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IT TAKES A GENERAL STORE (To Make a Village)

By Robbi Hartt

In a recent *New York Times* article noting the demise of local bakeries in France, a distraught villager was quoted as saying, "Without bread, there is no more life.... This is a dead village." This sad commentary brings to mind one of the challenges facing New Marlborough. It takes no time for a new resident to learn that the Mill River General Store is a hub of community information and interactions in town — that it is our bread and life, and that we shouldn't take for granted how much of the richness of our village life we owe to this store.

"People really like the idea of an old country store," notes Scott Cole in his book *General Store*. "In fact, the appeal of the idea becomes even stronger as the reality — actual, surviving stores — becomes increasingly rare." There are many reasons to cling to our general stores — nostalgia for a less frantic, more authentic time, the opportunity to

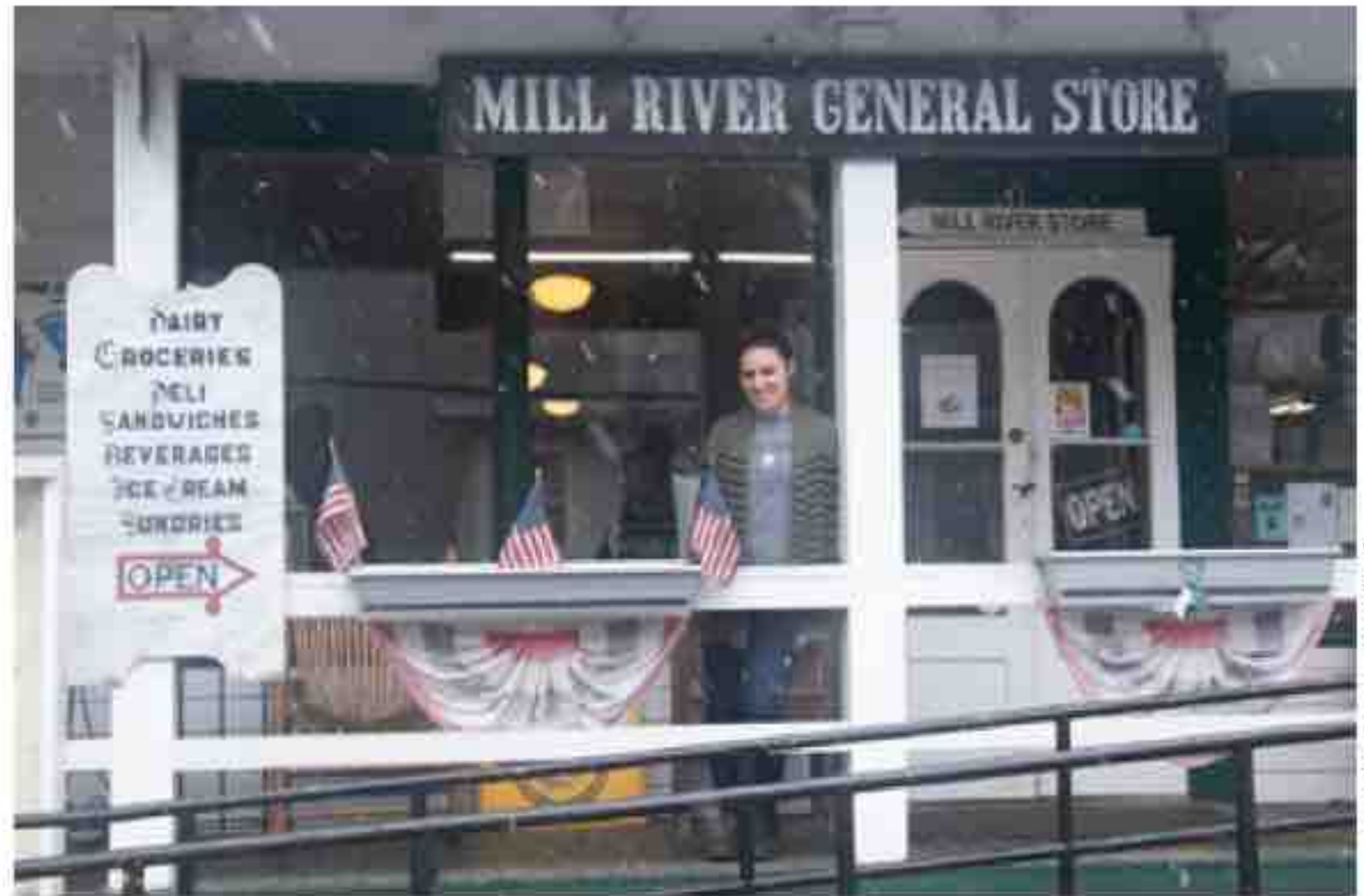


photo by Larry Barke

Amidst a late-November snow flurry, proprietor Jess Holcomb looks out from the porch of the iconic Mill River General Store.

connect with our neighbors in nonintrusive ways, the gift of remembering our shared past and discovering what links us now. Store owners are the longstanding curators of everything we need, people who know not only our names but also our daily routines, who can tell our friends we could use a hand when we're afraid to admit it. Regulars linger within their wood-floored sanctuaries to discuss the news around town and weekenders gain an immediate insider view of the local community.

Built in 1840, the Mill River General Store is the longest continuously operating general store in the Berkshires and one of the last traditional general stores that remains. Dave Herrick, the store's previous owner of twenty-five years, was looking to run his own business when he made a career change in his early fifties. He drew a line on a local map and told his sister, a realtor, "I want to buy something below this line." He recalls stopping by the Mill River store for a six-pack of Coke and being asked, "Do you really need all six of those?" The next day he observed the store routine, watching the owner open up a few minutes before 8:00 in the morning (just after everyone left the village for work elsewhere) and close at 5:00 p.m. (just before Mill River villagers returned home). He knew that if a general store were to thrive, it would need to work around the needs of the village, so after purchasing the store, one of the first things he did was change the hours to 6:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. on weekdays and Saturdays, and 6:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. on Sundays.

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It Takes a General Store, continued

Some years ago, Dave was interviewed by a reporter for Channel 6 in Albany, and when asked why he chose to run a business in such an out-of-the-way spot, he answered, "I'm the 'forgot me' store. I'm here for your wife who just got back from Price Chopper and forgot the ketchup. You're going to pay more because we don't have the volume, but it'll save you a trip back to town." The store has evolved into much more than that over the decades, serving the community in both obvious and unexpected ways. In an age of CVS and Starbucks, it is a magical stop for all ages – with one of the few remaining soft serve ice cream machines, the smell of melted butter on the grill, the charm of candy jars lined up on the counter. You can pick up your mail under the same roof, buy motor oil or jumper cables in a pinch, reserve your copy of the *Sunday Times*, use the ATM, buy locally grown products, or find a networking hub for almost any business.

Adding to its charm are the many long-standing traditions that Dave started, like the Coffee Cup Club – mugs with bird scenes and handwritten names identifying regulars who frequent the store, as well as honoring "our friends who have gone before us." You can also get your hunting and fishing licenses there, bring the deer or bear you shot to the Department of Environmental Protection weigh station, order 911 plates from the Fire Department, and find out about the tradespeople and happenings of the village.

Although he loved the people, after twenty years Dave realized that he no longer loved the hours. He looked for the right buyer for five years. At one point a potential investor explored turning it into a Starbucks. (Can you imagine?) Thanks to Freddy Friedman, Dave found just the right buyer in Jessica Holcomb, and he is quick to point out, "No one wanted to take it on 'til Jess came along." Indeed, she is uniquely suited to this role. Growing up near Boston, where everybody was a neighbor, instilled in her the importance of connection, of people helping each other out. Marrying Todd, who served in the military for fourteen years at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, added another layer of care – southern hospitality combined with motherly love for the forty soldiers they looked out for and hosted for Thanksgiving each year. Finally, moving to the Berkshires, where her dad was a Southfield logger, added ties to the land and community that run so deep you would think she was raised here. But to truly understand what makes Jess special and beloved, you need to witness her energy, compassion, knowledge, and experience in action.

On any given morning, if you park yourself at a table with a cup of coffee, you'll overhear Jess float in and out of the various conversations:

"That's \$11.50, darlin'..."

"Love you — have a good one."

"How's your mom doing?"

"Can you check on the berry and nuts order please?"

"I've become a professional at giving directions!"

"No, thank YOU!"

"That's four soft eggs, pepper jack, no bread, bacon on that breakfast sandwich..."

"Hey, Franny, you've got a package in the window!"

Most important of all is the community she builds. James Love explains, "People come here for more than food and groceries. Men come here for care and comfort, women come here for support and friendship." This care extends to all. "Every cog in the wheel is important," according to Jess. "We need to look out for everyone – customers, contractors, vendors, the local farmer, beekeeper, bread maker, even competitors. We all help each other."

While many customers panicked a few weeks ago, thinking the store might be closing, there was an audible sigh of relief when they saw ladders leaning against the building and roofing materials replacing the worn tarp. This doesn't mean the Mill River Store's customers can stop worrying. In an age when statistically only one third of all new retail businesses in our country survives for ten years or more, general stores work even harder to keep their doors open. Some make it, Cole notes, but not without challenges and obstacles. To keep them going "takes generations of individual neighbors and customers who are devoted and loyal... it takes a community that simply cannot — and will not — see itself without its general store."

Locals considering the long-term viability of the Mill River Store offer a variety of suggestions: For starters, before dickering over prices, think about the cost of no longer having all the convenience and variety the store offers. Take advantage of the home-cooked, locally sourced food and catering services, stop in for good wine and craft beer. Even if you only come to New Marlborough on the weekends, become a regular customer. Do whatever it takes as a community to work collectively to save this historic building and vital business.

When asked how she keeps going with all of the challenges of storekeeping, Jess is quick to respond, "This is the work I want to do because I want to serve this community." As Peter Schuyten put it, "I can't imagine this town without the store — I really can't. Where would I get a hug on a bad day? Maybe the sign should read 'Ammo - Worms - Hugs.'" □



NMPD: BEYOND THE POLICE DEPARTMENT LOG

By Joe Poindexter

There's more to keeping the peace in New Marlborough than rounding up stray cows.

A recent November morning ride in the passenger seat of 2518 (the Berkshire County dispatch office ID for the newer of the Town's cruisers) revealed the rich mosaic of policing New Marlborough. On a patrol that went from Town Hall to New Marlborough village, then through Southfield to Clayton and back to Mill River, Police Chief Graham Frank, with a 5 Village News reporter aboard, passed by a series of locations with police blotter history:

the home where Chief Frank persuaded a drug addict threatening suicide to get help, the residence of a major heroin dealer, a cornfield where an officer apprehended trespassers in possession of a high-capacity Glock pistol and an AK-47, neither of them properly permitted.

Those two weapons were confiscated and are now under lock and key with about a dozen other confiscated firearms. But evidence storage is inadequate, said the chief, so the Department has purchased a safe large enough to secure the arsenal. Heavy and bulky, its deployment awaits a move into the Department office in Town Hall.

Not all police work in town, of course, involves high crime or high-caliber weaponry. A ride in the cruiser tends to be down tempo. There's nothing like a police car in the rear-view mirror to persuade the driver ahead of a cruiser to adopt a conservative estimate of the speed limit. On this particular patrol, we eventually arrived at the intersection of South Sandisfield and Idle Hour Roads, where a homeowner had reported that her mailbox had been knocked down. The chief spotted a gouge in the post holding three boxes and the imprint of a tread — “probably a Cooper tire,” he said — grazing the post. He speculated that it had been clipped by a passing snowplow but then questioned why the vehicle appeared to be passing on the wrong side of the road. Further investigation required.

After a brief chat with the owner of the mailbox, the chief proceeded to Clayton Four Corners, where he pointed out a stop sign pock-marked with bullet holes, one of a number in town that have been targeted. Along the way, he discussed the ebb and flow of drug abuse. “Things are pretty calm right now,” he said, but there are periods of more frequent incidences of overdose. Typically, a police officer will be the first to show up at the



Police Chief Graham Frank inspects a toppled mailbox.
photo by Joe Poindexter

scene of an overdose. If the victim is without a pulse, the officer will perform CPR while awaiting the arrival of a paramedic, who can administer the opioid-blocking medication, naloxone. (naloxone needs to be stored at room temperature, so the Police Department will not carry its own until it is able to garage the cruiser in a heated space.)

Abuse of alcohol also occasions police intervention. Chief Frank cites calls involving what he terms a “domestic,” where the parties involved can be close “to getting into fights with serious

bodily injury.” The changing seasons and holidays are times — of elevated stress, the chief hypothesizes — when the Department is on the alert for incidents fueled by alcohol.

Seven years ago, Graham Frank was working part-time for Scott Farrell, his predecessor as chief of the New Marlborough Police Department. At the time, police were trying to track down a serial arsonist setting fires throughout South County — among them a barn on New Marlborough Hill Road set ablaze, twice. When the driver of a white Chevrolet van was noticed near the location of two fires in early 2012, a task force, including Officer Frank, was organized to shadow the van in unmarked cars. Within two months, it had gathered sufficient evidence to arrest the driver, a Chicopee deliveryman, who confessed to multiple counts of arson, larceny, and breaking and entering. Based on his work on the case, Officer Frank was hired full-time in March 2012 and appointed chief following Mr. Farrell's retirement in 2013.

Over the years since then, Chief Frank has been faced with what he calls a continuous “learning curve,” staying abreast of legal procedures, training, budgeting, and hiring. The department has expanded to one additional full-time officer and five part timers, each of whom handles four or five eight-hour shifts a month, enabling an expansion of coverage from 8:00 a.m. to midnight. To those commuters who have learned that they can speed with impunity earlier in the day, fair warning — Chief Frank is working on a plan to get patrols on New Marlborough's roads as early as 6:00 a.m.

Meanwhile, in addition to everything else, there will doubtless be a confused cow or two to round up. Not every police call in New Marlborough involves a bad guy. □

Town Business Is Your Business BOARD OF SELECTMEN



October 21: With Tara White and Nat Yohalem in attendance, the Board got underway with the consideration of pole permits on Knight and Mill River Great Barrington Roads. Mike Connelly, a senior electrical designer with National Grid, explained that electrical output from the solar array being installed off Knight Road will require heavier cable than the one presently in place. The weight of the cable, said Mr. Connelly, should be supported at least every 200 feet. Four spans on Mill River Great Barrington Road and two on Knight Road exceed this length and so will require mid-span poles.

Highway Superintendent Chuck Loring, in attendance, noted that a broadband make-ready contractor had haphazardly installed some new utility poles too close to the road and, in one case, right in the center of a drainage swale. "We can't have that," he said. In response, Mr. Yohalem asked that pole permits be contingent on an approval from Mr. Loring as to their placement. Mr. Connelly concurred and asked Mr. Loring to supply him with a list of badly positioned broadband poles so that he could address that problem as well. With that Ms. White and Mr. Yohalem signed the pole permits.

Planning Board Chair Peter Tiso then came forward to discuss an amendment to the Town's protective bylaws that would allow the Special Permit Granting Authority (i.e. the Board of Selectmen) to hire "professional and technical consultants" where needed to help sort out the ramifications of a permit request. The cost of the consultant would be borne by the applicant. Mr. Tiso, pointing out that this provision is already written into the solar permitting bylaw, argued for a bylaw that would extend it to all special permits. After a brief how-many-angels-can-dance-on-the-head-

of-a-pin deliberation as to whether interest or just principal of any overpayment on an advance to the consultant should be returned to the applicant (the decision: principal and interest), the Board voted to endorse the prospective new bylaw. (Like all new bylaws and bylaw amendments, the measure will require a two-thirds vote at a town meeting.)

In response to a suggestion from Town Administrator Mari Enoch that a number of bylaw changes might be piggy-backed onto this one, Dan Doern, a member of the Planning Board who was present at the meeting, said that "there is quite a bit of clean-up the Planning Board intends to tackle over the next two years." The selectmen agreed that the Planning Board should proceed at a deliberate pace.

Mr. Tiso moved on to the other item on his agenda: his letter of resignation from the Planning Board. Travel, Mr. Tiso explained, will take him away from New Marlborough for an extended period, and, given the open-ended nature of his plans, he felt that resigning rather than suspending his chairmanship was the right thing to do. Ms. White and Mr. Yohalem expressed appreciation for the skills he brought to the leadership of the Planning Board and thanked him for his service to the town. Then they reluctantly accepted his letter of resignation, effective October 24.

Next up: money issues with the two contractors slated for solar installations in town. Mr. Yohalem said that he had reached agreement with Alex Fox on a performance guarantee for the Knight Road project, but that Mr. Fox's French parent company, Cap Verte Energie, had returned the contract with added language, which now must be reviewed before being returned. "We're making progress, but it's slow," noted Mr. Yohalem. That cannot be said of the attempt to reach a

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PILOT (Payment in Lieu of Taxes) agreement with Park Avenue Solar, the contractor planning an installation off Mill River Southfield Road. "I've heard nothing," said Mr. Yohalem, in regard to a proposal sent more than two weeks ago. His next step, he said, would be to email Park Avenue that the Town's tax assessor would be informing it of its obligation under ordinary property taxes.

Recalling the twenty-hour blackout that hit New Marlborough the previous Wednesday evening, Mr. Yohalem expressed his pride in Town employees and volunteers who turned out to help in ways great and small: Ms. Enoch and Town Clerk Kathy Chretien writing out the Board of Selectmen meeting agenda by hand so that it could be posted on time; Police Chief Graham Frank and Officer John Mullen patrolling all night to assist with road hazards; ditto Superintendent Loring and a member of his Highway Department and members of New Marlborough Fire and Rescue. The library remained open after hours. "It's what makes New Marlborough the great town it is," said Mr. Yohalem.

Administrative Secretary Sharon Fleck, noting that LePrevost Heating and Cooling had successfully addressed a heating problem in Town Hall that morning, asked that the company be put on call for possible future problems. The Board acceded, while also requesting that Building Inspector Owen Wright be consulted on any changes in thermostat settings.

The meeting's final bit of business was a report from Ms. White on the so-called Eight Town Consolidation Committee, comprised of representatives from the five Southern Berkshire Regional School District towns and the three Berkshire Hills towns, plus a school committee member from each District and the two superintendents. According to Ms. White, the school consolidation committee, which last met October 15, is

now focused on pinning down the financial implications of consolidation. It plans to hire a facilitator, using a state grant, to help it understand how to move forward.

Mr. Yohalem, expressing frustration with the process, said, "You don't need a consultant to see if the high schools can be consolidated for less than \$50 million" (the estimated cost of rehabilitating Monument Mountain High School). His point: if high school classes could not be combined at Mount Everett, there was no point in dragging out the debate over years of committee meetings. Ms. White responded that every element of the consolidation decision needed to undergo a deliberative process. "We're making progress," she said. "So far, no one has gotten mad and walked out. We're doing well." In the end, Mr. Yohalem conceded, "I'm impatient." The committee's next meeting is scheduled for November 19.

After the selectmen signed business licenses for Woodruff Mountain Landscaping and The Farm New Marlborough, the meeting, lasting a tidy hour and fifteen minutes, was adjourned.

Joe Poindexter

October 28: The meeting was called to order at 6:01 p.m., and for the first order of business, the Board, with all three members present, met with Vincent Sandull of Sisson Hill Road to discuss emergency tree cutting.

According to Mr. Sandull, Nelson Tree Service, which performs storm-related line clearance work for National Grid, left cut-up debris in the drainage ditches along the sides of his driveway during a major storm two weeks ago. When he asked the workers to remove it, they refused, saying it wasn't their job and that the town would come by later and take care of it, "which I was certain you wouldn't do," he remarked to the selectmen. So, he spent the next two and a half hours doing it himself, leaving two piles of branches and

Highway Superintendent Chuck Loring noted that a broadband make-ready contractor had haphazardly installed some new utility poles too close to the road and, in one case, right in the center of a drainage swale. "We can't have that," he said.



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other debris out by the road, which he, he added, are still there. Then later, at the suggestion of Tree Warden Nate Redman, he decided to bring it to the Board's attention.

Chairman Yohalem started to respond that the Board would write a letter to National Grid, but was interrupted by Selectman White, who informed him that Emergency Management Director Ed Harvey is setting up a meeting with National Grid and Verizon, to include the Town's Police, Fire and Highway Departments, to go over storm-related issues, and that she would be there as well and would raise Mr. Sandull's issue with the utility. "Our idea for the meeting," she said, "is to bring those officials in front of us and be able to go over everything that went wrong with the storm and how it can be corrected," to which Mr. Yohalem added, "Yes, and I think the bottom line here is if you cut it down, you pick it up, period."

Then it was Selectman Long's turn, with an **update on the Town's efforts to participate – and benefit from – the state's Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness, (MVP) program.** As he explained, there are two parts to it: First, the town is joining with Sheffield and Sandisfield in applying for a regional Action Grant from the state to study the vulnerability of the Town's dirt roads to climate change. In return, he said, the Town has to commit to an in-kind contribution of approximately \$6,200 worth of hours assisting in the study.

As for the second part, **the Town is applying for an MVP planning grant worth approximately \$20,000 for an overall study of the town's vulnerability to climate change.** He said most of the work on the application has already been completed pro bono by an outside consultant and that the Town only needs to appoint a project manager and point of contact for the effort, and provide letters of support from the Board, the Highway Department, and the town administrator. To

move all this forward, the Board signed letters of support for both the Action Grant and the planning grant, and appointed Town Administrator Enoch to be the point of contact for both.

The Town's efforts to sell its surplus grader hit a snag recently. According to Ms. Enoch, the Town decided to use an online auction in selling the grader to reach a broader group of bidders, with the auction taking place last week. When it was over, she said, the Town, much to its delight, found it had received a high bid of \$50,000 for its twenty-six-year-old grader. Unfortunately, it was not to be. The bid, it turned out, was in error, the result of a typo on the bidder's part; he inadvertently added an extra zero to his bid. So, after consulting with town counsel and Highway Superintendent Loring, the Board decided to void the auction, and will rebid the grader – again using the on-line auction service.

The Board voted to approve a request from the state Attorney General's office for a thirty-day extension of its review of bylaws passed by the Town's voters at this year's annual meeting. This is the second such extension the Town has granted. The original deadline was August 27, but the AG's office asked to extend it until the end of October. The latest extension expires November 25.

The Board also approved and signed a performance guarantee from French parent company Cap Vert Energie covering its CVE subsidiary's Knight Road solar project. After waiting months for a response, Mr. Yohalem said he was "very pleased to say that it arrived today," and that after reviewing it, he said it was fine and that it addresses all the issues set forth in the special permit. This includes the requirement for vegetative screening, the maintenance of a twenty-five-foot setback, the permitted hours of construction, as well as power outages and any damage to Knight Road caused by construction vehicles. Most importantly, he

Ms. White and Mr. Yohalem expressed appreciation for the skills he [Peter Tiso] brought to the leadership of the Planning Board and thanked him for his service to the town.



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said the agreement concludes by saying that if CVE fails to perform on any of its obligations under the special permit, the parent company “will indemnify the Town and hold it harmless in the amount of the cost of curing the breach.”

And with that, Mr. Yohalem made a motion for the Board to approve and sign the guarantee, effective today, which it did, with Mr. Long commenting as he signed the document, “It’ll be nice not to see that on the agenda again.”

In a related matter, under town administrator updates, Ms. Enoch said CVE is requesting some minor revisions to the special permit. These include identifying a temporary site for parking vehicles and construction equipment during the build out and temporarily shifting the end of the access road where it meets Knight Road because of a utility pole and tree that are there, making it difficult for vehicles to turn into the access road. She said CVE also wants to clarify the timing for planting the vegetative screening to set it for either the spring or fall after construction of the field is completed.

Ms. Enoch said town counsel advises that all three items will need to be addressed at a special hearing, and that hearing will be held during the regular Board of Selectmen’s meeting on Monday, November 18, starting at 6:15 p.m. She said abutters are being notified by certified mail and an ad will be placed in The Berkshire Record to run for two weeks prior to the hearing.

As for the Town’s other commercial solar project to be located just off Mill River Southfield Road across from the Highway garage, Mr. Yohalem said he still hasn’t received a formal response back from Park Avenue Solar regarding the Board’s PILOT, or Payment in Lieu of Taxes proposal, but that he did hear back from company official Elaine Charlebois, who indicated in an email that the company is currently discussing it internally

and hopes to get back to the Town within two weeks.

Separately, Ms. Enoch mentioned that the paving of the Highway garage yard has been completed, with Mr. Yohalem estimating that it came in under budget by as much as \$25,000, although the final invoices haven’t been compiled yet.


Under selectmen’s updates, Ms. White said she received an email from Umpachene Falls Park Commissioner Robert Twing saying the company that will be replacing the Umpachene Falls Road bridge is asking if it can stage its project materials in the parking lot there. But as Ms. Enoch pointed out, there’s very limited parking there to begin with and the bridge project is slated to take up to two years, raising concerns as to how this will impact use of the park, especially during summer

months. Mr. Yohalem went so far as to wonder out loud whether the park will even be able to remain open during construction, “as there’s really no other place to park down there,” he said. Ms. White said she will get back to Mr. Twing and ask him to get further details from the company on how large an area will be required for the staging, and whether worker and or construction vehicles will need to be parked there as well. And finally, the Board wants to know whether the company will indemnify the Town against damage to the park. The Board then spent the next thirty-five minutes, or nearly 40 percent of its time tonight, reviewing the minutes from three previous meetings, and making numerous corrections to misstatements and other inaccuracies.

And finally, under administrative business, Mr. Yohalem reported that this year’s Massachusetts Cultural Council grant to the Town is for \$4,800, a \$300 increase over last year.


November 4: A short meeting tonight, just thirty minutes, with only one new item on the agenda, a

Recalling the twenty-hour blackout that hit New Marlborough the previous Wednesday evening, Mr. Yohalem expressed his pride in Town employees and volunteers who turned out to help in ways great and small.




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discussion of a drainage problem at Les Trois Emme Winery. Meeting with the Board to discuss the issue was Wayne Eline, a co-owner with his wife Mary Jane of the winery. As he explained it, rainwater from Knight Road has been draining onto the winery's property, flowing across the parking area and onto the patio where it keeps eating away at the sand under the pavers there.

He said it's only been in the past two-and-half or so years that this has been a problem, and it wasn't until last March that he realized how bad a problem it was, and that he'd have to do something about it. That was when it rained while the ground was still frozen and the runoff, according to Mr. Eline, came rushing across the parking lot and into the winery's warehouse. "Oh my God," he remembers thinking, "I can't believe this. I've got an inch and a half of rainwater in there running around."

Mr. Eline said he was in communication with Highway Superintendent Loring about the problem over the summer, and now he's turning to the Board for help. "That's what I'm here for, to get some help with this," he stated.

Unfortunately, that was not to be. According to Chairman Yohalem, who's also been talking with

Superintendent Loring about the issue, it's really not the Town's problem. As he explained to Mr. Eline, if the Town had altered the road in some way, say by recrowning it or sloping it one way or the other, then it would be the Town's responsibility to cure the problem. But no major work has been done to that road in thirty years, he said, except some patching to fill in potholes. "And frankly, if we did the work for you, we'd have

to do it for everybody who had a similar problem.

The best the Town can offer the Elines is Superintendent Loring's expertise on how to fix the problem. "What Chuck is willing to do and wants to do," Mr. Yohalem said, "is to sit down with you and show you what should be done. He can also recommend contractors who are

qualified to do the work," he continued, "review estimates to make sure they're reasonable and check on the work once it's completed to make sure it was done properly."

"It's unfortunate that it happened," Mr. Yohalem said, "and unfortunate that we can't help in any other way." Mr. Eline thanked the Board for at least listening to him.

Under town administrator updates, **Ms. Enoch reported that Solomon Joffe of New Marlborough Village recently received Firefighter I and II certification after completing the Call/Volunteer Recruit Firefighter Training Program at the Massachusetts Firefighting Academy in Springfield.** She said he attended classes and trainings two evenings a week and on Saturdays and some Sundays for four months for a total of two hundred and forty hours. (See story, "Solomon Joffe, Firefighter," on page 22 for details.)

And finally, the Board approved the October 9 minutes and adjourned.

Peter Schuyten

November 8: On October 16 and 17, New Marlborough muddled through twenty hours that sent us back to the 19th century. No heat, no light, no telephone. Time stopped — at least as told by electric clocks — as power and telephone lines were torn down by falling limbs and trees. For most residents, the outage, as high winds and heavy rains roared through Berkshire County, was little more than an irritating reminder of how thoroughly we have become electricity reliant. But for a few the lack of warmth and electrically operated machinery posed a serious health risk.

This was the catalyst of a **special, Friday morning Board of Selectmen meeting at the firehouse, intended to review what went wrong and how to prepare for future emergencies.** Perhaps as a sign of how far we have to go in improving preparedness, neither of the utilities invited to the meeting showed up. Verizon had simply

According to Ms. White, the school consolidation committee, which last met October 15, is now focused on pinning down the financial implications of consolidation.

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failed to respond to a request to send a representative, and miscommunication with National Grid resulted in its absence. The meeting, nevertheless, provided a productive forum for what the town itself could do to be better prepared.

Tara White called the meeting to order (Chairman Nat Yohalem was absent) and immediately turned it over to Emergency Management Director Ed Harvey. **Mr. Harvey said that within a week of the outage it became apparent that the biggest challenges are 1) information flow, and 2) an up-to-date list of people who need to be checked on.**

The ensuing discussion focused first on the role of the utilities, both in preventive maintenance and in quicker, more robust response once an emergency occurs. **There was general agreement with Mr. Harvey's contention that Verizon's interest in its land-line business is at a low ebb.** He said he would follow up with the company on what he believed was a company plan to install a generator at a substation that would keep telephone lines open during an outage.

National Grid's slow response to downed lines was related, in part, to the fact that it had understandably prioritized larger communities. "National Grid will go to where it can restore power to 3,500 people before it goes to a community with thirty-five," said Mr. Harvey. Highway Superintendent Chuck Loring and Police Chief Graham Frank, both present at the meeting, pointed out that Verizon and National Grid could do a better job of trimming trees near power lines — and recommended that the town's tree warden help determine trim-back margins of safety.

New Marlborough, too, can improve its emergency preparedness. As discussion at the meeting made clear, the October storm laid bare a number of shortcomings:

- At present, the only public building with a generator to fire up a furnace is the firehouse (and, as it happened, it was locked on the night of the storm). The Town Library was said to be installing a generator.

- The town's reverse 911 communication system was useless without telephone service.
- Emergency Management has a list of about three dozen residents who might be at risk during an electrical outage, but, again, there was no way to reach them by telephone.

Given the possibilities for bad outcomes, it was fortunate that New Marlborough residents survived the storm

without serious consequences. In at least one instance reported at the meeting, National Grid sent a representative to the home of customer at risk. For townspeople who may not be aware that the company keeps such a list, Ms. White suggested that a notice to this effect be included in the next tax bill.

To a question from Selectman Richard Long as to who maintains the Town's list of at-risk residents, Mr. Harvey responded, "Prue [Spaulding] and me." Mrs. Spaulding, also present at the meeting, said that as chair of the Council on Aging she had tried, without success, to recruit a corps of volunteers, who would be in touch with vulnerable residents. She said that it might be useful for at-risk homes to have available a sign or a glow stick that could be put in a window to alert a passing highway worker or police officer to the need for help. Ms. White noted that family members often filled this role. Others present at the meeting suggested that a neighborhood watch program be encouraged, and Mr. Harvey said that Emergency Management could provide basic first-aid training for such volunteers.

Mr. Yohalem went so far as to wonder out loud whether the park will even be able to remain open during construction "as there's really no other place to park down there," he said.


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In closing, Mr. Harvey said he is pursuing a grant and working with the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission to develop an emergency mitigation plan. One project: the creation of a map, both printed and digital, showing the locations of all residents who might be at risk in storm-related emergencies. Finally, he said he would like to form "an emergency management committee," made up of representatives from the Police, Highway, and Fire Departments, the business community, the Council on Aging, and the School Committee.

New Marlborough, it was clear, has a good ways to go to ready itself for the next big weather event.

November 14: A joint meeting of the Board of Selectmen and the Finance Committee to coordinate planning for the FY21 budget,

with all three selectmen being joined by the Finance Committee Chairman Steve Klein and members, Vice Chair Michele Shalaby, Barbara Marchione, Robert Miller, Douglas Newman, and Sandra Walker, began at 5:00 p.m. The meeting was immediately turned over to Tom Scanlon of the Deerfield accounting firm of Scanlon Associates, who had been invited to help the Town develop sound budgeting procedures.

He opened the discussion by asking whether the Town wanted a full-bore audit of its books or a less formal consultation. The latter would result in a certification of Free Cash and the development of so-called "agreed-upon procedures," a list of practices intended to produce stable, error-free budgeting and bookkeeping. Mr. Scanlon said that even though the last formal audit of New Marlborough's books was completed in June 2013, he saw no need for another audit unless the Town was going into the bond market or applying for grant money totaling \$750,000 or more. The Town is, at present, doing neither.

Members of the Finance Committee then debated the wisdom of an audit, a much more expensive undertaking

than a consultancy, with Ms. Marchione recommending a three-consecutive-year audit to prepare the Town for a possible need to go into the bond market or a large-scale grant application. Mr. Klein opted for a consultancy that would help close the books on the present fiscal year and then identify good practices for future budgeting. "Once we get a report, we can see what that tells us," said Mr. Klein. "And see if it raises any red flags," Ms. Marchione conceded.

Ms. Shalaby supported the need for a consultancy. "Following the 2013 audit," she said "we were given guidelines on procedures, but over the past six years we haven't gotten there. So I think we need some guidance as to how to get there. How do we establish procedures that are more sustainable?"

To nudge the process forward, Mr. Klein proposed a motion that the Finance Committee recommend that the Town enter into a consulting and an agreed-upon procedures engagement with Scanlon Associates, the first priority being the certification of Free Cash, followed by the recommendation of sustainable budget procedures. The motion was seconded and passed. Mr. Scanlon excused himself and departed.

At around 5:50 p.m., the floor was turned over to Mr. Klein, who described his preferred recipe for assembling the FY21 budget. He noted that he would like to continue a practice established last year of furnishing all departments with an Excel spread sheet on which to formulate budget requests. He plans to ask that it show not only last year's expenditures but also the amounts budgeted.

His second recommendation was the establishment of personal relationships between Town officials and department heads during the budget creation process. "I would like to propose that we interact more directly with the major departments in town," he said. He plans to call for volunteers to be assigned to each of them — the Police and Highway Departments, the Transfer Station,

There was general agreement with Mr. Harvey's contention that Verizon's interest in its land-line business is at a low ebb.



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the Town Hall staff, and even the School District.

He proceeded to a run-down of key scheduling deadlines:

- January 15, completion of capacity analysis;
- January 15, distribution of budget forms to department heads;
- February 15, budget requests returned to the Finance Committee.

Mr. Klein then zeroed in on the issue of compensation. "Historically, it has been postponed to the end of the process," he said. "But this gives it unnecessarily short shrift." Instead compensation will be included in the total budget request submitted in mid-February and not left as a separate consideration to be broached after the capital budget has been considered.

To get things started, the Finance Committee will request that the Board of Selectmen provide a recommendation, based on capacity, for an average percentage increase for all Town employees. Department heads would be permitted to vary the amounts awarded, based on individual need and contribution, and on guidance from a human resources consultant. The one exception: "Nobody submits a recommendation for their own compensation — that has to be determined by the Board of Selectmen," said Mr. Klein. "In the end we will have [a compensation package] that is the result of an orderly process and that we can feel good about."

The Finance chairman then moved on to the formation of a capital budget and recommended that a committee be formed, comprising a member of the Board of Selectmen, the Finance Committee, and Town Administrator Mari Enoch. This group would compare upcoming capital requests with actual expenditures in FY20 and available capacity from tax and state revenue. He also recommended the virtue of looking further out, beyond the coming fiscal year, to needs five and ten years in the future. "We need to be more forward-

looking," he said.

As one example, he reminded the selectmen of the Town's coming obligation to repay the commonwealth for its contribution to New Marlborough's new internet infrastructure, which will be coming on-line next year. Even though this cost will be largely offset by an annual payment to the Town by the state, Mr. Klein wants this obligation to remain a visible element of the budget.

Finally, he brought up an issue born out of personal experience. "My wife and I made a significant addition to our house in 2015, but it only showed up on our tax bill this year," he said. "I'm happy to have saved, but others in town are paying taxes that I should have paid." He recommended that communication

between the building inspector, the assessor, and the appraiser be improved and that the Board of Selectmen be furnished copies of all Certificates of Occupancy.

The Board and Committee agreed to a second joint meeting December 12. The Finance Committee approved the minutes of a past meeting, and the meeting was adjourned. □

Joe Poindexter

He [Tom Scanlon] opened the discussion by asking whether the Town wanted a full-bore audit of its books or a less formal consultation.

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View from the Board

GIVING THANKS

What better time of the year is there for the Board to express its appreciation to those Town departments and boards whose members contribute to our wonderful way of life in New Marlborough. The list is long, so bear with me (and add those I may inadvertently have overlooked). Our thanks to:

- Our highway crew and its superintendent; they work through the night when it snows and were out in the wind and the rain during the October storms.
- Our police officers and their chief, who keep us safe; they, too, were out through the night during the October storms.
- Our town administrator and our Town Hall staff, who keep the Town running and are there every day to greet and assist anyone who walks through the doors of Town Hall.
- Our Fire Department and its chief, who drop everything to come to our aid.
- Our Rescue Squad members. If you need medical aid or transportation, you can count on them being there.
- Our librarian, her staff, and the Library Trustees for making our library feel like a second home.
- Our Transfer Station director and employees, who make the station a community meeting spot.
- Our Board of Assessors and its clerk, for performing an ongoing and often thankless task while at the same time being available to answer questions from residents and contractors.
- Our Cemetery Commissioners, whose duties are not always fully appreciated, but who maintain our many cemeteries.
- Our Board of Health members and health inspector, who keep us safe and warn us of potential problems.
- Our Planning Board members, whose forward thinking helps prepare us for the future. Theirs is an enormous task which is often unappreciated.
- Our Finance Committee, which watches over our expenses and works tirelessly to ensure our money is well spent.

- Our School Committee representatives for the patience to sit through committee meetings that often run for hours and still focus on the best education for our children.
- Our Council on Aging, which provides transportation for the elderly, education, health services and wonderful and free Friday lunches.
- Our Conservation Commission, which looks after our rivers and wetlands.
- Our Historical Commission, whose members preserve our history and traditions.
- Our Umpachene Falls Park Commission members, who maintain our beautiful park and waterfalls.
- Our Cultural Council, which raises and distributes funds for the arts and education projects that enrich our lives.
- Our Memorial Day Committee and, in particular, its chairman, who make Memorial Day memorable.
- Our Commission on Disabilities, for its ongoing efforts to make all Town facilities ADA compliant.
- Our Broadband Committee, which has persevered through some disappointments but is presently overseeing the make-ready process to bring broadband and related services to our town.
- Our Building Inspector, whose experience holds our contractors to a high standard. He does it with respect and makes himself available.
- Our Emergency Management director, who is always thinking "what if."
- Our tree warden, whose never-ending task helps keep our roads safe.
- Our moderator, who keeps our town meetings orderly and focused, and our constable, who makes sure order is maintained during elections and at town meetings.
- And, finally, thanks to you, who, by sticking with me to the end of this lengthy list, demonstrates that you, too, appreciate the contributions of those who help make New Marlborough the special place it is. □

Nat Yohalem

Thank You to Our Contributors:

Robin Tost; Ellie & Ned MacDowell; Marilyn Fracasso; Jean Travis; Eugene & Elizabeth Rosenberg; Mary E. Barton; Ron & Marilyn Bisiewicz; Roy Blount; Thomas M. Callahan; Eli Cook; George & Anita Cook; Cynthia Finkle; Kathleen George; Anne Caban & Alan Gewirtzman; Natalie & David Hosford; Dawn S. Massini; Frank & Sharron Kellogg; Eileen & Edgar Koerner; Ellen Sweet & Ari Korpivaara; John & Judy Ladd; Kathy Andrus; Bill & Cathie Litchfield; Anita E. Matthews; Robert & Dawn Oates; Patrick & Jean Pollock; Betsy Colhoun; Bruno & Mary Ann Quinson; Richard & Cally Ryan; Jay Kwawer & Beth Teitelman; Louise & Nat Yohalem; Barry & Marjorie Shapiro; Bob & Debra Beham; Janet S. Brown; Vera Edelman; Mike & Kathy Giulian; John & Joan Hotaling; Ismail & Fern Khan; Caryn & Richard King; Elaine & Steve Mack; Timothy Merjos; Bette Ann Stalker; Abbe & Peter Steinglass; Dennis Sears & Rene Wood; Bruce & Lisa Youmans

THE PLANNING BOARD

The October 23 meeting of the Planning Board, attended by Peter Tiso, Daniel Doern, and Mark Carson, was relatively brief and to the point. Chairman Tiso informed his board members that the last set of changes to the bylaw draft on medical cannabis and research facilities was in the hands of the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission, for its inspection. Dan Doern volunteered to take a run up to Pittsfield to help expedite that step in the process.

Mr. Tiso also reported on his visit with the Board of Selectmen. (See the October 21 Board of Selectmen report on page 4 for an account of the conversation.) He then moved on to his intention to resign from the Board, effective the following day. He allowed that he was “going on an adventure for a few months,” and would be, “finding a way to help out when I get back.” With those assuring words, Mr. Tiso’s fellow board members thanked him again, and then Mr. Carson made a motion to elect Daniel Doern to take Peter Tiso’s place as chairman of

the Planning Board. Mr. Doern agreed, on the condition that Mr. Carson would be willing to help with some of the workload.

As the meeting wrapped up, Bob Hartt of Mill River, who was the lone member of the audience, let the Board know that he would be willing to sign on as a new member – a positive bit of news, meaning that the Planning Board will now have four out of the five positions filled.

At its November 13 meeting, which this reporter was unable to attend, Chairman Dan Doern, when asked, said that the marijuana bylaw is now in a form that can be reviewed by Town Counsel and possibly other overseers. It will then be distributed to New Marlborough citizens prior to a public hearing, most likely in January. Mr. Doern also said that the Board voted to recommend to the Board of Selectmen the appointment of Robert Hartt. □

Larry Burke

CONSERVATION COMMISSION

On November 16, Conservation Commission members John Schreiber, Nanci Worthington, and Dave Herrick, convened the regular monthly meeting, which started with a Request for Determination (RDA) submitted by Emily Renshaw and Mico Menchetti of Morgan, Lewis and Bocklus LLP on behalf of their clients Margaret and Joseph Koerner of 2128 Canaan Southfield Road. Ms. Renshaw explained that the Koerners are concerned about the activity on property abutting theirs, owned by Bruce Poor of Grassmarket LLC. At issue are: the operation of a large-scale gravel pit, the clearing of trees and shrubs, and new driveways on the property. The questions posed to the Commission were: 1) per the RDA how does the Wetlands Protection Act (WPA) apply to the activities described and 2) does the operation of the gravel pit require permitting under the WPA and, specifically, is a Notice of Intent required.

Dr. Schreiber explained that the Commission had consulted with town counsel, and, given that the Commission is not able to visit the site without the property owner’s permission, answering the applicability of the WPA is not determinable by the Commission, given the information available to them. Without permission from the property owner the Commission cannot visit the site and evaluate the issues at hand. After some discussion, the Commission agreed to continue the public hearing. Dr. Schreiber explained that the Commission will wait for guidance on next steps from town counsel.

Next up was Shannon Boomsma from White Engineering presenting an RDA on behalf of Marion Rosenfield of 563 Canaan Southfield Road. The work proposed included two voluntary upgrades by the property owner – the installation of a new well and the replacement of the still-operating but old septic system. Ms. Boomsma explained that the proper site controls will be installed during construction. The Commission agreed that no further permitting was necessary.

Lastly, the mail was reviewed. A forest cutting plan for cutting on forty acres owned by James McGary on Sisson Hill Road was received.

After the minutes were approved, following several minor edits, the meeting adjourned. □

Martha Bryan



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MAILBOX

To the Editors:

We recognize the valuable role that the *New Marlborough 5 Village News*, an all-volunteer effort, plays in bringing together our community. That is why we were particularly disappointed that the *5 Village News* missed an opportunity with its coverage of the literary part of Music & More's Award-Winning Author event in the November issue. While we appreciate that the reporter was trying to write a balanced account, we feel that goal was not achieved. Referring readers to the exchange on Maggies-List ignored people who do not subscribe to it. But, more important, by not reporting the perspective of those who objected to Garrison Keillor (as the article points out, mainly women), the *5 Village News* made us and our viewpoints invisible. By not covering our objections in a substantive way, the paper trivialized our concerns, which compounded the profound error in judgment that the New Marlborough Village Association made by inviting Keillor in the first place. Also missed was an opportunity to educate readers about the significance of the #MeToo movement.

In the interest of supplementing the coverage, we want to mention some facts about Keillor. First, Minnesota Public Radio severed its relationship with him, at huge cost to itself, based on a twelve-page complaint it found credible. A subsequent investigation by MPR News, an independent reporting agency, found that he had engaged in a wider pattern of abuse of power over years, including multiple credible incidents of harassment, bullying and humiliation. Keillor's damaging behavior occurred not just in his role as producer at MPR but also as bookstore owner and professor at the University of Minnesota.

All these facts were known eighteen months before Keillor appeared here. Despite this, our community gave him a platform that allowed him to excuse his bad behavior and to continue dismissing his accusers.

#MeToo is not about toppling powerful men, but about creating a safer world. To help women do that, our society has to be willing to hold men who abuse their power accountable. The voices that we hear depend on the stories we choose to amplify, and the perspectives we choose to report on.

Some of us who were opposed to Keillor's appearance in New Marlborough have been meeting to brainstorm ways to heal the fissures this event caused, and to address what we see as a lack of diversity of all kinds — including race, gender, sexual orientation, and age — in the composition of and choices made by local organizations. In this way, the Keillor event has become a catalyst for exploring how our community can elicit our best ideas and values. We welcome others to join us in our work, and we urge the *5 Village News* to cover these positive efforts as they evolve.

Signed,

Gail Belmuth

Sue Cohen

Alexandra Eidenschenk

Alice Fahs

Joyce Hackett

Marion Rosenfeld

Michele Shalaby

Ann Sweeney

Ellen Sweet

Louise Yohalem

As always, the 5 Village News appreciates hearing from its readers, even when, perhaps especially when, they take issue with what we have published, or, in this case, what we may have failed to publish on a given subject. It was our intent to present a balanced report on the Garrison Keillor program and the issues surrounding the decision to invite him to New Marlborough. We know that reasonable people can differ as to whether we succeeded, but we would like here to reaffirm our pledge to fairness — and our pledge that when issues such as this one arise again, we will be there to report them. —The Editors

Call for Volunteers for Housing Committee

The Board of Selectmen seeks qualified and interested individuals from New Marlborough to participate in a Housing Committee. This recently formed committee is mandated to focus on possibilities of providing lower cost housing opportunities in New Marlborough, as needs exist among all age groups in our town. Residents who have an interest in serving on this committee are encouraged to send a short letter of interest to the Board in care of Sharon Fleck, Administrative Secretary, at sfleck@newmarlboroughma.gov or P.O. Box 99, Mill River, MA 01244 by 5:00 p.m., on December 9.



LAND TRUST NEWS

Just before our first little snow fall in early November, volunteers roughed out an additional three-mile walking loop extending the two-and-a-half mile loop established this summer at the Goodnow Preserve. (See the accompanying trail map: the dotted trail is the existing loop; the continuous line is the proposed new loop extension.) This addition opens up new trail experiences at the preserve. The trail includes an extended walk along the Konkapot, a moderately difficult traverse through pristine forest uphill from the river to the open field on Hadsell Street, and a chance for a walk of up to six miles through the woods. As soon as the ground warms in the spring, we'll start clearing and blazing this new trail. Planning new trails is almost as fun as reading seed catalogs in winter. Both activities hold dreams of spring, renewal, and the possibility for a new adventure.

Miscellaneous notes from the trails:

Dogs are loving the Goodnow Preserve. Remember that, while your dog is for sure the cutest of them all, some people may not share your comfort with dogs, especially ones that are not their own. Be courteous on the trails.

It is hunting season so "get your orange on," both you and your dog. Note that hunting is not permitted on Sundays.

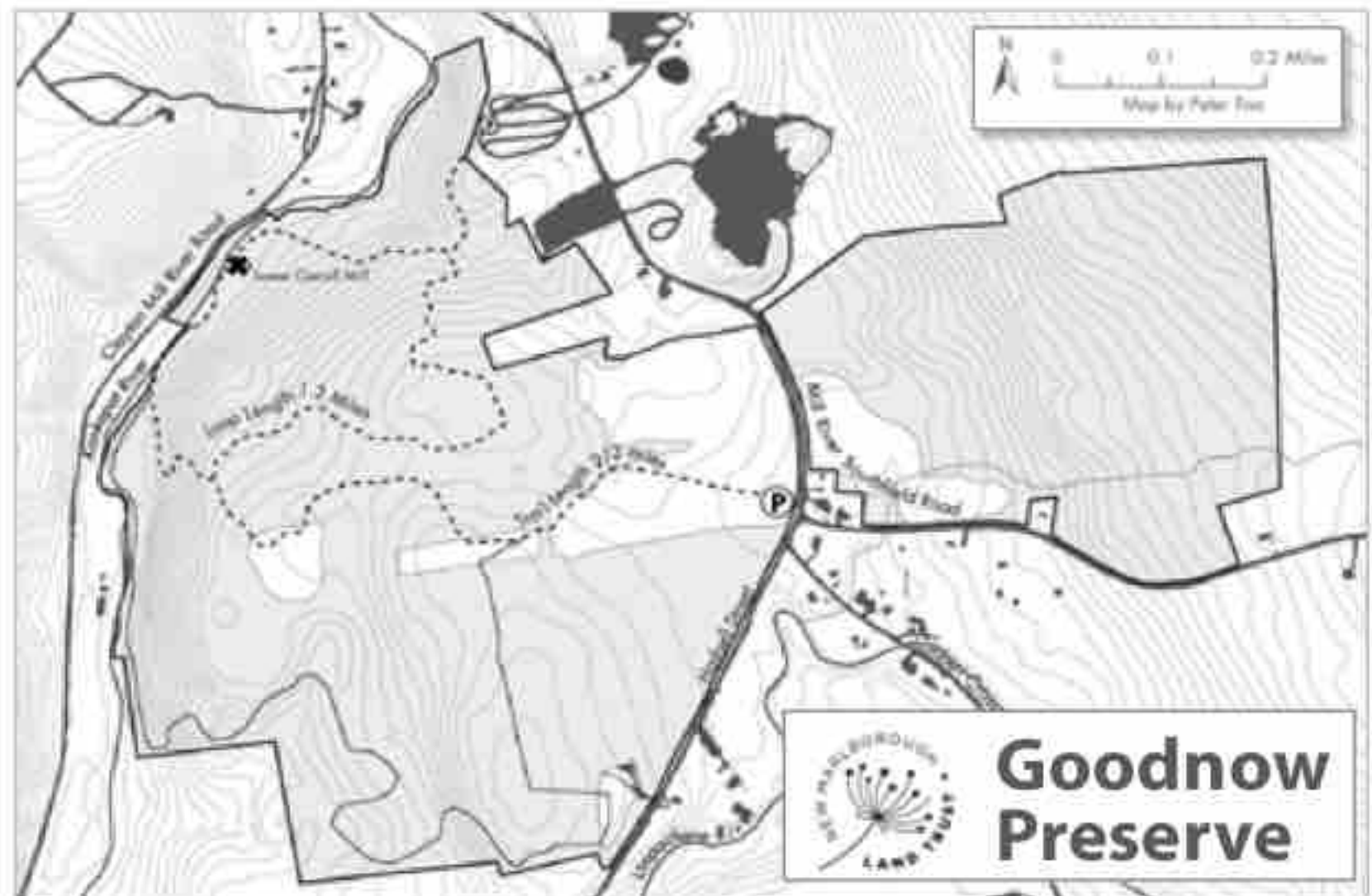
There have been significant blowdowns in the woods and along the trails due to recent dramatic winds and fickle weather. Our dedicated volunteers have answered the call and helped clear many huge trees that mysteriously happened to fall across walking trails. We are aware how important it is to keep trails clear and safe for us all to enjoy.

Every day offers a new trail experience, even walking the same route. And that magnificent oak tree looks utterly different with a dusting of snow. Don't let the cold keep you captive inside this winter. We hope you bundle up, get out your snowshoes or cross-country skis, and give yourself a break and a dose of fresh air. The Goodnow Preserve offers a huge open field, but do not overlook other magnificent trails at the New Marlboro Preserve, Steepletop, and 1,000 Acre Swamp to name just a few.

We want to hear your ideas for the Land Trust. We have added a "virtual suggestion box" to our website at nmlandtrust.org/your-feedback. Share your thoughts and help us continue to be an active part of our community.

And lastly, just in time for the holidays, baseball caps with our new logo are available! Visit our website at nmlandtrust.org/support-our-mission and get your very own. □

Martha Bryan



Call for Volunteers for Designer Selection Committee

The Board of Selectmen seeks qualified and interested individuals from New Marlborough to participate in a Designer Selection Committee. This committee will be selecting a designer to renovate the Town Hall and bring it into ADA compliance. The ideal candidate will have a background in construction or architecture/design.

Interested residents should contact Sharon Fleck at sfleck@newmarlboroughma.gov or P.O. Box 99, Mill River, MA 01244 by 5:00 p.m., on December 9

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OFF THE SHELF FARM

Eggs for Sale

By Barry R. Shapiro

(This is the first of three articles about the commercial egg farmers of New Marlborough)

Walking across the field toward her flock of about 700 chickens, accompanied by Opal, her Australian cattle dog, Anna Houston, co-owner of Off the Shelf Farm, laughs as she relates the story of how she and her business and life partner, Rob Perazzo, first met. "It was rather unromantic circumstances. He was showing me how to eviscerate a chicken. We were both up to our elbows in chicken guts."

That fateful meeting while they were both working at North Plain Farm in Great Barrington, has, well, hatched a thriving business located on Ned and Ellie MacDowell's property in New Marlborough.

"We had both worked for a number of years at farms with pasture-based eggs and we knew what it would take to be farmers," said Anna.

Investing their own capital, augmented by a loan arranged by Berkshire Agricultural Ventures, as well as assistance in developing their business plan from BerkShares Inc., Anna and Rob launched the business in 2017.

Despite their experience working on other farms, Anna and Rob moved forward with some trepidation. "We were quite anxious about it, but decided to take our dreams off the shelf which is how we named our farm 'Off the Shelf.'" says Anna. "We are very proud of our farm, which primarily raises chickens, along with about thirty lambs per year. We love our eye-catching, pink egg cartons. Selecting the right color which would really stand out was not easy. We did consider teal but are very happy we decided on pink. Our customers love it."

The farm's business plan envisioned differentiating their venture from their competitors not only by their distinctive cartons, but also by being able to provide a large and consistent supply of eggs to local businesses. Many of their competitors simply don't have the ability to do that given their smaller flocks of hens.

"No one is raising as many hens as we are. We can have as many as 1,400 to 1,500 at a time, sometimes as many as 2,000," says Anna with obvious pride. "Incredibly, our hens produce almost 400,000 eggs per year. We can meet



Rob Perazzo and Anna Houston, proprietors of Off the Shelf Farm
photo by Larry Burke

our customers' demands in ways that smaller farms can't. Because of this, we were very fortunate to land commercial accounts with Guido's and the Berkshire Food Co-op. It took some real perseverance to get on their shelves but we're glad we were finally able to get our foot in the door. Our eggs are also used by a number of local restaurants such as the Southfield Store, Gould Farm, Prairie Whale and Rubi's. Because Rob and I had spent time in the area, we had lots of local contacts, which really

opened some doors for us."

Anna and Rob also have a stand at the Great Barrington Farmers' Market, where they not only sell their eggs and lamb, but offer a fresh-off-the-grill egg and cheese sandwich on a buttery brioche bun – a treat which has become a "must have" for many market-goers, who can be seen happily munching as they stroll around the grounds.

All of the farm's chickens are pastured, and the hens eat a diet of grass, bugs, and grain that is obtained from Stone House Farms in New York. "The grain is non-GMO, locally grown with minerals and calcium added," says Anna. "These farms employ local farmers and workers who are paid fair wages, and the grain is what we call practicing organic, even though it is not formally certified as such."

Anna and Rob's pullet chickens arrive at about seventeen weeks of age. They start laying at twenty weeks and, as the chickens gain weight, the size of the eggs increases. The flock consists entirely of Red Star chickens which are purchased from a hatchery in Pennsylvania. Red Stars are a hybrid, not heritage, breed, bred to lay one egg per day. All eggs are a uniform brown color. The chickens are kept for two years at which point they are "processed" (an industry euphemism for slaughtered) and, being too tough for eating, become the basis of some great soups and stocks.

Anna expresses some melancholy about her chickens' ultimate destiny.

"I know it's the way things work and that they are not pets, but I am sad about processing them. They do so

much for you. You just have to look at the wonderful eggs they produce and the way they fertilize and improve the soil." She pauses to point at neat rectangular sections of the pasture which are noticeably greener than the surroundings. "See," she says. "That's where the coop was previously."

Anna has a harder time dealing with the other component of Rob's and her livestock: "I really feel terrible about our lambs. Slaughtering them is very hard on us. We love animals, but, in the end, it's worth it, since we are feeding people in the Berkshires. Our lambs are served at Prairie Whale and Cantina 229, and we also sell them to consumers by the box or half-box. We really love New Marlborough and the surrounding towns. People really support us in our effort to grow great food in a positive way."

Although Anna was raised in Waterbury Center, Vermont, she is no stranger to New Marlborough. "My maternal grandparents were Mary and Walter Simons, who were longtime residents of town, and I now live in their home on County Road. I was very close to both of them and lived with my grandfather during the last years of his life. I'm sure many residents remember both my grandfather, who worked for the United Nations and lived all over the world, as well as my grandmother, who was a journalist."

Anna, now 29, graduated from the University of Puget Sound in Tacoma, Washington, with a degree in political theory and had a varied work experience after graduation, none of it directly related to her college major. "I did environmental education with youth, worked on farms, milked goats, and acted as a wilderness therapy guide for troubled youth. I then wound up at North Plain Farm."

Rob, age 30, was born in Paramus, New Jersey, and, like Anna, is a college graduate, having attended Fordham University in New York, graduating with degrees in both biology and English. After working as a bike mechanic in New Jersey, he decided, given his love of cooking and his desire to learn more about food sources, to seek work on farms, working at Kinderhook Farm, North Plain Farm, and The Farm New Marlborough, before then setting out on his own with Anna.

Winter is, for some egg farmers, a slow time since, with shorter days, hens become less productive. Not so for Off the Shelf Farm. "We over-winter our 1,400 hens in greenhouses on Freddy Friedman's property and they are fairly productive through the winter months."

Keeping up a large, consistent supply of eggs is important not just because it is fundamental to their business model. There's a larger, philosophical imperative for Anna and Rob.

"Our goal is to take as much business away from corporate, commodity farms as possible. We are doing so, not only to provide better quality eggs and lamb, but so that fewer animals are locked in inhumane conditions."



photo by Barry Shapiro

Anna Houston, standing amidst a few of her Red Star hens

The practicalities of chicken farming keep both Anna and Rob very busy. "We built one of our coops and bought the other. We move the coop daily. We have not had many losses to predators, given our electric fence, although the occasional barred owl can be a problem. We used to wash all of our eggs by hand but recently acquired an egg washer which can clean 700 dozen in less than eight hours. We do most of the work on the farm ourselves, but we are thrilled to have three special needs adults who come over and help out. They bring enormous pride, joy, and excitement to their work and we, and our customers, love it."

And what does the future hold?

"While we're so grateful to Ned and Ellie for making their land available to us and to Martha Bryan for making the introduction," says Anna, "we'd love to have our own farm of about 100 acres of open, flat land, something which is not easy to find. We don't have a five-year plan, but we hope that wherever we end up, it's in New Marlborough."

"For now, we are thrilled to be in New Marlborough. It's this community which has made us a success and we've had great support from the local farmer network. It's so cool that we can work together, and I consider fellow egg farmers, Tom Brazie and Jan Johnson, allies in trying to build a thriving local economy and to grow great food for the local community."

While Off the Shelf Farm's hard-working hens may produce almost 400,000 eggs a year, ironically almost none of them wind up on Anna and Rob's table.

"Rob doesn't like eggs and I eat them only sometimes," says Anna with a big smile. □



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. Maggie's-list followers may have already seen the following piece by Tom Brazie, but we were so taken with the pure joy and good humor (and instruction) of Tom's writing that we wanted to give it as wide a readership as possible.

Using Cattle To Sow Seed

By Tom Brazie

As many of you know from taking a tractor ride (farm tour) with me, our animals are very involved with the development of the farm's land. They are the professional horticulturists that we employ to renovate and maintain our lands. They are very good at what they do, and they get to bring their children to work with them every day!

Throughout the farm you'll find land in all different stages of renovation. The animals and I are working together on this, and both parties have agreed to use as little petroleum as possible, mainly because I don't want the cows running my tractors. They never check the oil before starting the engines, and they struggle turning the engines off. Big hooves and little keys don't work well together.

Over the past year and half, the cows have done an incredible job nurturing what little grass there was back to health, and promoting it to crowd out the less desirable vegetation. As this growing season draws to a close and the cows are making their last lap around the farm, we are stalling them in the various paddocks that have very little grass to promote. We cover these areas with hay, the cows' daily wage.

Turns out cows will indeed work for food! By unrolling the hay bales and spreading them out over a large area, we are encouraging the cows to spread out too. This keeps them from "fertilizing" in only one spot. Because cows don't stand still to eat (unlike me, they can walk and chew gum at the same time), they end up walking through and on top of the hay. This is key. Harvested, solar dried, biomass (i.e. hay) is chock full of seeds. As the cows dance around with each other at their daily dinner gala, they are pressing these seeds into the soil with their hooves. And just like that, we have introduced various, but proven, cultivars of forage grass into an otherwise desolate area – all without any cows driving a tractor or taking my truck into town to buy seed! Whatever hay they don't eat stays in place and acts as a mulch to protect the earth, newly-sown seed, and existing vegetation under it. It also provides a lovely place for earthworms and microbial colonies to live and thrive.

Side note: Isn't it funny that back in the day, colonies and villages were developed based on access to water and food. In later years, employment played a key role. Today, because of cheap energy, we do whatever we want. How often do you think about the distance your water needs to travel every time you turn on the faucet? Or the amount of water that is required to flush a toilet? We'd think about these things a lot more if we had to go to the well with a bucket each time we needed water! There was a nice reminder of how vulnerable we are last month, when the power went out for hours. In nature, if you offer the simple amenities of food, water, and employment, you'll have communities in abundance, even if they are only microscopic. As you know, this farm is all about building community!

So anyway, getting back on track, with the hay in place and the cows moving on, Mother Nature calls in her staff of underground workers. They assist in turning the hay into



photos by Larry Birke

With New Marlborough Village as a background, Tom Brazie unravels a large bale of hay as his herd of professional horticulturalists get going on their part of the work.

Farmer Brazie takes a moment to contemplate his bovine co-conspirators in soil improvement.

compost, and eventually, into soil. This compost and soil will feed the grass plants and provide a lovely long-term housing option for earthworms and underground microbial communities. I call this my “slow release” seed and feed system. By mid-summer next year, you’ll see many more dark green shoots popping up in areas that were just brush just a few short weeks ago. The cows will continue stage two of their work by pruning these new grass plants, promoting “root and shoot” growth. Over time the newly introduced cultivars of grass will spread throughout the pasture, growing big and strong and eventually crowding out the undesired vegetation. This will be the cows’ “raise in compensation.” We all work hard to better our lives; so do the animals!

What we have accomplished with this simple daily task:

- ▶ Fed an entire herd of cattle
- ▶ Offered employment and housing opportunities to nature’s best
- ▶ Introduced new cultivars of grass into an otherwise struggling and relatively unproductive area of land
- ▶ Fertilized, aerated and pruned the soil and existing vegetation
- ▶ Assisted in promoting photosynthesis in healthy thriving plants
- ▶ Created a larger food bank for future foraging
- ▶ Lessened our carbon footprint by using almost zero petroleum
- ▶ Created a scenic view as a backdrop of the village
- ▶ Created food for all communities
- ▶ Increased the water-holding capacity of our soil
- ▶ Offered employment to both the underground and above ground communities

Pretty cool!



NEIGHBORS



Christmas Eve will mark the end of an era for New Marlborough. **Paul Borelli**, known to many of us as just “Paul” or “Paul UPS”, will be making his last United Parcel Service deliveries on that day. After forty and one-half years at UPS, Paul is retiring. He started in 1979 at age eighteen, and for eight years worked indoors. He then became a driver, and in 1988-9 began covering for Marty, his predecessor on the New Marlborough route. When Marty retired, Paul took over the route full-time, and has been doing for close to three decades.

When he took over the route in the early 1990s, the 911 house numbering system didn't exist, so locating his customers was a challenge. In addition to calling upon Marty for help, Paul says he developed his own system: “Mill River Store, Library, Town Hall, Southfield Store, post offices, Bud Stiles...” He also started a notebook with telephone pole numbers for his customers until he knew the route.

In those twenty-plus years, Paul has come to know just about everyone in town and counts many as friends. His customers likewise appreciate his thoughtful, personal, and reliable service, and will miss his friendly greeting. It's a two-way street, and Paul has a message for the town:

“I would like to thank the NM5VN for the opportunity to address the people of New Marlborough. I've been delivering out here for over twenty years and will deliver my final package on December 24. Over those years I have made many friends in this town. The people in this town have been amazing and kept me going for all those years. I always look forward to seeing many of you on a daily basis. Your kindness, generosity, and, most of all, your friendship will be with me long after my retirement. It's been my pleasure to serve the people of New Marlborough, and I can't thank you all enough. You never know – down the road you may see me as a resident some day!”

—Paul Borelli, your UPS service provider □

compiled by Barbara Lowman: deeuell@yahoo.com



photo by Deb O'Brien

Paul Borelli aboard his faithful steed, heading into the last roundup.

OUR WILDLIFE NEIGHBORS



photo by Don Beauchamp

A trio of bluebirds paying a visit to Don Beauchamp

On November 15, **Liz Goodman**, who lives along the Konkapot just to the north of Clayton, wrote the following: “I wanted to share what I've been seeing at the river lately, specifically today. For the past couple of weeks, I've seen a **bald eagle** hanging out at our swimming hole at the river. It's been freaking me out a little because our little dog **Bitsy** is only just over eight pounds! The eagle is always there in late afternoon, and I assume it is spending the night there. Today on our walk to the river we saw a **red fox** run across the meadow and take cover in the brush between the two fields. **Jolie**, our twelve-year-old mixed breed dog, ran after it in vain. Moving on to the river, we came to our favorite spot and sure enough our eagle friend was there peering down at us. At this point I put little Bitsy on the leash so I could get a closer look. (Of course I forgot my camera this time.) The eagle and I were just gazing at each other calmly when suddenly, **SLAP!**, a **beaver** alerted us to its presence. Jolie is deaf and didn't hear it and Bitsy didn't seem to notice either, but the eagle sure did. His attention turned away from us and focused on that pesky beaver. The beaver swam back and forth a few times until I decided to leave him to his business. All in all, it was a good walk filled with wildlife!”

On November 17, **Don Beauchamp** checked in with the following: “Had nothing to report until these **bluebirds** showed up a few days ago. And on my way home from the library on Saturday, a nice, small **black bear** crossing the road down by Goodman's farm.” The following day Don saw a pair of **yellow-bellied sapsuckers**, and two days later, “a rare bird – a **brown creeper** – brown on top and white underneath.”

The scarcity of birdlife that was the subject of last month's column seems to have eased up a bit, according to reports from our human neighbors. **Robin Tost**, early in November, said she was seeing flocks of **cedar**

waxwings and robins competing for berries in the cedar trees this cold morning. Others have been seeing the usual suspects – juncos, chickadees, nuthatches, bluejays, and sparrows – though perhaps not in the numbers we normally see at this time of year around our feeders. The Burkes had a brief visit from a flock of fifty or more redwing blackbirds on November 18, and have also been seeing bluebirds and flocks of robins. Larry Burke has noted hearing and seeing pileated woodpeckers, who are attracted to the wild grapes along the edge of the woods. He also has heard from two hunters on his property that they have each had close, adrenalin-producing encounters with large black bears. □

Compiled by Larry Burke. Send your wildlife sightings to him at lburke2@me.com

A FESTIVAL OF LESSONS & CAROLS

A Warm, Family Welcome

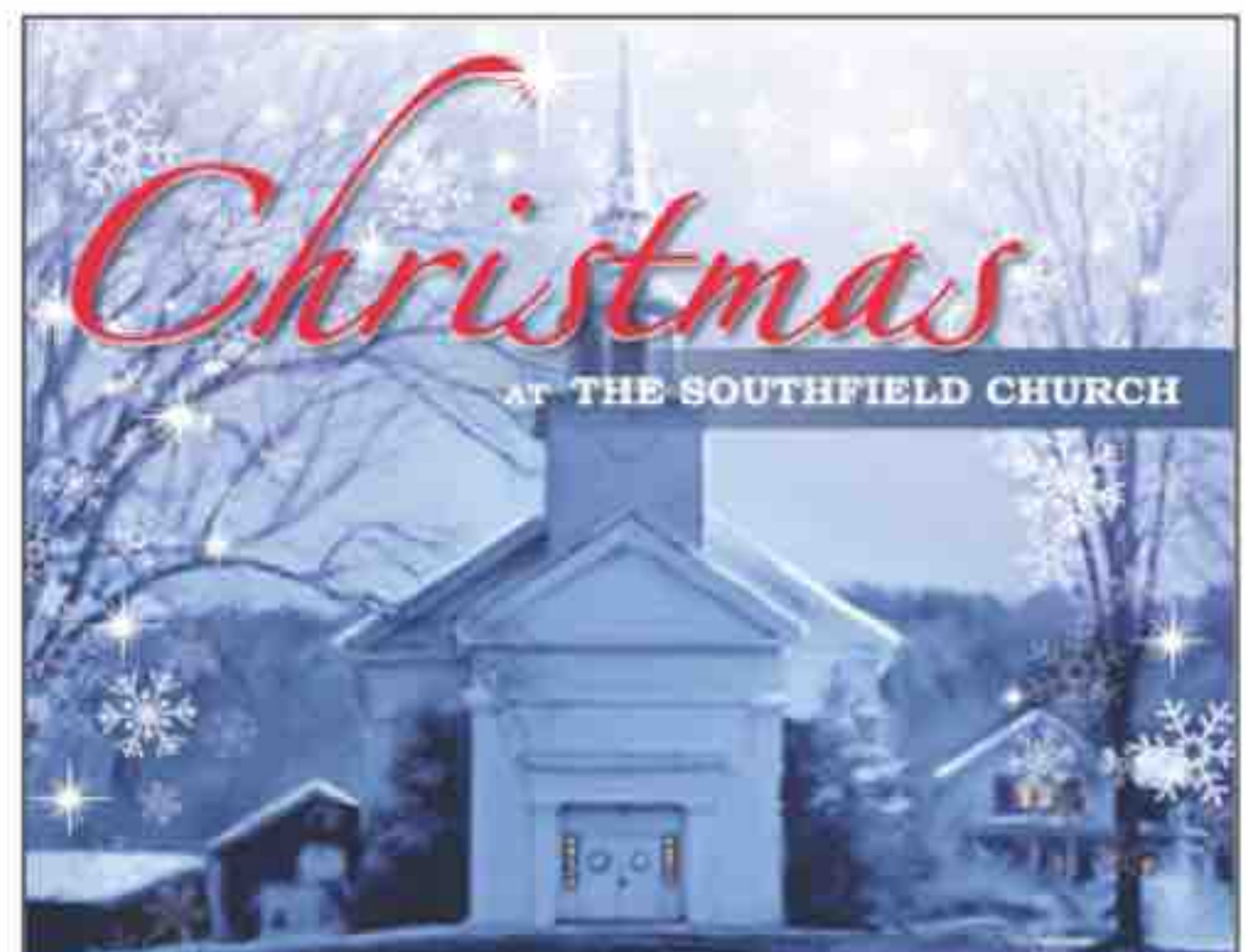
A Festival of Lessons & Carols, the Christmas Eve service at The United Church of New Marlborough (also known as The Southfield Church), is a memorable holiday tradition. Like everything Robert Olsen takes on, this service is planned with exquisite care and dedication to every detail. Designed to closely mirror the Lessons & Carols tradition established by King's College in England, but with more accessible New Testament scriptures, the service offers an intimate family experience for people of all beliefs on Christmas Eve. This is in keeping with Robert's philosophy that "everyone who steps through our doors is a parishioner." Citing a poem posted at the entrance to the Manchester Cathedral that states "All of these colors are born of one light," he notes that those who gather together represent all faiths and no faith, a "mixed bag" that mirrors the diverse beliefs and backgrounds within our community.

The United Church of New Marlborough was formed in 1960 to join congregations from the five villages that comprise New Marlborough, and A Festival of Lessons & Carols was first held nine years ago. This year's musical selections include traditional Christmas carols, popular favorites, and newer anthems like Richard Donn's "See, Amid the Winter's Snow." The community choir of roughly fifteen, formed specifically for this occasion, practices two hours every Sunday evening for eight weeks leading up to the service. An added gift last

year and this year is the beautiful accompaniment by New Marlborough resident and Simon's Rock pianist/instructor Manon Hutton-DeWys, whom many will remember from the Summer Concert Series at The Southfield Church.

The service will be held at 7:00 p.m. on December 24 at the United Church of New Marlborough, 234 Norfolk Road, Southfield. Turnout has grown each year, but the close-knit feeling hasn't changed a bit. Join friends, neighbors, and strangers who will soon feel like family for this deeply moving holiday experience! □

Robbi Hartt



Holiday Market

December 14 from 10:00 to 3:00

Featuring Artists, Bakers, Crafters,
Farmers, Food Makers and Writers

A Festival of

Lessons & Carols

Christmas Eve at 7:00 pm

with The Southfield Church Community Choir

Manon Hutton-DeWys, Piano

All Welcome

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SOLOMON JOFFE, FIREFIGHTER

Congratulations to New Marlborough Firefighter Solomon Joffe, who recently graduated from the Massachusetts Fire Academy's Call/Volunteer Recruit Firefighter Training Program.

Solomon was among twenty-six firefighters who graduated on October 30 from the fifteen-week program, which includes classroom and practical training in firefighter skills. Solomon also earned Firefighter I and II and Hazardous Materials First Responder Operational Level certification by the Massachusetts Fire Training Council. Classes began at the end of June and continued through October, for a total of 240 hours of training at the MFA's Springfield campus.

What prompted Solomon to give up weekends and two nights each week? "The class was something I was made aware of, and I wanted to do more to advance my skills," says Solomon. "I also saw it as a way to add to my personal growth."

Solomon, who is 23, moved to New Marlborough at age 9, from his previous home on Long Island. (He was born in Munich, Germany). He lives in New Marlborough village with his mother and father, Simeon and Christine, and sister, Sophia. He graduated from Berkshire Waldorf High School and works for Wood to Stone, a Great Barrington-based construction company. He joined New Marlborough Fire & Rescue in May, 2018.

Solomon gives credit to John Pollock, a fellow New Marlborough firefighter, for suggesting that he join New Marlborough Fire & Rescue, adding, "It was something I had always been kind of interested in, and would also be a way to give back to New Marlborough...and I enjoy it."

As part of the course of study, students receive classroom training in all basic firefighter skills. They practice first under non-fire conditions and then during controlled-fire conditions. To graduate, students must demonstrate proficiency in life safety, search and rescue, ladder operations, water supply, pump operation, and fire



photo by David Smith

Solomon Joffe, fourth from the left, received his Firefighter I and II certification at the Massachusetts Fire Academy on October 30. Standing to Solomon's right is New Marlborough Fire Chief Chuck Loring.

attack, including multiple-floor and multiple-room fires. Solomon's classmates included members from eighteen fire departments in Western and Central Massachusetts, including firefighters from Egremont, Great Barrington, and Lee.

Solomon says he most enjoyed gaining practical hands-on skills. "I really liked learning and practicing proper movement of a crew through a structure fire and dense smoke and the teamwork involved in that," he says. "Also the 'mayday' and self-rescue procedures, as well as learning about effective and safe fire suppression." And Solomon is not done learning. He has already signed up to take an Emergency Medical Technician class early next year. Ultimately, he aims to be a career firefighter with a paid department, and he would no doubt thrive in the role. For the time being, New Marlborough is fortunate to have him.

Congratulations, Solomon! □

David Smith, President, New Marlborough Fire Company

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SHAKESPEARE COMES ALIVE ON THE MOUNT EVERETT STAGE

Mount Everett graduate Madeleine Maggio and her co-director Devante Owens of Shakespeare and Company inspired an exuberant group of twenty Mount Everett students in a magical performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Remarkably, half of the talented cast members reside in New Marlborough.

From Scene 1, act i, the audience was thoroughly delighted by the hilarious goings on. Mary Shalaby, Angus Kerr, Odie Fields, and Mike Fass outdid themselves in showing their comedic talents, which brought on frequent outburst of laughter and applause from the appreciative audience. Isabella and Amelia Kemp choreographed some beautiful dances which they also performed as Oberon's fairies. Cece Caldwell and Maple Webster-Ben David both delivered excellent performances. Andrew Haiss distinguished himself through his acting, but also by providing the incidental piano music, which he composed and performed on stage.

One came away in awe of the maturity and heart of these young actors, and with appreciation for the way they had so clearly and deeply absorbed William Shakespeare's text, and then translated that into their personifications of the characters. Kudos to Ms. Maggio and Mr. Owens for their brilliant guidance in helping create a life-changing educational experience. □

Jane Burke

Near right, Titania, Queen of the Fairies (Jordan Kammeyer), under Oberon's spell, finds herself smitten by Nick Bottom (Mary Shalaby), who, unbeknownst to himself, is now an ass who does not quite understand why he is the object of the queen's great ardor.

Far right, Nick Bottom (Mary Shalaby) now playing the role of Pyramus in the play-within-the-play, woos Francis Flute/Thisbe (Odie Fields) through a crannied wall/Peter Quince (Sarah Markham), as Snug the Joiner/the lion (Mike Fass) waits for his big moment in the farce.

Lower right, Nick Bottom (Mary Shalaby), transformed by Oberon into a jackass, becomes the object of great affection by the fairies and especially by Titania, Queen of the Fairies (Jordan Kammeyer).



Four young Athenians – Hermia (Cece Caldwell), Lysander (Jeremiah Tomascak), Demetrius (Angus Kerr), and Helena (Elisabeth Enoch) – deal with their misplaced attractions, as Oberon, King of Fairies (Jake Martin) spies upon them and comprehends that his misunderstood commands have spawned unintended consequences.



Photos by Larry Burke

Upcoming: Events Calendar for December

December 7: New Marlborough Central School's Holiday Fair, crafts, Christmas trees, live music, silent auction, delicious food offerings; 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., at the school in Mill River

December 14: Holiday Market, homemade gifts, crafts, and, of course, fresh foods; 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. at the Southfield Church

December 24: Lessons and Carols, a Christmas Eve service at the Southfield Church, beginning at 7:00 p.m.

RECIPE OF THE MONTH

Every year growing up, one Saturday afternoon in late November or early December, I would help Mum cut up the fruit for our traditional Christmas cake; I loved and looked forward to this ritual all year. Once the fruit was cut up and brandy added, it would be left soaking (stirring occasionally) until the cake could be baked, sometimes days later.

Baking time was not as much fun as the cutting up and stirring; Mum would be so stressed, constantly checking the edges, adjusting the temperature and the paper, until finally, hours later, the cake would be perfect (though she would always think it was too dry). After Mum passed away in 2006, my sister became the cake maker. I'd make the trifle, she would make the pavlova and the fruit cake, but since moving here I make one too. Sometimes, one of the kids will help me, but usually I enjoy spending this time alone with my memories. For both my sister and me, this ritual is a way of maintaining the connection to Mum and to each other. We swap photos, discuss which recipe we're using, and anything new we might be trying out (adding a few squares of grated chocolate adds a hint of richness).

This rich fruit cake is often called a "Celebration Cake," as in Australia it is also used for weddings and significant birthdays. The last time Mum made this was to celebrate my dad's 70th birthday – just a month before she passed away; she was so proud of that cake! With so many of us having family spread across the country (and the globe), these small rituals help maintain a connection with our loved ones, so this holiday season I wish you all moments of quiet with your memories along with many opportunities to create new ones with your family and friends. Happy Holidays.

Fiona Kerr

CELEBRATION CAKE

After much experimenting I have settled on the recipe on the next page. It is smaller than the one Mum made (and therefore much less stressful to bake), and includes a mix of fruit that I love (no glace cherries). This is a combination of a Delia Smith recipe, Mum's recipe, and my own tweaking. I'm sorry it is all in grams but thankfully most kitchen scales can be changed from imperial to metric. Feel free to email me if you have questions: Fiona.kerr.au@gmail.com

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Celebration Cake

Ingredients

For the pre-soaking: 325g currants
 175g raisins
 175g golden raisins
 100g dates
 50g cranberries
 25g mixed peel
 50g prunes
 50g almonds, roughly chopped
 125ml brandy

Cake: 225g all purpose flour
 (or 225g gluten free flour + 1/4 teaspoon of xanthan gum)
 1/2 teaspoon salt
 1/4 level teaspoon nutmeg, freshly grated
 1/2 level teaspoon ground mixed spice
 1/2 level teaspoon ground cinnamon
 225g dark brown sugar
 4 large eggs
 1 tablespoon of black treacle or molasses
 225g softened butter (2 sticks)
 Zest of 1 lemon and 1 orange

For feeding and topping: Armagnac or brandy to 'feed' the cake, 100gm whole blanched almonds

Equipment: 20cm round loose based high side (at least 2.5") cake tin, baking parchment, brown paper (paper shopping bags are perfect for this), oven safe string, parchment paper

Fruit: Cut the larger pieces of fruit so that everything is roughly the size of the sultanas. Mix the fruits and almonds together in a saucepan, add 75ml brandy, stir and bring to a boil. As soon as it boils, transfer to a bowl, add the remaining 50ml of brandy and leave stored in a cool spot (not the fridge) for at least 12 hours (up to 5 days), loosely covered, stir occasionally. I like the almonds soaked in the brandy, but they can be omitted from the soaking and added later to the cake.

To Make the Cake: Pre-heat the oven to 280°F.

- Sift the flour, salt and spices into a large mixing bowl then add the sugar, eggs, molasses, and butter, and beat with an electric mixer until everything is smooth and fluffy.
- Gradually fold in the pre-soaked fruit mixture, then the grated lemon and orange zests (and the almonds if you didn't soak them).
- Grease and line the base and sides of the cake tin with baking parchment. The parchment should extend above the rim of the tin by an inch.
- Using a large kitchen spoon, transfer the cake mixture into the prepared tin, spread it out evenly with the back of the spoon and, if you don't intend to decorate the cake with fondant icing, lightly drop the blanched almonds in a pattern of your choice over the surface.
- Wrap a double layer of brown paper around the outside of the tin, tie in place with the string. This is usually a two-person job. The paper should extend at least an inch above the parchment paper.
- Take a double square of baking parchment with a quarter-sized hole in the center (for extra protection during the cooking) and place this, not on top of the mixture itself, but on the rim of the brown paper. Bake the cake on the lowest shelf of the oven for four hours until it feels springy in the centre when lightly touched. Turn the cake around after two hours. Sometimes it can take 30–45 minutes longer than this, but in any case, don't look at it for four hours.
- Cool the cake for 30 minutes in the tin, then remove it to a wire rack to finish cooling.
- When it's cold, 'feed' it by making small holes in the top and bottom with a cocktail stick and spooning in a couple of tablespoons of Armagnac or brandy, then wrap it in parchment paper, foil and a tea towel and store in an airtight tin. You can now 'feed' it at odd intervals until you need to ice or eat it. It will keep like this for weeks.

Decorating: Remove all the parchment prior to decorating. If decorated with almonds prior to baking, brushing the top with a light glaze of warmed apricot jam gives the cake a nice shine before serving. Fondant, which can be made from marshmallows or bought at specialty stores, is the traditional icing used to decorate (instructions can be found online).

Serving portions are usually small. Once cut, store in an airtight container.

THE LOG

Police Department (selected entries)

- Oct. 2 8:12 p.m. The Department is alerted to a possible drug overdose at a Clayton residence.
- Oct. 3 2:46 p.m. National Grid is alerted to electrical wires and pole to a residence on Mill River Southfield Road pulled down by a trailer truck passing below with insufficient clearance.
- Oct. 4 2:57 p.m. A driver, wishing to put the incident on record, reports that two days ago he hit a guard rail on Hartsville New Marlborough Road.
- 10:51 p.m. Alerted to a disturbance by a diner, officers are told by the owner of Cantina 229 that he had ordered a group who had crashed a wedding party to leave.
- Oct. 5 11:04 a.m. National Grid notified of tree on wires on Mill River Great Barrington Road.
- Oct. 8 8:08 a.m. A Clayton Mill River Road resident reports the theft of marijuana plants from her garden.
- 10:15 p.m. National Grid is notified after a vehicle collides with a utility pole on North Road.
- Oct. 9 2:00 p.m. The Department agrees to increase early morning patrols in Hartsville in response to a caller's complaints of speeders through the village.
- Oct. 10 6:44 a.m. A caller reports vandalism the previous evening to two vehicles parked at his Clayton Mill River Road residence.
- Oct. 11 9:32 p.m. A caller reports hearing around twenty shots, possibly from a shotgun, near her Clayton residence.
- Oct. 12 12:30 p.m. A caller reports damage to the stone wall bordering his North Road property.
- 1:38 p.m. Their owner is notified after three cows are reported loose on Mill River Great Barrington Road.
- Oct. 13 3:43 p.m. A part-time resident reports that on recent occasions she found the front door open upon her return to her Southfield home.
- Oct. 15 5:56 p.m. Verizon advised of a tree on wires on Adsit Crosby Road.
- Oct. 16 2:00 p.m. A Southfield resident reports the resumption of text-messaging harassment from an individual who had been issued an order to desist.
- 9:33 p.m. National Grid notified of tree on wires on Cross Road to Canaan Valley Road.
- 9:54 p.m. Tree down and blocking Hadsell Street.
- 10:17 p.m. Tree down on Route 57 at Sandisfield town line.
- 10:24 p.m. Tree down on County Road.
- 11:12 p.m. A tree branch obstructs traffic on Clayton Mill River Road.
- 11:57 p.m. One tree down and one hung up on wires on Hartsville Mill River Road.
- Oct. 17 1:17 a.m. Officer reports closures on Cross Road to Canaan Valley, Hartsville Mill River, and Clayton Mill River Roads.
- 9:36 a.m. Tree on wires on Sisson Hill Road.
- 10:26 a.m. Tree on wires on Foley Hill Road.
- 10:30 a.m. Tree on wires on Canaan Valley Road.
- 11:17 a.m. Wires down at the foot of East Hill Road.
- 11:18 a.m. Tree on wires at the intersection of Aberdeen Lane and Knight Road.
- 2:28 p.m. An officer assists a driver whose vehicle has lost a tire on Mill River Great Barrington Road.
- Oct. 18 8:45 a.m. A motorist who commutes through New Marlborough daily complains of a driver who regularly tail-gates and then speeds past her crossing double yellow lines on Hatchery and Mill River Great Barrington Roads.
- 11:05 a.m. National Grid notified that a tree that had fallen on wires October 16 had still not been removed.
- 1:30 p.m. A caller advises the Department of a motorist ahead of her driving very slowly and wandering to either side of the road.
- Oct. 19 4:26 p.m. A caller alerts the Department to a pole and wires down on Konkapot Road.
- Oct. 21 9:43 a.m. A resident, who, the day before, found a wallet while out riding a bike, reports that she has been unsuccessful in reaching the owner and wishes to leave the wallet at the Police Department office.
- Oct. 23 8:15 p.m. An officer dispatches a deer gravely injured when struck by a vehicle on Mill River Southfield Road.
- Oct. 24 12:10 p.m. A Hartsville resident reports that her mailbox has been vandalized.
- Oct. 25 5:42 p.m. A caller reports a cow loose near Hartsville New Marlborough Road in Hartsville village.
- Oct. 26 7:30 a.m. A Hartsville resident reports spotting what he believes is a long-missing

	Black Angus cow near his residence on Hartsville New Marlborough Road.		has been missing from her Hayes Hill Road residence for a day.
Oct. 28 7:00 p.m.	A Clayton resident complains of a large, aggressive dog, possibly belonging to his neighbor, loose in his yard.	Oct. 31 5:40 a.m.	A caller reports a tree down and blocking both lanes on Sisson Hill Road.
Oct. 30 10:36 a.m.	A caller reports that her pet terrier		<i>Graham Frank, Chief of Police</i>

FIRE AND RESCUE

Oct. 1 8:16 p.m.	Adsit Crosby Road Medical Call	Oct. 17 12:03 p.m.	Church Road Medical Call
Oct. 2 8:13 p.m.	Canaan Southfield Road Medical Call	Oct. 17 9:10 p.m.	Norfolk Road CO Alarm
Oct. 5 12:56 p.m.	Cross Road to Canaan Valley Road Medical Call	Oct. 19 8:18 a.m.	Corser Hill Road Fire Alarm
Oct. 7 2:16 a.m.	Church Road Medical Call	Oct. 22 3:31 a.m.	Clayton Mill River Road Fire Alarm
Oct. 7 7:23 a.m.	Church Road Medical Call	Oct. 22 7:55 a.m.	Clayton Mill River Road Fire Alarm
Oct. 7 7:53 a.m.	Church Road Medical Call	Oct. 24 12:39 p.m.	Adsit Crosby Road CO Alarm
Oct. 8 5:27 p.m.	Alum Hill Road Medical Call	Oct. 26 1:22 a.m.	Mutual Aid to Great Barrington Medical Call
Oct. 10 6:09 p.m.	Church Road Medical Call	Oct. 31 7:20 p.m.	New Marlborough Branch Road Fire Alarm
Oct. 15 7:02 p.m.	Church Road Medical Call	Oct. 31 8:33 p.m.	New Marlborough Branch Road Fire Alarm
Oct. 16 9:40 p.m.	Multiple Calls (8+) Trees/Wires Down		<i>Fire Company President David Smith</i>
Oct. 17 12:01 a.m.	Hartsville Mill River Road Wires Down		

HIGHWAY DEPARTMENT NEWS

Get Ready for Winter!

The Highway Department is prepared for winter and will provide reasonable snow and ice control to public roads and properties. Our top concerns will continue to be personal safety, environmental protection, and cost. We ask that motorists use common sense and recognize that they are traveling at their own risk in inclement weather.

The highway crew is responsible for more than ninety miles of road. With only seven highway workers, we ask for your patience and cooperation. On school days, bus routes take priority. After the paved roads are plowed, the unpaved roads are taken care of. During a rain storm, when road temperatures drop below 32°F, unpaved roads freeze almost instantly, and the sand that is applied quickly freezes over. We will treat roads during a storm, and right after the storm passes, but please be aware that it is not possible to keep unpaved roads passable at all times. Sand, for residential use only, is always available at the Highway Garage. Residents are asked to take no more than two buckets at a time.

Highway workers do their best to avoid damaging private property. Anything (mailboxes, fences, signs, etc.) installed in the Town's right-of-way is placed there at the owner's risk. The Postal Service recommends that mailboxes be placed six to eight inches away from the edge of the road. Creating an apron where the mail carrier can pull off the road to make deliveries is

ideal. Because roads vary in condition, please use your best judgment and understand that the Town does not reimburse for property damaged by snowplows. Privately owned installations should be inspected regularly to insure that they are secured properly and that wood posts have not rotted.

Please review the following guidelines:

- Use common sense and refrain, when possible, from driving during a snowstorm.
- Reduce your speed and drive cautiously.
- Avoid distractions. The use of electronic devices while driving is never wise, especially during a winter storm.
- All-season radial tires are not the best choice during winter months in New England. Putting snow tires on your vehicle, or using studded tires if you travel on unpaved roads is recommended.
- Do not park your vehicle on any road or property that is maintained by the Town.
- Vehicles parked in driveways should be far enough off the road to allow plow trucks to pass safely.
- Plowing or blowing snow into Town roads is illegal and dangerous. Please find proper means to dispose of snow on your property; violators can be ticketed by the police.
- Tune-in to the local weather forecasts and pay attention to changing conditions.

Please drive carefully. ▣

Highway Superintendent Charles Loring

THE SCHOOL REPORT

A Very Busy Month for Our School Committee

November 5: A special meeting was called to allow for a time-sensitive response to an open meeting law complaint from Jennifer Brown of Monterey regarding a meeting held on October 23. Following the executive session, the School Committee announced in open session that, on the advice of legal counsel, it had voted in response to the complaint that there was no violation and that the school committee was acting in compliance with the law.

November 6 – 9: Five members of the Southern Berkshire Regional School Committee attended workshops at the joint meeting of the Massachusetts Association of School Committees and Superintendents held in Hyannis. David Travis and Jane Burke attended several sessions where they learned about the very complex state expectations for evaluation of superintendents. A key part of this process is working with the superintendent on setting her annual goals. Superintendent Beth Regulbuto and committee chair Jane Burke attended an illuminating session on building relationships with town officials where case studies from two districts were discussed. This was especially helpful, given that we are just beginning to prepare next year's

budget. In all, over thirty workshops were attended on a wide range of subjects including self-evaluation for school committees, communication with the public, legal issues, and creating a positive school climate.

November 14: At this regular meeting of the School Committee, the agenda packet was seventy pages long. First on the agenda was the annual reorganization required at the first meeting in November. Jane Burke and Dennis Sears were nominated for the position of chair. Ms. Burke received seven votes and Mr. Sears three. Jonathan Bruno had no no opposition for his position as vice chair, and was re-elected. The committee appointed Beth Regulbuto as secretary, Harvey Thompson as treasurer, Lynette Gagnon as clerk, Murphy, Lamere & Murphy as district law firm, and Lisa Sylvia as district physician.

A short executive session followed, with legal counsel attending, regarding two more open meeting law complaints. The regular meeting was then reconvened, and a vote immediately followed on the committee's response to matters discussed in the executive session, and then followed by the reading of letters to complainants Jennifer Brown and Carl Stewart, stating that the School Committee was within its rights to hold executive sessions in order to confer with counsel to consider complaints against a public officer. (On November 15, the Committee received a letter from Mr. Stewart stating that he misunderstood the law and that there was, in fact, no violation by the committee.)

Three items under new business were very compelling. First the committee held a vote to enter negotiations with Ms. Regulbuto regarding a new contract. The vote was eight yes, one no, and one abstention.

Next, David Travis guided the committee through the complex twenty-five-page rubric provided by the Department of Education outlining the process of establishing the goals of the superintendent. A draft of her goals was presented by Ms. Regulbuto. Once the final goals are accepted by the committee, hopefully at the December 19 meeting, they become the basis for the evaluating her work over the year. The public can view them on the District website.

Finally, the six members of the administrative team – Mount Everett principal Jesse Carpenter and vice principal Doug Daponde, elementary schools principal Charles Miller and vice principal Amy Lyn, head of technology Chris Thompson, and head of student services Sandi Hubbard – presented their Strategy for Continuous Improvement. This document is key to mapping out how the District can move forward on the three major objectives identified as most important by representatives across the school community in 2018: 1) Student need



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will drive decisions in developing curriculum and instruction; 2) SBRSD will strive to create a school climate where safety, security, and well-being are high priorities; 3) Acknowledging the unique advantages and challenges of sustaining a small district, we will create a variety of pathways for students to develop as resilient, curious, and ethical global citizens.

As they explained some of the action steps listed in the plan, it was clear that the team is united, with a clear plan of how to institute the changes needed. The document they presented named who is responsible for each action, what evidence will be used to measure success, and when it will be completed. It can be viewed on the school website.

In the third hour of the meeting, the committee performed the second part of its annual reorganization, the election of members to a total of nineteen subcommittees and liaison positions. The business manager reported that the District is financially sound, with spending in line with expectations. After three and a half hours a weary committee moved to adjourn the meeting.

November 19: Four School Committee members and the superintendent attended the 8 Town School Consolidation Committee (8TSCC). A motion was passed to have the eight towns form Regional School District Planning Committees (RSDPC) as outlined in Massachusetts General Law. To establish RSDPCs,

each town requires a majority vote from the Board of Selectmen and a majority vote of the School Committee or a special town meeting. The town moderator then appoints a School Committee member and two others to the RSDPC to explore the pros and cons of consolidation. The 8TSCC envisions that RSDPCs from all of the towns would come together to determine whether there are enough pros to go on to form the required Regional School District Planning Board to lead the next steps in the process. Pending confirmation of the legality of their motion, the group will dissolve. A School Committee member told the group that the law also allows a less complex path where the two school committees form their own RSDPCs, which can include town officials and others. Our School Committee has already voted to do that but Berkshire Hills has not. Tara White said, "The 8 Town committee prefers the municipal option so they can stay involved."


November 20: This was a special meeting to review the findings of an independent investigator the School Committee had hired to look into allegations of inappropriate actions by teachers towards special needs students in 2018 and retaliation directed at a whistleblower for reporting said behavior. After reviewing and accepting the report, the committee approved a statement to the public about the findings. **The investigator found that Superintendent Regulbuto and Director of Student Services Sandra Hubbard acted entirely appropriately in the manner in which they dealt with the initial complaint alleging inappropriate actions by District teachers. They acted to remove one of the identified teachers from the classroom and conducted an immediate investigation, which resulted in the teacher ultimately resigning. Other professional staff named separated from the District. The investigator found no evidence of any retaliation against the whistleblower. The investigation uncovered no evidence that there exists a culture of intimidation at SBRSD or that Superintendent Regulbuto has acted to foster such a culture.** □

SBRSD School Committee Chair Jane Burke

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HALLOWEEN – A FIELD OF SCREAMS

The New Marlborough Public Library’s annual Halloween gathering took place on a clear, cool late-October afternoon on the Land Trust’s Goodnow Preserve, with a host of creatures attending, not the least of whom was the commanding, unsettling figure of “The Gatekeeper” (and mastermind of this whole affair), who, in her day job, is none other than our mild-mannered head librarian Deb O’Brien.

As folks arrived at the scene, they were invited to come aboard Tom Brazie’s hay wagon, where they were then transported through the broad fields and deposited at a trail leading into the deep, dark forest, a trail populated with all manner of ghosties and goblins and eerie sounds from beyond the grave.

The ever-so-scary walk in the forest finally gave way to yet another, very remote, circular field where a group of former New Marlborough citizens, returned from the grave for this special occasion, sat in wait for the moment to break their long silence. Master of ceremonies Joe Poindexter, to all appearances the mortician who had brought these characters back from the dead, welcomed the large crowd and then introduced each of the speakers. One by one the spectral figures told their story: 18th Century settler Moses Cleveland (John Schreiber) described the harsh realities of life in what was then known as Township #2; Timothy Leonard, a.k.a. the Hermit of New Marlborough (Tom Stalker), regaled the audience with stories of his missteps, misdeeds, and misfortunes in courting the opposite sex; Mary Ann Gibson (Tara White) spoke of her husband’s mining for gold on Dry Hill back in the 1800’s – not exactly the Klondike; and Ruth Rhoades (Claudette Callahan) discoursed on her pivotal role in obtaining financing from Andrew Carnegie back in the early 20th Century for the Mill River Library... without which, of course, we would not today have Deb O’Brien!

Having absorbed the historical information of these voices from beyond the astral plain, the crowd journeyed back to the present time, some on foot and others via hay wagon, to gather in around a roaring bonfire as the dark of night descended, thus concluding yet another in a series of Halloween spectacles here in New Marlborough. □

Larry Burke



photos by Sandra Fusco-Walker and Larry Burke

Contributions are needed to continue the paper!

Please fill in the form and send with your contribution to:

New Marlborough 5 Village News, P.O. Box 243, Southfield, MA 01259

YES, I WANT THE *New Marlborough 5 Village News* TO CONTINUE!

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Town Times

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

Window hours: Monday - Friday 11:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.

Saturday 9:00 - 11:30 a.m.

Southfield (413) 229-8476

Window hours: Monday - Friday 9:00 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. and 1:30 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.

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., Tuesday and Thursday 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.

PERMITS ARE DUE JULY 1

and can be purchased for \$125 at Town Hall, the Transfer Station, or by mail. Please enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Late fee of \$150 after August 15.

Emergency calls:

Police, Fire, Medical
911

New Marlborough Highway Department

Located on Mill River-Southfield Rd.

Hours:

Monday - Friday 7:00 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.

PO Box 99, Mill River, MA 01244

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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

NM5VN Editorial Team

Larry Burke, issue editor; Diane Barth, designer;

Janice Boults, Martha Bryan, Jane Burke, Robbi Hartt,

Barbara Lowman, David Lowman, Joe Poindexter,

Peter Schuyten, Barry Shapiro, Sandra Fusco-Walker

Contributing writers and artists: Ann Getsinger, Fiona Kerr,

Mary Richie Smith. Index: Donna Weaver

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

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