

REDDING SENTINEL



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Reservoir levels alarm residents, but no reason to panic

By Donna Christopher

Recent views across the Saugatuck Reservoir – exposed mud flats, trees visible on the island – have prompted questions from passersby about its water levels, with some long-time residents musing the water level looks “as low as it’s been in recent memory.”

While the sight may lead some to think the water levels are dangerously low, that is far from the case, according to experts and Aquarion Water Company officials who don’t base the information on visual measurements. The Reservoir’s capacity in the Eastern Fairfield County System, where total usable storage is 19,477 MG, was 62.8% filled on December 10.

The Saugatuck Reservoir is owned by Aquarion Water Company

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Photo by Danielle Dimston

A weekend snowfall blanketed Topstone Park in white. If you have a photo you’d like to see featured here, e-mail editor@reddingsentinel.org.

Georgetown Holiday Festival becomes an outdoor and indoor affair

By Pamela Brown



Photo courtesy of Georgetown Community Association

The Georgetown Holiday Parade and Festival will return this year on Sunday, December 21 with the same seasonal cheer and a new partnership.

The celebration kicks off at 11:00 a.m. with a parade down Main Street, featuring holiday-decorated vehicles; Fred Baker’s hay wagon carrying Santa and local leaders; horses from Rising Starr Horse Rescue in Wilton; Schwick Wheels, a family-owned business featuring exotic and supercharged cars; and more.

Georgetown Volunteer Fire Company will be showcasing four to five trucks, and volunteers will host a recruitment table. “We’re excited to be participating and expect this year to be the best one yet,” said Alex Mirello, the Company’s captain and recruitment coordinator.

The fun will continue following the parade this year at The Granite at 5 North Main Street, where for the first time indoor holiday activities, treats, raffles, and photos with Santa will be offered.

“By the last week before Christmas, we find that folks enjoy a local, non-commercial event focused on families and community to remind us of the magic of the holiday season,” said Bonnie Sasso-Troy, a local businesswoman, Georgetown Community Association board member, and Festival volunteer. “We’re excited and grateful to collaborate with The Granite. They’re an amazing addition to Georgetown. Their commitment to the community and bringing people together made the collaboration feel like a natural fit,

and the space is perfect.”

The annual event is a team effort, with this year’s festivities organized by the Georgetown Community Association Festival Committee; Bill Dexter; Marty the “Head Elf”; Megan Dexter Brant; The Granite, and Leo Spinelli of Uncle Leo’s & Rosny Café. The event is free with a suggested donation.

The event is the main fundraiser for the Georgetown Community Fund, an initiative of the Georgetown Community Association that focuses on supporting neighbors in need.

“This year, we started a sponsorship program that we hope will be very helpful. We’ve been blessed to have received generous donations and sponsorships from many area residents, businesses, and various non-profits, allowing us to help more people,” said Sasso-Troy. More fundraising events are planned for next year.

Richard Wenning, Executive Director of The Granite, said the event is consistent with The

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REDDING'S BIG OUTDOORS

Shakespeare, Latin and a Christmas wreath

Exploring Crossfield and Little River Preserve | By Mary Flieger



Photo by Mary Flieger

The glorious golds of the native Solidago plant beckoned as we approached the trailhead to Crossfield earlier this fall, so named for its location on Cross Highway and the gorgeous field it traverses.

Indeed, I had driven this road for years never knowing there was a trail here until the new Redding Land Trust sign appeared! The entrance is found at the “Equus” sign (my companion’s Latin coming to the rescue here), and we mused that this would indeed be a wonderful horse trail.

The walk skirts the westernmost edge of the field, and as you approach the woods, you are greeted by a majestic sugar maple – too large in fact to capture with my iPhone. As the Equus trail ended, a trail intersection appeared, and we paused to consult our map; we decided to take the Fraxinus (ash) to the Rivulus (river) to the Quercus (oak) loop and return via the Rivulus. We would save the Apex (peak, tip) for another day. Sure enough, the Fraxinus trail was

practically a graveyard of fallen ashes, but we were heartened to observe maple (*Acer*) and birch (*Betula*) seedlings springing up in their place, along with some hornbeams and northern spicebush in the understory. This was a beautiful, easy walk and signage easy to follow. We were eager to find the river, so after completing the Quercus Trail we re-connected with the Rivulus and kept a lookout for the water. In the dappled sunlight, nailed to a tree we encountered this beautiful quote by William Shakespeare: “The earth has music for those who listen.”

How true, we thought, as we approached the banks of Little River.

Marsh marigolds flanked the edges, the water level unusually

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Housing is front and center in Georgetown development discussion

By Rocco Valluzzo

Members of the Gilbert & Bennett Wire Mill Advisory Committee noted last week that the right balance between housing and mixed-use will play a major part in the area’s re-development.

A Thursday, December 11 meeting of the Gilbert & Bennett Wire Mill Advisory Committee involved much discussion on Redding’s need for housing. Some noted that increasing its non-residential tax base is also a priority.

“If you look at the future of the town, that’s where you need to focus your attention,” said Committee member Rob Dean. “The State needs housing. The Town needs a non-residential tax base.”

Dean added that Redding has half the non-residential tax base of other surrounding towns that are in good shape financially, though First Selectwoman Julia Pemberton noted that many, like Wilton, are larger than Redding.

The topic of the diversity of Redding’s housing stock was also discussed; whether new units are “affordable” units or market-rate smaller units, many have identified the lack of options for households of all sizes and stages of life.

“I believe that we would benefit from some multifamily housing,” Pemberton said. “That is my opinion. For me, the important thing to focus on and the question I am asking is what is the breakdown?”

Last month, Governor Ned Lamont signed an omnibus housing bill that requires Connecticut towns to set goals for housing growth as the State works to address its housing shortage. Committee member Tracy Kulikowski noted that Redding may need to have some legal advice concerning this legislation and what impact it will have.

“It’s going to be hard for us to have any conversation about changing our housing stock until we know what the State is imposing on us with this new legislation,” she said.

Pemberton replied that she and Town Consulting Planner David Woods have already met and discussed the impact of the bill. This planning is also being addressed by the Western Connecticut Council of Governments.

Dean felt that Georgetown will not be redeveloped without multi-family housing being a significant component. He added that multifamily housing is currently an active sector in the development business and was unsure of how long that trend would continue. ■

The Revitalize Georgetown team is still accepting responses to its survey on the three proposed design options for the Georgetown master plan. Community members are encouraged to review the presentation materials at reddingct.gov/revitalize-georgetown-project and give feedback through the survey link found on that page.

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EDITORIAL

A holiday wish for you



Crunching over the newly fallen snow on Sunday evening towards Town Hall, I paused to take a few photographs of the Town Green.

The blues of twilight filled the air; light from the gazebo spilled over the lawn of white, and Redding's Christmas tree twinkled with cheerful color. The menorah stood waiting to be lit, tree branches casting intricate shadows against its slender frame.

Nearby, the American flag flapped quietly from its position at half-mast, a memorial for the lives lost at Sandy Hook Elementary School 13 years ago. Across the street, another glow of color came from a parked police car with its lights illuminated, a sentry as the Town's menorah lighting ceremony approached on the day of Australia's Bondi Beach shooting.

In this moment of winter quiet, the beauty of our small town coexisted with the ugliness that the world can hold.

The dissonance of holiday cheer amidst tragedy sometimes is difficult to process. But intrinsic in both Christmas and Hanukkah, and in the secular marking of the solstice and the new year's arrival, is the celebration of light in the darkness – hope arriving like a warm flame when our days are shortest.

As we celebrate the holidays, my wish for you – neighbors, friends, and readers – is that you find strength in our community; find peace with those you love; find inspiration from strangers; find room for grief and stillness; find joy in purpose and leisure; find support when you are weary; find humor in your friendships; find patience when it is needed most; and find beauty in the world around you.

May your light be brighter than the darkness. A new year awaits.

LEGAL NOTICES

At the regularly scheduled meeting of the Zoning Commission held on December 10 at 7:30 p.m. in person, the Commission reached the following decision:

Application #25-12Z – 195 Umpawaug Road (Assessor's Map and Lot #28-7) Owner Olivier Manigat & Lauren Beebe – In accordance with Redding Zoning Regulations Section 5.1.2 request for a Special Use Permit for Accessory Apartment. **Approved**

*Matt Lecher, Chairman
Redding Zoning Commission*

NOTICE TO TAXPAYERS, GEORGETOWN AND REDDING

THE SECOND INSTALLMENT OF REAL ESTATE, PERSONAL PROPERTY, AND SUPPLEMENTAL MOTOR VEHICLE TAXES ON THE GRAND LIST OF OCTOBER 1, 2024, IS DUE AND PAYABLE JANUARY 1, 2026.

TAXES DUE JANUARY 1, 2026, MUST BE POSTMARKED OR PAID, NO LATER THAN FEBRUARY 2, 2026, TO AVOID PENALTY. TAXES ARE DELINQUENT FEBRUARY 3, 2026

Payments postmarked, Paid in Person or Paid online, on or after February 3, 2026 are delinquent and will carry an interest penalty charged at the rate of Eighteen (18%) percent annually or one and one-half (1.5%) percent monthly, from the January 1, 2026 due date.

Supplemental Motor Vehicle Taxes are due in full January 1, 2026. Failure to make payment in accordance with the above will result in suspension of registration privileges in addition to the interest charges.

Delinquent Motor Vehicle Taxes must be paid in cash, certified check, money order or by credit card, to obtain a registration clearance.

FAILURE TO RECEIVE A TAX BILL DOES NOT EXEMPT YOU FROM PAYMENT OF TAX OR PENALTY.

Oldest outstanding taxes must be paid prior to paying current taxes.

Taxes can be paid or viewed at www.reddingct.gov. You may call (866) 923-8245 to make a credit/debit card payment.

Town Hall hours may vary due to weather conditions. However, due dates do not. Verify the Town Hall is open and the department you need is open before coming in person. The Town Hall is closed on Fridays. We are located at 100 Hill Rd, Redding, CT; Telephone: (203) 938-2706.

*Patricia J. Moisio, C.C.M.C., C.C.M.O
Tax Collector
Town of Redding*

Give the Gift of Membership and share the love of nature this holiday season with New Pond Farm

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- *eligibility to host birthday parties at the farm



For more information, please call us at 203.938.2117 or visit us at newpondfarm.org

POLICE BLOTTER

Police activity December 8 – 14

By Donna Christopher

Police assisted six citizens, seven drivers with disabled motor vehicles, made one well-being check, and assisted in three emergency medical calls.

Traffic

Police stopped 63 motor vehicles, issuing one summons, 15 infractions, 14 written warnings, and 33 verbal warnings. The infraction rate was 25%.

Six motor vehicle accidents were reported during the one-week period, including four two-vehicle collisions, one vehicle striking a garage during a delivery on White Birch Road, one vehicle hitting a stone wall on Lonetown Road, and one accident on Limekiln Road that resulted in property damage.

Fraud

There were two fraud incidents in the one-week period. A caller reported that someone called claiming to be from their bank but was not. Another caller reported being on the phone with Microsoft and unintentionally giving them banking information.

Suspicious incidents

There were nine suspicious

incidents reported. All were followed up on and either resolved or checked out okay.

Regional investigation

Local police gave guidance last week to residents to remain alert and practice routine safety measures as law enforcement agencies across the region coordinated a homicide and stolen vehicle investigation that originated in New York.

The investigation began on December 7 after the body of a Danbury taxi driver was recovered at the Croton Falls Reservoir. During the early stages of the case, authorities sought the public's help in locating a stolen vehicle believed to be connected to the incident. An arrest has since been made by the Putnam County Sheriff's Office of a Putnam, N.Y. man.

While unable to comment on specific investigative details, Redding Police Chief Robert Kalamaras was asked about the Department's role in supporting regional investigations and maintaining local public safety.

"Whenever there is a serious violent crime or a stolen vehicle that may cross town or state lines, law enforcement agencies in the

region stay in close communication," he said. "If there is information suggesting a connection to Redding or nearby communities, we coordinate with lead agencies to share information and follow up on any leads."

He emphasized safety practices for residents to follow: Be aware of your surroundings, particularly at night and in less populated areas. Keep vehicles locked and never leave keys, key fobs, or valuables inside. Trust your instincts. Report unfamiliar vehicles parked for extended periods, suspicious behavior, or individuals appearing to watch or follow others.

Kalamaras stressed that at this time there is currently no known threat directed at Redding stemming from this case. However, he said incidents of this nature serve as a reminder of the importance of routine safety measures and promptly reporting suspicious activity.

"The Department will continue working closely with regional partners to support ongoing investigations and protect the community," he said.

Holidays

The *Sentinel* wishes you Happy Holidays and a wonderful New Year.

SENTINEL HOLIDAY PUBLISHING SCHEDULE

The *Sentinel* will not be published on Thursday, December 25 or Thursday, January 1. Subscribers will receive the next issue of the *Sentinel* on Thursday, January 8.

Contact us at publisher@reddingsentinel.org with any questions.

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Menorah lighting includes Town proclamation against antisemitism

By Jessie Wright



First Selectwoman Julia Pemberton reads a proclamation as part of the event.

A crowd of over 75 people filled Town Hall on Sunday, December 14 for the Town of Redding's third annual Menorah Lighting to celebrate Hanukkah.

The festivities were moved indoors last minute after testing of the large menorah on the Town Green revealed an issue with illuminating the bulbs. Many – including Cantor Harriet Dunkerley of Temple B'nai Chaim, who helped lead the ceremony – said they didn't mind the warmth of the new setting as temperatures plunged outside at sunset.

Dunkerley also mentioned during her welcome that "it feels safe in here." With two patrol cars lit up along the road outside of Town Hall and Police Chief Robert Kalamaras greeting attendees at the door, security was a visible but welcome presence. The joyful mood of the room was tinged with pain as community members processed the news of the mass shooting on Australia's Bondi Beach during a Hanukkah celebration that took place only hours earlier.

In between rousing rounds of "Lots of Latkes" and "The Dreidel Song" led by Dunkerley, Rabbi Jason Greenberg, Cantor Robin Sills, and Traci Greenberg, First Selectwoman Julia Pemberton addressed the room, reading an official proclamation of the Town of Redding.

Town of Redding Proclamation Celebrating Hanukkah and Standing Against Antisemitism and Hate Against the Jewish People

Whereas Hanukkah, the Jewish Festival of Lights, is an eight-day celebration, commemorating the re-dedication of the holy temple in Jerusalem and the triumph of religious freedom, resilience, and hope over oppression

And whereas in 2025, Hanukkah begins at sundown on December 14 and continues through nightfall on



Rabbi Jason Greenberg, Cantor Harriet Dunkerley, and Cantor Robin Sills greet the crowd on Sunday, December 14.

December 27, during which Jewish families and communities, in Redding and around the world, gather to light the menorah and share prayers, songs, and traditional foods, and celebrate together

And whereas the lighting of the Hanukkah menorah and the sharing of Hanukkah traditions symbolize the enduring belief that even a small light can dispel great darkness.

And whereas Jewish residents have long enriched the civic, cultural, and spiritual life of the Town of Redding, contributing their time, talents, leadership, and traditions to the common good

And whereas the Town of Redding affirms that every person has the right to live openly and safely in accordance with their faith, culture, and identity, free from fear, harassment, or discrimination

And whereas Antisemitism, hatred of, prejudice against, or discrimination towards Jews, has persisted across centuries and in recent years, has been expressed through threats, vandalism, harmful stereotypes, violence, causing fear and pain for Jewish individuals and communities

And whereas antisemitism and all forms of religious, ethnic, or racial hatred are fundamentally incompatible, with the Town of Redding's values of dignity, safety, equality, and respect for all people, and it is the responsibility of communities to speak out clearly and consistently against such hatred

And whereas the spirit of Hanukkah calls upon us to bring more light into the world through acts of kindness, education, solidarity, and courage, in the face of intolerance, and bigotry

Now, therefore be it proclaimed that I, Julia Pemberton, First Selectperson of the Town of Redding, Connecticut do hereby recognize and celebrate Hanukkah and extend warm greetings and

best wishes to all who observe the Festival of Lights.

And be it further proclaimed that the Town of Redding honors and celebrates the Jewish community and the rich traditions of Hanukkah as an integral part of our shared civic and cultural life, and explicitly condemns antisemitism and all forms of hate directed at the Jewish people and commits to promoting dialogue and mutual

understanding to counter prejudice and misinformation, and affirms that Jewish residents are welcomed, safe, and valued in our community, and that the Town will continue working to ensure that no one is targeted because of who they are, what they believe, or how they worship.

In witness whereof, I hereto set my hand and cause the seal of the Town of Redding to be affixed on this 14th day of December, 2025.

The crowd applauded in appreciation and leaders embraced Pemberton after it was read.

"No matter how dark life gets, we learn to never let the light go out. This Hanukkah has already started with a dark moment," said Rabbi Greenberg. "But still, we are here together, bringing the light here on this evening. It is so wonderful to see so many of you come out tonight to celebrate with us and to support the Jewish community here in Redding. And I'm so proud to live in town and be friends with so many of you."

As the evening ended, attendees enjoyed latkes and donuts (*sufganiyot*) and headed outside on their way home. The large menorah on the Town Green had been brought back to life by a congregant who had tinkered and fixed the electrical issue. The first light of Hanukkah was burning bright, shining into the darkness. ■

Fence can remain on scenic Umpawaug Road | By Rocco Valluzzo

Finding that a section of a fence likely extends into the Town right-of-way on a scenic road, the Planning Commission nevertheless allowed it to remain in place after a discussion at its Wednesday, December 10 meeting.

Located at 311 Umpawaug Road, the structure in question is a pre-existing fence that has been renovated by property owners Michael Drexler and Joan Peckolick.

An investigation by Commission member Toby Welles found that there are no surveys in the Town of Redding's records – neither in the office of the Zoning Enforcement Officer, nor in the archives located in the Old Town House – to determine whether the fence lies completely on the owners' property. However, there are surveys of the two neighboring properties (305 and 313 Umpawaug) which delineate their front property lines, which are collinear. By this reasoning, the front boundary of 311 Umpawaug can be assumed to run in a straight line between the front corners of these two abutting parcels.

The investigation determined that the portion of fence closest to Umpawaug Road extends into the Town's right-of-way, giving the Commission purview to determine if this change to the scenic road

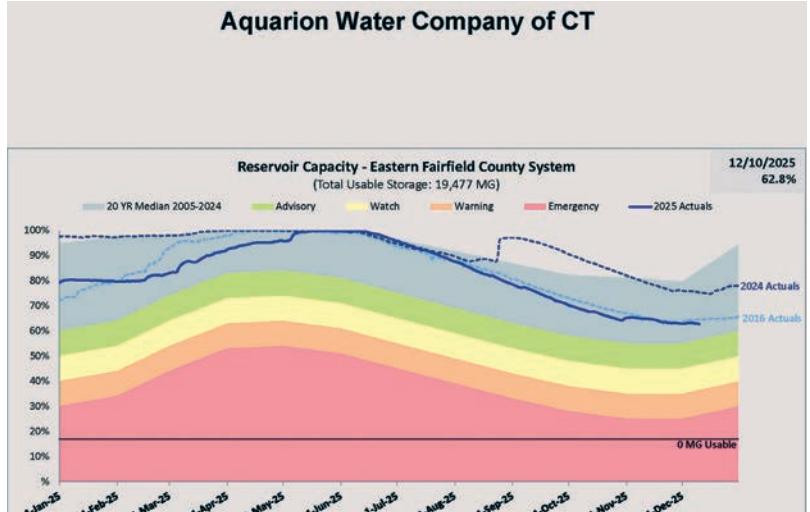
is acceptable. Since the fence is a replacement of a similar fence, the owners had no awareness that this matter needed the Planning Commission's approval.

"My personal opinion is that, because their driveway enters Umpawaug obliquely, there's wide exposure to a sort of gravelly driveway and a garage seen from Umpawaug, whereas with the fence in front that's more hidden," said Welles. "I think it benefits the scenic nature of the road to have that hidden. So, I think that even though the fence is in the Town right-of-way, it's a scenic benefit."

Welles also noted that many of the attributes in the scenic road ordinance, such as historic homes and vistas, are subjective. He also felt that subjective judgment by the Commission in this particular this case would not be out of step with the purpose of a scenic road designation.

In its decision, the Commission noted the confusion over the location of the front property line, and that it is in the interest of the Town to allow the six-foot high fence to remain in its current location provided that no further changes to the Town right-of-way at this address are made without the group's express permission. ■

Reservoir levels alarm residents, but no reason to panic / continued from page 1



Graph courtesy of Aquarion Water Company

and is part of a three-reservoir system. Aquarion moves water from the Saugatuck to the Aspetuck and then on to Hemlocks in Fairfield where the company's treatment plant is located. These reservoirs are part of the Eastern Fairfield County System, which has the largest water capacity of all Aquarion's systems.

"The system is currently 62.8% full, which is within the 20-year median level," said Peter Fazekas, Director of Corporate Communications at Aquarion Water Company.

"Even when it appears low, it still has substantial water reserves. During the 2016 drought, we did not hit any drought triggers for this System. Based on our modeling, we do not expect to hit any drought triggers for the Eastern Fairfield System. We expect the System to fill by the spring."

Redding is not currently in a drought, though it has been a dry year.

As of last week, Connecticut is "not in any kind of drought stage, but a couple of parts of southern Connecticut are abnormally dry," said Michael Dietz, Ph.D., Extension Educator for UConn Extension and the Director of the CT Institute of Water Resources. "Stream flows are on the low side of normal for this time of year. If we have a dry winter, that could be problematic as we go into the growing season next spring/summer," Dietz said.

Governor Ned Lamont declared a Stage 2 drought advisory in October for several Connecticut counties, including Fairfield. This declaration only flags the possibility of a drought event developing if dry conditions continue. "The lack of

rain over these last several months has impacted all of Connecticut, and in particular the regions around Fairfield, Middlesex, and New Haven counties," he stated in the advisory. "The purpose of increasing these counties to Stage 2 is to raise awareness that as this lack of rain continues, there is a possibility that this emerging drought event could intensify."

The Saugatuck Reservoir relies on the watershed to fill it – water cannot move into the Saugatuck from another reservoir. A watershed is an area of land where surface water and groundwater from precipitation or runoff flow into a common outlet, such as a reservoir or river.

In the event there was a drought, Aquarion would manage it with restrictions on water use according to various drought triggers of Advisory, Watch, Warning, and Emergency. "If we hit the first trigger, we implement voluntary water use restrictions and then move into mandatory water use restrictions if additional triggers are hit," Fazekas said.

"The Reservoir capacity is currently following the levels that occurred during the 2016 drought, which is within the 20-year median," he emphasized. "However, it is quite a bit lower when compared to the 2024 levels."

Customers on Aquarion water can help the water system recharge quicker by using water wisely. Ways include fixing leaks promptly indoors, shortening shower times, running full loads in dishwashers and washing machines, and turning off the tap when brushing teeth and washing dishes. ■

SPORTS

Young talent could help Knights

Hockey preview | By Rocco Valluzzo



Photo by Rocco Valluzzo

Greyson DiBlasi is one of four seniors on the 2025-26 Joel Barlow High/Weston/Abbott Tech hockey team. While the Knights are missing several key players from last season, they hope some young talent can step in to help fill these holes.

How quickly the Joel Barlow High/Weston/Abbott Tech (JBWA) boys hockey team gets up to speed will depend in part on a number of younger players stepping up.

The Knights have several talented underclassmen in their ranks. Some will be put to use when the team starts the season this week.

"Everyone looks like they can help the team out," said 12th-year Head Coach Bob Stearns, who has about 19 players this year. "We'll have a very well-balanced team and everyone should be getting a lot of ice time."

At practice for more than two weeks now, the Knights are in the process of configuring their lines, something they will continue to adjust all season. The first real test will be when they open the season on Saturday, December 20 when they host STORMAC (Staples/Norwalk/Brien McMahon) at 1:00 p.m. at the Danbury Arena.

They will make use of a number

of experienced players who have returned from last season's team, which won the South-West Conference Division III championship.

The Knights also advanced to the finals of the state Division III tournament before losing to Conard of West Hartford to finish at 18-6-2 overall.

They did graduate a number of key players last season, namely former captains Connor Thomas, Max Krug, and John Shaffer, all starting players. Thomas brought a lot of experience in goal with 605 saves while Krug and Shaffer were on defense and forward respectively.

The Knights will also miss the scoring of Peter Robinson, who led the team with 33 goals, and Kris Nieger, who was second with 13. Also gone is defenseman Colin Morse.

Other players will step up to fill the void, including this year's senior captains Wes Arees, Greyson DiBlasi, and Dylan Hilario, all

key contributors last season. The Knights will count on Arees (12 goals last season) and DiBlasi (five) to score, while Hilario will be on defense.

Also on defense is classmate Brandon D'Angelo and juniors Sean Fenton-Samuels, Joe Nigro, and Ty Palladino. Back at forward is junior Chris Nesto.

In goal, the Knights will have sophomore Max Durrwachter, whom Stearns looks forward to seeing improve. George Manna and Brandon Sweet are forwards.

"I see a lot of points coming from a lot of different people," said Stearns. "The potential is definitely there for more than that."

A few freshmen could also see varsity time, including Beau Frej, Liam Robinson, Andrew Malay, Sean Wallace, and Quinn Murphy.

"We have a lot of young talent on the team," said Stearns. "They all look experienced and they look like they have some good hockey knowledge, and I'm looking forward to it."

JBWA will face its fare share of competition in the SWC. Stearns expects Bethel/Brookfield/Danbury/Immaculate to be the powerhouse of the league and Masuk should be strong as well. If the Knights continue to come together and do the right things, he feels they can have a very strong season.

"I think winning our conference would be difficult but I don't think it's unattainable," he said. "I would love to be the number two team in the SWC. I think number three is a very good possibility. We're going to take one game at a time and not worry about who we're playing two games down the road." ■

Another strong showing for novice debaters

By Rob Sample



Photo by Randall Smith

Twelve debaters from Joel Barlow High School took part in the December 6 tournament at Daniel Hand High School in Madison. (Left to right): Sophia Baker, Max Unfried, Sam Goldman, Aniket Gupta, Tessa Simpson, Annabel Lau, Arianna Pereira, Emery Oppenheim (obscured), Maansi Tibrewal, Charles Rabinowitz, Sharon Sara, and Lucy Juncadella.

The Joel Barlow High School Debate Team put in another strong showing at the Connecticut Debate Association monthly tournament, with novice competitors placing among the top ranks. The event took place on Saturday, December 6 at Daniel Hand High School in Madison.

"We brought 12 speakers," said Barlow Social Studies Teacher Randall Smith, coach for Barlow Debate. "Eighty-four speakers were present from 11 schools – among them public, private, and parochial programs."

A concurrent tournament took place at King School in Stamford. In total, 248 students from 26 participating schools took part in the two December events. In both events, participating teams debated for and against this statement:

"This house believes that the U.S. government should buy equity stakes in private companies."

As Smith pointed out, the statement basically posed a question

that's currently the subject of debate in Washington, D.C.: Whether the Federal government should create a sovereign wealth fund. No final actions have been taken, but President Donald Trump issued an executive order earlier this year directing the Commerce and Treasury Departments to create such a fund.

Four Joel Barlow sophomore debaters earned awards in the competition at Daniel Hand. "Leading the pack was Aniket Gupta, the first-place novice speaker," said Smith. "Gupta and partner Charles Rabinowitz also were the third-place team."

"Annabel Lau was the fifth-place novice speaker," Smith continued. "She and partner Emery Oppenheim were the fifth-place team." Smith noted that this was Oppenheim's first award in debate, but she was a state finalist in Poetry Out Loud as a Barlow freshman last year.

Continued on page 5

BETHEL POWER EQUIPMENT

11 1/2 DAYS OF GIVEAWAYS

Countdown to Christmas with Bethel Power!

Any purchase at Bethel Power or Park City Power = entry into our **11 1/2 DAYS OF GIVEAWAYS**

(our stores close early on Christmas Eve!)

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Student leaders inducted into National Honor Society

By Jessie Wright



Photo by Jessie Wright / The Class of 2027 chapter inductees.

Families and friends of 31 high school juniors gathered at Joel Barlow High School on Wednesday, December 10 to celebrate their induction to the school's chapter of the National Honor Society.

"For current members and those former members who may be among our guests, we hope this will serve as a reminder of our standards of excellence you too are charged with maintaining as members of the nation's oldest, largest, and most prestigious student recognition program," said Chapter President Greyson DiBlasi in his opening remarks.

The National Honor Society is a country-wide program that empowers and recognizes well-rounded students, providing a framework for schools to encourage its four pillars of scholarship, service, leadership, and character.

Students are selected by the Joel Barlow High School faculty for membership based on their achievements in the four pillar areas. School Psychologist Rebecca Hoyt serves as Advisor to the group. National Honor Society members act as student leaders, hosting service and academic activities throughout the year.

"Throughout the year, members of our chapter serve as role models and tutors for other students," explained DiBlasi. "In addition to the strong academic records, which establish their eligibility for chapter membership, our chapter members are leaders in many student organizations as we serve our school and community through many activities, including an annual blood drive with the American Red Cross. We are proud of our record of accomplishment through the years and welcome these new members who bring new energy and support of our continuing work as National Honor Society members."

History Teacher Randall Smith – who was selected as Region 9's Teacher of the Year 2025 – was asked to give the guest address at the induction ceremony. He stressed the power of interdependence and working together, and the importance of finding something to do with your life that is both fun and meaningful. "I can't wait to see what you do next," he told the inductees. "This is a stepping stone for other things. What's next? Don't be a stranger. Come back and tell us about it. Give

the next generation of students a window into what can happen beyond our walls."

The Joel Barlow High School Chapter of the National Honor Society has been inducting new members since the 1960-61 school year. The members inducted on Wednesday include: Victoria Abukhovich, Christopher Alvarado, Noah Beninati, Austin Bradford, Edward Chiaramonte, Samuel Cooper, Lila Fellows, Lucia Ferrari, Victoria Flishenbaum, Hayden Goldstein, Carolyn Hopstaken, Paige Jarvis, Zackary Jhilal, Desmond Kady, Mackenzie Kassner, Iris LaMastro, Austin Lehberger, Caroline Lippoth, Grace Masone, Michael Mininberg, Milo Mutuski, Arjun Nambiar, Emma Ogden, Sara Perales-Hudson, Lyra Robinson, Ripley Robinson, Stephanie Robinson, Kimaya Sajit, Amelia Samon, Melanie Schrade, and Frances Wood. ■



MUSIC NOTE

Sing your heart out

at Barlow next week

Community Carol Sing on December 22

By Jessie Wright

Joel Barlow High School is once again inviting the community to join its musical groups for an evening of holiday cheer just before Christmas. On Monday, December 22 from 6:30 p.m. – 7:30 p.m., the 15th annual Community Carol Sing will take place in the Joel Barlow High School Auditorium at 100 Black Rock Turnpike.

Part concert and part sing-along, the event is hosted each year by the Tri-M Music Honor Society,

a national honor society of the National Association for Music Education for student musicians.

Against a backdrop of festive decorations, guests will enjoy favorite holiday carols, hymns, and instrumental pieces. The evening typically showcases music from the Barlow music ensembles, including Concert Band, String Orchestra, Jazz Band, Concert Choir, and Chamber Singers, as well as its extracurricular music groups. ■

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Upcoming school capital requests discussed

By Rocco Valluzzo

The Redding Board of Education presented various capital request items at the Long Range Financial Planning Committee meeting on Thursday, December 11.

Board of Education Chair Laura Worosz noted that it has been about 28 years since the roofs at both Redding Elementary School and John Read Middle School were replaced, with Redding Elementary School undergoing a partial roof replacement more recently. Since neither roof is in imminent danger and has been maintained, they are expected to last another two or three years.

"We know they're at end of life and they need regular repair, so we do have to take care of it before the roofs fall in," Worosz said. "We're not saying in two years we need to replace them. We're just not there yet. It could be five years. I don't know."

Roof replacement costs will likely be lower than originally expected. The Board previously budgeted for two roof replacements at the Elementary School but opted to do just one section over the main office.

The modernization project at the schools is proposed to

continue next year with upgrades to the special education and music spaces at the schools. There is also a request for replacing student lockers at John Read Middle School. About half no longer work, according to Worosz.

"They're all banged up and broken," she said. "Most of them are unusable for the students."

The fifth-grade restrooms need toilet and sink replacements, and some of the partitions that are damaged will have to be replaced. Another capital request item is for exterior door units, which stick and can be difficult to open. This is a safety issue, according to Worosz.

The Board of Education also plans to expand and improve the area of John Read Middle School's Project Adventure program. Ropes at the outdoor course, which currently are attached to trees, will be installed on permanent poles.

The Long Range Financial Planning Committee will make its recommendations to the Board of Finance by January in time for the start of the Town's 2026-27 budget cycle. ■

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Another strong showing for novice debaters / continued from page 4

In the varsity competition, a team from Groton's Robert E. Fitch High School took first place at Daniel Hand, while Windsor's Loomis Chaffee School came in second.

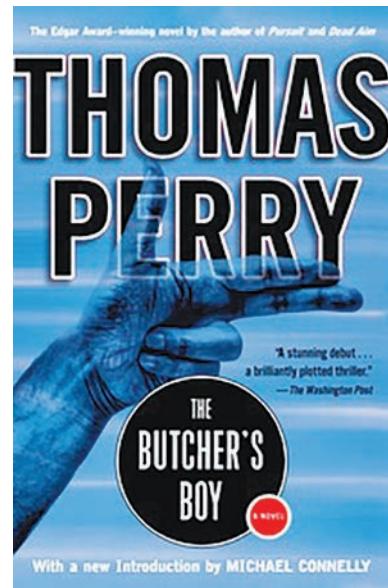
During the day's events, parents Michael Rabinowitz and Julia Pang were on hand as judges.

Rabinowitz is the father of novice debater Charles, while Pang is mom to novice Annabel Lau. Barlow Debate has been in existence since 2003 and is now in its 23rd year competing – Smith has been a coach and mentor from the start. ■

BOOK REVIEW

The Butcher's Boy | By Thomas Perry

313 pages / Random House Trade Paperback / \$9.87



The Butcher's Boy by Thomas Perry is a murder mystery that unfolds like a bomb blast (which actually happens at the beginning). But this is not one incident that troubles the imagination of a super sleuth. Rather, *The Butcher's Boy* is a study of two cultures existing simultaneously, one civic and one criminal. The rules, violence, and keen paranoia seem excessive as criminal exclusively until the reader realizes that the world of organized crime might easily create these contexts toward a behavioral subtext that the will enforce loyalty and protection. The reader sees how the omni-present threat of violent death increases when the social order, such as it exists, is unstable. Perry legibly creates these two worlds, crime and enforcement, and his novel adroitly tracks movements within each. At the end of this award-winning debut novel (1984 Edgar Award), in the last sentence, we are given a wink by the author for our efforts.

Thomas Perry is a solid writer of fiction. Describing FBI agents: "... their beefy, unlined, and untroubled faces had a quality of merciless and efficient innocence that would terrify whoever saw them show up with a search warrant." This is the sort of description that sets a first-class author apart from a dilettante. He describes the good guys with stereotypes of the bad. It is a technique to draw the reader into a human sympathy with miscreants as they move toward their destinies outside of convention. The pleasure got from literature in any genre depends on the quality of the writing. Raymond Chandler comes

to mind as a first-rate writer in the mystery genre. There are certainly others, and devotees know their names. Thomas Perry easily stands in their company.

The main investigator character, Elizabeth Warring, is the bright junior analyst. Perry gives her distinctly human qualities as she makes errors in process as the investigation she has been drawn into takes unanticipated turns. While artfully dodging stereotypical conclusions, the ending is wholly satisfying, an authorial signature we have seen in the best popular novels and screenplays.

The social underpinnings of criminal enterprise can be considered nearly a character in this novel. Crime in this story requires a unique mindset. Perry shows the reader a different way of thinking and being, and what might be considered criminal common sense. For example, "What they found, I'm afraid to say, was not a pretty sight. It was the head and hands of Edgar Fieldston, and the pistol that killed him." These are found in a shallow grave. When you awaken to the fact that physical identification is made with face and fingerprints, you realize that professional criminals won't waste effort on what they bury. Why bother?

The Butcher's Boy examines the thought process when moral and ethical considerations don't matter. Those who can't be shamed are cousins to the unscrupulous, and tribal ruthlessness reigns. In *The Butcher's Boy*, those who can kill, do, remorselessly, but not without object. Good and evil exist, but fate seems not to favor one over the other. Civilized life requires justice and enforcement, and criminals want to survive. The lesson Perry offers is that forces representing one side or another wax and wane. When instability is a constant threat, and killing is inevitable to the zeitgeist, there is really no end to it. Certain behaviors will manifest as normal to those extremes, and mistakes will be made on both sides. ■

Review by Tom Casey,
author of *Human Error*,
Strangers' Gate, and
Unsettled States

LIBRARY CORNER

Beyond books | By Erin Shea Dummeyer

I have worked in libraries for almost 15 years at this point, so allow me to share with you some of the top 10 trade industry library hacks I've learned over the years.

1. For patrons who use Hoopla to borrow digital content, there is a "Bonus Borrows" program during the last seven days of the month. Log into the app during this time and check out the bonus borrows. These items will not count towards your monthly borrow limit.

2. If you download the "Acorn Catalog" app and store your library card in the app, you can use your phone to check out books on the self-checkout or even have your phone scanned at the front desk as if it were a library card. So even if you don't carry your library card, as long as you have your phone... you're good!

3. Did you know you can "suspend" your library holds?

If you're going on a long trip and don't want all your holds to become available while you are away, you can suspend them either in the app or in your online account.

4. Have you ever wanted to read a *New York Times* article but it's behind a paywall? Check out the link on our homepage labeled "*New York Times*" for brief instructions on how to use the Library's subscription to break through that paywall.

5. Next time you're in an airport and you feel the urge to buy a trashy magazine, open your Libby app instead and peruse our magazine collection – for free.

6. We have a collection of passes to local museums you can borrow that will get your entire family in for free or for a reduced price: The Aldrich, Bruce Museum, Stepping Stones, and more.

7. The Kanopy app has a whole collection of "story time books

brought to life." If you are feeling guilty about giving your kids screen time, this is a great option.

8. If there's a book you would like to read and it's not in the Mark Twain Library collection, we can sometimes get it for you from another library in the Bibliomation consortium. And if it's not available there, we will also consider buying it for you – just ask!

9. Mark Twain Library has a peaceful and serene loggia off the back of the building within listening distance of two different waterfalls.

10. Finally, if there's anything we can help you with, just ask. Our library staff want everyone to feel welcome and seen at the Mark Twain Library. Give us a call or stop in. ■

Erin Shea Dummeyer is Director, Mark Twain Library

Good books for good readers Holiday reads to add to your list

By Margi Esten



As I was preparing to write my annual Christmas books column, I did a little extra research and was surprised to discover that there are several holiday themed books written by writers who are quite famous and will certainly be familiar to you. I have included some of them here, and so this Christmas list is a little short on descriptions but long on quantity. There is something for everyone here! I hope you get to enjoy some of these during this wonderful season.

A Christmas Memory by Truman Capote is an autobiographical short

story published in 1956. He looks back on one very special Christmas that was spent with his older, eccentric cousin, Sook. This is a particularly moving story about friendship, love, and the importance of gift giving.

A Child's Christmas in Wales by Dylan Thomas is a Welsh poet's nostalgic reminiscence of a much simpler time.

A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens was published in England in 1843 and became an instant classic that miraculously brought the author out of his impending financial ruin.

The Man Who Invented Christmas by Les Sandiford is a fictionalized version of the dispirited and somewhat desperate Charles Dickens in Victorian England as he put his story – *A Christmas Carol* – on paper.

Small Things Like These by Claire Keegan takes place in the weeks leading up to Christmas in 1985 in a small Irish town, where a coal merchant is forced to confront his past and the complicity of the town in connection to the local convent. NPR wrote that the novel reads as a "feminist revision of Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*."

Sherlock Holmes and the Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle by Arthur Conan Doyle is a classic Christmas mystery. It is a short and sweet holiday novella.

A Merry Christmas and Other Christmas Stories by Louisa May Alcott is a collection of heartwarming tales that are perfect to read in the Christmas season and of course includes an excerpt from *Little Women*.

Holidays on Ice by David Sedaris is an essay collection by a humorist set during Christmastime, including one detailing Sedaris's experiences working as an elf at Macy's.

Christmas Holiday by Somerset Maugham was originally published in 1939 and follows Charley, whose father gifted him an all-expense paid trip to Paris for Christmas.

Hercule Poirot's Christmas: A Hercule Poirot Mystery by Agatha Christie involves the famous detective taking on a Christmas Eve case. *The New York Times* wrote "Poirot has solved some puzzling mysteries in his time but never has his mighty brain functioned more brilliantly..."

Merry Christmas to all, and to all a good night. ■

"Meet my teacup" A quest to share stories on exhibit at Mark Twain Library

By Lisa Goldstein



Photo by Lisa Goldstein

When Jessica Hughes was a teenager, the only connection she had to her late grandmother was a couple of Snow Geese teacups and saucers she inherited. She started drinking tea around the same time after elderly residents at a senior center where she was volunteering urged her to try it. She pulled out her grandmother's old cups and

would make herself black tea with milk and sugar and ended up falling in love – not only with the taste, but also with the vessels that held her drink.

"I always loved the cups, the shape of them (especially the small really round ones,) how delicate they can be, that there are so many different shapes and designs and meanings," effused Hughes.

Hughes, who is an art teacher and likes to collect things in general, started to amass an array of teacups about five years ago, rescuing them from Goodwill, thrift stores, and estate sales. She now owns 110 teacups, which she normally displays on bookshelves in her home but has currently loaned to Mark Twain Library for a display in the building's rotunda.

"The timing seems perfect as we begin thinking of sipping hot tea and coffee and celebrating the upcoming holidays. It is a charming display!" said June

Myles, who coordinates the Library's rotunda exhibits.

For Hughes, the timing also seemed ideal since part of her goal in sharing her collection was to connect with others. With the "Meet My Teacup" display and a corresponding social media presence #meetmyteacup and @meetmyteacup, she hopes to spark conversations as people take out their china for the holidays.

"Hopefully, #meetmyteacup will inspire people to go back and look for a special teacup and share their stories," explained Hughes. "It's a way to encourage people to think about a memory they hadn't recalled for a while and talk about it."

You can visit the teacups on display at Mark Twain Library at 439 Redding Road through the end of the month or share your photos and stories anytime on Instagram @meetmyteacup or #meetmyteacup. ■

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New Outreach Librarian for Meadow Ridge



Photo by Carol Morgan

For five years, in an impressive civic outreach, Mark Twain Library Librarian Midge Loery has been a vital weekly link between the residential senior community of Meadow Ridge and the Library. On Tuesday, December 9, she passed the torch to Dolly Zurzuski, a Redding resident and the Library's Circulation Assistant. (Left to right): Margaret Brown, Meadow Ridge resident and Mark Twain Library Trustee; Dolly Zurzuski, Circulation Assistant and Outreach Librarian; Midge Loery, Mark Twain Library Librarian.

BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT

A financier's creative second act

Irish Flare Photography | By Justin Reynolds



Marion Lynott started Irish Flare Photography a decade ago after a career in finance.

Growing up in Ireland, Marion Lynott dreamed of a career in art. When she ultimately wound up working in the corporate world, little did she know she'd find that dream career after an unexpected layoff.

About 10 years ago, her position at Bridgewater, the world's largest hedge fund headquartered in Westport, was eliminated after a round of layoffs. Working in high finance has its advantages, though.

"I was laid off but paid a heap of money," Lynott said with a laugh. "I had a whole year to figure out what I wanted to do next. Then I leaned into photography."

For the past decade, Lynott has been unleashing her creative talents with Irish Flare Photography, a business that specializes in equine photography but also covers events, weddings, and families.

"I like to keep things as natural and free-flowing as possible," Lynott explained. "I try to avoid the staged, posey photos. I know they're important. But natural smiles, natural connections, natural movements – I'm all about that. That's why I like to work with horses so much. They're always moving."

Lynott moved to the United States about 30 years ago and has lived in Bethel with her husband, Chuck, for the last 15 years. Today, she primarily shoots locally.



Photos courtesy of Irish Flare Photography

Irish Flare Photography covered Make Music Day - Georgetown this summer.

"I've shot some horse events in Ireland, but I mostly stay around here," she said, adding that she still has family in Ireland and visits two or three times a year. Her equine photography covers "the gamut – hunter paces, show jumping, taking portraits for clients and their horses in natural settings, you name it."

In November, her photos of Irish landscapes and horses were on display at The Shops at Auburn Landing in Georgetown, and she regularly covers events at The Granite.

(About halfway through our interview, we realized we had actually crossed paths at The Granite last summer on Make Music Day.)

In an age when everyone carries a high-quality camera in their pocket and editing apps and filters are just a tap away, how does a photographer stand out?

"My eyes, my vision, my perspective – all gifts from God put to amazing use – help to make me different," Lynott explained. "They say an epic image is the combination of light, leadlines, and layers that all work together to draw attention to the subject. This is true, but there's also something in me that sees things a little differently and homes in on the smaller details."

"I recently got hired to photograph a wedding, and my

client said, 'I chose Marion because she's not just a photographer, she's an artist.' Weddings are always so challenging – capturing the essence of the ceremony, the couple, the families, the event. It's a fabulous feeling and a lot of hard work: capturing the moments, post-processing, and editing."

Whenever a client hires Irish Flare, they can expect a super-responsive engagement; it's not uncommon for Lynott to be able to pop over for a next-day portrait if a client is so inclined.

"Whatever clients have in their minds, I work with them to bring them to life, make their life easy. I'll go to their home or meet somewhere of their choosing. I just try to make it as great of an experience as I can. My style is relaxed and cheerful; I bring calmness and good energy to every photo session, and I love meeting new people," she explained.

Lynott continues to sharpen her photography chops through continuous online learning and "shooting nearly every single day."

"It's cliché, but practice makes perfect," she said. "I am in constant pursuit of excellence, and I'm not stopping until I get there." ■

For more information, visit irishflare.com



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Celebrating Our 35th Season

Notes from a neighbor

A matter of life and death – or not

By Carter Wiseman

Have you been suffering lately from an *existential experience*? I have, but it's not about the meaning of life and death – it's about the meaning of those two words.

I associate "experience" with a rewarding semester in high school, a memorable summer vacation, or years on a demanding job. The term "existentialism" triggers a course I took in college that included books by the French philosopher Jean Paul Sartre. If I recall, it meant thinking about existence – why we are here, and what it all means – not whether a corporation makes a profit in the next quarter.

William F. Buckley, Jr., considered by many to be the father of modern conservatism, made a point of having a better vocabulary than his opponents, suggesting that they weren't as smart as he was.

Marketers are doing something similar with "experience" and "existential," suggesting that there is more to the words than the untutored among us might know. A television ad for replacement windows subtly implies that the experience you had with your old ones was ill-informed, and that you don't know what a really good door does. I had hardly paid for dinner at a local restaurant when I got a text asking me to measure my "experience." Verizon is eager to improve my "mobile experience" with a new phone, although the one I have works fine.

The experiential exchange that has bothered me most is the one with my favorite doctor. I have been seeing him for years and have always valued the schmooze after the exam. But recently, I have noticed that he ducks out faster than before. When I got my

most recent reminder from his office about an upcoming visit, I noticed that it was scheduled for 15 minutes. A day after I left, I got a message asking me to assess my last "experience," telling me how important my "feedback" was. I responded, suggesting that the doc might benefit from a bit more than 15 minutes with the patient. The next visit ran to 10.

I wonder how those responses are used. I would like to think that they help improve service, and maybe get a good employee a raise. But in an age of algorithms, I am worried that they may just be sorted to boost sales – or track my movements.

I don't think I am being paranoid. This has larger implications. The survival of democracy is more worrisome than a visit to the doctor, but the stretching of the term "existential" is connected. If Joel Barlow doesn't make the top-10 high schools in the state, do they face an existential crisis? If the Republicans or the Democrats lose seats on the school board, are they in danger of extinction?

Certainly not, but the more accurate use of the term might make us wonder about how education creates an informed electorate, and why political debate can improve a community. Now that's existential, and definitely worth experiencing.

The most rewarding professional experience I have had lately was with an insurance broker who got me a great policy in a matter of hours and never sent me a survey. So, I wrote him a personal thank-you note – and put it in an envelope, with a stamp – wishing him continued and prosperous existence. ■

Georgetown Holiday Festival becomes an outdoor and indoor affair /
continued from page 1

the spring.

To keep the Santa photo session moving along, there will be new technology notifying people when it is time for photos. Guests can bid on 40+ raffle prizes donated by community members.

"We have amazing items. All the funds raised go directly back into the community and the winners now get to go back out in the community and enjoy their items or services they have won. It's a win-win," Sassano-Troy said.

The fun continues with several silent auction items, including a one-year family membership to the Riverbrook Regional YMCA, a smokeless firepit from Route 7 Mason Supply, and a week of riding camp at Rising Starr Horse Rescue.

In addition, there will be outdoor activities around The Granite. Fred Baker and his hay wagon will be offering hayrides around the "block," and in the parking lot Rising Starr Horse Rescue will be offering photo sessions and interactions with mini horses.

Melanie Jarvis, also part of the Georgetown Community Association, added that the Festival offers something for everyone.

"It supports our local community and creates special holiday moments that people look forward to each year," she said. "It's a laid-back, feel-good way to celebrate the season as a community." ■

For more information, visit gca-ct.org/holiday-festival-2025



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Thank you to our incredible Boys & Girls Club of Redding-Easton volunteers, generous donors, and supportive community for making this past year truly meaningful. Your time, talent, and kindness have helped create safe, joyful, and growth-filled spaces for the youth we serve. Because of you, our Club continues to be a place where kids feel seen, supported, and inspired. We are deeply grateful for your partnership and wish you and your families a warm, bright, and hopeful holiday season.

Christ Church Episcopal Parish

Christ Church Episcopal Parish is a welcoming community of loving Christians exploring our faith, serving others, and growing in God's love. A little church with a big heart, we are active in Redding, as well as the broader community. From contributing monthly meals to Dorothy Day Hospitality House to sponsoring the Redding Concert on the Green series, from offering community painting socials to providing Christmas gifts to residents of Danbury homeless shelters, we take great joy in fulfilling Jesus's command to love God and our neighbor in prayer, word, and action.

Come serve with us! Join us for candlelight worship this Christmas Eve, Wednesday, December 24, at 6:00 p.m. And look for our unique, service-based children's Vacation Bible Camp, coming at the end of summer, 2026! All are welcomed, included, and affirmed at Christ Church.

To find out more, visit www.christchurchredding.org.



The year is winding down in our beautiful little town. Redding Grange thanks you all for a great Spring, Summer, Winter, and Fall.

Please attend our last market of the year on December 20th, it's almost near!

Bring a gift to share with others in need. It will make you feel good inside, most indeed!

Redding Grange Procrastinators'
Market: December 20
1:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.
399 Newtown Turnpike

Cub Scouts Pack 118



Redding Cub Scouts Pack 118 would like to thank the Redding community for their support of our annual wreath and centerpiece fundraiser! We continue to invite boys and girls ages 5-10 and their families to join our fun program.

Please e-mail reddingcubscouts@gmail.com for more information.

Mark Twain Library



Mark Twain founded our library with the hope of it becoming a community hub in our quaint New England town. We continue to thrive as a place to discover, grow, and connect thanks to the spirit of volunteerism in town. As a private non-profit association library, we rely on fundraising to cover 40% of our operating budget. Each year, hundreds of volunteers lend a hand to help with fundraisers including the Art Show, Frog Frolic, and the Book Fair.

We could not do that without the dedication and continued enthusiasm of these amazing volunteers.

Many thanks for your support!

Redding Preservation Society



HAPPY HOLIDAYS TO THE TOWN OF REDDING

We strive to promote and preserve the rural and historical character of the Town of Redding through advocacy and education.

Historic preservation matters.

Redding Celebrates America's 250th Anniversary with Charles Ives Concert

Redding invites the community to join in marking the nation's Sestercentennial with a special concert planned for Saturday, May 30, 2026, at Joel Barlow High School Auditorium. The Greater Bridgeport Symphony, conducted by Eduardo Leandro, will perform Charles Ives's masterpiece *Three Places in New England*, joined by talented Joel Barlow High School music students in an inspiring side-by-side collaboration.

Ives, a longtime Redding resident, drew direct inspiration from our town: The second movement, "Putnam's Camp, Redding, Connecticut," vividly evokes the Revolutionary War winter encampment at Putnam Memorial State Park – Connecticut's own "Valley Forge."

This patriotic evening will celebrate Redding's unique role in American history and music, honoring the ideals that shaped our nation 250 years ago. To make this once-in-a-generation event a reality, we need your support! Generous donors and sponsors are essential to cover orchestral and production costs, ensuring this celebration benefits the entire community.

Additional free community events – including a guided history walk at Putnam Park, scholarly talks, and panels – will enrich the commemoration throughout May.

For sponsorship opportunities or to learn more, contact Sean McNamara of Redding Nursery (203) 938-3297 or sean@reddingnursery.com.

Together, let's make Redding's America 250 unforgettable!

THE GRANITE

Thanks to your support, The Granite is becoming a vital non-profit community arts and event space in Redding. Our Annual Appeal helps us to continue moving forward, preserving this beautiful landmark and activating it as a vibrant place for emerging artists, community performances, and cultural exchange.

Every dollar donated in December will be **matched**, doubling your gift amount.

If that wasn't enough, **memberships** at The Granite launched in time for your end-of-year gifts and 2026 plans.

With your help, we can create a one-of-a-kind gathering space for our community. Please join us.

Invest in The Granite today: thegranitechurch.org/annual-appeal2025/

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Improving the lives of people locally, nationally, and internationally is a core belief at First Church of Christ, Congregational.

In 2025 our members:

- Regularly made sandwiches and baked hot meals for the homeless
- Distributed food at Daily Bread Food Pantry in Danbury
- Donated bags of stuffing for Thanksgiving meals for Christian Community Action in New Haven
- Collected coats for the Dorothy Day coat drive
- Funded construction of clean cookstoves in Uganda
- Contributed to Texas flood and Jamaican hurricane relief
- Brought Christmas cheer to 80 needy children
- Supported the training of future guide dogs for the visually impaired
- Contributed scholarship funds for international divinity students
- Contributed funds to heat the homes of Redding residents in need

Join us for worship Sunday at 10:00 a.m. Call the church office at (203) 938-2004 to learn about our programs for children, youth, and adults.

The Season

Help make a



Continued



Rooted in Purpose: Inspiring Stewards Across Generations

Help New Pond Farm Education Center inspire environmental curiosity and stewardship at every stage of life. Your gift fuels hands-on programs that connect our littlest learners, students of all ages, adults, families, and seniors to nature, our food systems, and the land that sustains us all. Spanning 102 acres, our living classrooms include pastures, wetlands, woodlands, and a model working farm where learning comes to life, nurturing deeper understanding and lifelong appreciation for the natural world.

Your support truly makes a difference.
Please donate at newpondfarm.org/support



Standing as a beacon of hope and healing, Connecticut Humane Society's new facility at 863 Danbury Road opened in summer 2025 and stands now as an innovative model of care for those in need, preparing pets for adoption and providing resources to keep pets with their families for a lifetime of love.

The new pet resource center is more than bricks and mortar. It is a promise. A promise that no family will ever have to choose between keeping a pet and affording essential care.

Make a gift of promise this season for pets in need:
CThumane.org/Wilton

FANS of Putnam Memorial State Park

Make history happen with the Friends & Neighbors of Putnam Memorial State Park! In 2025, we introduced over 1,100 students to local Revolutionary War history with our School Days program; obtained a grant to renovate the Park Museum's diorama room; revived the lanternlight Ghost Walk, not held since 2019; and staged another successful Winter Walk, with a historic walking tour followed by a re-enactment skirmish.

These events can only happen with your support. As we head into America's 250th, we're continuing our decades-long tradition of education through popular programs like the above, plus our beloved Re-enactment Encampment in November. But as a volunteer organization, we rely on neighbors like you to help pull it all off. Support history education in 2026 and beyond by signing up at putnampark.org today.



2025 Highlights:

Good news for the preservation of the Salmon Read Barn & Museum. Because the Society qualified under the CT Neighborhood Assistance Act, we met our \$24,000 fundraising goal. This means restoration work can resume.

- *Founding Fathers* book signing with Dr. Kevin Gutzman;
- A Joel Barlow junior received our history award;
- Student programs at the Umpawaug Schoolhouse;
- The Rock 'n Roots concert and fireworks, a plant sale, and llama visit at Lonetown Farm.

Thank you to our corporate sponsors, dedicated volunteers, and members. Become a member and help continue 60 years of preservation work and programming.

Looking forward to 2026 and celebrating America's 250th birthday with you.

The Redding Historical Society Board
info@reddinghistory.org
reddinghistory.org



Dedicated to protecting, preserving and revitalizing Redding's trees, forests, and wildlife habitats.

Members work closely with local and state officials along with community organizations. Together, we forward conservation legislation while urging utility companies to underground power lines rather than deforest our land.

Two of RTC's proudest accomplishments: 1) Mobilizing the Town to stop Eversource from cutting down 70 healthy trees on Cross Highway; 2) Helping prevent United Illuminating's plan to put up huge transmission lines that would deface the Southport Historic District.

Contact: reddingtreeconservancy@gmail.com

n of Giving

local impact

on page 10



**Housatonic
Habitat
for Humanity®**

Housatonic Habitat for Humanity is a self-funded affiliate dedicated to providing affordable housing for hardworking families and offering free critical home repairs for low-income seniors and veterans. We also provide free financial literacy workshops, including first-time homebuyer education, fraud protection, budgeting, and more. Giving comes in many forms, and all of them make a difference. We hope you'll choose the kind of giving that feels most meaningful to you. Through donations, volunteering, or financial support, every contribution helps local families build stability. Together, we strengthen our local community, one home, one family at a time. Learn more at housatonichabitat.org.

The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum



Members are at the heart of everything we do. Join as a member and support first museum exhibitions for emerging and under-recognized artists, safeguard arts education for underserved students, and sustain our beautiful and accessible Sculpture Garden. Enjoy access to exhibiting artists, free or reduced program fees, and reciprocal benefits at local and national arts and culture institutions.

Give the gift of an Aldrich membership this holiday season and delight a loved one with a year's worth of access to contemporary art.

Join at www.thealdrich.org/support/membership

Calvary Independent Baptist Church

Calvary Independent Baptist Church, 711 Redding Road (Route 53), invites the Redding community to join them Wednesday, December 24, at 6:00 p.m., for our children's Christmas Eve program followed by Carols & Candlelight, a time of singing and reflection on the significance of the birth of Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.

Westbrook Nature School

As a non-profit nature-based preschool, Westbrook helps children develop a love and respect for the Earth. Our approach gives children the freedom to explore and discover nature for themselves in our woodlands and streams. Every day, children, ages three to six, are outside, embracing the sunshine, rain, mud, wind, and snow. They track animals, learn bird and frog calls, grow organic vegetables and herbs, and identify plants, animals, and insects native to our bioregion. These experiences are enriched by song, dance, puppetry, storytelling, and the celebration of seasonal festivals. In addition, we offer Parent-Child Classes for caregivers and children from birth to age three. Through these programs, we serve our local community while contributing to the global movement to nurture, heal, and steward the Earth.

We deeply value the continued support from our community, which sustains and inspires us.

**With Gratitude & Peace,
Your Friends at Westbrook Nature School**

LWV LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF REDDING

Start the New Year with a Civic Pledge
Join the League of Women Voters of Redding!
Get involved. Stay informed. Help shape our community.

As we welcome a new year, there's no better time to make a meaningful commitment to our town. Pledge to join the League of Women Voters of Redding – and be part of a non-partisan effort that strengthens our local democracy.

- We welcome new members – women and men – to join our non-partisan effort to foster an informed and active citizenry.
- Your membership supports civic education, encourages voter participation, and strengthens local democracy.

Start 2025 with purpose.
Make your pledge to join us today.
lwvreddingct.lwv.org

Scouts BSA Troop 306

Thank you, Redding for your support of Troop 306, Redding/Easton's first Scouting America Troop serving girls aged 10-17. We appreciate how our community always steps up to donate to our annual fundraiser and contribute to our Eagle Projects. Stop by and say hello if you see us volunteering at community events like Georgetown Day, the Library book sale, the Redding tree lighting, or the Memorial Day parade. The troop is run by its elected Scout leadership, and the program is geared toward girls who love the outdoors. At monthly campouts, Scouts practice fire starting, outdoor cooking, pitching tents, and building shelters. Weekly meetings focus on rank advancement, first aid, tying knots, and other Scout skills. We emphasize character development, leadership, survival skills, and community service. Check out our troop Facebook page "Scouts BSA Troop 306" and Instagram at "t306redding." Interested girls can contact t306scoutmaster@gmail.com.



BEST WISHES FROM THE REDDING LAND TRUST THIS HOLIDAY SEASON!

Thank you to our wonderful community for your vital support of our mission to preserve 2,200 acres of forest, wetlands, meadows, streams, and ponds in perpetuity.

We look forward to connecting with our Redding neighbors in the new year, enjoying our town's treasured open space.

Happy holidays to all!

To learn more about Redding Land Trust and how to volunteer, participate in our photography show, walk with our community hiking club, or support our work through membership and donation, visit: reddinglandtrust.org

Redding Social Services

Special Thank You to those who have supported Redding Social Services in 2025

Bethlehem Lutheran Church	Jane T. Muhlethaler Foundation, Inc.
Boys & Girls Club of Easton-Redding	JRMS Outreach Program
Keystone and Torch Clubs	Marilyn Sloper Realty, Inc.
Brunissen Trust	Meadow Ridge Worship Service
Caraluzzi's	National Charity League Redding & Easton
Chef Audra Kruk	Redding Elementary School PTA
Christ Church Parish	Redding Garden Club
Coldwell Banker Realty	Redding Grange #15
Commission on Aging	Redding Neighbors & Newcomers
Democratic Town Committee	Redding Police Department Blue Santa
Eastward Christian Fellowship	Redding Salvation Army Unit
Erin Deluca Jewelry	Republican Town Committee
Fairfield County's Community Foundation	Ridgefield Thrift Shop
First Church of Christ Congregational	Sacred Heart • St. Patrick Parish
Georgetown Community Association Inc.	Santa Fuel
Georgetown Holiday Festival & Parade	SOAR Together
Georgetown Lions Club	Temple B'nai Chaim
Georgetown Village Restoration	United Way ALICE Program
Great Turkey Escape 5K	Warrup's Farm

Many Thanks to All of the Private Donors in Redding and the Surrounding Communities

Redding Neighbors & Newcomers

Redding Neighbors & Newcomers (RNN) is a 501(c)3 volunteer-led social organization established in 1974 to help new and existing residents make meaningful connections with each other.

We offer a wide variety of activities, including Bunco, Cooking Club, Movies With Friends, Coffee Hour, Ladies Night Out, Mahjong, Hiking Club, Book Club, Children's Playgroup, Happiest Hour Out, and more. We also host public events, such as our annual summer party, Halloween Trunk or Treat, Halloween Costume Party, Noon Year's Eve, holiday party, etc.

Although RNN is primarily a social club, we're also involved in civic activities with other local organizations, and we appreciate the collaboration among organizations that help make Redding a wonderful place to live.

We are so grateful to ALL of our volunteers and members for their contributions in 2025! Visit our website at reddingneighborsandnewcomers.org to learn more and reach out to president@reddingneighborsandnewcomers.org to get involved!

Georgetown Village Restoration, Inc.

Georgetown Village Restoration, Inc. (GVR) would like to thank all the Georgetown residents, businesses, and supporters who work hard to make the village a vibrant and exceptional place. We would also like to thank the Town of Redding and the Wire Mill Committee, particularly Committee Chair Amy Atamian, for their dedication in forging thoughtful and viable plans for the Wire Mill's future. GVR is dedicated to supporting the village as it is now – a lively commercial hub for Redding and surrounding towns – and also in its potential to become an even more bustling and exciting area down the road.

GVR has many volunteer opportunities for those who want to get involved, from Georgetown Day next June and other events that showcase Georgetown, to street clean-ups and beautification, marketing and grant-writing, and more. If you'd like to join us in our work, please visit our newly redesigned website at www.georgetownct.org.

Together Women Rise

Together Women Rise is a national organization which seeks to empower impoverished women and girls living in the developing world to become economically self-sufficient and to promote gender equality. To achieve this they research charitable groups, assess their needs, and provide information on their goals and progress.

The Redding chapter, established in October 2018, meets quarterly on Monday evenings at First Church of Christ, Congregational. Each meeting begins with a potluck dinner featuring the cuisine of the Grantee of the month, followed by a video presentation and discussion of the organization and its accomplishments. We "dine in" yet every participant donates an amount she would pay for dinner if we were "dining out".

All Redding residents are welcome. For more information contact vhcints@icloud.com or go togetherwomenrise.org



The Connor Sheehan Fund has been part of the Redding community since 2020.

In 2025, we piloted an exciting nature-based youth mental health program with our partners at Ridgebury Farm. In 2026, we'll be expanding that program to reach more local kids and families. Visit connorfund.org to learn more.

We're so grateful for the support of our Redding neighbors. And, we look forward to making an even greater impact in the lives of young people in 2026. With your donations, we can do it!

Peace and happiness to you and your family in the new year.

Barbara and Dan

Redding Elementary School PTA

The Redding Elementary School PTA would like to thank our sponsors and members of the community that have made donations, purchased auction items, and participated in our fundraisers. These contributions have allowed us to expand our enrichment programs and assemblies, allowing us to reach more students.

Additionally, the RES PTA was able to provide over \$8,500 in grants to teachers and staff. Upcoming programming for the new year includes science week, International Festival, author visit, book fair, member events, game night, read-a-thon, evening meetings in February and May at New Pond Farm focusing on mental health and building community (with programming and pizza for students) and so much more. The RES PTA wishes to send a heartfelt thank you to our volunteers, who make all of these programs and events possible. If you want to volunteer with the PTA,

please e-mail us at respta4kids@gmail.com.

Redding Park and Recreation

Redding Park and Recreation would like to wish all our supporters a wonderful holiday season. When you show up to enjoy fitness classes, sign up your children to participate in our basketball leagues or summer camps, or show up with your family for a concert or a day at the beach, we know we are serving you. Extra thanks to those of you who volunteer your time as a youth coach or donate funds that help things happen such as being a concert or team sponsor.

Best wishes to our instructors and our youth program staff who are essentially the ones who make our programs special as lifeguards, referees, camp counselors, rec program staff, and Extended Day staff.

Thanks again for showing up for our programs and events.

May you, your friends, and family have a happy and healthy New Year.

The Season of Giving



Help make a local impact



Continued from page 9

SOAR Together

SOAR Together is a Redding-based non-profit with a mission of helping address loneliness and social isolation through programmatic and collaborative opportunities to uplift. SOAR's Flower Power and Spreading Sunshine programs utilize rescued and donated flowers arranged and delivered to fellow community members. Our Let's Chat program was developed to help spark conversations and connections while fostering self-expression, kindness, and confidence.

Gratitude abounds for our collaborations in Redding this year, with deep appreciation to Robert Mars and the Boys & Girls Club of Redding-Easton for participating in an Eagle Scout project which brought two Chatty Benches to town and the team effort that created the Spreading Warmth, Sharing a Meal program. Special thanks to the Redding Garden Club, Margherita Pilato, Audra Kruk, Autumn Tooker, and Jess Tyson for being the change we are so thrilled to see.

Please reach out to Ginger Smith at gsmith@soartogetherct.org if you would like to learn more.



The Georgetown Volunteer Fire Company sends warm holiday wishes to our Redding community. Your support helps our crews respond to firefighting, fire prevention, emergency medical service, hazardous materials, vehicle extrication, and cold-water rescue throughout the year.

We welcome new volunteers for Fire and EMS as well as in Admin support roles. No experience is needed – we will provide all training. We meet every Monday evening and invite you to stop by after 6:30 p.m. to learn how you can get involved. Your time and skills will strengthen our department and deepen our connection to the town we serve.

Visit your GVFC volunteers at the Georgetown Holiday Parade on Sunday, December 21. In this season of giving, year-end contributions help sustain training, equipment, and readiness. Your generosity supports the safety of every Redding neighbor!

Redding's Boy Scout Troop 15

Celebrating our 75th year, Holiday Greetings from Redding's own Boy Scout Troop 15. We meet every Tuesday evening at 7:30 p.m. at our sponsor, the West Redding Fire Department on 306 Umpawaug Road. Boys between 11 and 18 are welcome to visit, check it out, and join the troop at any time. We welcome guys from John Read, Barlow, home schooling, and several neighboring towns, so there are always new friends to make in the troop.

Once a month, all year round, we camp outside in tents, hammocks, shelters we make ourselves, or lean-tos. The highlight of every year is a whole week of troop camping in the summer.

We combine service with practical skills, silliness, and character education in a program that many find life-changing. For more time outdoors doing real things, please join us.

Contact Joe Downey at T15ReddingScoutmaster@gmail.com

John Read Middle School PTA

The John Read Middle School PTA is a volunteer-run organization supported entirely by members and donors. Our mission is to advocate for and enrich the experience of JRMS students, teachers, and staff. Each year, we organize a range of events – student assemblies, cultural activities, community events, social activities, and parenting workshops – to bring our mission to life. We are truly thankful for our extraordinary volunteers and community sponsors – your support is what makes everything we do possible!

We are currently preparing for our 3rd Annual Professional/Career Day in March and are looking for professionals from all fields in the greater Redding community who are excited to share their career journeys with students.

Stay connected with PTA updates and opportunities at www.jrmspta.org, on Facebook at www.facebook.com/jrmspta, or by e-mailing jrmsptainfo@gmail.com

Redding Police Department



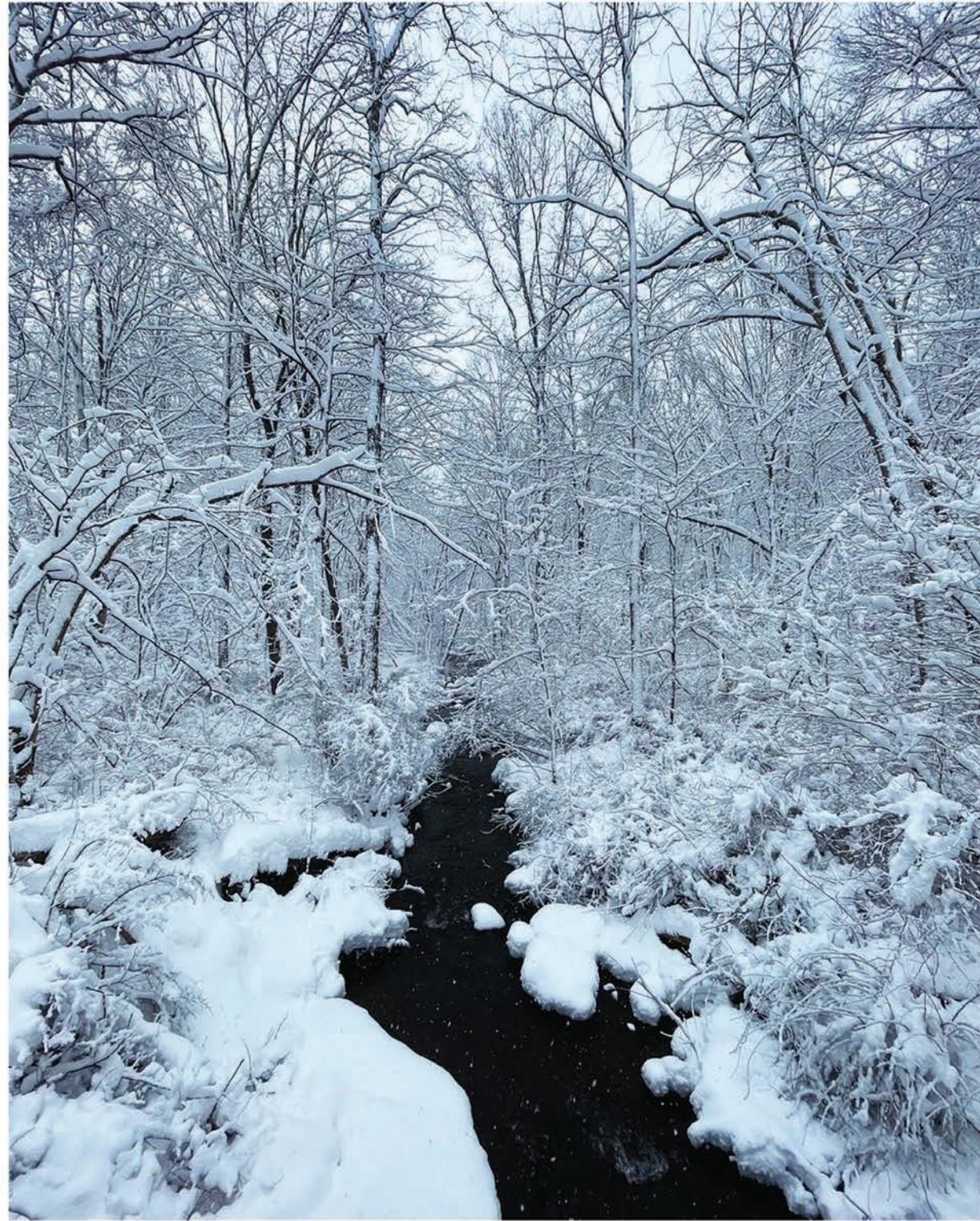
The Redding Police Department extends our heartfelt thanks for your continued support and partnership. As we celebrate the holidays, we ask that you keep our officers, dispatchers, and all first responders in your thoughts as they spend this season serving our town, often away from their own families.

Your trust means everything to us, and we are honored to serve and protect this remarkable community.

We are currently hiring entry-level police officers. Learn more about joining our team at <https://rpct.us/index.php/employment/>

With gratitude, The Redding Police Department

Happy Holidays from Redding Land Trust



Join us outdoors—
become a member!



Join with a donation of \$25 or more.
Mail a check or scan the QR code:

Redding Land Trust
PO Box 1076
Redding, CT 06875



www.reddinglandtrust.org/giving

Little River North. Photograph by Nicholas Colletta from the 2025 Redding Land Trust Photography Show

New Year's Day Hike Thursday, Jan. 1 at 11am at McCormack Preserve

OBITUARIES

Cynthia Lee Rohr-Blyth

May 4, 1958 – December 3, 2025



which she ran for a number of years.

Cindy was always ambitious, and she worked part time at a local restaurant as a bartender. The bar was a hang-out for the local police department. That is where she met her future husband, Bill Blyth, a Monroe police officer. The first time he saw Cindy, he said to a friend, "Someday I am going to marry that girl."

On May 19, 1984, they married. Cindy gave birth to their daughter, Ashley, on May 18, 1986.

Cindy began her journey to Heaven on December 3, 2025, at the age of 67. Born in New York City on May 4, 1958, she was the daughter of Elizabeth and Robert Rohr.

She moved to the Chicago area and then to Buffalo, NY, where her father's work took the family, finally settling on the family homestead in Easton where her mother's family had lived for six generations. She lived the rest of her life in Connecticut.

Cindy knew from an early age that she wanted to be a teacher. She graduated from Joel Barlow High School and Central Connecticut University. After graduation, she established her own nursery school, Easton Early Learning Center,

and later for Aspetuck Pop Warner in Easton/Redding. She coached so well that one year her team won the local championship and went to the nationals at Disney World. Eventually, she coached for her alma mater Joel Barlow.

Cindy was active in the Redding Education Association, and was president of the union, looking out for her fellow teachers' work rights. Many of her fellow workers approached her with their problems over the years.

Cindy is survived by her husband of 41 years, William Blyth, her daughter Ashley and Ashley's husband, Junior Matos, two grandchildren Diana Matos, 6, and Wesley Matos, 5. She is also survived by a brother, Richard Rohr and his wife, Charmaine, and a sister, Barbara Rohr. In addition, she is survived by six nieces and nephews, Alexandra, Victoria, Jacob, Matthew, Elizabeth, and Andrew. Also, sister-in-law Kathy Blyth Raynor and her husband Mike, and a brother-in-law, Tim and his wife, Lisa and their two children, Madison and Michael.

In lieu of flowers, please consider making a memorial donation to the Building Improvement Fund of Christ Church, Easton, at christchurcheaston.com/give. ■

Mary Eileen Wagner

February 4, 1939 – November 29, 2025



life brought them from Manhattan to Hartsdale, NY, before settling in Connecticut. After several years in New Canaan, they made Wilton their home in 1978, remaining there until early 2025.

Mary was fun-spirited, warm, and endlessly devoted to her family—especially her grandchildren, whom she spoiled with boundless affection. She was an avid sports fan and rooted passionately for her favorites, including Steph Curry, Derek Jeter, Aaron Judge, and Travis Kelce.

A gifted home cook, Mary created gourmet meals with ease and joy. She also found deep happiness in gardening, spending countless hours tending the flowers and plants in her beloved backyard. She even took her talents to the local florist, Wallflowers, and worked among some of her closest friends. Her lifelong affection for frogs was well-known; they appeared everywhere—scattered in her garden, her kitchen backsplash, her shelves, and even her license plate. Over the years, she lovingly cared for several pet frogs—Jeremiah, Claudius, and Priscilla—who lived in a tank on her kitchen counter.

Mary was an active member of the Wilton Garden Club, where her memorable claim to fame was renting out the newly renovated Old Town Hall for a national commercial. She volunteered

for years with Minks to Sinks, preparing her famous meals for fellow volunteers, and when A Better Chance opened its doors in Wilton, she faithfully baked and delivered cookies to the scholars each month.

During her final months, Mary became deeply cherished by the community at her assisted living facility. The outpouring of love from the staff spoke volumes about her ability to connect with others. Many shared warm stories, and nearly all said the same thing: They laughed with her.

Mary is preceded in death by her parents; her brother, James; her sister, Jeanne; and her nieces, Lisa and Gina. She is survived by her devoted husband, Martin; her children, Kelly and Neil; her grandchildren, Noah, Molly, and Logan Gels, and Martin and Emma Wagner; and her nieces and nephews, Karen, Jack, David, John, JG and Noel; along with countless friends she made throughout her life.

Mary will be remembered for her strength, resilience, and the deep love she carried for her family. She leaves behind a legacy of laughter, kindness, and treasured memories.

Per her wishes, there will be no services. The family would like to thank the many therapists, nurses, and aides who cared for her throughout this year. ■

If trees could talk

I carry your heart

By Laurie Heiss

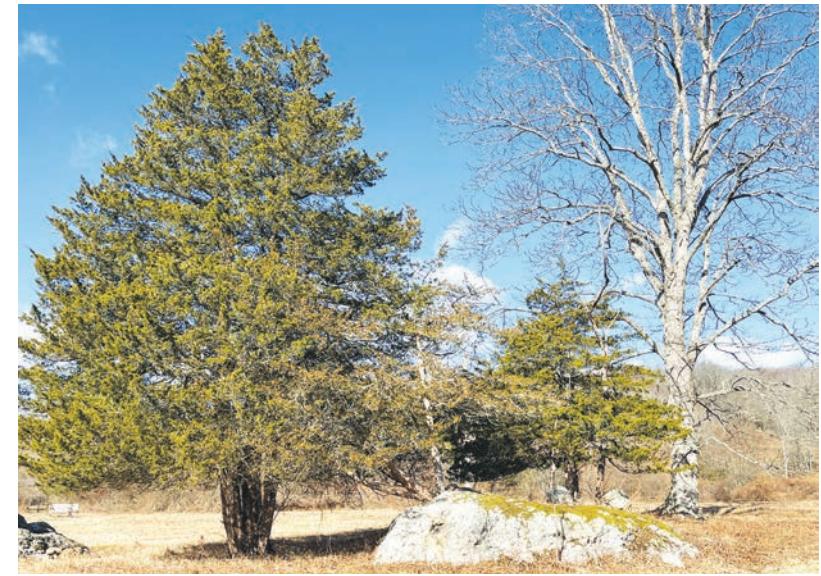


Photo by Laurie Heiss

At the holidays, we think about our friends—and for some of us, those can be trees. A tall, solitaire hickory near a pioneer Eastern redcedar (a juniper!) are the friends I'm introducing.

Long-lived and rather unkempt, shagbark hickories are my favorite tree species (okay, tied with burr oaks) and have been since as long as I can remember. Many grew in my childhood yard, which was carved out of an old-growth forest, and my great-grandmother's dairy farm, bordering a cornfield. Hickories are a crucial host for insects and some bats while providing food for many animals. Their large compound leaves—with five or seven leaflets—are obovate (wide at the top and tapering at the base; an upside-down egg shape). Their spring-green fruit is a large round nut with a thick outer husk with four ribs protecting a roundish light tan nut. If you dig your nail into the thick green husk, it releases an exhilarating fragrance. The shaggy bark is so whimsical and messy—why does it curl up like that? Why doesn't it fall off? What should I use it for? These were questions I contemplated as a youngster.

At the base of these trees are scattered some ashes of dear friends. So, it is not just that the trees are friends; they carry the hearts of friends in their roots up to their spring leaves. They remind me of e.e. cummings who wrote, "I carry your heart (I carry it in my heart)". At this holiday time, amidst the chaotic bustle and festivities, it is appropriate to think about those friends no longer with us. These attractive arboreal friends help me do just that as they stand watch in the meadow, as sentinels, today and every day. ■

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League of Women Voters hosts Georgetown presentation



Photo by Susan Clark

The Redding League of Women Voters held their annual holiday luncheon on December 10 at Lombardi's Trattoria in Georgetown. It was a fitting location for the event, which featured a presentation by Amy Atamian, Chair of the Gilbert & Bennett Wire Mill Advisory Committee, about the revitalization options under consideration for the village. Around two dozen guests participated in an active question and answer session with Atamian about future developments.

REDDING SENTINEL

We now offer Redding Sentinel logo merchandise, just in time for the holidays!

We have custom blend coffee, caps and T-shirts.

Learn more at
www.reddingsentinel.org/shop



THE NATURAL WORLD

Mushroom hunting in a Mexican cloud forest

By Terry Karpen



Photo by Terry Karpen
Marta Contreras Luna

I was in Oaxaca, Mexico this past September with a cultural, culinary tour group. On the fourth day of the week-long trip, we departed the city of Oaxaca and traveled by van to the tiny mountain village of Cuajimoloyas for an overnight mushroom hunting adventure.

Oaxaca, one of the 32 states of Mexico, is located in the southern part of the country, and Oaxaca City is the capital of the state. Oaxaca is crossed by three mountain ranges (sierras), and in between the mountains lay deep canyons and narrow river valleys. This rugged terrain has contributed to a land of amazing biological and cultural diversity.

Communities have remained isolated for millennia, and distinct ecosystems, languages and traditions are sustained here. These indigenous people of Oaxaca are descendants of the inhabitants who were present long before the Spanish invasion, with over a third speaking one of the state's 16 officially recognized indigenous languages. The largest group is the Zapotecs. The Zapotec village Cuajimoloyas is in the Sierra Norte mountains of Oaxaca at almost 10,500 feet elevation above sea level and is part of a network of eight self-governing indigenous communities that protect the local traditions, the forest, and oversee sustainable ecotourism.

When we arrived in the village, we were greeted by our guide Marta Contreras Luna, a local Zapotec woman. Marta is a third-generation mushroom forager (*hongueras*) and a chef. The knowledge passed down by her grandmother is deeply rooted in the connection between the forest and indigenous traditions, wisdom Marta generously shares with others through educational excursions.



Photo by Mandy Chan
Baskets of foraged mushrooms

Marta hopped into the van, and we drove out of the village, ascending, and into the "Mushroom Forest of Cuajimoloyas," the cloud forest surrounding the village. What makes the mushroom forest in Cuajimoloyas ecologically and culturally significant? The altitude creates a specific ecosystem known as a cloud forest where there is persistent mist, high humidity, and fog, thereby creating immense biodiversity. This combination, along with the pine-oak forest, creates an ideal habitat for mushrooms.

Symbiotic relationships between the mushrooms and the trees sustain the forest. There are countless species of wild mushrooms, with over 50 known to be edible. The Zapotec communities have been foraging mushrooms for centuries, both for food and medicine. Culturally, the mushrooms are rooted in their identity, traditions, and economy.

We reached the starting point of our adventure, and Marta provided each of us with a basket to hold the mushrooms we would forage. She demonstrated how to detect the wild mushrooms on the forest floor, which was heavily covered with leaves and pine needles. These mushrooms are elusive, difficult to see, even when you stand next to them. To know where to look, we needed to focus on the environmental cues of the habitats and specific locations in the forest where edible mushrooms grow.

We hiked, steadily climbing, and giddily gathering mushrooms with childlike excitement. Each discovery triggered gleeful shouts. But for me, it was difficult to hunt for mushrooms because I was distracted by this magical place of cool, misty air with a soft glow of sunlight, and superabundant plant life – the forest canopy was filled with a mix of pines, oaks, and alders.

Mosses and lichens blanketed the trees, rocks, and forest floor. Gigantic agaves perched on rocky outcroppings. Never-ending ferns and a continuous procession of colorful wildflower varieties led the way.

Marta inspected our finds and advised on which mushrooms are edible and suitable to harvest and other toxic ones to avoid. She showed us how to cut the mushrooms, leaving the base in place, and covering it up with pine needles or leaf litter so that the underground network is maintained to allow for regrowth. The visible mushrooms are the "fruit" of the thread-like mycelium that lives within the soil. The elusive mushrooms have unique forms, colors, and textures. While the most familiar mushrooms have a cap and stem, other forms include conical, fan-shaped, star-shaped, and cauliflower-like. Colors are across the entire spectrum and textures can range from smooth, velvety, and spongy to chewy, firm, slimy, scaly, or tough.

We ended our forest hike at a clearing that appeared unexpectedly, like a mirage. We could see mountains and fields of corn and patches of wildflowers. There was a yellow wooden cabin, several other colorful out-buildings, and a trout pond. We watched as Marta's family caught trout in a net and playfully joined in the pursuit, and just as it started to rain, we gathered inside the cabin. It was lunch time, and Marta and two other women cleaned and cooked the trout over a wood fire oven. They were making trout soup and grilled trout with rice, vegetables and fresh flour tortillas. We stuffed ourselves with the offered food and admired our foraged mushroom-filled baskets set up on a table nearby. Marta



Photo courtesy of Oaxacan gastronomic media website Leche con tuna
Cuajimoloyas

assured us that we would eat the mushrooms for dinner when they are combined with other ingredients to create mushrooms in yellow mole (*hongos en mole amarillo*), a traditional Oaxacan dish.

We left the warmth and camaraderie of the yellow cabin, and stepped out into the rain, fog, and chilly mountain air, and piled into our waiting van. From the clearing, we drove into the forest on a bumpy dirt road, many miles further away from civilization, to the secluded rustic cabins where we would sleep in the cloud forest. It was damp and cold, and we were grateful for the cozy refuge of our individual cabins with fireplaces readied for our arrival and stocked with burning wood.

After a respite lounging in front of our fireplaces, we met in the community building and joined Marta in the kitchen. Laid out on the counters were the mushrooms we foraged and other fresh ingredients for the *hongos en mole amarillo*. Mole is a complex Mexican sauce with regional variations, each with unique ingredients and characteristics. Core components include a variety of dried chilies, onions, garlic, tomatoes, tomatillos, herbs, and spices. Corn masa or broken-up corn tortillas are usually added as a thickener for the sauce. In this terrain, yellow potatoes are one

of the main crops grown, besides corn, beans, and apples. So, in this region, in addition to traditional ingredients, puréed yellow potatoes are added to the mole sauce, rather than corn masa. This mole can be eaten with various vegetables and most types of meat. For this meal, Marta sautéed the mushrooms and added them to the pot of mole sauce and simmered it until flavors melded and the sauce thickened. Lastly, Marta made potato dumplings by taking tablespoon-size portions of extra puréed potatoes, rolling them into balls, and adding them to the pot.

When the dinner was ready, we adjourned to a candle-lit dining hall with a single long table. Placed at every setting was a gifted flask filled with mezcal. Soon after, we were served bowls filled with mushrooms in yellow mole and plates of warm tortillas. We were joyful and tipsy.

When people think "Mexico," what usually comes to mind are beaches and deserts. But there are high mountains, deep canyons, and magical forests in the center of the country. Mushroom hunting in a Mexican cloud forest is transformative, an experience most traveler to Mexico overlook. ■

Terry Karpen is proprietor of Queen Of Spades Gardens & Landscapes in Redding

Redding's Big Outdoors: Shakespeare, Latin and a Christmas wreath / continued from page 1



Photo by Jessie Wright / Crossfield in winter

low due to the summer drought, and we searched in vain for a way across. We spied the continuation of the trail – the "Rivulus" sign was in plain sight on the other side, but the usual ingenious trail tender options were missing; we split up to try and find a way across. Following the river south, I suddenly discovered the reason: A once sturdy, well-constructed bridge had been washed downstream (a remnant of the August 2024 storm, no doubt) and was now half in the water and half on shore! So, we looked for the lowest point in the river and jumped from stone to stone to the other side.

Once across, we realized we had bitten off a little more than we could chew. We weren't exactly bushwacking our way through, but the trail was a little more overgrown than usual – no doubt having been cut off from trail tending by the

loss of the bridge.

But there were discoveries up ahead. We were now on the other side of the river and heading north in the direction of Cross Highway. As we looked across, we spied something bright red – and it wasn't a bird. A large and aging Christmas wreath was hanging from a tree; an unusual adornment in this natural setting, and it leaned a kind of mystery to the moment. The path began to head uphill and narrowed into a kind of arbor; suddenly as we pushed some branches aside, we were at the cable guardrails on Cross Highway. Lacking a shoulder, we crossed to the other side to safely walk the hundred yards back to the car. And here, we found the final discovery of the day: the entrance to the Little River North trail, soon to be our next hike. ■

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

\$ = fee applies
R = registration required

This Week's Featured Events

Procrastinators' Market

Saturday, December 20
1:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.
Local vendors, find the perfect last-minute gift
Redding Grange #15
399 Newtown Turnpike
reddinggrange.org/events-and-activities

Georgetown Holiday Festival

Sunday, December 21
11:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.
Parade on Main Street followed by photos with Santa and festivities indoors
The Granite
5 North Main Street
thegranitechurch.org

Redding Land Trust's New Year's Hike

Thursday, January 1
11:00 a.m.
Hike with Redding Land Trust to ring in 2026
McCormack Preserve
reddinglandtrust.org

Want to feature an upcoming event?

E-mail us at advertise@reddingsentinel.org for more information.

ARTS

Saturday, November 22 – Saturday, January 3

Tiny Acts
Saturdays 12:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.
Group art exhibition of works with intimate scale
G-Town Arts
5 Main Street
gtownarts.com

Friday, November 28 – Saturday, January 3

101 Teapots by Frank Kara and Infused Group Exhibition
Saturdays 12:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.
G-Town Arts
5 Main Street
gtownarts.com

Thursday, December 11 – Saturday, December 20

Flash
Thursdays and Fridays 1:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.
Wednesdays and Saturdays by appointment
Group exhibition of small works under \$500
Anonymous Society
268 Simpaug Turnpike
anonymoussocietygallery.com

Thursday, December 18

Call for Photographs!
Back by popular demand:
Redding Land Trust Photography Show
Take photos now, submit March 19 – April 20
Entry requirements, FAQs, key dates, and cash prize information now available
reddinglandtrust.org/photoshow
\$, R

Sunday, December 21

Afternoon Tea
2:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.
Closer look at shaping exhibitions on view
G-Town Arts
5 Main Street
gtownarts.com

CHILDREN | TEENS

Saturday, December 20

Connecticut Invention Convention – Innovation Expedition
10:30 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.
For ages 8-11 years old, work in teams to solve a challenge and present solutions
Norwalk Housing Authority
EnVision Center
30 Day Street
Norwalk
wiltonymca.org/invention-convention
\$, R

Sunday, December 21

STEM Sundays (Grades K-4)
10:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.
Hands-on experiments and creative problem-solving
New Pond Farm Education Center
101 Marchant Road
newpondfarm.org
\$, R

Friday, January 9

Register Now: Kids Night Out
5:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.
Hosted by Boys & Girls Club of Redding-Easton and Mark Twain Library
Dinner, games, fun
Mark Twain Library
439 Redding Road
marktwainlibrary.org
R

HOLIDAY | SEASONAL

Thursday, December 18

JBHS Student Council Winter Wonderland
6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.
Cookies, crafts, hot cocoa and free photos with Santa
Joel Barlow High School / Cafeteria
100 Black Rock Turnpike
er9.org

Thursday, December 18

Celebrate the Season – Holiday Recipes with the Thirsty Radish
7:30 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.
Chocolate recipes from cookies to homemade candies
Virtual
Mark Twain Library
marktwainlibrary.org
R

Thursday, December 18

Bethel Pride's Holiday Party
7:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.
Open mic and holiday celebrations
Molten Java
213 Greenwood Avenue
Bethel
bethelctpride.com

Friday, December 19

Floral Workshop Holiday Centerpieces
11:00 a.m.
Materials provided
Heritage Center
37 Lonetown Road
RSVP mstillman@reddingct.gov or (203) 938-9725
\$, R

Saturday, December 20

Holiday Event: Beyond Yoga
8:30 a.m. – 9:30 a.m.
Morning of movement, refreshments, shopping, and live music
Yoga Station
9 Brookside Road
yogastationct.com/workshops-events
\$, R

Saturday, December 20

Procrastinators' Market
1:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.
Local vendors, find the perfect last-minute gift
Redding Grange #15
399 Newtown Turnpike
reddinggrange.org/events-and-activities

Saturday, December 20

Jingle All the Way!
2:00 p.m. and 2:30 p.m.
Sing-along with Holiday Handbells and Children's Chorus
Wilton Historical Society
224 Danbury Road
Wilton
musiconthehillct.org

Saturday, December 20

Holiday Caroling
6:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.
Caroling by Joel Barlow High School Chamber singers
The Granite
5 North Main Street
thegranitechurch.org/events

Sunday, December 21

Georgetown Holiday Festival
11:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.
Parade on Main Street followed by photos with Santa and festivities indoors
The Granite
5 North Main Street
thegranitechurch.org

Monday, December 22

Community Carol Sing
6:00 p.m.
Join the Joel Barlow music groups for an evening of holiday music
Joel Barlow High School
100 Black Rock Turnpike
jbhs.er9.org

Tuesday, December 23

Christmas Carol Sing-along
7:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.
Family friendly, hosted by Tracy Carlucci
Nod Hill Brewery
137 Ethan Allen Highway, Ridgefield
nodhillbrewery.com/live-music-and-events
\$, R

NATURE

Saturday, December 20

Winter Tracking and Tree Identification
10:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.
In partnership with Ridgefield Conservation Commission
Woodcock Nature Center
56 Deer Run Road
Wilton
woodcocknaturecenter.org
R

Thursday, January 1

Redding Land Trust's New Year's Hike
11:00 a.m.
Hike with Redding Land Trust to ring in 2026
McCormack Preserve
reddinglandtrust.org

SPECIAL PROGRAMS

Monday, January 5

Barlow Program of Studies Orientation
7:00 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.
Presentation on Joel Barlow High School course offerings, graduation requirements, and course selection
Joel Barlow High School / Auditorium
100 Black Rock Turnpike
er9.org

MEETINGS

Thursday, December 18

Historic Review Committee
6:00 p.m.
Town Hall / Hearing Room
100 Hill Road

Thursday, December 18

Democratic Town Committee
7:00 p.m.
Town Hall / Hearing Room
100 Hill Road

Monday, December 22

Board of Finance
7:30 p.m.
Town Hall / Hearing Room
100 Hill Road

Monday, January 5

Park and Recreation Commission
7:00 p.m.
Redding Community Center
37 Lonetown Road

Monday, January 5

Republican Town Committee
7:30 p.m.
Town Hall / Hearing Room
100 Hill Road

Tuesday, January 6

Georgetown Fire District
5:00 p.m.
Georgetown Firehouse
61 Redding Road

Tuesday, January 6

Conservation Commission
7:00 p.m.
Town Hall / Hearing Room
100 Hill Road

Thursday, January 8

Historic Cemetery Committee
2:00 p.m.
Town Hall / Hearing Room
100 Hill Road

Thursday, January 8

Redding Fire District #2
7:00 p.m.
West Redding Firehouse
306 Umpawaug Road

Friday, January 9

Board of Selectmen Budget Workshop
8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.
Town Hall / Hearing Room
100 Hill Road

Monday, January 12

League of Women Voters
4:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.
Town Hall / Conference Room
100 Hill Road

Tuesday, January 13

Planning Commission

7:00 p.m.
Town Hall / Hearing Room
100 Hill Road

Wednesday, January 14

Commission on Aging
9:00 a.m.
Heritage Center
37 Lonetown Road

Wednesday, January 14

Zoning Commission
7:00 p.m.
Town Hall / Hearing Room
100 Hill Road

**Town offices will close at 1:00 p.m. on Wednesday, December 24 and will be closed Thursday, December 25 for Christmas.

**Town offices will close at 4:00 p.m. on Wednesday, December 31 and will be closed on Thursday, January 1 for New Year's.

*Sign-up to receive meeting agendas and notifications at reddingct.gov/subscribe



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WISHING OUR CLIENTS & COMMUNITY A JOYFUL HOLIDAY SEASON AND PROSPEROUS NEW YEAR.

*We are grateful for your trust and extend
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With gratitude, we say,

Thank You!



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