

Pension settlement is almost complete

By Rocco Valluzzo

The settlement between the Town of Redding and the State Employees Retirement Commission (SERC) concerning retirement benefits is nearly complete.

During the financial crisis of 2008-09, Redding along with other towns in Connecticut elected to stop enrolling its employees in the Connecticut Municipal Employees Retirement System (CMERS) plan and enrolled new, non-union employees in a less costly defined contribution plan, similar to a 401(k). The SERC has claimed those employees should have instead been enrolled in CMERS and claimed several years of back contributions were owed. Its original demand exceeded \$2.6 million.

Under the terms of the settlement, funding for which was approved by voters at a special meeting in December 2024, Redding is making cash payments

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Photo by Dana Taylor

The First Church of Christ, Congregational parsonage was framed by spring blossoms last week. If you have a photo you’d like to see featured here, please e-mail it to editor@reddingsentinel.org.

Voters pass budget at referendum

By Jessie Wright

All five items on the referendum ballot were approved on Tuesday, May 6, with 9.8% of voters turning out to the polls.

The 2025-26 Town Operating Budget, Redding Board of Education Budget, and Redding’s share of the Region 9 Budget were included in the referendum, as well as three other expenditures.

Voters passed a combined 2025-26 annual budget of \$56,731,447 (Town Operating Budget at \$17,751,404; Redding Board of Education Budget at \$26,521,323; and Redding’s share of the Region 9 School District Budget at \$12,458,720). The combined budget passed by just under a 3:1 margin, with 474 votes for and 172 against.

The Region 9 School District

Budget, which totaled \$26,489,155, passed by a very similar margin with 473 for and 173 against. Easton voters also approved their share of the Region 9 School District Budget.

Redding voters also approved an expenditure of \$1,180,000 to include road repaving (\$675,000), Town facilities improvements (\$347,000), an emergency services strategic plan (\$70,000), and a Community Center space needs assessment (\$88,000) by a margin of almost 4:1.

They also gave the green light to an expenditure of \$782,602 for the Redding Board of Education school facilities improvement by a margin of 3:1.

Finally, an expenditure of \$205,000 was approved for Georgetown Sewer Plant facilities

improvements by over a 3:1 margin.

Of the 6,538 registered voters in Redding, 639 cast a ballot this year, with seven voting by absentee ballot. There was no early voting. The turnout rate of 9.8% was higher than last year’s referendum, which brought out 6.7% of voters. Turnout in 2023 was 14.8%.

The Board of Finance met Tuesday evening and unanimously approved setting the 2025-26 mil rate at 29.54, a 2.86% increase. They also voted to fund the expenditures in ballot items 3, 4, and 5 from the Unassigned Fund Balance.

To determine your real estate taxes for the next fiscal year, which begins July 1, multiply the mil rate by the assessed value of your property. ■

REDDING’S BIG OUTDOORS

Get to know poison ivy

By Jessie Wright



Photo by Jessie Wright

When I moved to Redding five years ago, I was unable to identify poison ivy; I had a vague recollection that “leaves of three” were bad. Not so anymore.

It has been a rite of passage, I’ve found, among Redding transplants from more urban areas to unknowingly encounter poison ivy during an eager gardening project or off-trail exploration. Luckily, ignorance is usually wiped out completely after that first, painful encounter – fool me once, as the saying goes.

Redding’s Trail Tenders do an excellent job of keeping the vines at bay and off the blazed trails throughout our open spaces. But almost everywhere – along trail borders, over stone walls, up trees, and beside ponds – poison ivy

creeps. Once you know what it looks like, you won’t stop seeing it.

Poison ivy is a native species in Connecticut and grows in virtually all types of soil and under most conditions, according to the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station. Its leaves are typically shiny and always grow in groupings of three. The edges of the leaves are smooth, not toothy, and typically begin reddish in spring, turn green in the summer, and turn yellow, orange, and red in the fall. I have started seeing this year’s vines coming to life in the last two weeks.

The “poison” is an oily resin found on all parts of the plant called urushiol. It triggers an allergic reaction in most people who touch it. The trick is that the resin can linger for long periods of time on fabric and objects that have come into contact with it – we found this out the hard way in my household when we reused garden gloves that had been worn during a major underbrush clearing project a few summers ago.

When striking out on your hikes,

be sure to wear tall socks, sturdy shoes, and stay on the trails or paths. Be aware of trees or limbs you may brush against – poison ivy loves to climb. Wash your hiking clothes after returning home, and never re-wear gear without a good cleaning. I keep a little bottle of liquid dish soap in our barn and the car, just in case I (or, heaven forbid, the kids!) accidentally touch some. We’ve found washing your skin right away with dish soap and water can help prevent the urushiol from spreading to other areas of your skin or clothing.

Some point out that poison ivy isn’t “all bad.” Wildlife feeds on the leaves and berries, and it can help create a wind buffer on the edge of forests. While I’m sure that’s true, I still avoid it at all costs. No fooling me twice. ■

Do you like to hit the trails? The Sentinel is looking for additional volunteer contributors for Redding’s Big Outdoors. E-mail editor@reddingsentinel.org for more information.

Connecticut headed for second-largest surplus in its history

By Keith M. Phaneuf

Surging income and business tax receipts will leave Connecticut with its second-largest surplus in its history, analysts reported Wednesday, even as officials remained divided whether to use any of the \$2.3 billion windfall to mitigate big cuts in federal aid.

And while the consensus revenue report from Governor Ned Lamont’s administration and the legislature’s non-partisan Office of Fiscal Analysis showed a modest softening of revenues in the future, analysts still anticipate Connecticut will save an average of almost \$1.3 billion in each of the next two fiscal years.

“Connecticut’s current fiscal year outlook remains positive,” Lamont said Wednesday, before quickly adding, “there are troubling signs” for the near future.

Despite the latest surge, the sales tax – Connecticut’s second-largest revenue engine after the income tax – is beginning to sputter. Analysts had expected the sales tax, which will produce \$5.1 billion this fiscal year, to generate \$127 million more in 2025-26, and \$256 million more by 2026-27. Now they say there will be no growth next fiscal year, and only \$127 million more two years from now.

Similarly, the corporation tax was expected to generate \$1.56 billion this fiscal year for the State and then climb to almost \$1.6 billion by 2026-27. Now analysts have downgraded expectations for this fiscal year’s receipts by \$85 million, and that level largely will remain flat for the next two years.

“The economic policies coming out of Washington are directly impacting our state’s economic future, as evidenced by leading indicators such as consumer confidence,” Lamont added. “Over the coming weeks, I will be working with legislative leaders to pass an honestly balanced budget that protects Connecticut’s core values, provides flexibility for inevitable federal cuts, and adheres to our statutory and constitutional budget obligations.”

A controversial budget cap that bars legislators from spending a portion of income and business tax receipts will capture \$1.9 billion this fiscal year, according to analysts who had been projecting \$1.4 billion in savings before the report was issued.

That \$1.9 billion, combined with the \$384 million operating surplus the administration projected this week, would leave Connecticut with an unspent cushion equal to 10% of the General Fund. The projected \$2.3 billion combined surplus is topped only by 2021-22, when Connecticut finished \$4.3 billion in the black, an outlier driven by the arrival of billions in new federal pandemic aid.

Critics of the budget caps say the system is far too aggressive and that much of the reported “surplus” is revenue badly needed for education, human services, municipal

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HAPPY
Mothers
DAY

POLICE BLOTTER

Police activity
from April 21 – 27
Minor accidents and traffic stops

By Jessie Wright

Police assisted in four medical emergencies, four fire department calls, and responded to two calls for family matters. Two firearms permits were processed.

Traffic

Police assisted three operators of disabled motor vehicles.

The Department made 20 motor vehicle stops, with the majority occurring on Umpawaug Road, Route 53, Poverty Hollow Road, and Route 107. Police issued two infractions (for an infraction rate of 10%), 11 written warnings, six verbal warnings, and one stop resulted

in no action.

On April 23, there was a report of a one-vehicle accident on Pine Tree Road at the intersection of Route 58. The driver was traveling southbound on Route 58 and made a left turn onto Pine Tree Road, striking a curb island. There were no injuries, and no enforcement action was taken.

On April 25, an accident occurred on Simpaug Turnpike near the railroad tracks when two vehicles passing one another on a narrow stretch of roadway hit exterior mirrors. There were no injuries, and no enforcement action was taken. ■

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LEGAL NOTICES

The Redding Zoning Commission has scheduled a Public Hearing for May 14, 2025 at 7:30 p.m. in person at the Town Hall Hearing Room, 100 Hill Road, Redding, CT. The purpose of the hearing is to consider the following application.

Application #05-03Z – 3 Dan Beard Lane (Assessor’s Map and Lot #29-10) Owner Adam and Shannon Fischer. In accordance with Redding Zoning Regulations Section 5.1.2 request for a Special Use Permit for accessory residential apartment. ■

Matt Lecher, Chairman
Redding Zoning Commission

The Redding Zoning Board of Appeals has scheduled a public hearing via Zoom on Tuesday May 20, 2025 at 7:00 p.m. to review and possible vote on the following application.

Application #05-01-25 – 19 Great Oak Lane (Assessor’s Map and Lot #21 & #125): Owner: Tatiana Solimchuk & Nugzari Alavidze: Requesting a variance to reduce side yard setback from 40’ feet to 37’ feet for a Pizza Oven. Redding Zoning Regulations Section 4.6.5. **Variance requested is 3’ feet.** ■

Elizabeth Williams, Chairman
Redding Zoning Board of Appeals

Pension settlement is almost complete / continued from page 1

not to exceed \$2 million to account for some of SERC’s claimed losses. Funds from the Town’s defined contribution plan have rolled over into the CMERS and are offsetting the \$2 million settlement figure.

“We made an additional payment last week,” said Finance Director Jim Sanders at a Board of Finance meeting on Monday, April 28. “We are essentially nearing the end of the settlement process.”

To date, the Town has made payments to CMERS amounting to approximately \$1,450,000. It has only one open item remaining related to acceptance of a waiver for a former employee. Redding had taken a waiver from a former employee who was active as of October 31, which was the settlement date. SERC’s initial take on the matter was that the employee could not be waived and was an active employee on the settlement date.

The State later accepted the waiver but with an indemnification from the Town should that employee ever return. Working with Town Attorney Steve Stafstrom, Redding has been exchanging some information with SERC and its legal counsel to see if an agreement can be reached with respect to that indemnification.

Depending on the resolution of the waiver, the Town will return between \$100,000 and \$150,000 to the Unassigned Fund Balance and the cash payment in the settlement will end up in the range of \$1.45 million to \$1.5 million.

“And it was good to hear today several of our former employees received their first CMERS pension check,” said Sanders. “We are very, very close to the light at the end of the tunnel with respect to this issue.”



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Connecticut headed for second-largest surplus in its history / continued from page 1

aid, and other core programs.

And with three-quarters of the General Fund tied to fixed or largely fixed costs, including contractually pledged wages, Medicaid, debt service and payments toward pensions and other retirement benefits, removing 10% from the remaining quarter budget has a big impact.

Majority Democrats in the House and Senate have pushed for the past two years to scale back these savings efforts. Lamont, a fiscal moderate, largely has resisted. But he conceded in February that some change should be made and proposed reducing mandatory savings modestly by about \$300 million per year starting July 1.

But the Governor and his fellow Democrats are farther apart on how to use this fiscal year’s windfall when it comes to the threat of impending cuts in federal aid.

With Congress aiming to reduce Medicaid and other programs by as much as \$880 billion over the next decade, Lamont has said some models show Connecticut losing as much as \$880 million in annual Medicaid assistance alone. Federal officials also are eyeing cutbacks in assistance for K-12 education, public colleges and universities, and other health care programs that could cost the State and its municipalities hundreds of millions in additional yearly assistance.

House Speaker Matt Ritter, D-Hartford, and Senate President Pro Tem Martin M. Looney, D-New Haven, both appealed to Lamont recently to carve out a portion of this fiscal year’s surplus to mitigate likely losses from Washington. The State has a \$4.1 billion rainy day fund equal to 18% of the General Fund, but Democratic leaders say much of that could be spent in the next two years if the nation slips into a severe recession.

“Four billion dollars,” Ritter said earlier this month, “could go so quickly that people’s heads will explode.”

And Looney has noted that, traditionally, Washington responds to an economic downturn by increasing aid to states. If there is a slump and a contraction in federal aid, the double-whammy would be unprecedented.

The Democratic-controlled Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee last week approved a measure that would set \$700 million of the surplus aside to mitigate cuts in federal aid.

Progressive groups also are urging the Governor to ease Connecticut’s savings efforts to preserve programs here.

“We would join the Governor in celebrating a 10% budget surplus if our schools were fully funded, housing and healthcare were affordable, and our public services were fully staffed,” said Norma Martinez HoSang, Director of CT For All, a coalition of more than 60 faith, labor, and other civic organizations. “Instead, we are facing unprecedented federal funding threats while working families continue to pay more for less.”

Lamont has been reluctant to commit anything more than the rainy-day fund to solve all challenges facing Connecticut’s finances. He prefers to use the projected surplus to continue whittling down the State’s considerable pension debt, which topped \$35 billion entering this fiscal year. Pension burdens, created by inadequate funding between 1939 and 2010, are projected to continue to strain Connecticut’s finances well into the 2040s.

“Our fiscal house has been rebuilt to weather an economic downturn,” said Jeffrey Beckham, the Governor’s Budget Director. “Now is not the time to tear it down.”

Lamont also has support from minority Republicans in the House and Senate, who oppose any reduction in savings efforts.

“The [State budget] caps that we have in place have well positioned us for what may or may not happen

at the federal level,” said House Minority Leader Vincent J. Candelora, R-North Branford, who added that excessive spending ordered by the Democratic State legislators is behind weakening consumer and business confidence in Connecticut.

“These numbers should have the Democrats looking in the mirror,” he added.

“What this report shows is that, without question, the fiscal guardrails that Republicans fought to implement and preserve are working,” Senate Minority Leader Stephen Harding of Brookfield and Senator Ryan Fazio of Greenwich, ranking GOP senator on the Finance Committee, wrote in a joint statement Wednesday. “They are saving taxpayers billions and protecting against economic fluctuations. They have helped to control State government spending. They are paying down on the State’s debt.”

But Ritter and Looney both were hopeful Wednesday a compromise could be reached, at least between majority Democrats and Lamont.

The surplus is large enough, Democratic leaders said, to set aside funds to offset federal aid cuts; make a large payment to shrink pension debt; and adopt Lamont’s February plan to take \$300 million from this year’s windfall to expand child-care services.

“We’re fortunate to be in a position to do that,” Looney said.

“I do think [the rising surplus] makes budget negotiations even easier,” Ritter added.

Legislators and Lamont are aiming to adopt a new spending plan for the next two fiscal years before the regular General Assembly session adjourns on June 4. ■

This article originally
appeared in CT Mirror



Redding Sentinel Ltd
News and Views of Redding, Connecticut
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Printed by The Republican, Springfield, MA
Telecommunications by CCi Voice
www.reddingsentinel.org
203.938.3800

Contact us at:
editor@reddingsentinel.org
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Single copy price \$3.00 / Annual subscription \$85.00

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Frog Frolic delivers fun in the sun

Photos by Debora DeCarlo Rosa, Jessie Wright & Tracy Mignone



Residents of all ages reveled in games, music, food, and fun at the 28th annual Mark Twain Library Frog Frolic on Saturday, May 3. The annual fundraiser added a car show for the first time this year, alongside its longstanding offerings of live music, festival games, and food trucks. Attendees enjoyed a picture-perfect sunny day; rainclouds rolled in just as the final clean-up was underway.

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Police overtime drives line-item transfer | *By Rocco Valluzzo*

At the request of the Board of Selectmen, the Board of Finance has approved a line-item transfer of \$233,000 in the 2024-25 fiscal year budget to fund police department overtime.

According to Finance Director Jim Sanders, the Town has experienced an increased level of police overtime due to a combination of factors. Two sergeants retired, one officer resigned, and another was out on maternity leave.

“Our approach to backfilling vacancies has really been by looking towards new grades,” he said. “As we previously discussed with the new recruit, it does take eight months at the Police Academy and an additional three months of local field training in order for that new hire to be able to act independently as a certified officer.”

To fill additional vacancies, Redding Police Department is interviewing applicants from neighboring police departments. The proposed 2025-26 budget – included in the May 6 referendum vote – also includes the restoration of a 17th officer position, which at some point will provide some staffing flexibility as well.

Through the end of March 2025, police overtime was \$138,000 over the budget. Sanders expects that the

period from April through June will accrue another \$95,000 in overtime.

Three areas within the current fiscal year’s budget have been identified that could offset that overrun. Redding has finished the winter season with \$33,000 remaining in the snow removal expenditure line. Sanders also expects the Town to be ahead of budget by \$130,000 with respect to health insurance premiums by the end of the 2024-25 fiscal year. This is due to two factors: fewer employees selecting family coverage (the most expensive option) and a higher percentage of employees waiving coverage entirely. A third source to offset the overrun is \$70,000 remaining in the contingency line.

First Selectwoman Julia Pemberton noted that the new walking path at the Community Center will be partially paid for by a State Small Town Economic Assistance Program grant, which requires a matching grant from the Town. However, she did not anticipate using contingency funds for that match, but rather funds that have been under-spent for other capital projects.

The line-item transfer will require approval at a special town meeting, to be scheduled later this spring ■

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SPORTS

Falcons win one of three

Girls track and field | By Rocco Valluzzo



Photo by Rocco Valluzzo
Joel Barlow High's Sofia Benitez took third in the high jump at a girls track meet at Bethel last Tuesday, April 29.

Some outstanding individual performances propelled the Joel Barlow High girls track team against Notre Dame Prep last week. The Falcons captured six first places on Tuesday, April 29. This would help them overcome the Lancers 88-52 but not enough to catch Pomperaug (63-86) or host Bethel (57.5-92.5). Barlow faced much competition in the relays, taking fourth in each one. The team of Raveena Tala, Phoebe Swedrock, Viv D'Amico, and Mila Baker would finish in 12:40.28 to take fourth in the 4x800. Assembling a team of freshmen, the Falcons took the same spot in the 4x100. Gia Foley, Eliska Beska, Elizabeth Kimball, and Olivia Gatti finished in 1:00.92. The 100-meter high hurdles were a different story. Earning the first of several victories that day, Phoebe Cora Smith led the field in 15.69 seconds. Fifth went to Sofia Benitez in 19.85. Both also competed in the 300-meter intermediate hurdles, with Smith winning again, this time in 46.86. Moving up to third, Benitez ran a 51.01,

her fastest time of the season. It was a fast field in the 100 meters. Jordan Carr had her team's best time of 13.51, taking fifth overall. Pomperaug had the upper hand in the 1,600, claiming the top two places. Barlow's Ally Bardani ran a 5:45.60, her fastest time of the season, to take fourth. One spot behind her was Olivia Kotula in 5:50.32. Breaking into the top three in the 400, Barlow's Lucy Zima ran a 1:05.37, good for second and a personal record. The Falcons fared even better in the 800, taking two of the top three spots. Clara Mehner won it in 2:32.77, and D'Amico was third in 2:43.06, a personal record. Smith picked up a third win, coming in the 200 in 27.70. Ally Bardani was second in the 3,200 in 13:02.09, her best time of the season. The final relay, the 4x400 had the Falcons run a fourth-place time with Kotula, Stephanie Bardani, Zima, and Ally Bardani finishing in 4:44.62. Moving onto the field events, the competition dominated the throws. Barlow's highest finish was by Olivia Taylor, who had a javelin toss of 56' 1", a personal best and good for 12th. In other events, however, Barlow had the upper hand, as in the long jump. Carr won it with a leap of 16' 0.5" and Smith was second with 15' 4". Carr also won the pole vault by clearing 12 feet, and D'Amico tied for third with a vault of 7 feet. Also scoring for the Falcons, Benitez had a height of 4' 6" in the high jump, just two inches off the lead and good for third based on number of attempts. Barlow, now 4-5, visits Bunnell and also takes on Immaculate on Tuesday, May 13 at 4:00 p.m. ■

Falcons split with Nighthawks, Rebels

Girls tennis | By Rocco Valluzzo



Photo by Rocco Valluzzo
Chloe Gustavson returns a backhand shot at second singles during a Joel Barlow High girls tennis match. Barlow was edged out 3-4 by Newtown on Monday, April 28, but defeated New Fairfield 5-2 two days later.

Having the advantage in the doubles matches would not be enough for the Joel Barlow High girls tennis team when it visited Newtown last week. Although the Falcons won the majority of the doubles matches, they took only one singles contest on Monday, April 28. The Nighthawks had the upper hand here, winning three of the four for a 4-3 win. Barlow's only singles victory came in the No. 1 spot. In a close match, Abby Dedaj held off Newtown's Emily Anderson 7-6, 6-4 for the win. The remainder would go to the hosts. Sophia Dutsar was a 6-2, 6-1 winner over Chloe Gustavson at second singles. Jamie Rowan beat Sylvia Callemmo 6-4, 6-2. At fourth singles, Ren Weiss defeated Molly Lapatine 6-2, 6-2. Moving on to the doubles contests, Barlow took the top spot as Carolyn Hopstaken and Jolene

Paczek were 6-4, 6-2 winners over Reese Lischuk and Eli Munsen. Allowing only one game at second doubles, Sarah Ballos and Kristina Stranik nearly swept Emma Lyddy and Kate Jarvis in a 6-1, 6-0 win. It was the same score but a different result at third doubles, with Newtown's Sydney Bruno and Charlotte Grasso beating Lexi Flaherty and Xenia Artegas 6-1, 6-0 to clinch the win for the hosts. Visiting New Fairfield two days later, the Falcons dominated the doubles contests again. Such played a big part in a 5-2 win. The singles matches featured a split, with each side winning two contests. The Rebel's Izabelle Tidikyte took the No. 1 spot in straight sets at 6-2, 6-2 over Dedaj. Catherine Tomaino gave the hosts the win at second singles with 6-0, 6-3 scores over Gustavson. Third singles went Barlow's way with Callemmo defeating Alexa Oder 6-2, 6-0. The closest match came at fourth singles, with Lapatine holding off Katherine Baresi in three sets at 6-3, 6-7, 6-3. Hopstaken and Paczek posted a shutout at first doubles with 6-0, 6-0 scores over Peyton Roemer and Sarah Braun. Ballos and Stranik surrendered just two games against Emilia Sedlak and Saki Cohen to win second doubles at 6-1, 6-1. Things were much closer at third doubles. Flaherty teamed up with Lydia Santangeli, and despite dropping the first set, they won the second before winning in a tiebreaker at 4-6, 6-2, 10-5. Barlow, now 5-4 overall, visits Stratford on Wednesday, May 14 at 3:45 p.m. ■

Barlow pitching runs afoul of Law

Baseball | By Rocco Valluzzo



Photo by Rocco Valluzzo
Joel Barlow High's Ken Esposito threw a two-hitter in a Joel Barlow High varsity baseball game against Jonathan Law of Milford on Tuesday, April 29. Barlow won 4-0.

From start to finish, the Joel Barlow High varsity baseball team had plenty of moxie on the mound when it faced Jonathan Law of Milford last week. Barlow pitcher Ken Esposito kept the Lawmen off balance on Tuesday, April 29. Surrendering only two hits, he threw a complete game and had the offensive support he needed in a 4-0 win. While both sides went quietly in their first turn at the plate, the Falcons scratched out their first run in the bottom of the second inning. After Will Gregor singled on a hard ground ball to third base, Law recorded two outs on a fly out to center field and a fielder's choice. However, an error allowed Logan Kady to advance to second. The error would later prove costly, as Connor Thomas singled to right field to bring home Kady for a 1-0 Barlow lead. Law threatened to score in the top of the third when Brady O'Neil doubled with two out, but he was left stranded. Barlow would then add to its lead in the bottom of the

inning. Dan Smith and T.J. Baer hit back-to-back singles, and Esposito bunted safely with no one out, loading the bases. Although a fly out to center field was not enough to bring in a run, the Falcons did score on a sac fly by Gregor that made it 2-0. Baer later stole home, and Barlow nearly scored another on a single to left by Bill Bardani, but O'Neil's throw was good to get Esposito out at the plate to end the inning. Esposito would shut out the Lawmen in each of the next three frames until the Falcons added their last run in the bottom of the sixth. Gavin Maryott led off with a single, followed by one from Gregor. After a groundout and a fielder's choice, the Falcons scored their final run on a single to center by Thomas. A walk, a fielder's choice, a single, and an error gave Law two runners on base in the top of the seventh before Esposito struck out Dalton Evans to secure the win. Gregor and Thomas each had two hits for Barlow. The former also drove in one run and Thomas as two. Bardani, Baer (one run scored), Maryott, Esposito, and Smith (one run) also had hits. One the mound, Esposito pitched a complete game, allowing no runs on two hits with three walks and three strikeouts. Barlow, now 11-1 overall, is at Pomperaug on Thursday, May 8 at 4:15 p.m., hosts Ridgefield on Saturday, May 10 at 11:00 a.m., and is home to Bunnell and Bethel on Monday, May 12 and Wednesday, May 14 respectively at 4:15 p.m. ■

Sports stats and schedule

Baseball

Results:
April 28:
Joel Barlow 3 / Stratford 2
April 29:
Joel Barlow 4 / Jonathan Law 0
April 30:
Joel Barlow 8 / Notre Dame Prep 4
May 2:
Joel Barlow 6 / New Milford 3
Record:
Joel Barlow 11-1
Next games:
May 9:
home versus Pomperaug at 4:15 p.m.
May 10:
home versus Ridgefield at 11:00 a.m.
May 12:
home versus Bunnell at 4:15 p.m.
May 14:
home versus Bethel at 4:15 p.m.

Softball

Results:
April 28:
Stratford 15 / Joel Barlow 5
April 30:
Notre Dame Prep 5 / Joel Barlow 1
May 2:
New Milford 17 / Joel Barlow 0
Record:
Joel Barlow 5-8
Next games:
May 9:
home versus Pomperaug at 4:15 p.m.
May 12:
home versus Bunnell at 4:15 p.m.
May 14:
home versus Bethel at 4:15 p.m.

Girls golf

Results:
April 28:

Girls golf (continued)

Masuk 169 / Joel Barlow 228
Record:
Joel Barlow 0-4
Next match:
May 13:
away at Stratford at 3:00 p.m.

Boys lacrosse

Results:
April 29:
Joel Barlow 18 / New Milford 8
May 1:
Greenwich 13 / Joel Barlow 6
May 3:
Joel Barlow 8 / Daniel Hand 6
Record:
Joel Barlow 8-4
Next games:
May 8:
away at Masuk at 7:00 p.m.
May 13:
away at Bethel at 6:00 p.m.

Girls lacrosse

Results:
April 29:
Joel Barlow 15 / New Milford 2
May 3:
Southington 6 / Joel Barlow 6
Record:
Joel Barlow 5-6
Next games:
May 8:
home versus Masuk at 5:30 p.m.
May 10:
home versus Stratford/Bunnell at 10:00 a.m.
May 13:
home versus Bethel at 7:00 p.m.

Boys tennis

Results:
April 28:
Newtown 7 / Joel Barlow 0
April 23:
Joel Barlow 7 / New Fairfield 0
May 2:
Joel Barlow 5 / New Milford 2
Record:
Joel Barlow 4-4
Next match:
May 9:

Boys tennis (continued)

away at Bunnell at 4:15 p.m.
May 14:
home versus Stratford at 3:45 p.m.

Girls tennis

Results:
April 28:
Newtown 4 / Joel Barlow 3
April 30:
Joel Barlow 5 / New Fairfield 2
May 2:
Joel Barlow 4 / New Milford 3
Record:
Joel Barlow 5-4
Next match:
May 14:
away at Stratford at 3:45 p.m.
May 15:
home versus Notre Dame Prep at 4:00 p.m.

Girls track and field

Results:
April 29:
Joel Barlow 88 / Notre Dame Prep 52,
Bethel 92.5 / Joel Barlow 57.5,
Pomperaug 86 / Joel Barlow 63
Record:
Joel Barlow 4-5
Next meet:
May 13:
home versus Bunnell, Immaculate at 4:00 p.m.

Boys volleyball

Results:
April 28:
Joel Barlow 3 / Kolbe Cathedral 0
April 30:
Joel Barlow 3 / Brookfield 0
May 2:
Joel Barlow 3 / New Milford 0
Record:
Joel Barlow 9-4
Next meet:
May 13:
away versus Bunnell at 6:00 p.m.

Have fun, run, and raise money for John Read Middle School

By Anne Young Albanese



Photo courtesy of JRMS PTA

Racers are doused with bright green powder at last year’s Color Run.

On Sunday, May 18, the John Read Middle School (JRMS) PTA will host its second annual Color Run. This fundraising event invites the entire community of all ages and abilities to participate in a 5K race and a 1-mile Fun Run.

“The Color Run is one of the key events that our PTA does that really brings our community together in a healthy, fun, and positive way,” says Beatrix Eriksen, President of the JRMS PTA. “From the volunteers to runners of all ages and ability, people show up to enjoy the dynamic energy while supporting a great cause!”

The race will take place on Joel Barlow High School’s cross-country course. Participants will run or

walk through the woods and fields around the school. To add to the fun, runners will be doused with a colored powder at each kilometer mark. The powder is made using all non-toxic ingredients, including baking soda, cornstarch, and plant-based dyes. The powder is certified by the Federal Drug Administration.

The 1-mile Fun Run will begin at 8:30 a.m., and the 5K Run will start at 9:00 a.m., rain or shine. Check-in the morning of the race will begin at 8:00 a.m. Runners can also pick up their bibs on Saturday, May 17, at the main entrance of Joel Barlow High School between 11:30 a.m. and 2:30 p.m.

If there is lightning or extreme

weather, the race may be cancelled. Tickets are non-refundable but will be honored if the event occurs again.

“Last year’s first-ever Color Run drew over 100 runners, and we’re hoping to see an even greater turnout this time,” said Seana Bedard, VP of Fundraising for the JRMS PTA. “It’s a spirited and colorful way for the school and the greater Redding community to join together, get some exercise, and build community, all while supporting our students and our school.”

Proceeds from the run help fund JRMS PTA programs. Registration is currently open at jrmspta.org/colorrun.

“This is another great community-building opportunity sponsored by the JRMS PTA. High school students assist the PTA with logistics and serve as mentors for some of our middle school runners. It is great to see families running together. Runners get to relish in cheers of support as they approach the finish line,” said Jennifer Desmarais, Principal of JRMS.

The JRMS PTA is a registered 501(c)(3) non-profit that prides itself on being a powerful advocate for students and a resource for families and the community. Membership in the PTA is open to anyone concerned with Redding children’s education, health, and welfare. ■

For more information, visit www.jrmspta.org

Talent overflows at annual Artisan Spring Market

By Pamela Brown

The Redding Artisan Spring Market returns this weekend for a chance to shop local. The free event takes place on Saturday, May 10, from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. at John Read Middle School at 486 Redding Road.

“The event has become a staple in our community. We have our Redding Artisan Holiday Market, and this year we’re presenting the fourth annual Redding Artisan Spring Market and have rebranded it with a new name – Spring Market, not Artisan Fair,” said Marion Unangst.

The Market will feature the work of 50 local vendors from Redding, Ridgefield, Wilton, Weston, Trumbull, Bridgeport, and more. The Spring Market also provides a platform for student artisans to showcase and sell their work.

“The talent in Redding and our surrounding towns is amazing. People love to hear how products are made, who made them, and the story behind it,” said Unangst.

Items for sale will include soaps, candles, airplane art, artwork, home decor, jewelry, wood bowls and cutting boards, clothing, skincare, stationery, sweet treats, and more. “We have to keep some a surprise!” said Unangst.

Unangst has chaired the event since its beginning. “It started out as a PTA-hosted event at Redding Elementary School when my boys were still attending the school, but I eventually started organizing it by myself and hired students to help me before, during, and after the event,” she explained.

Most of the student artisans this year are from Redding Elementary School and John Read Middle School, but there will also be students from Joel Barlow High School, the University of New Haven, Bethel Middle School, Newtown Middle School, and Race Brook School in Orange. They will be selling a wide variety of items, from fresh mozzarella bites and cookies to dog treats and jewelry.

“Their talent will blow everyone away. Each year they get better, and the smiles on their faces when they get positive feedback and sell one of their items is just the best,” said Unangst.

As the event is the day before Mother’s Day, the Market has added a new offering called Bouquets for Mom. Attendees can assemble floral bouquets with provided supplies and assistance from high school students.

In addition, there will be local food and beverage vendors including Grumpy Dumpling, Baked in Weston, Seaside Lemonade, Tumu, Goni’s Lobsta Truck, Secret Kusinera, and Nicholas “Nicky Zooks” Zaccagno. A raffle to benefit John Read Middle School will also be held with all participating artisans donating a homemade gift.

“Redding doesn’t have a downtown like other towns, but we have a lot of talent here,” Unangst said. “Our event is another way to let people know about them. ■

Learn more at facebook.com/reddingartisanmarket

Rising stars shine in *Frozen Jr.*

By Jessie Wright



Photos by Jessie Wright

(From top left, clockwise): Siobhan Reilly as Anna with ensemble; Chloe Alonzo and Siobhan Reilly as Elsa and Anna; Sonja Friedman as Young Anna with ensemble; Silas Leahy as Sven and Zane Gourad as Kristoff.

A talented cast and crew of John Read Middle School students (with help from several Joel Barlow High Schoolers on the technical crew) brought *Frozen Jr.* to life last weekend. Even before the curtain rose Friday night, the experience was magical. The lobby of Barlow’s auditorium had been transformed into a glittering snowscape, with students scooping fresh popcorn and selling snacks to a buzzing crowd.

This air of professionalism continued as the lights dimmed in the auditorium. With confidence, the students hit their marks, telling the story of sisters Elsa and Anna, princesses whose relationship is tested by Elsa’s powers she has been told to hide. Sonja Friedman, playing young Anna, brought an effervescent humor to her role rivaling any Disney princess.

Siobhan Reilly commanded the stage as adult Anna with a captivating mix of maturity and innocence.

The vocal talents of the leading players were something to behold; Scarlett Wood’s belt as she soft-shoed in Olaf’s song “Summer” was especially delightful. Chloe Alonzo as Elsa brought all the gravitas needed to pull off the showstopper “Let It Go” as well as a beautiful, new song “Dangerous to Dream”.

All the actors imbued humor of some kind into their time on stage. Zane Gourad and Silas Leahy as Kristoff and Sven had a very fun rapport, and Kate Duggan’s physical comedy as Hans was excellent.

The ensemble served as both characters and settings, twirling as icy snowflakes at times, and donning Hawaiian shirts and sunglasses at others. As Director

Marcelle Morrissey wrote in her program note, “I encourage you, as our audience, to immerse yourself in this magical world.” The ensemble’s presence helped us do just that, bringing the well-constructed sets to life and populating the story with captivating characters.

The effort of many generous, hardworking adults was apparent throughout the evening, from the decorations to the costumes to the direction. But the trick of live theater is – no one is there to help once that curtain goes up. At showtime, it’s just you, the audience, and the magic you make together. The students met that challenge with impressive poise and colorful self-assurance. ■



Redding students impress at Invention Convention State Finals

By Anne Young Albanese



Photo by Rebecca Richards
(Back row, left to right): Hope Vecchiarelli, Julia Verses, Milania Fabbri, Anya Caes, Lucy Giddings. (Front row, left to right): Leo Canhao, Hudson Bentler, Avi Patel, and Grace Ray.

Four young inventors from John Read Middle School took home awards at the Connecticut Invention Convention State Finals on Saturday, May 3 at the University of Connecticut in Storrs.

Seventh grader Julia Verses earned three awards with her invention, the “Popp Bottle”, which helps children learn how to swallow pills safely. She won the Connecticut Academy of Science and Engineering (CASE) award, which recognizes outstanding innovators in seventh and eighth grade who exemplify the founding values of CASE. She will be invited to the annual CASE Gala Dinner. Verses also won the McCormick, Paulding, and Huber (MPH) Patent Award, honoring the invention that a team of attorneys thinks is the most credible opportunity for security intellectual property rights. Verses will receive pro bono services from MPH, LLP to submit a formal application to the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office. Her third award was an invitation to the U.S. National Invention Convention, which will take place in June in Dearborn, MI.

Avi Patel, a fifth grader, won an invitation to the U.S. Innovator Challenge, a virtual, invite-only competition for students nationwide. Patel’s invention, the “Power

Healer”, helps monitor healing of bad cuts or abrasions with a bandage that has sensors that record temperature and pH levels of the wound. The national challenge winners will advance to the Global Innovation Challenge.

Two seventh graders, Hope Vecchiarelli and Milania Fabbri, won ESPN Innovation Awards. The award recognizes inventors who have taken strides to innovate in athletic technology and equipment. Vecchiarelli invented “Fresh(INS)”, which keeps athletes’ shin guards clean through a replaceable insert. Fabbri invented “The Block Buzzer”, which helps swimmers feel when they are supposed to start a race through a vibration on the starting block. Both students received a gift card, a medal, and a certificate recognizing their awards.

Rebecca Richards, the Science and Technology Instructional Coach for John Read Middle School, coordinated the students’ participation. Science teachers Sydney Collentine, Jessica Steeves, and Kate Suba guided the students through the process. The students started their projects following winter break and presented them at the grade-level Invention Convention on March 7 and 13.

“The students learn the engineering design process through this project. They need to look at their lives and the lives of others to seek out a problem that they want to find a solution to,” said Richards. “They learn to brainstorm, try ideas, and iterate the process until they develop their prototype. In addition, they learn about public speaking and how to present an idea to an authentic audience.”

Other John Read Middle School students who made it to the state finals were seventh-graders Lucy Giddings and Anya Caes and fifth graders Hudson Bentler, Leo Canhao, Grace Ray, and Matteo Olcese. ■

OBITUARY

Jo Ann Abbazia Dugdale
December 22, 1933 – February 27, 2025



Jo Ann Abbazia Dugdale, formerly of West Redding, passed away peacefully on February 27, 2025, at the age of 91, in hospice at the Bryn Mawr Hospital in Pennsylvania with her children by her side.

Beloved wife of nearly 60 years, Jo Ann was married to her soul-mate, George W. Dugdale, who passed away in 2018. She was a devoted mother to their five children whom they raised in Redding where they lived for nearly 35 years. Jo Ann is survived by Jody Secules (Michael), Tracey Dugdale (Frank), George Dugdale (Nancy), David Dugdale (Kristen), and Suzanne Doran (Jamie). She was a loving Grammy to their 11 grandchildren: Chiara, Nick, Eric (Tiffany), George “Sam” (Morgan), Jack, Luke, Joseph, Molly, Emma, Jenny, and Mary.

Jo Ann was predeceased by her parents, Joseph and Louise Abbazia; her husband, George; her two sisters, Corinne Hekker and Mildred Gaipa; as well as her brother, Michael Abbazia. Jo Ann is survived by many nieces and nephews as well as her Spina and Abbazia cousins.

She was the youngest child of the Abbazia family, born in Stamford on December 22, 1933 and was a graduate of the Sacred Heart Academy, class of 1951. Jo Ann attended college as a pediatric

nursing student at the University of Mount Saint Vincent in Riverdale, NY.

An adoring wife, mother, and grandmother, Jo Ann’s life’s work was raising her five children, and she did this with fairness, love, and grace. She was always happy to help her children, encouraged their independence, and worked alongside her husband to assist the children financially so they could attend college. She was very proud of the family that she and George created together.

An easy-going person, Jo Ann nurtured long-lasting friendships throughout her lifetime. She enjoyed her crossword puzzles, Scrabble, and bridge as well as a good game of doubles tennis or golf with the many friends they made in Connecticut and in North Carolina where they retired. She and George treasured their neighbors on Granite Ridge and Archers Lane in Redding and held those memories close to their heart.

As the caregiver to her husband and as a widow in her later years, she was amenable to moving to be near her children and grandchildren, not once but three times! Each time she adjusted, she made new friends, strengthened bonds with her children, and still managed to bestow everyone with her love, kindness, quick wit, and occasional feistiness. She brought joy to all of us with her beautiful smile.

We, the children, would like to express our sincere gratitude for all of the love, guidance, and prayers that our family, friends, and the professionals have shared with us over the years.

A Memorial Mass will be held for Jo Ann on May 16, 2025 at 11:00 a.m. at St. Patrick Catholic Church in Redding. Committal Services will follow at Umpawaug Cemetery in Redding, as well as a reception at The Redding Roadhouse for family and friends. ■

“Love”: A tennis exhibit at Mark Twain Library

By Lisa Goldstein



Photo by Lisa Goldstein

At one time, John Hichwa owned hundreds of tennis rackets, including wooden rackets that date back to the 1800s, a metal AMF Head Arthur Ashe from the 1970s, a Wilson Chris Evert Autograph, and a Bjorn Borg Personal racket. Many are now currently on display at the Mark Twain Library as part of “Love” – a new tennis exhibit in the Library’s rotunda.

“I don’t play tennis,” admitted Exhibit Curator and Library Board member June Myles, “but it was exciting to me because one of them belonged to one of the first presidents of Yale!”

In fact, that racket was the original item that prompted Hichwa to start collecting over six decades ago. Hichwa is something of a Redding legend himself, albeit a humble one. For 35 years he taught physical education in town, starting at Redding Elementary School, but spending most of his career at John Read Middle School. He and his wife Marion have lived in Redding since the 1960s. In retirement, he wrote a book about how to teach physical education effectively to middle schoolers, *Right Fielders*

Are People Too. That launched his next chapter, traveling the world for 19 years while he shared his teaching knowledge.

But back to his tennis collection and that old racket. In the early years of his career, Hichwa spent his summers as the teaching pro at tennis clubs in Old Lyme and Fairfield. In 1963, while working in Old Lyme, Hichwa was given the racket – which he points out is still in “immaculate” condition – by the son of its owner, Yale President A. Whitney Griswold, who had recently passed away.

“I put it up in my pro shop, and then all of a sudden people started bringing in rackets for free,” explained Hichwa.

He’s been collecting ever since. The beauty of his collection, according to Hichwa, is that most items were donated hand-me-downs from people he knew or those who walked into his shop.

The display at the Library showcases an array of tennis rackets through the years. Some are ordinary yet were popular for their time, others were created and named for famous players. There’s also a photo display of a tennis tournament that used to be held in town. Did you know there was a Redding Challenge Cup?

Hichwa, who is now in his 80s, only has about 50 items left in his collection. The rest he has given away, donating to a museum at his alma mater, Springfield College, as well as to other organizations and

Continued on page 7

Easton to celebrate the historic Sport Hill Races

By Bruce Nelson



A 1908 James Florida Vanderbilt Cup Race 1 Locomobile.



A Locomobile 1 racing car.



A 1914 Mercer 450 race car.

Shortly following the turn of the last century, several wealthy men from Bridgeport met at the Algonquin Club where they sipped whiskey and enjoyed their cigars with each of them extolling the virtues of his latest acquisition – a new form of transportation – the motorcar. And high on the list of those virtues was the speed at which one could reach his destination.

They soon formed the Automobile Club of Bridgeport. Early automobile clubs were by then sponsoring events that showcased the automobile’s ability to travel long distances or impress the public with their speed. Endurance runs were held to prove reliability, while hill climbs were the preferred method of speed competition.

By the spring of 1902, members of the Bridgeport club were eager to pit their driving skills and the speed of their automobiles against each other. They agreed that a hill climb would provide the best test, but the question was where.

The Sport Hill section of the Jackson Highway in nearby Easton was a formidable piece of highway that clung to the side of a rocky cliffside to the west. It was steep, surfaced largely with dirt and rocks, and presented somewhat of a challenge to teamsters passing in opposite directions on some of the narrowest and sharpest turns.

In total, there were barely more than a dozen houses along that section of Jackson Highway between the Fairfield Town line and Flat Rock Road in Easton. The only intersection along that stretch of highway was Delaware Road – there were no other side streets. The State hadn’t yet begun to issue license plates for motor cars – there were barely enough to count, and in a town as small as Easton, there wasn’t a single resident who owned an automobile in 1902. With no established motor vehicle laws on the books and no police presence in Easton, it is doubtful that the club even notified the Town that they planned to race on the hill that year.

On Memorial Day morning, 1902, seven different owners showed up at the base of Sport Hill with a total of eight automobiles. DeVer Howard Warner was the Secretary/Treasurer and the son of founder Doctor Ira DeVer Warner of the Warner Brothers Company, a manufacturer of corsets in Bridgeport. Lewis B. Curtis was the Vice President and Treasurer of Curtis & Curtis, a manufacturer of pipe-cutting machinery on Railroad Avenue. Jesse Banks Cornwall was the President of Cornwall & Peterson, a manufacturer of piano and organ hardware on Fairfield Avenue. Ernest V. Sloan and Herbert A. Budlong were the Head Engineer and Plant Manager of the American Graphophone Company. Jonathon Godfrey was the owner

of the Compressed Paper Box Company and Miles V. Doud headed the sales department at Locomobile, the Bridgeport-based manufacturer of three of the motor cars that were entered that day.

Curtis and Warner entered their Cleveland-built gasoline engine Wintons. Godfrey raced his Peerless, also a product of Cleveland. Budlong’s gasoline-powered Columbia had been built in Hartford. Doud drove two of his company’s Locomobile steamers, while Sloan competed with a third steamer from the same manufacturer. The lone foreign entry was a gasoline-powered de Dion Boughton built in France and piloted by Jesse B. Cornwall.

The steam cars proved to be far quicker than the gasoline-powered machines. The fastest machine of the day was piloted by Sloan, a mechanical engineer by profession, who got his Locomobile to the finish line in 2:45, for an average speed of 22 miles-per-hour! Not at all a blistering speed by modern standards, but it was certainly impressive for a steep uphill incline with tight turns and a rough surface – especially when one considers that the vehicle was steered by using a tiller!

An article published in the October 11, 1902, edition of Automobile Topics confirms both the inaugural date and the list of participants. It is doubtful that the event was even reported in the local press – the automobile was such a novelty that few people would have even cared.

It is not known if the club recreated the hill climb during the years immediately following the initial run, but in 1906, they ran a similar event in the late summer at Sport Hill, and beginning on Memorial Day of 1907, the Sport Hill event in Easton began a four-year run that saw it grow into one of the three largest and best attended hill climbs in the country. The 1909 races reportedly were attended by over 10,000 people, although reported numbers of that era were often exaggerated.

A number of factors led to the rapid demise of hill climbs and organized street racing. But safety was likely the number one issue; spectators often lined the course, gathering within feet, or even inches, of the racing surface. Any vehicle that went off course was sure to create mayhem – perhaps even death. The 1909 Sport Hill event saw a horrific crash that injured dozens, a few quite seriously.

The final blow likely came with the introduction of closed racecourses. Spectators could be safely contained; ordinary traffic was no longer interrupted while automobiles competed against each other; side-by-side racing became a reality, while more dangerous for the competitors, it was certainly more

exciting to watch; and perhaps most importantly, the organizers could charge admission and make a profit.

A celebration of the Sport Hill Races tradition will be held this year. Starting off on Saturday, May 17, the Staples Academy Foundation will host a preview event at the Old Staples Academy building at 336 Center Road in Easton between 12:00 p.m. and 3:00 p.m. It will showcase a limited number of Brass Era motorcars – including a beautiful, fully restored 1914 Mercer 450 race car. Attendees can enjoy some barbeque, with libations available from the Two Roads Brewing Company. Entry to this event is free to the public, but parking is extremely limited, so get there early!

On Saturday, May 24, between the hours of 10:00 a.m. and 2:30 p.m. in the parking lot of the Easton Town Library at 691 Morehouse Road, the Fairfield County Horseless Carriage Club of America in conjunction with the Town of Easton will celebrate the history of the Sport Hill Races. The club will stage a small antique motorcar exhibition highlighting several Brass Era (pre-1916) vehicles including a factory-built Locomobile race car – one of only two ever produced as company-sponsored competition racers. Three short demonstrations of speed on Morehouse Road between the Library and the top of the hill are scheduled. Motorcar historian Alex Dragone and Sport Hill Race historian Bruce Nelson will be on hand to talk about the significance of the vehicles and the original hill climb on Sport Hill Road. This event is also free to the public, and parking is available at the old Samuel Staples School building at 654-660 Morehouse Road. The Simply Smashed Burgers & More food truck will be on site for those who wish to purchase lunch. Due to the noise produced by some of the older motorcars, we kindly request that you leave your canine companions at home.

This will be a weather-dependent event – so pray that the sun gods are fans of history and 100-plus-year-old motorcars! In the event of inclement weather, notice of cancellation will be posted on the Facebook page of the Historical Society of Easton at facebook.com/historical-society-of-easton-ct.

Our sponsors include the Historical Society of Easton and the Staples Academy Foundation. Special thanks go out to Greiser’s Coffee and Market for supplying the organizers and exhibitors with some early morning sustenance! ■

Bruce Nelson is Co-Historian for the Town of Redding and Co-Founder of the Redding, CT History Project

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Notes from a neighbor

This round's on me By Carter Wiseman

Among the more unusual things my father left me when he died was a copper still he had used to make whiskey during Prohibition. It looked like a cone-headed version of the adorable robot R2D2 from *Star Wars*, and I thought it made an amusing conversation piece in our entryway. But the recent imposition of tariffs on European products made me think that there might be more than sentimental reasons for holding onto it.

Well before the tariffs, alcohol consumption in our country was under assault. And with good reason. Alcohol abuse can be devastating, as my family has known too well over the years. And recent studies have argued that no amount of alcohol is actually good for you, in contrast to the old view that red wine was heart-healthy. But not everyone falls victim to alcohol's risks. Ancient Greek amphorae and Pompeian frescoes survive to tell us of its social virtues; wine is at the heart of the Christian sacrament of communion. Not all frat parties were of the *Animal House* variety.

A measure of spirits has also played a positive role in some of history's great conflicts. The story goes that when President Lincoln was told that Ulysses S. Grant—who rescued the Union Army from the overly cautious general George McClellan—drank too much, Lincoln hoped that Grant would be sent a barrel of his favorite whiskey. Winston Churchill, whom the teetotaling Adolf Hitler mocked as a drunkard, reportedly quipped: "I have taken more out of alcohol than alcohol has taken out of me." Churchill died at 91, having done much to win World War II.

Then there is the literary legacy, which includes in this country

William Faulkner, Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald, and, closer to home, Jimmy Breslin and Pete Hamill. Of course the *New Yorker* writers who lunched at the Algonquin "round table" were not drinking buttermilk. And let's not forget the great bibulous actors, among them John Barrymore, Richard Burton and Jason Robards.

I realize that many of those folk eventually had to swear off the sauce, and some died well before Churchill's four score and eleven years. It's a scary record. Nevertheless, various forms of alcohol have created precious memories for me. I first sipped ouzo as a college student dancing under the stars on a Greek island.

Poire Williams did a lot for my skiing on leave from the Army in the Swiss alps. And Calvados capped a dinner in Bayeux, where I eavesdropped on a pair of Brits who had landed on D-Day. Many years later, I brought a bottle of Muscadet – the wine with which that dinner started – to an aging Navy veteran in Westport. He burst into tears, telling me that he had last tasted it when he met his brother in Normandy in June of 1944 with a French *resistant* who had buried a case of it four years earlier to save it from “*les Boches*.”

At gatherings with friends these days, many will call for seltzer with lime, or just water (tap, not bottled). That's fine with me, and it's probably better for them.

A doctor once advised me to practice moderation in all things; a waggish friend added: except moderation. They are both welcome to a round on my tab.

Meanwhile, if tariffs demand a recall to duty, my father's still needs only a new hydrometer. ■



Art Inspired by Nature: New Pond Farm Art Show & Silent Auction

Celebrate the natural beauty of New Pond Farm and the surrounding countryside through stunning local artwork. Enjoy artist demonstrations and fun art activities for all ages.

Special Preview Evening
Friday, June 6 • 6–8 PM

Join us at sunset for a festive kickoff—mingle with artists and fellow art lovers while enjoying a signature cocktail, wine, local brews, and delicious bites. Tickets: \$50 Includes a \$25 credit toward any art purchase.

RSVP by June 3 at newpondfarm.org or call 203-938-2117.

“Love”: A tennis exhibit at Mark Twain Library / *continued from page 6*

to his three children.

While he has bought and sold items over the years, collecting has always been a passion rather than a side hustle. The most valuable item he still owns is “God’s Racket,” made in the mid ‘90s as a promo-

tional prop that Hichwa bought for \$15 and could sell for up to \$1,500. But Hichwa's prized possession is still the old wood Spalding Gold Medal that belonged to the late president of Yale. It's the one item he says he will never get rid of.

Hichwa's collection truly is a labor of "Love." ■

“Love” will be on display at the Library through the end of May during Library hours – visit marktwainlibrary.org for details

REAL ESTATE

April 2025 real estate report *A look at trends in the local housing market* | By Bill Whitehead and John Talley

Seven properties sold this April versus eight in April 2024. There are currently 19 properties under-contract in Redding. The average price of houses sold in Redding decreased in April by 12% year-over-year. Year-to-date, the average price of houses sold in 2025 remains 16% higher than in 2024. The average price-per-square-foot for the year is \$342 versus \$322 in 2024, a 6% increase. The average days-on-market is currently 116 days versus 110 in 2024. ■

Bill Whitehead and John Talley are REALTORS® with Berkshire Hathaway Home Services

April 2025													
Town	Current Inventory	Homes Sold		Average Days on Market		Average List Price		Average Sale Price		Percent Sale Price >/< List Price		Average Price/SqFt	
	As of May 4	April	2025	April	2025	April	2025	April	2025	April	2025	April	2025
Redding	24	7	26	82	116	\$855,428	\$1,094,019	\$845,714	\$1,057,442	-1%	-3%	\$324	\$342
Ridgefield	37	13	41	77	91	\$990,000	\$1,329,459	\$1,055,385	\$1,363,897	7%	3%	\$480	\$452
Weston	33	9	35	51	130	\$1,165,544	\$1,414,937	\$1,247,929	\$1,459,797	7%	3%	\$463	\$428
Wilton	30	19	43	78	97	\$1,241,889	\$1,355,672	\$1,365,524	\$1,433,643	10%	6%	\$433	\$415
Easton	21	4	17	62	154	\$1,158,000	\$1,030,588	\$1,179,000	\$1,038,529	2%	1%	\$264	\$328
Bethel	16	9	36	94	89	\$661,422	\$573,097	\$685,000	\$573,201	4%	0%	\$289	\$270
Newtown	46	23	69	96	106	\$732,888	\$659,971	\$747,735	\$658,446	2%	0%	\$298	\$283
Average	30	12	38	77	112	\$972,167	\$1,065,392	\$1,018,041	\$1,083,565	4%	1%	\$365	\$360

REDDING SOLD - April	Sale Price	List Price	%/ List Price	Price/Sqft	Days on Market
40 Peaceable St	\$525,000	\$535,000	-2%	\$410	43
15 Limekiln Rd	\$670,000	\$749,000	-11%	\$290	39
50 Mountain Rd	\$815,000	\$799,000	2%	\$287	68
3 Deacon Abbott Rd	\$835,000	\$820,000	2%	\$320	73
59 Sidecut Rd	\$900,000	\$999,999	-10%	\$312	237
45 Lamppost Dr	\$1,010,000	\$950,000	6%	\$309	49
17 Farview Farm Rd	\$1,165,000	\$1,135,000	3%	\$342	68
Average	\$845,714	\$855,428	-1%	\$324	82

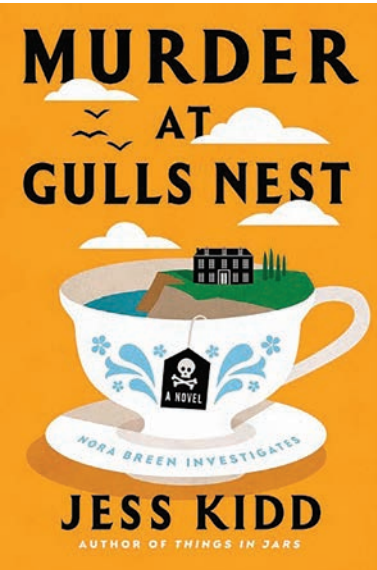
REDDING CURRENTLY FOR SALE	List Price	Price/Sqft	Days on Market	REDDING CURRENTLY FOR SALE	List Price	Price/Sqft	Days on Market
87 Picketts Ridge Rd	\$559,000	\$435	5	149 Limekiln Rd	\$1,199,999	\$373	3
21 White Birch Rd	\$660,000	\$484	33	9 Beck Rd	\$1,499,000	\$261	18
3 Apple Ln	\$679,900	\$384	3	99 Cross Hwy	\$1,499,000	\$311	70
343 Redding Rd	\$749,999	\$279	4	61 Marchant Rd	\$1,595,000	\$426	60
12 Granite Ridge Rd	\$765,000	\$253	79	56 Cross Hwy	\$1,625,000	\$464	19
14 Parsons Ln	\$798,000	\$274	19	279 Black Rock Tpke	\$1,750,000	\$389	162
181 Picketts Ridge Rd	\$799,000	\$453	19	34 Fox Run Rd	\$1,800,000	\$230	156
45 Wayside Ln	\$849,000	\$287	12	7 Long Meadow Ln	\$1,895,000	\$352	23
12 Winding Brook Ln	\$879,000	\$291	7	65 Umpawaug Rd	\$1,895,000	\$474	1000
49 Lamppost Dr	\$899,000	\$310	17	37 Giles Hill Rd	\$1,995,000	\$370	17
75 Stepney Rd	\$1,049,000	\$262	2	2 Meadows Edge	\$2,349,000	\$407	16
23 Old Mailcoach Rd	\$1,100,000	\$371	13				
7 Tunxis Trl	\$1,175,000	\$418	2	Average	\$1,252,662	\$357	73
Listings continue on right side of table							

BOOK REVIEW

Murder at Gulls Nest

By Jess Kidd

324 pages / Artia / \$28.99



Murder at Gulls Nest, by Jess Kidd, is a novel that examines a tawdry seaside boarding house and its occupants. A guest of the boarding house dies. The police investigator suspects suicide. A former nun with an investigative nose staying at Gulls Nest thinks it is murder. Other things happen. The reader is left delightfully in the dark until the perpetrator is identified and properly disclosed.

The frisson between the investigator and an intrusive amateur is a common devise, but as usual, how a writer handles the narrative points up the opportunity for humor or anger or both. Kidd has created moments of almost comedic friction between professional and amateur, but this results in solid respect. Strands of story between characters will find resolution by book’s end, but the role of author is crucial to hold the reader in suspense until questions raised are answered and the culprit is revealed with satisfaction. What tantalizes the reader of murder mysteries is *possibility*. Kidd’s honest characterization leaves the reader gratified, no matter how extenuating the circumstances.

Novelist Jess Kidd writes in the detective genre, but she also shows cultural change forthrightly. Nora Breen was a former nun. She came to her convent as a young, teenage victim of rape, pregnant with a child she would give up. But Nora, formerly Sister Agnes, will have none of what she was as a nun. Her secular passage resonates with her personal truth. Her reintroduction to life outside religious vows is partially shown by her awkward but resolute introduction to cigarettes and wine. And murder.

Every novel should present more than its basic promise to entertain. Jess Kidd subtly shows how

social attitudes have shifted. In this novel, human passion reigns in the realm of truth, where fixations complicate emotions; relationships ill-conceived or carried on intemperately are merely human, not sinful. As we see various relationships revealed, questions ensue. Add to this brew a murder that could be a suicide, a lurking child/witness and what she might know, a former tenant discovered to be either a victim of homicide or misadventure, and a look at the uneven lives of all the down-at-the-heels inhabitants of this seaside establishment, and you have the cast and character of Kidd’s novel. How she cooks this up is the measure of its success.

This question must be asked and answered: did the author write a convincing and entertaining yarn in *Murder at Gulls Nest*? Yes, she did. Is the novel more than a genre offering? Yes, it is. Her amateur investigator is not a cute nun on leave from a convent; rather she is a victim of rape who seeks the world with sore experience of both brands of sin and redemption; she does not seek shelter from truth, rather she seeks further clarifications. She is aware of her nose for “puzzles;” she seeks to open her eyes. Kidd takes the reader on Nora Breen’s excellent, eye-opening journey.

Throughout *Murder at Gulls Nest*, published this year, most effective thinking is done by women. In fact, the men Kidd presents are not fully developed as characters or, implicitly, as human beings; they are not by comparison, as functional as the women characters. Women dominate, as men in fiction once did. For example, Kidd deflates the aspiration of one male character by creating circumstances that ruin a meal he made to impress fellow guests and the female owner he favors.

Jess Kidd was born in Ireland and grew up in London. Social conventions of the past have changed in Ireland. Murder is here presented as serious transgression against society, not as a moral sin against God. Murder, universally unwished for, expresses desperation that visits life as toxic despair that can contemplate death as a solution to life, which *Murder at Gulls Nest* attests is false understanding. ■

Review by Tom Casey,
author of *Human Error*,
Strangers’ Gate, and a
new novel, *Unsettled States*,
available now

The HCCA (Horseless Carriage Club of America)
and the Town of Easton present

**SPORT HILL RACES -
HILL CLIMB DEMONSTRATION
& ANTIQUE CAR SHOW**

Saturday, May 24th, 2025 (Fair weather permitting, no rain date.)
Easton Town Library Parking Lot
10:00 am - 2:30 pm. Open to the public
Free to the public and Free for all car owners (Cut off 1957)
Not a judged event.

This is an antique car show featuring early brass cars (1900-1915), pre-war cars and cars made in 1957 or earlier. There will be 3 hill climb demonstrations (11:00 am, 1:00 pm and 2:30 pm) for the public to enjoy the sights and sounds of the early brass cars that would have run the original hill climb races, with an audio narration by historians Bruce Nelson and Alex Dragone.

After the 2:30 pm demonstration, all antique car owners are invited to join a car tour procession of 30 miles from the Easton Library to Broken Symmetry Brewery in Bethel (5 Depot Pl, Bethel).

For information: <https://fairfieldcountyregion.org/event-flyers>

LIBRARY CORNER

Meeting and greeting | By Erin Shea Dummeyer

Every year at the end of April, the Connecticut Library Association (CLA) hosts a professional conference in a Marriott near Mystic. This year, six of our staff members made the trek to attend this conference. What happens at a library conference? Well, many things. The highlight for me was Kathryn Zimmerman’s fantastic presentation on the Memory Care Kits she produced for our collection last year thanks to a grant from the American Library Association. Her talk was so popular that afterward she had a line of library workers waiting to ask her follow-up questions and take a closer look at the sample kit that she brought with her. Presentation topics at the conference ranged from artificial intelligence, fundraising, intellectual freedom, and even one on Gen Z and Alpha slang.

In addition to the presentations, there is also an exhibit hall where librarians can check out library furniture, study pods, database services, library schools, and more. The CLA conference is also a fantastic networking opportunity. At professional conferences the spontaneous conversations I have with librarians from other towns and

cities are sometimes more valuable than the presentations. I have been attending library conferences since 2010 or 2011, and it makes me smile to think that this was the first year where I really felt like a mid-career librarian able to mentor the “youngins”. So many conference attendees are new career librarians or library school students! It is so exciting to see their energy and enthusiasm for this career path. Our staff is grateful each year for this opportunity to attend. ■

Erin Shea Dummeyer is
Director, Mark Twain Library

Jen Wastrom wins CT Library Award

By Lisa Goldstein



Photo by Lisa Goldstein

Mark Twain Library is proud to announce that longtime supporter and past Board President Jen Wastrom has won the prestigious Edith B. Nettleton Award, presented by the CT Library Association. The Edith B. Nettleton Award honors an individual who has demonstrated an outstanding record of volunteer service to their library.

“It is impossible to summarize the indelible mark that Jen has left on our Library,” said Mark Twain Library Director Erin Dummeyer. “She is a ‘where the rubber meets the road’ kind of volunteer – when our boiler exploded in 2018, Jen trudged over to the Library in freezing temperatures to secure

Mark Twain’s personal, founding book collection.”

Edith B. Nettleton served as Guilford Town Librarian from 1933-1978. After retiring, she returned as a volunteer, organizing the historical collection and serving for 35 years. Wastrom served as President of the Mark Twain Library Board of Directors twice, from 2005-2006 and again from 2016-2018. Over the years she has also worn several additional leadership hats – Secretary, Publicity Chair, Programming Chair, Development Co-chair, Co-founder/Co-chair of the Puddin’head Prize Gala fundraiser, and currently as Vice President.

If her official leadership roles at the Library seem endless, her behind-the-scenes work goes above and beyond them. In the last 27 years, Wastrom has rolled her sleeves up to move furniture, assemble gift bags, spearhead fundraising campaigns, welcome younger board members, attract sponsors, and generate donations.

“Her volunteer efforts have been instrumental in helping the Library to raise the required 40% of our operating budget each year, as we are an association library – an incredible feat,” remarked Sheila Corr, President of the Mark Twain Library Board of Trustees.

Wastrom has been described by

fellow Board members as an “extraordinary,” “heroic,” and “mightiest” volunteer. Her ability to connect and engage donors has been called “inspiring,” her dedication “unparalleled.”

“She didn’t just help raise funds; she built lasting relationships with our supporters – relationships that are still thriving today,” said Sandi O’Reilly, the Library’s Development Operations Manager who has worked alongside Wastrom since 2008.

With infectious enthusiasm, boundless energy, and a deep knowledge of all things “Mark Twain,” Wastrom continues to work tirelessly to craft and execute strategic plans, write the Library’s annual appeals and *Tattler* newsletters, and mentor new volunteers.

“Like Edith B. Nettleton, Jen Wastrom’s impact on the Mark Twain Library is immeasurable. Not only has she made the Mark Twain Library a better place, but she has also enriched the entire town of Redding, and we are a community that loves our Library because of her,” raved Pam Robey, Mark Twain Library Trustee Ex-Officio.

Wastrom was presented the award by Dummeyer, who is the incoming CT Library Association President, on April 29 in Mystic at the CT Library Association’s Annual Conference. ■

Thrills ahead at the Ridgefield Independent Film Festival | By Donna Christopher



Photo courtesy of RIFF

A still from the Psych Night feature film Thanks for the Room.

If you like feeling on edge with your heart racing at the movies, then psychological thriller is your genre. The Ridgefield Independent Film Festival (RIFF) has developed a program especially for such thrill seekers as part of their 10th anniversary line-up of films being screened at The Prospector Theater from May 15 – 17.

Psych Night on Friday, May 16 will feature the world debut of *Thanks for the Room* at 4:00 p.m. by The Butler Brothers, with a chance to meet the filmmakers Jason and Brett at a post-screening Q&A session. (The Butler Brothers will also be participating in Anatomy of a Scene at the Ridgefield Library at 2:00 p.m. earlier that

afternoon). Thanks for the Room explores a man’s descent into darkness while working as a midnight courier during a pandemic. Then, at 7:00 p.m., there will be a screening of Psych Night Shorts with *Smiley Death Face*, *Persons Unknown*, *Won’t Be Long Now*, *Steps*, *Emily’s Mountain*, and *Story of a Theft*. An After Party will follow at Brasserie Saint Germain.

“Psych Night is a RIFF tradition – from our early days screening horror shorts in Keeler Tavern’s Carriage Barn, to our state-of-the-art screenings in the Prospector Theater, we welcome the weird and wonderful imaginations of filmmakers who push the boundaries of the horror and sci-fi genres,” said

Joanne Hudson, RIFF’s Founder/Director.

The genre tends to attract younger audiences. “We love that. Fairfield County is where you graduate high school, go to college, and then you don’t come back ‘til you’re 40, it seems,” said Hudson. She noted, however, that she has new neighbors in their 30s and sees the area’s age demographic is getting younger. “A lot of people are coming back,” she continued. “We would like to definitely give younger people something to do out here.”

Psych Night is just one of several programs in this year’s Festival, which includes 31 films. For the first time, it will be presented as an accessible film festival; audiences will have the option of using closed captions and/or audio descriptions through The Prospector’s accessibility systems for all films. To help filmmakers meet this new requirement, RIFF created the description tracks through 3 Play Media and covered the cost. After the Festival, RIFF will provide participating filmmakers with an ADA-compliant copy of the audio description for their films.

In addition to accessibility features, RIFF will offer opportunities for filmmakers and film enthusiasts

Continued on page 10

MUSIC NOTE

All-day music festival coming to Newtown

By Pamela Brown

The Fairfield Hills campus in Newtown will rock and roll with its first-ever music festival next weekend. The event will feature a stellar line-up of local bands with headliner Deep Banana Blackout, an acclaimed eight-piece ensemble playing jazz-rock-soul fusion. “We are envisioning a family-friendly atmosphere where people can enjoy music, relax, and have some good food,” said Dina and Dave Sabia, Event Chairs.

Musicians will take two outdoor stages at the Fairfield Hills Music Festival on Saturday, May 17 from 12:00 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. at Homestead Field on the Fairfield Hills campus.

The line-up includes 12 bands from the Tri-State area and one solo artist, Shawn Taylor. The larger Main Stage will feature Max Wareham & The National Bluegrass Team; Mile Marker Zero; Jake Kulak & the Modern Vandals; Adam Ezra Group; Slambovian Circus of Dreams; and Deep Banana Blackout. Their sets will range from 60-90 minutes. The Second Stage will feature Dirty Door-knockers; Jules Kessler & Vertigo; Walker Russell Band; Shawn Taylor; The Bargain; and The Meadows Brothers. The Second

Stage will feature 30-minute sets.

The organizers described a casual, relaxed afternoon of live music.

“Attendees are welcome to bring chairs and blankets, along with sunscreen and lots of positive vibes,” they said. Five food trucks will serve up good eats all day, including two from Los Mariachis featuring Mexican food and a potato and corn roaster truck; Genoa’s Wood Fired Pizza of Ridgefield; and Joey C’s Boathouse for burgers and chicken. No outside food or drink will be allowed, except water. The organizers noted there will be an Aquarion Water Truck available for water bottle refills.

A Beer and Wine Garden will feature beers from two Newtown-based breweries, NewSylum Brewing and Reverie Brewing. Wine from Aquila’s Nest Vineyard’s will also be available along with hard seltzers.

Proceeds for the event will benefit Kevin’s Community Center, a Newtown non-profit and the main sponsor of the event. Kevin’s Community Center was founded by Dr. and Mrs. Z. Michael Taweh, in memory of their son, to address the health care crisis for uninsured and underinsured adult residents

of Newtown, Bridgewater, and Roxbury. Its medical outreach program encompasses educational and community programs and referrals to medical services and specialty care to network providers in the community.

“The inspiration for the Festival came from a late-night conversation with neighbors after attending the Friday night kickoff concert for the Newtown Arts Festival,” said Dina, who also serves on the Board of Kevin’s Community Center. “I am excited to use my talents and expertise to contribute to the Newtown community. The main mission of the event is to bring the community together for a great day of music and to bring awareness about Kevin’s Community Center and the new initiatives that they are bringing to the community.”

“Our hope is that this will be a hit and turns into an annual event – one where people discover new styles of music, connect with others, and come together to support Kevin’s Community Center,” said the Sabias. ■

To learn more and to purchase tickets, visit fairfieldhillsmusicfest.org

“Hat Cakes” and the art of a life well-lived

By Christina Mattinson



Photo by Christina Mattinson
Mary Brewster and her handmade “hat cakes”

In a world driven by speed and convenience, it is refreshing – and rare – to come across someone whose work is defined by patience, purpose, and pure love. Meet Mary Brewster, a Redding local, an artist, and the heart and hands behind Hat Cakes, a charming small business with a boundless spirit.

Mary’s specialty? Hand-knitted baby hats, each one lovingly crafted and tucked inside a petite

cake box, tied sweetly with baker’s twine. The presentation alone elicits a smile, but the real magic lies in the stitchwork – soft, intricate, and made with the kind of care that only a grandmother’s hands can give. They’re gifts that speak of warmth, comfort, and beginnings.

Though Hat Cakes officially launched just six months ago, Mary is no newcomer to creativity or conscious craftsmanship. Before she picked up her knitting needles, she founded and ran a company that produced sustainable fabrics and products from recycled plastic – a forward-thinking endeavor that combined environmental responsibility with textile innovation. Her education and professional roots are in the arts, and it shows. From fabric to fiber, Mary’s life has been one long act of making beauty from what she touches.

She and her husband still live in the storybook home they bought when they were first married, a home that has grown alongside their family. Over the years, they’ve lovingly added rooms and memories. Today, the house hums with life – grandchildren giggling,

grown children visiting, the scent of something delicious drifting from the kitchen. The walls are filled with character, art, and the unmistakable fingerprint of a woman who knows how to make a space feel like sanctuary.

Meeting Mary was like stepping into one of her little cake boxes: sweet, unexpected, and full of heart. She is a Renaissance woman in every sense – deeply thoughtful, endlessly talented, and quietly bold in the way she moves through the world. With Hat Cakes, she’s taken a simple idea and infused it with joy, stitching love and legacy into every loop of yarn.

Whether you’re welcoming a new baby into the world, buying a gift for a new mom, or just want to support something meaningful, a Hat Cakes hat is more than a gift. It’s a story. And like Mary herself, it’s one worth celebrating. ■

You can find Mary’s beautiful baby hats at Wild Blueberry at 2 Main Street in Georgetown, or you can connect with her directly on Instagram at [@hatcakes_by_mary](https://www.instagram.com/hatcakes_by_mary) or by e-mail at marybrewste@gmail.com

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Tour de France
Wine Dinner

Touring the country in an Airstream, musical duo plans stop at The Granite

By Pamela Brown



Joanna Serenko and Tyler Dale

Joanna Serenko and Tyler Dale – remember those names. The up-and-coming soulful duo from St. Louis, Missouri is making a name for themselves in the industry and will be appearing at The Granite at 5 North Main Street for a special two-night gig on May 16 and 17 at 8:00 p.m.

“I’m looking forward to playing at The Granite. I’m excited and grateful to be traveling and playing music full time. We’ve been planning and working hard to make this a reality over the last couple years, and it’s awesome to finally be doing it,” said Serenko. “Since I’ve been in St. Louis for the majority of my music career, we’re playing mostly smaller venues as we build up our following.”

The Granite performances are just one stop on the duo’s year-long coastal tour of the country while traveling in an Airstream trailer.

“It’s been incredible! We love our new home on wheels,” Serenko said. “We’re doing the coast of each quarter of the country in each quarter of the year. We’ve been meeting tons of people of all walks of life and learning their stories.”

Richard Wenning, The Granite’s Executive Director, was impressed when he heard Serenko perform. “After listening to Joanna’s beautiful voice, I thought she would be perfect for The Granite’s acoustics. Beautiful voices in a beautiful space go wonderfully together,” he said. “This emerging artist performance fits perfectly for The Granite as a non-profit community space that connects generations through learning and creativity. We’re restoring this cherished space as a cornerstone for cultural life in the greater Georgetown area, nurturing artistic expression and community engagement through dynamic events and performances.”

Serenko earned accolades after appearing as a contestant on Season 18 of The Voice, a reality television singing competition, with Dale cheering backstage. Mentored by Nick Jonas, John Legend, and James Taylor, Serenko made it to the semifinal round, finishing ninth

overall. “The credibility that comes with being on that show gave me a solid foundation to continue building on for the rest of my music career. There have been times where people come out to shows because they recognize me, which has been cool,” said Serenko.

At The Granite, Serenko will be accompanied by Dale’s masterful guitar work, playing a mix of old and new original songs, along with some re-imagined covers. Each artist has a new album: Best of Me by Serenko and Salutations by Dale. “My style of music is a mix of songwriter, R&B, pop, blues, all with my own soulful twist. My mom grew me up on show tunes and country, which I have a great love for. She’s definitely a huge reason I’m so into music,” she said.

Serenko feels she and Dale mesh as musicians because of his velvety, smooth tone. “He also graduated with a jazz performance major, so I play rhythm guitar, and he adds the tastiness on top. Riffs, percolation, solos – he always knows what to add to bring a song to life,” she said. “With him having the theory from music school, it’s awesome that I can bring him an idea that I’ve loosely worked up and he can refine all the chords into something unique. Not only is he incredibly talented, but some of my favorite things about Tyler are his warm heart, zest for life, and infectious laughter. It makes being on the road together so much fun.”

While building her music career, Serenko also attended school and recently graduated with a nursing degree from Maryville University. “My mom and grandmother are both nurses, and it was something I thought in my heart I might do. It was a struggle to know if what I was doing was the right thing. There were times that I seriously considered dropping out, as I felt extremely spread thin between feeding my passion for music and my nursing studies,” she said. “I’m glad I pushed through. I learned so much, I got to help so many people during clinicals and my OR externship, and I feel a deep sense of accomplishment. I still got to do a lot of music during those years, using that time to better establish myself as an artist.”

While she has put nursing on hold for now, she feels her music still gives her the opportunity to help others.

“What’s most important to me in my music is that it strikes a chord somewhere within the listener and makes them feel heard. That can be done through both melodies and lyrics,” she said. “Choosing a path and trusting in it can turn into something beautiful. I want my audiences to feel free, joyful, warm, and relaxed when they hear us play. I want them to feel not so alone in this human experience.” ■

For tickets to May 16 and May 17, visit thegranitechurch.org/events

To learn more about Serenko, visit joanna-serenko.com

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Redding Garden Club Annual Plant Sale

Saturday, May 10 | By Randy Thomas

Spring has sprung and it's time to get planting! The Redding Garden Club is holding its annual Plant Sale on Saturday, May 10, at Lonetown Farm at 43 Lonetown Road from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., rain or shine.

With roots back to the origin of the Garden Club, established in 1964, the Plant Sale has evolved through the years. One of the favorite features of the Plant Sale – perennials donated from the gardens of Club members – began back in 1998 when the event was held on the Town Green. A focus of the Plant Sale has always been to provide useful information on the characteristics of each plant, such as light and soil preferences, deer resistance, and mature size.

This year's event not only offers the member-donated plants, but also annuals, herbs, vegetables, and unique perennials. Flower gift baskets designed and made by members are also available and make wonderful Mother's Day gifts. Second Hand Rose, a garden-related tag sale, offers a selection

of gently used items. Garden Club members are on hand throughout the event to offer advice and answer your gardening questions. As a community-based event, the Plant Sale also showcases many of Redding's fabulous local organizations: Backyard Beekeepers, Highstead, New Pond Farm Education Center, Norwalk River Valley Trail Association, Redding Grange #15, Redding Historical Society, Redding Land Trust, Redding Neighbors & Newcomers, and the Trail Tenders.

Proceeds from the event support the Garden Club's civic beautification efforts, including gardens at various intersections around town, planters at places such as the Community Center, and holiday wreaths hung at Christmas time.

"We so appreciate the people of Redding coming out to support the Garden Club," said Karen de Friesse, Garden Club President. "We have so much fun seeing old friends, meeting new friends, and talking gardens and nature all day!" ■

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Thrills ahead at the Ridgefield Independent Film Festival / continued from page 8

to delve more deeply into the craft. "As we celebrate our 10th anniversary, we are excited to rededicate ourselves to education in filmmaking; from our Accessibility in Filmmaking panel, to our Make Your Move master class with filmmaker Brooke Berman, to our Anatomy of a Scene panel, RIFF is fostering an independent film community," said Hudson. Visit riffct.org for more information and tickets.

A conversation with Jason Butler, one of the directors of Thanks for the Room.

What are your thoughts on psychological thriller as a genre for directors and audiences?

Brett and I think this genre has a lot of room to play with audience expectations, allowing us to get into some interesting nooks and crannies for storytelling, which intrigues and excites us as filmmakers! We organically navigated to psychological thrillers over the past five years because we wanted to challenge ourselves while continuing to make films that pack an emotional punch. By bringing a psychological element to a thriller, you instantly have another tool to keep the audience on edge and engaged, making for a more visceral experience overall. Intense, engaging, and entertaining – what more could you ask for?

How did you come up with the story in Thanks for The Room?

The story was directly born out of the pandemic. *Thanks For the Room* is set in the city where we live, Toronto, which is the fourth largest city in North America. The community as a whole was hit hard by Covid, and what was usually a vibrant, bustling, multicultural

metropolis became a very quiet place, very quickly – too quickly. The economy ground to a halt, and almost instantly there were "tent cities" popping up all over, often in green spaces like parks and playgrounds. It was shocking how quickly so many individuals and families became unhoused as a result of the pandemic. For Brett and I, as people who were born and raised in Toronto, it was a real eye opener. As filmmakers, we felt the best way to raise awareness and try to make a difference for the city we love was through our medium. That was the spark.

What do the staging and filming location reveal about the story?

This was entirely filmed in Toronto. Even at the time of filming, Toronto was still feeling the repercussions of the pandemic, and to this day, the city isn't the same, with so many fantastic local bars, restaurants, and artistic venues having had to shut down permanently. With the help of the Yonge Street Mission (YSM), we were able to access parts of the city that were otherwise off limits, so what you are seeing on screen are very real, very affected parts of the inner city of Toronto. Even with coordination and outreach from YSM, it was still very intense filming some scenes, as we were met with reticence by members of the tent city community, understandably, as this was their life. Ultimately, and what is extremely encouraging, is the film reveals the resilience of the city. Despite the hardships that have been faced, there is optimism for the future. The fabric of Toronto was torn, but it wasn't ruined; it will survive, much like the characters in the film who demonstrate great strength in a time of strife. ■

THE NATURAL WORLD

If trees could talk “Mamma Mia!” | By Janice Rotchstein



Photo by justaskpenny
The “wood-wide web”

Many of us are about to celebrate one of the most cherished people in our life: Mom.

Yet there is another matriarch who deserves to be honored. This particular parent is at work underground raising and nourishing much of the beauty we see in our Redding forests. She is known as “The Mother Tree”.

Whether in our Saugatuck Falls Natural Area or Centennial Watershed State Forest, you probably have passed several such supermoms. These forces of nature are always one of the largest and oldest with root systems as wide as they are tall. Because these trees soar so high, they are able to catch the most sunlight, enabling maximum photosynthesis. This, in turn, enables them to feed their seedlings, ensuring the survival of genes to the next generation.

Listen to Suzanne Simard PhD, Canadian forestry scientist and conservationist, and you'll learn exactly what's in play. It's part of the “wood-wide web,” she explains, that happens as fungi connect underground with trees. The “mutualized relationship” provides each with food. Fungi receive sugar produced by the tree's photosynthesis and give nutrients and water in return. That response enables the Mother Tree – acting as a hub – to transmit life-giving fodder to her ever-growing brood which can count in the hundreds.

Like every good mom, this one's work is never done. For example, a specific species can become a stepmother to others, creating an extended family. Today, that's more important than ever. Climate change is causing temperatures to turn hotter and drier, which puts certain saplings under stress. As if that weren't enough, these epicenters offer foster care to birds, animals, plants, and other organisms by maintaining the surrounding environment's biodiversity.

Unfortunately, Redding lost many Mother Trees in the 18th and 19th centuries when forests were clear-cut to provide local saw mills with lumber. Today, many of those boards and beams are within our antique houses.... proof of a legacy that such homes share with these long-ago caregiving giants.

Fortunately, through the Redding Open Space Plan and Redding Land Trust, our forests are replenishing themselves. But we also must encourage woodland managers, tree wardens, and utility companies to respect the elders as they go about their jobs. A loss of even one can mean too many orphans.

So, here's to those multi-tasking woodsy moms who, like our



Photo by Janice Rotchstein
Mother Tree, Saugatuck Falls Natural Area

own, never think twice about the demands that life offers. That's why this Sunday, I plan to visit my favorite Mother Tree, give her a hug, and drop off a rose as a thank you. ■

Download a hiking map of the Saugatuck Falls Natural Area via reddinglandtrust.org or the Centennial Watershed State Forest: Saugatuck and Aspetuck Trails through <https://ctparks.com/media/1991/download?inline>

To accompany your trek, read Finding the Mother Tree by Suzanne Simard, PhD, Vintage Publishing, 2022

If you have a favorite tree you'd like featured in this column, contact reddingtreeconservancy@gmail.com

Strutt Your Mutt on Saturday | By Pamela Brown



Photo courtesy of Newtown Parks and Recreation
The 2025 Leader of the Pack, Baker the Corgi, with his human, Tara.

In a season of outdoor festivals for all ages, Newtown's Strutt Your Mutt provides a day of fun and activities especially for dogs and their families.

Newtown Parks and Recreation and Newtown Park and Bark, an off-leash dog park located on Old Farm Road, are presenting the 14th annual event on Saturday, May 10 from 11:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m. (rain date is May 11) at the Fairfield Hills Campus in Newtown. Proceeds benefit the operations and maintenance of the Newtown Park and Bark Dog Park.

"We want the community to come together to experience a fun-filled, enriching day with their canine companions as well as meet new people in the community, meet new canine friends, and learn about the services and products offered to the canine community in the region, and also be introduced to

local animal rescue groups," said Jennifer Balbes, Event Coordinator.

All dogs must be leashed. There will be an optional 2K Walk through the picturesque Fairfield Hills Campus, dog-friendly games and prizes, and a variety of vendors. "Entire families come with their beloved pups, and the Fairfield Hills Campus is a lovely place to spend the day," said Balbes.

The walk will be led by event staff and by Baker the Corgi, the winner of last year's drawing to be the 2025 Leader of the Pack. Games designed to include both dogs and their owners will include Red Light-Green Light, Musical Hoops, and a Spoon Run.

New this year will be an obstacle "agility" course for pups provided by The Canine Diplomat, a Newtown-based dog training company. There will be a Puppucino Station providing whipped cream treats, and Happy Tail Coffee Trailer, a mobile coffee shop located in a vintage converted horse trailer, will serve coffee, baked goods, and more. Food will be available for purchase by Crazy Taco Mex Food Truck.

A variety of vendors, showcasing dog-related products and other community services, will include The Canine Diplomat; Central Bark Danbury; Pleasant Paws Pet Center; Mt. Pleasant

Hospital for Animals; Active Dog; BrightPath Newtown; M & T Bank; Adelbrook Bark-ery; The SNO Company; Emily Pelella pet photographer; Herbs Love & Yoga; Wine Bags for Dog Breeds; The Cascades at Stone Ridge; The Sew Queen; Ridgefield Operation for Animal Rescue; CT Humane Society; Renewal by Andersen; and Newtown Veterinary Specialists.

Guests can obtain a Strutt Your Mutt Passport, stamped for each vendor visit, which can be entered into a prize drawing.

Newtown Board of Realtors will be collecting donations for Newtown Animal Control Shelter. Some of their wish-list items include wet and dry dog and cat food; dog and cat treats; catnip; Martingale collars; clip leashes; slip leads; new cat scratchers; non-clumping cat litter; trash bags; laundry detergent; dryer sheets; dish soap; paper towels; and toilet paper.

"The event plays a niche role in providing quality recreation and leisure opportunities for our community, and this includes our beloved pets who are part of our families," said Balbes. "Strutt Your Mutt is an entertaining event where our canine family members (and their humans) have the opportunity to feel pure joy while surrounded by other dog lovers." ■

For more information, visit newtown-ct.gov/parks-recreation To register, visit bit.ly/42CCoIg or call (203) 270-4340

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

\$ = fee applies
R = registration required

This Week’s Featured Events

Redding Garden Club Plant Sale Saturday, May 10 9:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. Annuals, perennials, herbs, vegetables and showcase of local organizations Redding Historical Society 43 Lonetown Road reddinggardenclub.org/ plant-sale	Redding Artisan Spring Market Saturday, May 10 10:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. Shop local with products from 50 local vendors John Read Middle School 486 Redding Road facebook.com/ reddingartisanmarket	Yom HaShoah: Holocaust Remembrance Day – An Evening of Shared Stories Tuesday, May 13 10:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. Heirloom and organic plants and seedlings grown without the use of fossil fuels or pesticides and a pop-up cafe selling seasonal treats and beverages Open Farmhouse 11 John Read Road openfarmhouse.com	Want to feature an upcoming event? E-mail us at advertise@reddingsentinel.org for more information.
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ARTS

Saturday, May 10
Redding Artisan Spring Market
10:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.
Shop local with products from 50 local vendors
John Read Middle School
486 Redding Road
facebook.com/
reddingartisanmarket

Thursday, May 15 – Sunday, May 18
RIFF 2025 – Ridgefield Independent Film Festival
Showtimes vary
Accessible film festival hosted at The Prospector Theater
The Prospector Theater
25 Prospect Street
Ridgefield
riffct.org
\$

Friday, May 16 – Saturday, May 17
Joanna Serenko & Tyler Dale
7:00 p.m. Doors open
8:00 p.m. Show
Musical duo seen on The Voice performing soulful vocals and masterful guitar work.
The Granite
5 North Main Street
thegranitechurch.org/events
\$, R

Thursday, June 5
Redding Land Trust 60th Anniversary Photography Show Opening Reception
5:00 p.m. - 7:00 p.m.
Opening reception with catered refreshments, registration required
Mark Twain Library
439 Redding Road
rltphotoshow.eventbrite.com
R

CHILDREN | TEENS

Friday, May 9
4th Grade MTL Party
3:15 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.
Celebrate the end of the school year with pizza and ice cream
Bus service from RES
Mark Twain Library
439 Redding Road
marktwainlibrary.org
R

Monday May 12
Card Games & Sour Gummy Taste Tasting (Grades 2-4)
3:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.
Bus service from RES
Mark Twain Library
439 Redding Road
marktwainlibrary.org
R

Monday May 12
DIY Coasters
4:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.
Grades 7+
Mark Twain Library
439 Redding Road
marktwainlibrary.org
R

FUNDRAISERS

Tuesday, May 13
Golf Outing and Pickleball Tournament
10:00 a.m. – Golf begins
12:30 p.m. – Pickleball tournament begins
Support New Pond Farm’s education programs with a full day of golf, pickleball, lunch, and prizes
The Redding Country Club
109 Lonetown Road
newpondfarm.org/golfouting
\$, R

Saturday, May 17
The Eras Gala
7:30 p.m.
The Ridgefield Symphony Orchestra celebrates 60 years of world-class music with a performance, auctions, and a pre-concert cocktail party
Ridgefield Playhouse
80 East Ridge Road
Ridgefield
ridgefieldsymphony.org
\$, R

Saturday, May 18
JRMS PTA Color Run
8:30 a.m. 1-mile fun run
9:00 a.m. 5k
Run through a wooded course and get doused by colored powder to raise money for the JRMS PTA
Joel Barlow High School
100 Black Rock Turnpike
jrmspta.org/colorrun
\$, R

Monday, June 9
Putt Fore Paws – The Joyce Allen Memorial Golf Tournament
11:00 a.m.
Proceeds support Danbury Animal Welfare Society (DAWS)
The Redding Country Club
109 Lonetown Road
dawsgolff2025.givesmart.com
\$, R

NATURE

Saturday, May 10
Redding Garden Club Plant Sale
9:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.
Annuals, perennials, herbs, vegetables and showcase of local organizations
Redding Historical Society
43 Lonetown Road
reddinggardenclub.org/plant-sale

Monday, May 12
Victorian Gardening - American Gardening from 1836-1901
1:00 p.m.
Redding Garden Club hosts speaker Marie Hayes
Redding Community Center
37 Lonetown Road
reddinggardenclub.org

Sunday, May 18
Homefront Farmers Plant Sale
10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.
Certified organic seedlings
Pre-orders must be received by May 11
Nod Hill Brewery Biergarten
137 Ethan Allen Highway
Ridgefield
homefrontfarmers.com/plant-sale

Sunday, May 18
Georgetown Volunteer Fire Company Plant Sale and Swap
1:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.
The Granite
5 North Main Street
thegranitechurch.org/events

Tuesday, May 20
Floral Workshop: Fairy Garden Arrangements
12:00 p.m. Lunch
12:30 p.m. Workshop
Heritage Center
37 Lonetown Road
RSVP by May 13 to mstillman@reddingct.gov or (203) 938-9725
\$, R

Saturday, May 24 – Monday, May 26
Open Farmhouse Plant Sale & Cafe
10:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.
Heirloom and organic plants and seedlings grown without the use of fossil fuels or pesticides and a pop-up cafe selling seasonal treats and beverages
Open Farmhouse
11 John Read Road
openfarmhouse.com

SPECIAL PROGRAMS

Thursday, May 8
A Black Soldier’s Revolutionary War Experience
6:30 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.
Mark Twain Library
439 Redding Road
marktwainlibrary.org
R

Tuesday, May 13
Yom HaShoah: Holocaust Remembrance Day – An Evening of Shared Stories
6:30 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.
Hosted in partnership with Redding League of Women Voters
Mark Twain Library
439 Redding Road
marktwainlibrary.org
R

Wednesday, May 14
Redding Prevention Council Meeting
7:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.
All are welcome
The Granite
5 North Main Street
thegranitechurch.org/events

Thursday, May 15
Okay to Delay
6:30 p.m.
Information session on group advocating delayed introduction of smartphones to children
Mark Twain Library
439 Redding Road

Friday, May 16
Annual Community Tag Sale
9:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.
Limited vendor spots available, table fee of \$15
Redding Community Center
37 Lonetown Road
Contact mpilato@townofreddingct.org or (203) 938-9725

Wednesday, May 21
Redding Neighbors & Newcomers Volunteer Meet and Greet
5:30 p.m. – 6:45 p.m.
Learn about community volunteering opportunities and build connections
Georgetown
reddingneighborsandnewcomers.org
R

RELIGIOUS SERVICES

Bethlehem Lutheran Church
Sundays at 10:00 a.m.
44 Portland Avenue
bethlehemlutheranct.org

Calvary Independent Baptist Church
Adult and Child Sunday School at 10:00 a.m. / Worship Sundays at 11:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m.
Wednesday prayer meeting at 7:00 p.m.
Nursery provided for all services.
711 Redding Road
cibcredding.org

Christ Church, Episcopal
Sundays at 9:00 a.m.
184 Cross Highway
christchurchredding.org

First Church of Christ, Congregational
Sundays at 10:00 a.m.
25 Cross Highway
firstchurchredding.org

Long Ridge United Methodist
Sundays at 11:30 a.m.
201 Long Ridge Road
Danbury
longridgeumc.com

Sacred Heart / St. Patrick Parish Sacred Heart Church:
Saturday Confessions: 10:00 a.m. at Pryor Hubbard Hall
Saturday Vigil Mass: 4:00 p.m.
Saturday Eucharistic Adoration: 6:00 p.m.
Sunday Mass: 9:00 a.m. & 10:30 a.m.
12:00 noon LATIN
Weekday Mass: Tuesdays and Thursdays at 8:30 a.m.
Wednesday 6:00 p.m. LATIN
30 Church Street

St. Patrick Church:
Saturday Vigil Mass: 5:00 p.m.
Saturday Confessions: 4:00 p.m. – 4:45 p.m.
Sunday Mass: 8:30 a.m., 10:30 a.m., 5:00 p.m.
Weekday Mass: Monday – Friday at 8:30 a.m.
Weekday Confessions: Mondays and Thursdays: 7:30 p.m., before or after mass, or by appointment
Eucharistic Adoration: Mondays and Thursdays at 7:00 p.m.
169 Black Rock Turnpike
sacredheart-stpat.org

Temple B’nai Chaim
Friday, May 9
Teacher Appreciation Shabbat
5:30 p.m.
82 Portland Avenue
templebnaichaim.org

MEETINGS

Thursday, May 8
Gilbert & Bennett Wire Mill Advisory Committee
6:00 p.m.
In-person and virtual
Town Hall / Hearing Room
100 Hill Road

Thursday, May 8
Fire District #2 Commissioners’ Meeting
7:00 p.m.
West Redding Firehouse
306 Umpawaug Road

Monday, May 12
League of Women Voters
4:00 p.m.
Town Hall / Conference Room
100 Hill Road

Tuesday, May 13
Planning Commission
7:00 p.m.
Town Hall / Hearing Room
100 Hill Road

Tuesday, May 13
Redding Fire District 1
7:00 p.m.
186 Black Rock Turnpike

Wednesday, May 14
Commission on Aging
9:00 a.m.
Heritage Center
37 Lonetown Road

Wednesday, May 14
Zoning Commission
7:30 p.m.
Town Hall / Hearing Room
100 Hill Road

Thursday, May 15
Historic Review Committee
6:00 p.m.
Town Hall / Hearing Room
100 Hill Road

Thursday, May 15
Democratic Town Committee
7:00 p.m.
Town Hall / Hearing Room
100 Hill Road

Monday, May 19
Board of Selectmen
7:00 p.m.
Town Hall / Hearing Room
100 Hill Road

Tuesday, May 20
Region 9 Finance & Operations
5:30 p.m.
Joel Barlow High School / Library
Learning Commons
100 Black Rock Turnpike

Tuesday, May 20
Conservation Commission
7:00 p.m.
Town Hall / Hearing Room
100 Hill Road

Tuesday, May 20
Region 9 Board of Education
7:00 p.m.
Joel Barlow High School / Library
Learning Commons
100 Black Rock Turnpike

Tuesday, May 20
Zoning Board of Appeals
7:00 p.m.
Viirtual

Wednesday, May 21
Water Pollution Control Commission
7:30 p.m.
Virtual

****Town Offices will be closed on Monday, May 26 for Memorial Day.**



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