved to a new location safely. Although, bobcats have to eat too?"



photos by Barry R. Shapiro

A mother red fox and some of her six kits



Did someone mention foxes? On May 6, **Barry Shapiro** had this to say: "So, Marjorie and I are driving down Hickey Hill Road and come



across a **mother fox and at least six kits** trailing her across the road. She stops. They catch up and nurse. She looks at the car and doesn't move until the kits have had a good meal. She then moves on and the kits run off together. Quite an exciting interlude on the way to the post office!"



Breakfast at Liz Goodman's



Exercising after breakfast



Bitsy the Bear Terrier

photos by Liz Goodman

Turning now to a larger mammalian neighbor, on May 1, **Liz Goodman** began what amounts to a war chronicle: "The other night, we had a **bear** visit us. Don was on his way out to bring in the feeders, and he got there just in time to disturb the bear, who was just on the verge of grabbing one of our feeders. We chased him away, or at least tried. He was very stubborn. It was a young bear and the sounds he was making with his irritation at us were hilarious. He was whining and huffing and popping – all warning sounds – but he was all noise and no action! He eventually left when he realized there was no food."



photo by Joe Poindexter

Yet another bear, this one on East Hill Road

And then two days later, May 3: "Hi! Just now (8:00 a.m.) I brought the bird feeders out for the day and our **little dog Bitsy** (all of eight pounds) was barking furiously at something around back of the house. Don went to the bedroom to look and there was the bear looking right at us merely ten feet away. I banged on the door and he fled, at which point Bitsy chased him across the yard and over the fence!"

"We went out to investigate and we saw *two* bears in the woods, outside our fence. The second one was larger. What a sight to see that little dog so fiercely chasing the bear away. I wish I could have captured it on video."

On May 12, Liz sent in photos of one of her bears, snacking at the remains of a bird feeder and then ambling away. And on May 16 the saga resumed: "We continue to strategize our bear problem. He is a stubborn bugger. I now hold off until 9:00 a.m. to put the feeders back out. We left a few

windows open last night and this morning at around 5:30 the dogs started barking, and even ancient Jolie jumped up at the sill. They were freaking out, which is unusual. We have learned to recognize their "bear barking." There was no bear to be seen but, when I let them out, there was no question from their behavior that the bear had been around. So, maybe after our bear visits a few times and finds no food, he will change his route!"

We hope that the bear hasn't given up on Liz and Don's feeders in favor of heading north from Clayton to Southfield, but, on that same day, **Joe Poindexter** reported, "We seem to have acquired a resident bear, who drops by mornings, cleans up around the base of the bird feeder (before I have put it out for the day), ambles around the back of the house, up the driveway, and onto East Hill Road, before disappearing into the woods below Cook's Ledge."



photo by Liz Goodman

Hungry Carolina wren chicks

As for what's been happening with our avian neighbors, **Robin Tost**, like her Clayton neighbor Liz Goodman, sent her story in installments: "May 1: I'll keep an eye out (I always do), but there's been nothing of note. Kind of boring like all the rest of life at this point!"

"May 2: One day later, **rose-breasted grosbeaks**, a **Carolina wren**, and a wild swirling of **tree swallows** over the field. Also **barn swallows** in the barn. No pictures. My camera isn't up to catching them. Hearing that others have had **hummingbirds**, I put out my feeder. Normally, they return and hover (crossly), buzzing outside my window. 'Lady, we're here! Where are you?'"

"May 3: **Oriole** pair today!"

"May 12: My isolation has been broken up by feeders awash in bright color the last couple of days. Seven **orioles!** (four male, three female, all at once), at



least six **rose-breasted grosbeaks** (four male), the usual **goldfinches** in their new spring colors, and an **indigo bunting**, a rarity for me. Still no hummingbirds, but the food's out for when they arrive. Still too cold I think. I take a huge pleasure in my avian neighbors!"

**Liz Goodman**, who, as you have just read, is in a pitched battle with the bears, and whose bird feeders have been much the worse for wear, corroborated Robin's account of the extravagant bird life of Clayton. "May 16: I don't know if this is worth reporting, but the bird activity around our feeders has been spectacular. Last Monday, I saw, at one single feeder filled with sunflower seeds, two male **goldfinches**, a male **grosbeak**, a male **cardinal**, and even a male **bluebird** perching on top of the hook holding the feeder! Quite a display of color. And at our orange feeders we have several pair of **orioles**, and yesterday the **redstarts** appeared. This morning I saw a male **oriole** and a male **redstart** feasting on the oranges at the same time."



An American redstart



A puffed-up indigo bunting

photos by Don Beauchamp

**Sandra Fusco Walker** sent along several gorgeous shots of a male **oriole** at her orange feeder, and a **female oriole** and a **rose-breasted grosbeak** sharing another feeder.

May 16 was also the day that **Larry Burke** glanced out his kitchen window to see a majestic **sandhill crane** strolling slowly through his backyard. Larry's grandchildren were pretty sure they were looking at a small dinosaur, and they were probably not far from the truth! After a leisurely inspection of the yard, this lone crane lifted off gracefully, revealing its impressive wingspan and clacking its strange and distinctive call.

Finally, on May 17, **Don Beauchamp** sent in the following, which, even if he didn't intend it as such, is a beautiful poem, an exaltation of spring in New Marlborough: "**Hummers, orioles, catbirds, grosbeaks** to start with, then **warblers, American redstarts, yellow**

**warblers, common yellowthroats, yellow-rumped warblers, flycatchers. Two eagles at once, big bobcat, a mink? Baby ducks, baby blackbirds, and an indigo bunting today."**

Yes!



Compiled by Larry Burke.

Send your wildlife sightings to him at [lburke2@me.com](mailto:lburke2@me.com)



photo by Sandra Fusco-Walker

A female oriole and an evening grosbeak share a feeder.



photo by Sandra Fusco-Walker

A male Baltimore oriole posing



photo by Larry Burke

A backyard sandhill crane

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## RECIPE OF THE MONTH

This month is another easy recipe, which is not only great to make with kids but has a story behind it - science, math, and history in one delicious package. I am not going to tell the story of Anzac biscuits here; that's your homework for the month. I will give you a head start: ANZAC stands for Australia and New Zealand Army Corps.

While we make these biscuits all year, they are particularly popular around Anzac Day, April 25, which is Australia's equivalent of Memorial Day. Angus, Evie, Digby, and I are currently in Wooli, New South Wales, Australia, where, due to Covid-19, we celebrated Anzac Day a bit differently. We joined thousands of other Aussies out on our driveway at 6:00 a.m. with a candle, recited the Ode (from "For the Fallen"), and listened to the "Last Post" playing on the phone, followed by a minute's silence. We plan to do it again for Memorial Day, May 25.

And, finally, a brief language lesson: For us Aussies, biscuits = cookies, so these are not like the biscuits that you eat with gravy but are more like oatmeal cookies.

Fiona Kerr

### Anzac biscuits

#### Ingredients

7 oz salted butter, chopped  
 1/2 cup golden syrup\*  
 1-1/2 teaspoons bicarbonate of soda  
 2 cups plain flour

2 cups dried coconut  
 2 cups traditional rolled oats  
 1-1/3 cups brown sugar

- Preheat oven to 180C/160C fan-forced. Grease 4 large baking trays and line with baking paper
- Place butter, golden syrup, and 2 tablespoons water in a saucepan over medium-high heat. Cook for 5 minutes or until melted. Bring to the boil. Remove from heat. Stir in bicarbonate of soda. Let stand for 2 minutes to cool slightly.
- Combine flour, coconut, oats, and sugar in a large heat-proof bowl. Make a well in the center. Add butter mixture. Mix well to combine. Roll slightly heaped tablespoons of mixture into balls. Place, 1-1/2" apart on prepared trays. Flatten balls.
- Bake biscuits, 2 trays at a time, swapping position of trays halfway through cooking, for 10 to 12 minutes or until golden and just firm to touch. Cool on trays for 5 minutes. Transfer to a wire rack lined with baking paper to cool completely. Serve.

\* golden syrup can be purchased at Guido's in Great Barrington. Honey, treacle, or molasses can be used as a substitute, but the flavor will be bit different. I wouldn't recommend using maple or corn syrup as they are thinner. Golden syrup goes really well on pikelets (April's recipe).

Note: the recommended cooking time makes a chewy biscuit; adding an extra 2 minutes makes a crunchy biscuit. Everyone has a favorite. I like mine chewy.

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## LAND TRUST NEWS

While everything feels unfamiliar these days, maybe it is only normal that a raffle for an e-bike starting on a snowy day in May in the midst of an international pandemic would somehow make sense. The Land Trust's Pedal It Forward raffle was a huge success, thanks to our community.

Our goal was to help our neighbors in need of food assistance and who are faced with significant financial challenges due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The Land Trust collaborated with Berkshire Bike and Board in Great Barrington to raffle off a Specialized Como e-bike. On Monday, May 4, raffle tickets went on sale and by Wednesday all 1,000 tickets had been sold! Total ticket sales were \$4,590!

All proceeds will go to two area food pantries that are working especially hard to meet the needs of our neighbors: The People's Pantry at St. James Church in Great Barrington and the Sheffield Food Assistance Program at the Old Parish Church in Sheffield.

Finally, we drew a winner for the e-bike who described herself as "a very grateful and excited 65-year-old with bad knees from New Marlborough." She will receive a Como e-bike and a \$100 store credit from Berkshire Bike and Board, plus a customized water bottle from the Southfield Store, a total value of \$3,050.

A huge thank you to all who contributed. Together we have made a difference in a time of adversity. Stay safe and enjoy our hiking trails while maintaining social distance. The fresh air soothes both the spirit and the body.

Martha Bryan



Guest of honor at the raffle drawing, Alex Platt of The Southfield Store, pulls the winning ticket.

## GIVING THE ELDERLY A LIFT

The Southern Berkshire Elderly Transport Corporation, which serves Alford, Egremont, Great Barrington, Monterey, and Sandisfield, as well as New Marlborough, is very pleased to announce that it is back in operation and once again offering to take on your personal errands — shopping, pet supplies,

prescriptions. We also will transport you to any medical appointment that cannot be postponed. Furthermore, we are providing these services at no charge through June 26. Please call (413) 528-4773 for complete details and to schedule!

### Thank You to Our Contributors:

Linda & Maurice Brazie; Peter Goodman; Joe & Debi Wilkinson, honoring the Class of 2020

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## CANDIDATE STATEMENTS

Each year the 5 Village News offers candidates for Town offices the opportunity to submit a statement in support of their candidacy. This year the Covid-19 pandemic was gathering full steam around the March 23 deadline for filing for the caucus ballot. As a result of that major distraction, only five candidates had signed up for the caucus ballot, leaving many positions totally blank. Four of the five candidates have submitted statements, which appear below. Additional nominee statements will be posted on [nm5vn.org](http://nm5vn.org) in mid-June.

### MODERATOR, ONE YEAR:

#### ► BARRY SHAPIRO

It is my honor to submit my candidacy for town moderator, a position I have held with pride since 2015. I take my responsibility of presiding at our town meetings, the oldest form of democracy in the country, very seriously. I endeavor to create a respectful and open atmosphere, where everyone can feel comfortable standing up and making their views heard, and where people can listen, think, and act in the best interests of the town. I have worked hard to understand the best practices to run our meetings in order to fulfill my responsibilities, including attending many meetings of the Massachusetts Moderators Association to discuss ideas with moderators from throughout the commonwealth. In this year of the pandemic, I have also given careful thought to the best way to conduct meetings safely so that our citizens can feel comfortable attending. I look forward to serving the town again. Please reach out to me at (413) 229-3993.

### TOWN CLERK – THREE YEARS:

#### ► KATHERINE CHRETIEN

My name is Katherine Chretien, and I am running for re-election for the position of town clerk. I obtained my first Massachusetts Municipal Clerk Certification in October 2013, and my second certification in September 2017. I also obtained certification through the International Institute of Municipal Clerks as a Certified Municipal

Clerk in October 2017, and I continue to attend classes through the Massachusetts Town City Clerk Association with your support. I am a native of New Marlborough and have lived here all of my life. My family has roots in New Marlborough that go back several generations. Both of my children have graduated from our local schools. I have been dedicated to, and have worked for, our Southern Berkshire community while serving as your town clerk. I thank you for your continued support.

### PLANNING BOARD, FIVE YEARS:

#### ► ROBERT HARTT

I volunteered for an appointment to the New Marlborough Planning Board (PB) last fall when I read in New Marlborough 5 Village News that the chairperson was stepping down and there was already an unfilled position on the PB.

I have always felt that the planning/zoning board is the most important board in any community. As a new resident of Mill River my inclination was to listen and observe before jumping into something like this, but the PB needed members, and I thought I could contribute.

We have been coming to this area for over twenty years. We paid close attention to the cannabis debate that played out over the last few years and attended several of the public meetings. Although not a voter, I was in favor of a moratorium to allow time to develop a protective by-law. I am mindful that the town voted to allow a research facility use (only) and that was by just two votes – suggesting a desire for a conservative approach to protect the interests of the community. As a member of the PB for the last six months, I have advocated a go-slow, incremental approach in developing the final by-law language.

If elected I would like to see the PB address ridge line protection, scenic road protection, night sky protection and the careful balancing of the unique rural character of New Marlborough with appropriate but essential economic development. The first task for the PB is to find



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additional qualified, fair-minded citizens to fill all five seats on the PB so as many different perspectives and interests in the community are represented as possible.

I have been involved in commercial real estate for thirty-five years. My company provides property management, asset management, and investment advisory services to individuals and families. I earned a B.A. from Hope College in Holland, Michigan, and a law degree from Catholic University in Washington, D.C.

#### BOARD OF SELECTMEN, THREE YEARS:

##### ► MARK CARSON

I am Mark Carson and I am running for the Board of Selectmen in New Marlborough. I believe that my years serving on Town committees and boards makes me the best candidate for this office.

For nine years, I served on the Town's Board of Health. I then served on our Finance Committee for four years, where I became familiar with the issues involved in planning the Town's budgets. For the past five years, I have served on our Planning Board and had to work on controversial and complicated issues. That's a total of eighteen years of service to the town, so I know how the town works. I have the time and will devote it to helping everyone in our community.

I have lived in New Marlborough since I was born. My wife and I built our home here thirty years ago and raised our sons (now 24 and 27) in New Marlborough. I own an auto repair shop in town, which I have operated for the past twenty years.

Please vote for me for selectman so that I can continue to work for our town. Questions? My number is 528-4380.

#### FINANCE COMMITTEE, THREE YEARS:

##### ► STEVEN KLEIN

Over the past three years that I have served as a member of the Finance Committee (as chair for the past two), we have introduced important changes designed

to streamline process, provide transparency, develop analytic tools to assess need, and increased the dialogue among Town departments, Town administration, the Board of Selectmen and the voters. I have chosen to run for another term on the Committee because I believe there is much still to be done, particularly as we face the challenges of addressing the financial impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Among the significant steps we have implemented during my tenure are:

- We have automated the budget request, review and approval processes, producing all requests in electronic format, integrating all requests into a master budget worksheet, and allowing the Committee to work both in person and remotely from a single budget worksheet. This has reduced the need for multiple paper copies, allowed for adjustment, correction, and scenario testing all from a single worksheet. Work in this area remains to be done, as we seek to build more robust tools for assessing requests and comparing requested amounts with past years' requests and spending.
- Working closely with Town financial staff and our auditors, we have overseen the adoption of more rigorous financial practices in town, reviewing financial reconciliations on a regular basis to better identify accounting errors and omissions on a timely basis. This practice will allow annual reconciliation to occur on a timelier basis, allowing earlier certification and availability of free cash balances. This work is ongoing.
- The finance committee now reviews and assesses the revenue side of the town's financial status. This has allowed us to consider the impact of Covid-19 on the town's revenues in the coming year and to plan conservatively.

I look forward to continuing to serve New Marlborough as a member of the Finance Committee. □

## BE COUNTED

### *The 2020 Census Wants You!*

If you have already filled out your 2020 Census form, please skip the rest of this brief reminder. If not, however, you are not alone. Many South Country residents have not yet responded.

Does it make any difference? Yes. Federal support of states and regions is calculated on population. The more people, the more dollars. It is in your own self interest — and that of your neighbors — that you be counted. So fill out the form mailed to all U.S. residents in April and mail it back to the Census Bureau. Or if self quarantining has made that more difficult, there is a painless alternative: register by computer. It will take you

about ten minutes, and you won't have to step outside your home to be counted. Here is the recipe:

- Call up [my2020census.gov](http://my2020census.gov) on your search engine.
- Click on "Start Questionnaire."
- Enter the twelve-digit number printed on the Census materials mailed or left with you.
- Answer the questions and hit "Send."

You will doing your community — and yourself — a favor. □

*Joe Poindexter*



# THE LOG

## Police Department (selected entries)

- Apr. 1 5:29 p.m. An officer helps a driver return to the Berkshire Spring Water plant on Norfolk Road after his truck is disabled by a faulty transmission.
- Apr. 4 3:11 p.m. A caller reports that individuals have trucked a dirt bike and an all-terrain vehicle to the Thousand-Acre Swamp boat ramp and are riding them around the area of the dam.
- 4:58 p.m. The Department requests assistance from an environmental police officer after a caller reports a rabid skunk in the vicinity of his Mill River Great Barrington Road residence.
- 8:35 p.m. Following a complaint from a caller who said she heard three gunshots from the woods near her Mill River Great Barrington Road residence, officers arrest two men for unlawful possession of shotguns and ammunition.
- Apr. 8 3:40 p.m. A Canaan Valley Road resident is advised on how to dispose of a dead raccoon on his property.
- Apr. 10 10:11 a.m. A caller alerts the Department to a number of packages that have accumulated untouched for nearly a week next to a mailbox on Hartsville New Marlborough Road.
- 6:26 p.m. National Grid is notified after a caller reports that a tree has brought down wires next to his Canaan Southfield Road residence.
- Apr. 11 10:19 p.m. Assist Sheffield police in the arrest of an inebriated male on charges of assault and battery at a residence on Shunpike Road.
- Apr. 12 1:00 p.m. Assist a driver who has locked himself out of his vehicle in Southfield village, who later reports the theft of car keys and wallet from the vehicle.
- 10:22 p.m. An officer, alerted to a bonfire at a Lumbert Cross Road property, tells the resident to reduce the burn to the size of a camp fire.
- Apr. 13 5:44 a.m. Following a call from a nearby resident, the highway superintendent is alerted to a tree down on County Road.
- 11:30 a.m. Tree on wires on Hartsville New Marlborough Road.
- 1:21 p.m. Tree on wires and blocking traffic on Clayton Mill River Road.
- 4:52 p.m. A vehicle is disabled following an accident on South Sandisfield Road.
- Apr. 14 6:13 p.m. Officer dispatches an injured skunk at a residence on Hayes Hill Road.
- Apr. 17 3:37 p.m. A Mill River resident alerts the Department to the possible need for assistance.
- 7:26 p.m. Officer removes the plates from an uninsured vehicle whose Hartsville owner has continued to drive it a month after being asked to renew.
- Apr. 20 12:17 p.m. A Hartsville resident reports incidences of dead animals being left in her mother's mailbox.
- Apr. 21 9:30 a.m. A caller reports the theft of a backpack from his Hartsville New Marlborough Road residence.
- Apr. 22 4:02 p.m. A caller reports the presence, during the past three weeks, of a drone hovering nighttimes over the village of New Marlborough. (Case solved: it was the planet Venus.)
- 6:06 p.m. National Grid is notified after a caller alerts the Department to a tree down near his Canaan Southfield Road property.
- 10:06 p.m. A caller asks to speak with an officer regarding her options in the issuance of a restraint order.
- Apr. 23 3:18 p.m. A caller reports a black terrier loose on Konkapot Road.
- 4:07 p.m. Tree down on Lumbert Cross Road.
- Apr. 25 2:22 p.m. A caller reports a dog lost while hiking the New Marlboro Preserve.
- Apr. 26 1:26 a.m. A caller reports an attempted break-in to a truck parked at his Mill River Southfield Road residence.
- Apr. 28 6:46 p.m. A caller reports a trespasser looking into the windows of her residence on Hartsville New Marlborough Road.
- Apr. 29 4:47 p.m. A caller complains of a motorist driving erratically and tossing nip-size alcoholic bottles from his vehicle on Main Road.
- Apr. 30 5:45 a.m. A caller requests a check on a suspicious vehicle parked outside his Hartsville business.

*Graham Frank, Chief of Police*



## FIRE AND RESCUE

April 2 12:27 a.m. Stone Manor Drive Medical Call

April 3 10:54 a.m. Hayes Hill Road Medical Call

April 3 12:30 p.m. Mutual Aid to Sandisfield Fire Alarm

April 7 1:05 p.m. East Hill Road Bicycle Crash

April 11 9:30 a.m. Hatchery Road Medical Call

April 13 6:27 p.m. Arroyo Way Fire Alarm

April 13 11:38 p.m. East Hill Road Medical Call

April 18 3:45 p.m. Canaan Southfield Road Medical Call

April 20 8:40 a.m. Mutual Aid to Sandisfield MVA

April 20 9:07 p.m. Hartsville New Marlborough Road Medical Call

April 21 3:55 a.m. Mill River Great Barrington Road Medical Call

*Fire Company President David Smith*

## FOR THE FIRST RESPONDERS, SAFETY FOR ALL

By David Smith

The Coronavirus/Covid-19 pandemic has certainly upended many aspects of our daily lives, not least for the members of New Marlborough Fire and Rescue, which has also had to adapt to the ongoing developments. Be assured, however, that new protocols have been put in place behind the scenes, and when you dial 911, a dedicated corps of firefighters and EMTs is prepared to respond to your call.

First, we have taken steps to increase our vigilance when it comes to cleaning the station and making sure members stay healthy and available to respond to calls. The last thing we need is a member bringing the coronavirus into the station and infecting the membership. As with most households, businesses, and public gathering points, hand sanitizer and disinfectant wipes are now part of daily life at the station. Anytime a member is in the building, all surfaces they have come into contact with are disinfected. On a regular basis, all doorknobs, light switches, radios, chairs, telephones, thermostats, and other surfaces are cleaned with disinfectant.

Members of the First Responders have always thoroughly sanitized the ambulance and equipment after calls. However, EMS has increased the sanitizing of high-touch surface areas such as switches, door handles, grab bars, and driver compartment after each use. Firefighters have also added to their protocols a regular disinfecting of fire trucks — door handles, steering wheels, radios, knobs, and switches, etc. — after every call. Additionally, Fire Chief Chuck Loring has adapted an out-of-service airpack to create a device that allows members to spray disinfectant inside each apparatus after calls, further ensuring we thoroughly clean each piece of equipment after use.

Second, early in the pandemic, we met as a group to review protocols and procedures regarding personal protective equipment and proper use when responding to calls and proper disposal after calls. We changed our protocols to minimize the potential exposure of members, and we are ever more diligent to making sure those in regular use are put into place. As is now part of daily life, we practice social distancing, which is certainly more

challenging in an emergency, but that is what personal protective equipment is for. Masks are available on each fire engine and the ambulance, and members will wear them when responding to a call. Upon arriving at your home, especially in “non-emergency” situations — a malfunctioning alarm, for example — we will also limit the number of responders who contact the homeowner and/or enter the household. If it is a false alarm, perhaps only one member will come to your door, maintain social distancing, and, if necessary, enter your home while wearing personal protective equipment. In the case of medical calls, ambulance personnel will arrive wearing face masks and conduct a brief conversation to ascertain if there is a risk of exposure in the home. If there is a higher risk, added PPE, such as gloves, face shields, and gowns will be worn. Please show your support by wearing a face mask when EMS/Fire/Police respond to your call.

Third, any member who is exhibiting symptoms of illness has been instructed not to report to the fire station or respond to any calls. We have postponed training and meetings, though we are working to begin online fire and EMS training that will continue even after we return to “normal” conditions. The introduction of online training will allow members to pursue coursework on their own time. One further step is that members who have underlying health issues, are in an at-risk category, or have family members at home with underlying conditions or who are in an at-risk category, have stepped back from non-emergency service at this time. That said, one unintended benefit of the Stay-at-Home Advisory we are currently observing is that many more of our members are working at home during the day and thereby available to respond to calls.

At some point, the pandemic will ease, and we will return to regular training and meetings, but realistically, many of the measures we are adopting will become a regular part of our protocols. Please know that you have a dedicated and experienced group of volunteers who will continue to provide high-quality service, no matter what your emergency. □

*David Smith is president of the Fire Company*



## YOUR TURN

NM5VN has established a place for our readers' stories. We encourage you to share your experiences, incidents, or thoughts through this space. Reviewing the rules: Up to 1,000 words, but short and succinct is best; no politics; points of view are welcome but civility is mandatory; editors reserve the right to accept, reject, and edit.

Send your story to Joe Poindexter at [joepoindexter@earthlink.net](mailto:joepoindexter@earthlink.net).

# Getting Everyone Safely to Shore

By Robbi Hartt

Poring through the pages of *The New York Times* used to be a relaxing Sunday morning ritual; lately it has become too much to bear, filled with devastating numbers, heartbreaking personal accounts, the relentless battle to clarify truths and untruths. The stories have an overwhelming depth and weight, like huge sunken oil tankers that are impossible to lift, clean up, and haul away. Those of doctors and nurses, in particular, eat away at the edges of the heart—the strange forced detachment of patients from family members, the trauma of doctors and nurses unable to share even an empathetic facial expression in the last moments of life.

Following the news of 9/11, as a country we felt a collective need to reach out to families of victims, to somehow share the grief and cost. Even communities far from the twin towers responded. My mother organized her women's group in Holland, Michigan, to send hundreds of tulip bulbs to a church in Montclair, New Jersey, where she had taught music after graduating from college and a place hard hit by the attack. We hung flags on windows, fire stations, and overpasses with words of encouragement.

Today, watching one country after another battle the coronavirus, and the ensuing economic downturn, we also feel a collective need to reach out. The difference this time is that we are not able to gather with family or friends, visit those who are sick or grieving, or volunteer in person anywhere. A quick perusal of Maggie's List or Instagram posts suggests that our connections are increasing in myriad ways: frustration with local cell and WiFi service, fear of droplets and need for protection, longing for the warmth of a simple hug. This period of social isolation is in some ways a great equalizer, but in other ways, it is creating even greater separation: between those who have had the virus and those who haven't; those who've experienced the loss of a friend or family member and those who have not; those who have lost the opportunity to work or work free from danger and those who can work from home, still be relatively productive, and collect the same pay.

So, where do we turn for help if we need it — or to offer help if we are able to give it? While there are many organizations designed to offer assistance, the oldest institution for helping, the church, has had surprisingly few requests. "I wish there was more help going on than there is," Southfield church leader Robert Olsen sighs when asked what the church is doing. "We have the means to help people. We need to help people. But where are the people who need help?" Mr. Olsen asks. "All we can do is keep planting the seed, that help is here. Even when we know of a need, it is hard to get people to accept support," he adds. "We're New Englanders, Yankees: self-sufficiency is our motto. And privacy is important; you don't want to tell people your business or ask for help, especially when it comes to financial help, rent assistance, help with bills or groceries."



Although some interventions require professional, ongoing support, the church is a valuable resource for short-term solutions – a few bills paid, meals provided, help with navigating community resources. In what meaningful ways can we address the needs in the community? Given the possibility that the pandemic is going to be with us for a while, what are we all willing to do? How can we find more effective ways of looking out for each other?

“New Marlborough is a microcosm of a macrocosm,” says Mr. Olsen, “with locals, second home owners, retirees, and people in between. We all need each other. If we can figure it out here [how to help each other], it will spread.” We need to start rebuilding the invisible network now, and it’s got to be representative both ways. Perhaps the church can once again serve as the instrument for this work, following its mission of supporting neighbors with love and care and preserving dignity.

Clearly, a spirit of generosity is already evident in our community. One person makes a donation to a local food pantry in response to getting something for free on Maggie’s List, another stops in at her favorite businesses with small donations and words of encouragement, others make a weekly ritual of ordering takeout to keep their favorite restaurants in business. But the system for helping is inefficient. There are already many individual advocates in our community, but what would happen if we all made a special point to be an advocate in a new way during this time? What if we could create a private, dignified clearinghouse for giving and receiving support, a Maggie’s List of needs and resources?

Vince Amlin, author and United Church of Christ minister, wrote recently about a Biblical passage in Acts in which a boat filled with prisoners was buffeted by a storm. The centurion in charge granted mercy to all. He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard and make for land. They were to be followed by those who were unable to swim but could be kept afloat by planks and others pieces of the boat. All were brought safely to land.

Some say we’re all in this boat together during the Covid-19 pandemic, but as this story shows, some of us are better equipped to survive the storm than others. The job ahead of us is to understand the strengths and weaknesses of everyone in the boat — and then make sure that everyone is brought safely to land.



photo by Erika Eigen

The Southfield church



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## MORE THAN BOOKS — A SAFE HAVEN

By Deb O'Brien

What started as a conversation regarding connectivity (or the lack thereof) in rural communities quickly morphed into a chat about the connection of small towns and their libraries serving as safe havens during trying times.

A little background: most of the sparsely inhabited but, area-wise, vast town of New Marlborough has quite poor or simply no internet access. With the Covid-19 crisis forcing the closing of schools and children being schooled remotely, this situation poses huge problems for families especially if they have more than one child needing to connect to the internet. Our Board of Selectmen recently acquired three new hot-spots, one being the town library. Paul Kissman from the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners (MBLC) approached me to find out how things were going with our town's reaction to our suddenly increased connectivity. From there a conference call was set up between Paul and Celeste Bruno from the MBLC and me.

We discussed how the library parking lot is filled with cars lately, pretty much all of the time, with residents and others using our WiFi. People are running extension cords from their vehicles to our outdoor electric outlets, some are setting up lawn chairs in the bed of their pickup trucks; even children are sitting in backseats of cars ostensibly trying to do their school work (and how many are playing games?). The conversation came around to the importance, especially for children, to be able to sit at tables to do their work — how hard it is for our library staff (currently of one!) to sit back and not be able to help. Here's where the conversation took a turn.

Internet connectivity is one topic, but what matters more is the connectivity of my library to the people of my town, the role it serves as its center and the glue that binds so many of us in this far-flung community. Our library (and I think libraries in general) is thought of as a safe haven no matter what world or local events swirl around us. *We are the community's security blanket.* Small rural libraries foster intimate relationships with their patrons, and it is mutual. We share in their life celebrations, we grieve their losses, and so many of us are bound together with them during emotional times. During the unprecedented course of this pandemic, it has been extremely difficult to sit back and watch patrons struggle, be it with children trying to do school work in the backseat of cars, folks wanting print materials or DVDs (no high speed internet means no Netflix, no Amazon, no streaming – period!), or just missing the comfort of coming in for a cup of tea or coffee and chatting.

I want to help my community! Can we set up tables in the backyard (appropriately distanced and supervised) so the children could have a solid surface to write on? Can



drawing by Robin Tosi

we designate separate space in the library so families by appointment can use our rooms for work without coming in contact with each other? The answer to all of these questions, at present, is no!

We have folks who walk by the library and knock on the window to wave to me and tell me how much they miss us; when I'm out walking for exercise, children and adults are shouting Hello and We miss you! It is so frustrating to feel like we are failing our community when folks need us the most.

Just as I hung up from the conference call, the phone rang again. It was a senior citizen who had just driven back from wintering in Florida. The conversation went something like this:

Me: "Hello, New Marlborough Library."

Patron: "Oh Debbie, good, you're there!"

Me: "Sorry, but we are closed to the public."

Patron: "That's okay, I just needed to know you were still there and now everything is right with my world."

Connectivity is so much more than computers, our phones, and all the other devices whose screens consume us. When the world is out of sync, libraries are and will remain the one constant that people can always rely upon for comfort and security. □

*This article first appeared in the MBLC Website Blog*

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- Board of Selectmen:** Every Monday at 6:00 p.m.
- Town Administrator:** Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, 8:30 a.m. - 2:30 p.m.
- Planning Board:** Second and fourth Wednesday at 7:00 p.m.
- Board of Health:** First Tuesday of the month at 7:00 p.m.
- 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
- Building Inspector:** Monday 5:00 - 7:00 p.m.; Thursday 8:00 to 10:00 a.m.
- First Responders:** Meeting/training: First and third Wednesday at 7:00 p.m. at the fire station
- Cultural Council:** Second Thursday at 4:15 p.m at the library
- Post Office: Mill River (413) 229-8582** — if and when it re-opens:  
Window hours: Monday - Friday 11:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.  
Saturday 9:00 - 11:30 a.m.
- Southfield (413) 229-8476**  
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Saturday 9:00 - 12:00 p.m.
- Town Treasurer:** Monday & Tuesday 8:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
- Tax Collector:** Monday 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., Tues and Thurs 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.
- Selectmen's Administrative Secretary:** Monday - Friday 9:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
- Dog and Animal Control Officer:** New Marlborough Police Department 229-8161
- Town Clerk:** 229-8278; 7:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m. weekdays; Saturday by appointment
- Town Hall:** 229-8116
- Police:** Business office: 229-8161
- Library:** 229-6668

## Transfer Station Hours:

- Wednesday: 9:00 a.m.- 1:00 p.m.
  - Saturday: 9:00 a.m.- 3:00 p.m.
  - Sunday: 9:00 a.m.- 1:00 p.m.
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*We welcome advertisements from businesses owned by New Marlborough residents. Other businesses can be listed in the Service Sector (see back page). Questions, rates? Call Barbara Lowman: 229-2369*

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For advertising, contact Barbara Lowman, tel: 229-2369  
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