



REDDING SENTINEL

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Redding property assessments jump by an average of 28 percent

By Jessie Wright

“I’m a popular guy this week,” said John Ford, Town of Redding Assessor, as property owners in Redding reacted to notices of their updated property assessments issued in early November. The updated assessments follow a revaluation process conducted by the Town of Redding and Vision Government Solutions, Inc. (VGS) over the last several months. According to Ford, the average residential assessment in 2022 increased by 28%.

Redding conducts revaluations every five years, in accordance with Connecticut General Statutes; the assessments alternate between “full” revaluations, including on-site and interior property inspections, and “update” revaluations, which include updating the valuation model with recent real estate sales and market data.

The 2022 Revaluation was an update, the timing of which captured the extraordinary growth in the Fairfield County housing market over the last two years. Sales data from October 1, 2021 – September 30, 2022 was used to update the valuation model. Housing demand in the area generated by the Covid pandemic, increased prevalence of remote work, and historically low interest rates had pushed property values for that period high above those of five years ago.

“This [year] was comparable to the change we saw back when I first came to Redding – in 2007,” Ford explained. “There was a huge increase in 2007. We’re in the ballpark of the percentage increase. But I will say we’re comparable to other towns in Fairfield County, what they’re seeing.”

Although the percent change in assessment values is remarkable this year, the process is a standard one. “This is just a normal process that every town has to go through,” Ford said. “And it’s just to equalize how much of the [tax] burden goes to each homeowner.”

While property assessment values are only half of the equation when determining property taxes – a new mil rate, the other half, will be voted on in 2023 and be applied to the new assessments – many homeowners are wary of what this increase may mean for their tax bill next year.

Clay Viands lives with his wife and two-year-old on Blueberry Hill Road, just north of Georgetown. They own a 4 bedroom, 3.5 bath home built in 1952 on a 1.1 acre lot (grandfathered in when the Town’s 2-acre minimum zoning took effect). Their property assessment this year jumped 40.4%.

“The numbers were pretty surprising,” Viands said. “We are coming out of a historically high

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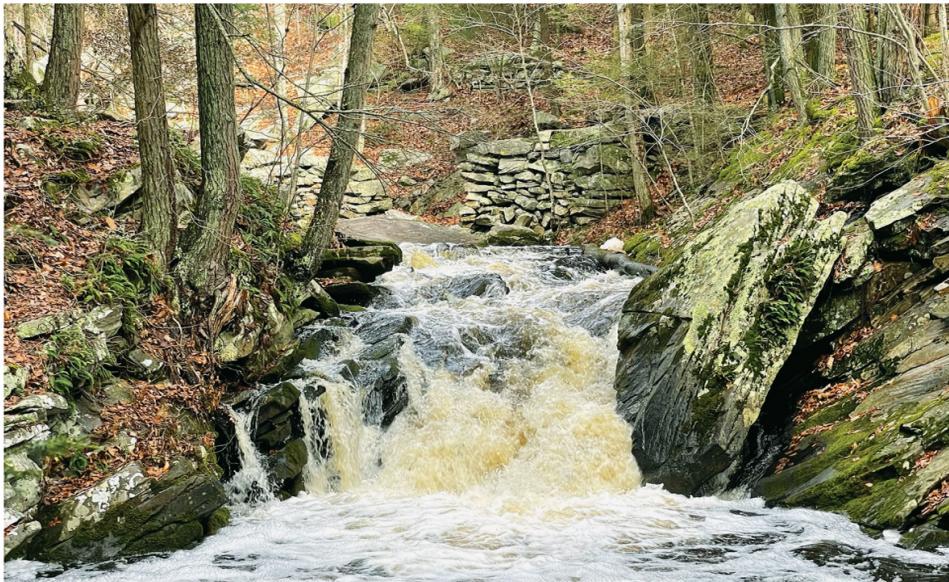


Photo by Richard Wenning

Before European colonists arrived in the 17th century to what is now Connecticut, the Saugatuck River flowed through land of the Paugussett tribe of Native Americans. Saugatuck means “river that flows out” in the Paugussett language. The Saugatuck Falls Natural Area pictured above is 312 acres of scenic woodlands, trails, and waterfalls. In 1968, the Town of Redding purchased the property with aid from federal and state funds, making it the Town’s second, and largest, purchase of open space.

REDDING’S BIG OUTDOORS

The Saugatuck Trail

By Jeanne Ammermuller



Photo by Jeanne Ammermuller

If you’re looking for a trail that you can return to time and again and customize for shorter or longer options, the Saugatuck Trail is for you. It offers varied terrain, great geological features, and if you extend beyond Newtown Turnpike, gorgeous views along the Saugatuck Reservoir.

First, to be clear: this is the Saugatuck Trail, not to be confused with the Saugatuck Falls Natural Area across from John Read Middle School.

The Saugatuck Trail traverses Centennial Watershed property in the broader Devil’s Den area. The best place to start this adventure is from Deer Hill Road off Route 107. The very well-marked trailhead is near 56 Deer Hill Road. There is ample space to park on the street – but neighbors request you don’t pull up on the grass. Note that

soon after you begin, you will see a very clear sign that no dogs are allowed. This is a policy of all Centennial Watershed and Nature Conservancy properties, which dictate the rules in the broader Devil’s Den area.

If you download the free Hiking Project App, look for the Ravine Trail (its former name) in Redding, CT, to follow this exact route. The Saugatuck Trail is also available on the app but offers a much longer route. There is also a kiosk off Deer Hill Road where you can snap a photo of a trail map.

To start out, follow the light blue and red access trail, which is a little uneven, but clearly marked. There’s nothing remarkable about this 0.2-mile hike between houses, but don’t give up, the rest of the walk is quiet and secluded.

At the end of the access trail, you’ll find a sign that offers you a choice between left or right. Don’t be fooled into thinking this is a loop trail. This choice is between two one-way trails. Take the trail to the right to Newtown Turnpike and to the Saugatuck Reservoir.

The most stunning features of this relatively easy hike are the rock formations so typical of Redding – both the natural formations that rise up and are often covered with a variety of mosses and lichens and the man-made stone walls that mark old fields and boundaries between properties.

The trail is mostly shaded by evergreens and a variety of deciduous trees. The trail follows a mostly downhill route, so save your energy for the return trip! It does rise up briefly to provide a lovely view of the reservoir in the distance – this is more visible in the winter months. Unfortunately, given the summer drought, the reservoir is quite low, but still a beautiful feature.

As you continue down the trail, take your time to appreciate the forest and quiet before the trail exits on the very end of Sherman Turnpike. Bear a little to the right and you will see Newtown Turnpike. This part of the walk is just over one mile. If you’d like to extend your walk, (carefully) cross Newtown Turnpike and pick up the trail which takes you along the reservoir, with a very flat walk with many beautiful views. You can turn back any time or continue on for miles.

This walk will be featured as the “Boxing Day” hike from the Redding Land Trust. The group will meet at 11:00 a.m. on December 26 near 56 Deer Hill Road. ■

Jeanne Ammermuller
is a member of the
Redding Land Trust
Board of Trustees

Connecticut Humane Society looks to open new facility in Georgetown

Reduced-fee veterinary service, pet food pantry, and humane education in the works

By Donna Christopher

A 15,000-square-foot Animal Resource Center & Veterinary Clinic on Route 7 in Georgetown will break ground mid-next year. The facility will be operated by the Connecticut Humane Society (CHS) and serve Fairfield County pets and their families. It is scheduled to open in 2024.

The new center will include a reduced-fee veterinary service for the public, a pet food pantry, and humane education programs for all ages. The facility will also include low-stress space for pets seeking adoption into a permanent home.

“The Connecticut Humane Society has been around since 1881. We’re here to meet the needs of what we’re doing in 2022...we have had to adapt over the years to meet changing needs,” explained CHS Executive Director James Bias.

“While we continue to accept pets from former homes, we have added programs to keep pets with their families when possible,” he continued. This includes medical services, pet food, and pet ownership training. The new campus will bring the sheltering work from our Westport campus plus allow us to provide local veterinary medical support and increased access to our Pet Food Pantry.”

One of the primary reasons families are forced to surrender a pet is the inability to pay for veterinary care, according to the CHS. Unfortunately for the animals, this means they need to be rehomed, or worse, go without necessary medical treatment.

The CHS’s donor-subsidized veterinary clinics, like the one planned for the new center, respond to the growing need for affordable care, while also providing immediate medical care for shelter pets. The new veterinary facility will not compete with local veterinarians, but rather fill a need for pet owners seeking affordable health care for their animals, explained CHS Major Gifts Manager Eve Basher. She provided a tour of the property and answered questions for the Sentinel.

Veterinary care is becoming more expensive and the cost of medical care like orthopedic surgery can be thousands of dollars, sometimes the difference

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EDITORIAL

My son and I were at Putnam Park Pond last week, enjoying the baby swing set situated near the water. He was bundled up and giggling with excitement as I pushed him back and forth in the chilly sunshine. A neighbor walking his dog strolled over and offered to take a photo of my son and me together. Many parents may recognize the delight I felt at this proposition – I take countless photos of my son and his daily interactions with the world but have very few of us candidly together. The interaction made my day.

As we transition out of a long period of pandemic-related isolation, these unexpected positive moments with strangers have the power to make a real impact. Research has shown how detrimental loneliness and social isolation can be to our mental and even physical health – some studies equate the risks of prolonged loneliness with smoking 15 cigarettes a day.

I've thought about that neighbor in the park several times since last week. His simple act of kindness – and neighborly connection – is part of what makes living in a small town like Redding truly gratifying. As the holidays approach, most of our traditions will be celebrated with close friends and family; but we also can brighten the days of the many other people we move through the world with – fellow drivers, shoppers, walkers, readers. We all have more power than we think. ■

By Jessie Wright

Gilbert & Bennett Wire Mill Advisory Committee to apply for clean-up grant

By Rocco Valluzzo

In an effort to secure additional funding for the Georgetown Redevelopment project, the Gilbert & Bennett Wire Mill Advisory Committee is applying for an EPA multi-purpose grant to help with the clean-up of the 42-acre property in Georgetown.

James Olsen, a licensed environmental engineer with Tighe & Bond (the firm which conducted a phase one environmental assessment on the property earlier this year), and Redding First Selectwoman Julia Pemberton have completed a draft of the application. The Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection is expected to make its decision on funding in late spring of 2023.

“This multi-purpose grant will cover planning, cover the clean-up, a lot of different things,” said Olsen. “That’s why they’re called multi-purpose. You have to at least clean up what they call one site. It can be a parcel, it can be a building, and it has to be at least a \$200,000 grant.”

Tighe & Bond is also in the process of conducting an environmental gap analysis as well as a structural, ecological, and remedial re-evaluation along the Norwalk River walls. A site walk of the property is planned for December 2 to take a closer look and finish up the hazardous material data gap analysis.

According to Olsen, the grant application addresses five major tasks:

- Task 1 (\$5,000) is oversight

for a cooperative agreement and involves money to go to conferences to do reporting to the EPA through various updates and financial reporting. “That’s pretty standard,” he said.

- Task 2 (\$2,000) is community engagement preparation of outreach materials and includes flyers, newspaper articles, and social media announcements.

- Task 3 (\$20,000) is conducting a planning and market study.

- Task 4 (\$50,000) is clean-up planning, preparation of the analysis of Brownfield grant alternatives, and a feasibility study of different remedial actions and costs, which is standard for any EPA-funded project. It also involves preparation of a quality assurance project plan, which outlines a sampling plan and quality measures, and is also standard for any EPA-funded project.

- Task 5 (\$543,000) is the oversight of that abatement, a closure report, and clean-up.

“The most advantageous buildings to do would be the old post office, which was actually part of a Norman Rockwell postcard painting, and the administration building, which was used for site functions and meetings,” said Olsen. “They were good buildings to pick because they’re high-visibility, they’re historic, the kind of the beginning pieces of whole project. They tell a good story.” ■

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

We welcome Letters to the Editor. Please be clear, civil and concise. Publication preference will be given to letters that suggest solutions to challenges identified.

To the Editor,

It’s my great pleasure on behalf of my colleagues at the Redding League of Women Voters to express our thanks to our spectacular new hometown paper for your very significant role in helping to get out the vote in November’s midterm election.

Our town can take great pride in the terrific level of voter turnout for this important election. Approximately 68% of Redding’s registered voters exercised their voting rights on November 8. This is significantly higher than the statewide participation level at 57% and is a tribute to the building of voter awareness generated in no small part by The Sentinel. The paper’s even-handed exposure to all the candidates and to all the issues provided just what our town needed to be inspired and engaged in this election.

Thank you to *The Sentinel* – and to our Redding community!

Kim O’Rielly
President, Redding League of Women Voters
Foundry Road

To the Editor,

I am Eric Gebhardt, a 40-year resident of Redding, and I have something to say regarding our “local” traffic. Speeding and careless driving on our winding country roads has caused several accidents in town...one happened to a neighbor who pulled onto Umpawaug Road and was hit by a car as she attempted to leave our side road. A similar thing happened to me over a year ago... a car traveling too fast nearly hit me as I did the same thing. Just last week I was run off 70 Acre Road by a speeding and distracted landscape truck. Umpawaug Road has become the favored shortcut between Danbury and Norwalk, leaving us locals to dodge people who have just used Redding as a place to drive through without regard for anyone but themselves. Speed humps on certain roads would slow these jerks down as would more speed enforcement. If you agree with me then write our local leaders and let’s crack down on the people I call “blow-ins”... those who don’t live here and don’t obey our traffic laws as they blow in and then blow out of town.

Eric Gebhardt
Mallory Lane

To the Editor,

I had an unexpected guest today:

While working at the back of my property, my video doorbell app prompted me that there was a visitor.

I hurried back, as I’d left my front door wide open. My dogs were up in arms over a triggered door chime (how dare anyone use it for its intended purpose!)

There was a beautiful holiday wreath when I finally made it - with no one in sight. After some bewilderment, I remembered ordering one during last month’s Trunk or Treat.

Thanks to the Redding Cub Scouts, my front door will look extra joyful this winter!

Anne Dirkson
Cross Highway

To the Editor,

I grew up in Redding several years ago. I recently moved back to town with my husband and young daughter. It is wonderful to be near my family again, especially as we raise our own family, and beyond that, it is also wonderful to be back in the place I called home. From my family to yours, we wish all the Sentinel readers a very Happy Thanksgiving this year!

Jennifer Edwards
Poverty Hollow Road

LEGAL NOTICE

At the regularly scheduled meeting of the Redding Zoning Commission held at 7:30 p.m. on Wednesday, November, 9, 2020 in the Town Hall Hearing Room, 100 Hill Road, Redding, Connecticut, the commission reached the following decision:

Granted to 241 Ethan Allen L.L.C., Ryan Fletcher Principal, request for Site Plan Amendment for renovation of, and addition to, an existing commercial building at 241 Ethan Allen Highway, with associated site work to allow for a change in use in accordance

with the previously submitted application materials. Publication of this notice initiates a fifteen-day appeal period after which the permit will become effective. Matthew Lecher, Chairman, Redding Zoning Commission. ■

Happy Thanksgiving from the Sentinel



We are grateful for all our subscribers, readers, advertisers, and contributors – in Redding and beyond – who make this newspaper possible. The Sentinel wishes you and your loved ones a very Happy Thanksgiving and festive start to the holiday season.

(Enjoy coloring in the graphics)

Short Survey

Dear reader,

Please point your mobile device’s camera at this QR code to take a short survey about the Redding Sentinel. We’d like to make sure we’re covering what you want to know.



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Redding Sentinel Ltd believes in supporting the community it serves.
We pledge to donate all profits to local community organizations.

Potable water at Redding Elementary School still out of reach | *By Rocco Valluzzo*



Photo by Jessie Wright

For approximately seven years, Redding Elementary School (RES) has used bottled water for drinking and brought in water from off-site for cooking in the cafeteria. According to Redding School Board Chairman Chris Parkin, there are two different issues with the water at RES: one that affects its color and one that affects its potability.

Mike D'Agostino, a member of the Redding Board of Education's Facilities Planning Committee, explained that elevated levels of manganese and iron in the water at RES have given it an orange cast. Work done to replace a filtration system over the summer of 2022 will help improve the quality of the water's appearance; however, it will take some time before it

can again be safely consumed by students and staff.

"I don't believe there's an expectation that the work that was done will result in being able to go off bottled water," said Parkin. "But it will result in the water having a clear appearance again."

The potability issue is more involved. Parkin noted many of the wells in the area have a chloride salt issue, a result of overuse of road salt on Route 107 by the State Department of Transportation.

In May of 2018, Greenwich-based hydraulic engineering firm WSP conducted a study of the water quality at the school at a cost of approximately \$13,500. The study determined a couple of options, both found to be cost

prohibitive at the time.

One option was to drill a new well. However, there are already two wells that supply water to the school, according to D'Agostino.

The study also concluded that the only way to effectively remove the chlorides from the existing wells would be to install a reverse osmosis system. The process would involve redesigning the plumbing system, separating the piping for the potable water and for the bathrooms.

"You have to be able to filter only the water that's being used for drinking, because you wouldn't want reverse osmosis for all the water going to toilets," said D'Agostino. "It's quite an involved process."

D'Agostino added that the waste that is removed from the reverse osmosis system must also be taken off-site, a costly and ongoing maintenance expense.

RES is not the only school in town that has struggled with its water quality. There had also been a water issue at John Read Middle School that was related to salt and flow from the well in use on Redding Road. Parkin said the well ultimately started collapsing upon itself. A little over a year ago, however, another well that was previously dug on the property provided a solution.

"We were able to determine that it had sufficient flow and sufficient quality," said Parkin. "We were able to connect it to the

school and that water is perfectly clean and potable."

As for RES, there is no clear path in sight for potable water. "I don't think right now there's anything that's on the horizon," said D'Agostino. "I know the [Facilities Planning] Committee continues to look at it and continues to make recommendations.

The Board of Ed has been very proactive in trying to do all we can with what we have to work with at Redding Elementary."

"As long as the bottled water is a sufficient solution, then it is what is probably going to be at least the near-term solution to the issue," Parkin said. ■

Redding property assessments jump by an average of 28 percent *Continued from page 1*

real estate market...and going into really high inflation. And it's not a great combination."

Property owners will have two ways to appeal their assessment – the first, through an informal session with Vision Government Solutions, Inc., appointments for which are now available. Ford and the VGSI Project Manager will review what is presented at those sessions and determine if any changes are in order before the Grand List is signed at the end of January 2023 (the Grand List is the aggregate valuation of taxable property within a given town).

The second way to appeal an assessment is through filing a formal written appeal with Redding's Board of Assessment Appeals – applications for a formal appeal will be available February 1, 2023 to February 20, 2023 with the review process occurring in March.

Viands plans to appeal his new assessment, using his spare time

to research comparable homes in Redding that have sold in the last two years at a lower price or comparable homes on the VGSI database with lower assessment changes.

"I've found that the accessibility to understand the appeals process and educate yourself is not as easy as I would like," Viands said. "People that this will likely most affect... I would think people who are in more financially tight straights or situations would have less free time to go and figure out how to do this themselves and do it."

Between his work towards a successful appeal and an expected decrease in the mil rate in 2023, Viands hopes the financial impact of his recent assessment change will be lessened.

"I'm holding out vague optimism that the net delta to my tax bill will be at least more reasonable than 40%," he said. ■

Police enforcement aims to put brake on speeders | *By Rob Sample*



Photo by Jessie Wright

A speed hump recently installed on Stepney Road

When Megan Cifarelli moved to Redding in 2020, she was excited to replace city life with a new home in a bucolic small town. Yet, she wasn't quite prepared for how fast people would zip past her new house on Newtown Turnpike.

"It's hilly and curvy and at points very narrow," Cifarelli noted. "People would often drive past my house at 50 miles per hour, in large vehicles, and they'd have difficulty staying in their lanes."

Cifarelli has seen a slight improvement in people's driving habits near her home, which is in a 30-m.p.h. zone. This owes in part to a speed-mitigation program begun this year by the Redding Police Department and headed up by Sergeant Mike Livingston.

"Speeding is probably the number-one complaint we hear from Redding residents," said Livingston, who has recently implemented several measures designed to tackle the problem. Among the most effective tools are the Town's five movable speed-warning signs, some of which are interactive.

One is the familiar type of electronic sign that shows how fast a driver might be traveling in comparison to the speed limit. More innovative are two signs that show a driver's speed, but also add a recording feature. The intent of the signs has less to do with issuing traffic tickets after the fact and more to do with gathering data on both average and excessive speeds.

The remaining sign units are the most advanced, because they give Livingston and other officers a live link to monitor speeding in real time. "They were provided to Redding by the state, with the provision that they have to be set

up on rural roads," said Livingston. "We move these around to different roads in town where we've experienced recurring problems with speeders."

The Police Department will then measure the results and assess the impact the signs are having on driving habits. Then, officers will move the signs to yet another location in town where they're needed.

Redding residents can also now go to the Police Department's website and fill out a complaint form, an enhancement Livingston implemented. The form is available at rpdcct.us. You'll see several rows of buttons across the middle of the page: the "Speeding Complaint Form" is in the right-hand column.

A resident can list a specific complaint, such as speeding or not obeying a stop sign. The Police Department also includes a check box, asking the resident if an officer can set up a radar check in that person's driveway.

"I personally follow up with all of these complaints," said Livingston. "We're trying to use the least-intrusive methods first."

Is it working? "Targeted enforcement has worked the best," said Livingston. This would include speed checks on busy roads or those plagued by recurring speeders. And contrary to popular opinion, Redding does not have traffic-ticket "quotas."

"We average 1,500 to 2,500 traffic stops per year," Livingston said. "It's a balance, because we do stop a lot of residents, too. The way our state laws are written, whether a stop results in a traffic infraction or a warning is up to the discretion of the individual officer. If the speed is not egregious and the driver hasn't had a speeding

ticket for the past two years, he or she might receive a warning."

During the Covid shutdowns of 2020, traffic became very light and traffic stops were fewer. Since then, Livingstone has noticed an uptick in speeding.

"People always seem to be in a rush now, and if stopped they're now more apt to be argumentative," he said. "Some drivers have lost all sense of etiquette," he added.

"Not long ago, I pulled over someone who had tailgated me in my marked police car," Livingston recalled. "When I asked him why he was tailgating me, he said he thought if he tailgated me, I'd speed up! Another major change I've seen recently: People who just take off in the middle of a traffic stop. In some instances, I let them go because it would be too dangerous to mount a high-speed chase."

Livingston said recent changes in state law have made a local officer's job more difficult. For instance, not carrying insurance on one's vehicle used to be a misdemeanor offense for which the driver had to appear in court. Now, such drivers will merely incur a \$500 fine.

Livingston said some of this resulted from the backlog motor-vehicle courts experienced after the Covid shutdowns. By easing the rules, they lessened this backlog.

"Still, this waters down the intent of the law," Livingston said. "How would you feel if your family got hurt in an accident by someone with no insurance?"

What about the use of speed bumps – or speed humps? The two terms tend to be used interchangeably, though they differ in size and use. Speed bumps are focused on limiting drivers to very slow speeds – two to ten miles per hour – such as in parking lots. Conversely, speed humps aim to keep speeds at ten to 20 miles per hour.

The Sentinel put this question to Jamie Gracy, Redding's Director of Public Works. "We've put in several speed humps in town, but there are issues with using them in areas with curves and hills – which describes most of Redding," Gracy said.

Speed humps tend to be more common in towns and cities with larger populations, and greater population densities, than is the case in Redding. They are used extensively in Florida cities, for example, which are characterized by dense urban and suburban neighborhoods with much smaller lots than here. While they do achieve their aim of slowing down traffic, they also can damage vehicle undersides.

In a recent letter to the Redding Sentinel, 40-year-resident Eric Gebhardt blamed the situation on what he called "blow-ins" –

"Those who don't live here and don't obey our traffic laws as they blow in and then blow out of town."

Still, as Livingston pointed out, traffic stops often involve Redding residents, too. In either case, excessive speed – particularly given the rural, meandering nature of Redding's roads – can result in injury.

Livingston is always exploring new alternatives. He's eyeing the purchase of a supply of roadside signs that residents can install in their front yards. Some of the slogans he's seen have been, "Drive like your kids live here" and "That seat belt looks good on you."

"These would serve to remind people of the basics – starting with, slow down! Come to a full stop at every stop sign," he said. "And people need to know, the police are out for you, the people of Redding. Keeping the residents safe is our job." ■

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SPORTS

Barlow wins state Class L title, finishing season undefeated | *By Rocco Valluzzo*



Photo by Rocco Valluzzo

Joel Barlow High's Emmy Asplund, left and McKenzie Sickinger go up for a block during the state Class L girls volleyball championship on Saturday, November 19. Barlow won 3-0.

With the state Class L championship within reach, the Joel Barlow High girls varsity volleyball team was not about to let it get away.

After taking the first two sets against Bristol Central, the top-seeded Falcons found themselves down a couple points in the third. Rather than face the prospect of

having to play an additional set, the Falcons regrouped in time to come from behind and take the set and the match for a 3-0 (25-13, 25-20, 25-23) sweep on Saturday, November 19 at East Haven High.

This marked Barlow's eighth trip to a state championship and its second title, the first coming in the Class L championship in 2018.

Having watched some videos of Bristol Central matches this season, Barlow head coach Carol Asplund knew her team had to be really disciplined in their upcoming play. As a result, the team was well prepared.

"We knew that they had some good outside hitters," she said. "They had a good setter. I honestly told the girls that they play a lot like us."

Seventh-seeded Bristol Central kept pace with Barlow for part of the first set, trailing 14-10 at one point. A block and subsequent kill by the Falcons' Sarah Mauro, however, sparked the beginning of an 11-3 run for Barlow. Along the way, Bristol Central was

hampered by some hitting errors as the Falcons closed out the first set 25-13.

"I think our strength in particular was serving and passing," said Barlow senior Emmy Asplund, who was also named the MVP for the tournament. "We worked super hard in practice every day and that's what helped us win."

Making their first appearance in a state championship, the Rams still fought for every point, as was the case for much of the second set, which featured seven ties and seven lead changes. Led by the hitting of Grace Higgins, Daigelis Figueroa, and Lily Kirk, the match was knotted at 13-13 and later at 20-20.

A kill by Elyssa Kalamaras won back the serve for Barlow. Libby Grob then stepped up to the line for the Falcons and reeled off five straight points to give her team a 2-0 advantage in sets.

Now with their backs against the wall, the Rams fell behind in the third set. Some well-placed kills by the Falcons often found

holes on Bristol Central's side of the court, allowing them to take an 18-12 lead, prompting the Rams to call time out in an attempt to stop the momentum.

Bristol Central return to the court fired up. Helped in part by a few hitting errors by Barlow, the Rams went on an 11-3 run to take the lead.

"The third set's always like that," said Coach Asplund, noting several other instances this season. "I think they play a little bit better when they're under fire."

And her team did respond in kind.

The Rams lost the serve on a hitting error and did not score again. Mauro then served up four straight points, including an ace, to secure the championship.

"We have seven seniors," said Coach Asplund. "They were all looking at that same goal. They really had that goal starting at the end of last year."

Barlow finishes their season undefeated, at 24-0 overall. ■

Thanksgiving rivalry game has high stakes for Barlow | *By Rocco Valluzzo*



Photo by Rocco Valluzzo

The Joel Barlow High varsity football team will host South-West Conference rival Weston in the annual Thanksgiving game on Wednesday, November 23 at 4:30 p.m. A win will secure Barlow a spot in the state Class SS tournament.

More than pride or bragging rights will be on the line when the Joel Barlow High varsity football team hosts Weston in the annual Thanksgiving game on November 23.

This year's game also has post-season implications. With a victory, the Falcons are guaranteed a spot in the state Class SS playoffs. Barlow

is currently ranked fifth overall in the eight-team tournament.

This marks the 26th time the two teams have met in the annual contest, which was first held in 1996. The game was not played in 2020 due to the pandemic. Weston currently leads in the history of the series at 12-9-4.

"Anytime you play a rivalry

game, a Thanksgiving game, it's a big game," said Barlow head coach T. J. Cavaliere, whose team last made the playoffs in 2017 when it reached the finals of Class M. "But when you have the opportunity to make the playoffs if you win, that adds a little bit onto the importance of the game."

The Falcons sport a record this season of 7-2. Weston is 4-5.

Cavaliere feels confident about several aspects of his team this year that will help against Weston. One is the triple option offense, orchestrated by senior quarterback Danny Shaban.

The team's leading rusher and scorer, Shaban has amassed 1,274 yards on the ground with 22 touchdowns. He's also passed for 425 yards with eight touchdowns.

Seven of those touchdowns have been caught by senior wide receiver Evan Corazzelli, who also has 389 yards in receiving. Senior and fellow wide receiver Charles Basta caught the other touchdown pass.

The Falcons can also count on sophomore running back Scott Romano to carry the football. Tied for second on the team in touchdowns with seven, he has

531 yards on the ground.

Also scoring seven touchdowns to date this season is junior running back Dylan Taylor, who has 486 yards rushing. Barlow can also count on senior running back Mason Leavitt (five touchdowns, 301 yards) and junior running back Cole Peterson (360 yards, two touchdowns).

"We feel that our offense has done a good job all year of kind of putting us in opportunities to score points," said Cavaliere. "And when we put points on the scoreboard you have a little pressure put on them to try to keep up."

On defense, the Falcons will count on a number of these players as well. As a defensive back, Leavitt leads Barlow in total tackles with 56. At linebacker, Peterson has 53.

Shaban as a linebacker and senior defensive lineman Tristan Counter each have 42 total tackles. Sophomore linebacker Jack Gilbert has 39.

"Our defense has done a nice job all year of keeping us in games long enough for our offense to start clicking," said Cavaliere.

Weston also has a number of players Barlow needs to look out

for. It will have to concentrate on stopping Weston's passing game, which is led by quarterback Nicholas Psichopaidas. He has amassed 1,720 yards in the air and has thrown 19 touchdown passes.

The Trojans have a number of capable receivers as well. Psichopaidas can throw to Alexander Nevitt (431 yards, eight touchdowns), Nico Bilbao (703 yards, five touchdowns) or Jay Watson (392 yards, four touchdowns).

On the ground, Barlow will have to stop running back Gino Carusone, Weston's leading rusher with 568 yards and five touchdowns.

"Defensively, they fly to the football," said Cavaliere. "I know their staff does a really nice job of getting people in the right places, being aggressive to the football and gang tackling. Those are things that we have to be aware of."

This year's Thanksgiving game will be played at Joel Barlow High School on Wednesday, November 23. Kickoff is set for 4:30 p.m. ■

A look at the CIAC six football division playoffs system | *By Mike Mitchell*

For the first time since 2009, the Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference (CIAC) will crown six state football champions in 2022 in six playoff divisions: Class LL, L, MM, M, SS and S. Additionally, for the first time there will be eight qualifiers in each division, giving the state an

all-time high 48 playoff teams.

2022 Football Championships
Quarter-finals:
Tuesday, November 29
Semi-finals:
Sunday, December 4
Finals: Saturday, December 10

The playoff divisions are divided equally by school

enrollment numbers (with Class LL the largest, Class S the smallest), except for CIAC designated "schools of choice" that reach the state semifinals at least once during the previous three seasons.

Joel Barlow High's football team is in Class SS this season. A quick breakdown of their division

follows:

- Class SS (2022)
- Enrollment size: 408-344 boys
- Number of teams: 22
- Number of "schools of choice": 4 (schools included in Class SS based on their past state semifinal performance, rather than enrollment size)

- Number of playoff teams: 4
- The six state championship games are scheduled for Saturday, December 10. Locations for specific games (10:30 a.m., 2:00 p.m., 5:30 p.m.) will be announced once matchups for the championship games are determined. ■

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Ridgefield Symphony Orchestra

features world-class musicians and community outreach programs | By Linda Meyer Mitchell



Photos courtesy of Ridgefield Symphony Orchestra / The Ridgefield Symphony Orchestra onstage

There is great news for classical music lovers in Connecticut – you don't need to make the trek into New York City to hear top-quality orchestra concerts featuring highly acclaimed musicians. Ridgefield Symphony Orchestra (RSO) is active in Fairfield County and preparing to present its next full concert, *Magic*, on December 3 at the Clune Auditorium in Wilton. The December 3 concert, under the direction of Yuga Cohler, will feature three pieces, including "The Sorcerer's Apprentice", by Paul Dukas, "Cello Concerto", by Antonín Dvořák, and "Pictures at an Exhibition", by Modest Mussorgsky (orchestration by Maurice Ravel). The featured cellist will be 23-year-old Zlatomir Fung, the youngest cellist to ever win the International Tchaikovsky Competition as he did in 2019.

Ridgefield Symphony Orchestra

began in 1964 as a community orchestra, but by 1970 they held auditions and transformed into a professional organization. This year marks the 58th season for the RSO. According to Executive Director Laurie Kenagy, "Ridgefield is the smallest town in America to support a fully professional orchestra." She believes this is possible primarily because of the strong support of the local community as well as Ridgefield's proximity to New York City, which allows them to attract world class talent and maintain close relationships with talent management organizations. The RSO has 50 core members and brings on additional players as needed depending upon the piece to be performed. The upcoming December 3 concert will feature 68 musicians.

The RSO's Musical Director

and Conductor is 33-year-old Yuga Cohler, who began with the organization in 2018. He is an extremely talented musician with a fascinating background. Cohler began his musical career as an oboist and conductor in high school, then went on to conduct the Harvard University Orchestra while studying computer science. After graduating Harvard, he worked for Google as a software engineer while completing his studies at Julliard, where he was the youngest conducting student to graduate from the school. He currently resides in Boston where he pursues both his music and his software engineering career, traveling down to Ridgefield for his directing engagements with the RSO.

Cohler is a cultural innovator as well as a conductor. According to the RSO, "He is the creator



Yuga Cohler, 33-year-old Musical Director and Conductor of the Ridgefield Symphony Orchestra

of multiple orchestral concerts presented by Lincoln Center that advance classical music as a culturally relevant institution. These include *K-Factor: An Orchestral Exploration of K-Pop*, which garnered Lincoln Center's youngest-ever audience."

The RSO is a non-profit organization that, in addition to presenting four large symphony concerts and smaller performances each year, also presents extensive community outreach programming. During the Covid pandemic when large group events were not possible, the RSO formed a string quartet which was extremely well-received and continues to perform often. The organization sends many of their musicians and conductors into local schools to work with

students in their music programs and will be spending a day at Wilton High School in anticipation of the upcoming December 3 concert. They maintain active relationships with many elder care facilities including Meadow Ridge, where they often perform and hold open rehearsals in the auditorium, to the delight of the residents. The RSO also provides adult music appreciation and education programs through the Ridgefield Library and partners with Ridgefield's Sphere program to provide developmentally disabled adults with unique opportunities for music instruction and performance with RSO musicians, as well as attendance at their concerts.

Many Redding residents may recognize one of the long-standing orchestra members who will perform onstage on December 3 – clarinetist Mary Ellen Rodgers, who was a beloved music teacher in town and inspired many aspiring young students at Redding Elementary School over the years. RSO Board Member Dan Sheehan is also a Redding resident.

For more information on the RSO and its programs, or to purchase tickets to the December 3 concert, *Magic*, visit their website at ridgefieldsymphony.org ■

Barlow Cheerleaders headed to competition season

By Linda Meyer Mitchell

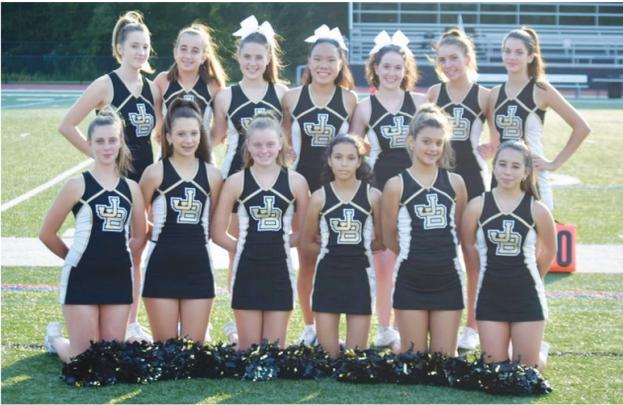


Photo by Sue Romano

Barlow's 2022 Cheerleading Squad. Bottom row left to right: Georgia Juhre, Holly Landa, Kimberly Moughty, Cheryl Southlea, Brooke Lansch, and Camila Mendez. Top row left to right: Maddy Schultz, Haileigh Sanzari, Hailey Romano, Emily Bruce, Jessica Wiesenfeld, Alexa Stark, and Grace Downey.

Joel Barlow High's cheerleading squad has spent the past few months leading record crowds of students to cheer on the Falcons varsity football team. During the fall, the cheerleaders cheer at home games, the famous annual Turkey Bowl against rival Weston, and all play-off games. Once the game day cheering comes to a close, however, the squad heads into competition season and the real work begins.

The team is hoping to repeat last year's stellar performance at its regional competition.

What constitutes cheer has changed greatly over the decades. Barlow's squad has traditionally cheered for the football and basketball teams, with this year's 13-member squad leading a repertoire of 40 cheers and performing a variety of stunts to entertain and motivate the crowds. Tryouts are held in the spring and

practices begin in August, when the cheerleaders start learning all the cheers and stunts. Practices include time at a gymnastics gym, where the students hone the many skills needed for their stunts which they perform at the games. This part of the sport, known as "game day" cheering, is what many people think of when it comes to cheer.

But the reality is, cheer has become a very demanding two-season sport. Cheer now requires more advanced gymnastics skills than previously needed, such as flips and back tucks, so the team can compete successfully in the three-month long competition season that begins in January. Each fall, tryouts are held for the competition squad, which is generally a subset of the game day cheer squad, and serious practices begin. The competition squad learns and perfects a two-and-a-half-minute routine, which includes a cheer section, multiple stunts, and a dance portion. A professional choreographer helps develop part of the routine and a music company puts it to inspiring music. Endless practices and days at the gym are required to perfect the routine to perform it flawlessly in competition. The performance requires athletic ability, stage presence, and a bit of theater to "sell" the routine. Everything ultimately rests on the performance at competition time – there are no second chances.

Barlow's cheer squad is under the direction of two very



Photo by Sue Romano

Barlow seniors and Cheer captains (left to right) Jessica Wiesenfeld, Hailey Romano, and Emily Bruce.

experienced and able coaches, Head Coach Jamie Krivosta and Assistant Coach Samantha Aurelia. The two friends met cheering at their Alma Mater Sacred Heart University and have spent the last eleven years teaching and mentoring the Barlow squad. In addition to the cheerleaders' gymnastic skills, "the mental fortitude and confidence factors are a huge part of the equation," said Krivosta.

The coaches are passionate about cheer and are an important part of creating the competition

routine for the squad. Something is clearly working well, as the Barlow squad won the South West Conference competition in 2021 and then went on to place second in the Northeast Regional competition for the first time in Barlow history.

Squad Captains Emily Bruce, Hailey Romano, and Jessica Wiesenfeld (one of the team's three "flyers") sat down to speak with the Sentinel about their experiences in cheer. They said this is a building year as some key members graduated. If one person in the squad is missing, they cannot practice, since each member has a set role when they perform stunts and if one piece of the puzzle is missing, they can't perform safely. They all enjoy the thrill of competition and agree there is nothing like the feeling of accomplishment when they "hit the routine" and perform at their best, as they did last year when they won second place for the Northeast Region. The entire squad is working hard to repeat that success in competitions this year.

Topping the list of things they enjoy most about the sport is the close relationships developed by the squad members during a long and intense season. According to Romano, "We spend so much time practicing together, it feels like family." ■



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Welcome to the

A local guide to making

Santa sightings

Bring your kids and your camera

By Jessie Wright

Santa has already begun his journey down from the North Pole – and his first stop is Redding! There are plenty of opportunities to visit with Jolly Ol' Saint Nick this year and get the perfect photo to capture the memory for years to come.

**Redding Fire and EMS Company #1
Santa Visits on a Fire Truck
Saturday, December 17**

What's better than Santa coming down your chimney on Christmas Eve? Getting a personal visit from him on a shiny, red fire truck. Redding families can register for Santa to visit their home on Saturday, December 17 – he'll chat with you, take photos, and even deliver a specially wrapped present.

Registration for Santa's fire truck route is due by Monday, December 5. A \$50 donation per household is suggested (active volunteer members of the Redding Fire and EMS Company #1 are free).

If you'd like Santa to deliver a gift, you must drop off the wrapped and labeled gifts (one per child) to the Center Fire House at 105 Hill Road on either Saturday, December 10 from 10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m. or Monday, December 12 from 6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.

More information and the link to register can be found at: facebook.com/reddingfire1

**Georgetown Holiday Fair
Sunday, December 18**

A festive parade down Main Street will kick off the Georgetown Holiday Fair at 11:00 a.m. on Sunday, December 18 – and we all know that Santa loves a good parade.

He'll be available for visits following the parade until 2:00 p.m. The fair will also host holiday crafts and games. Don't forget to do a little shopping while you're there!

**Danbury Fair Mall
Now through Saturday,
December 24**

It's hard to go wrong with a visit with Santa at the mall. He has already set up shop in the Center Court, Lower Level at Danbury Fair Mall, so head on over and enjoy a classic family photo op whenever your holiday schedule allows.

For those who like to plan and skip the wait in line, you can pre-book your time with Santa online.

Visit danburyfairmall.com/SantaPhotos for times and dates when Santa will be seeing visitors in his Winter Wonderland (note: no visits on Thanksgiving or Christmas Day).

Santa will also be seeing visitors at **Bethel Winterfest** on Friday, November 25 from 5:45 p.m. – 7:00 p.m. and the **Redding Town Tree Lighting** on Saturday, December 3. ■



Photo by Susan Clark

The evergreen tree on the Redding Town Green is decorated by Knapp Tree in preparation for the 2022 Redding Town Tree Lighting.

Redding Town Tree Lighting

Saturday, December 3 | Jessie Wright

Gather with your friends and neighbors for the Redding Town Tree Lighting on Saturday, December 3, and help fill the Redding Town Green with holiday cheer.

The festivities will start at 3:30 p.m. with a performance by the John Read Middle School Select Choir, led by Dave Ebert.

Enjoy fun, Scout-related activities like fire building and reindeer games with Boy Scout Troop 306 and make your own s'mores over the small fire. The troop is also offering a bake sale and photos with Santa. If you get

chilly, The Lions Club will have hot chocolate for all, and they expect special appearances from Frosty and Rudolph who will pose for photos and pass out candy canes for the kids.

The tree lighting will occur at approximately 4:45 p.m., accompanied by a performance by the Joel Barlow Chamber Singers, led by Gwynne Wittmann. Lights were strung for the Town courtesy of Andy Knapp of Knapp Tree.

Parking will be available alongside the Redding Town Green on Hill Road and on the right-hand side of the street

continuing north towards Redding Elementary School. Parking is also available in the Town Hall and First Church of Christ parking lots.

The Redding Parks and Recreation Department encourages everyone to dress for the weather, as all activities will be outdoors, with Town Hall access only available for restrooms. Call the cancellation line at (203) 938-5036 ext. 3 before heading over on December 3 in the case of inclement weather. ■

Shop local at the Redding Artisan Holiday Fair

By Pamela Brown

The holidays are a time for gifts and joyful events, and you'll find both at the Redding Artisan Holiday Fair. The seventh-annual event will be held at the John Read Middle School on Saturday, December 10 from 10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. Admission is free.

"This is a fun community event to start your holiday shopping by supporting local artists, local businesses, and the arts in Redding Schools," said Chairperson Marion Unangst, a local jewelry designer. "I grew up in the Netherlands where every holiday we'd go to Germany to visit Christmas Markets. My dream was to recreate something like that in Redding."

The fair will feature over 40 local artisans as well as food and beverage vendors, including Daily Fare of Bethel, Dani's Pantry of Ridgefield, Paella Party CT of Redding, and Quartertone Coffee of Ridgefield. There will also be a raffle to win a handcrafted item, with a portion of the proceeds benefitting Redding schools.

Andrea Ragsdale, owner of Oak and Vale in Redding, will showcase handmade, luxury-scented, biodegradable, clean-burning candles; wax melts; and scented sachets. "Local artisan fairs are essential to a small business like mine. It's only natural people want to smell [my products] in person

before purchasing," she said. "The support in our community for shopping local and supporting locally-made products and artisans is amazing and refreshing. Meeting and chatting with members of our community is delightful, and I feel a deeper community connection because of these experiences."

Another artisan, Sue Fow, owner of Stephanie Lauren in Redding, handmakes dog collars, leashes, and bandanas for her customers' furry friends. "I love being part of holiday craft fairs, getting to know new and repeat customers, and helping all the dogs out there stay festive," says Fow, noting holiday fairs are her busiest time. "Hand-making dog accessories is time-consuming and bringing them to fairs helps people appreciate the quality and beautiful ribbon in person."

Erin DeLuca, owner of Erin DeLuca Jewelry in Redding, will highlight handcrafted jewelry featuring one-of-a-kind gemstone pieces. "I use old-world techniques like milling, forging, piercing, and casting with responsibly-sourced metals and gemstones to create delicate but substantial pieces of jewelry," she said. Her designs are inspired by patterns and textures in nature, architecture, and vintage lace textiles. Deluca notes fairs are important to her business. "They're

our last big push for fourth quarter sales. I do a large amount of custom work throughout the year and much of that is initiated by word of mouth and through people that have seen my work at fairs, so it's important for me to continue to show my work and be present in the community."

Around 15 students from John Read Middle School, Redding Elementary School, Joel Barlow High School, and neighboring towns will also be showcasing handcrafted items at the fair. Peyton Lecher, 17, a senior at Joel Barlow High School, makes bracelets and will be selling art prints. "I love sharing my art and jewelry with others. I specialize in musician-themed bracelets which gives fans the opportunity to represent their favorite band with a small accessory," said Lecher. "I'm excited about attending. I grew up in Redding and I go to this fair every year. It's given me the opportunity to meet people with similar interests. Being a part of it in my senior year at Barlow will be very special." ■

Redding Artisan Holiday Fair. Saturday, December 10 from 10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. John Read Middle School, 486 Redding Road. For more information visit facebook.com/reddingartisanfair

Give to those in need

Holiday food, toy, and coat drives

By Jessie Wright

According to Feeding America, over 360,000 people in Connecticut are facing hunger, including almost 1 in 8 children. Consider donating to a local food, toy, or coat drive this year to help your neighbors in need.

**Toys for Tots
"Stuff a Bus" Toy and Food Drive / Saturday, December 3**

A charity program of the U.S. Marine Corps., Toys for Tots has distributed over 627 million toys to children in need since 1947. Donate toys or non-perishable food items and help "stuff a bus" full of holiday cheer at John Read Middle School from 10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m. on Saturday, December 3 at 486 Redding Road.

**Savers Fundrive
RES PTA Gently-Used Clothing Drive
Friday, December 9 –
Saturday, December 10**

Clean out your closets, help those in need, and support the RES PTA – all in one event! The RES PTA will be accepting donations of gently-used clothing in bags or small boxes on Friday, December 9 from 3:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m. and Saturday, December 10 from 9:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.

Donation collections will be near the cafeteria, accessed through the Redding Elementary School main parking lot at 33 Lonetown Road.

**Westbrook Nature School & Dorothy Day Hospitality House
Winter Coat Drive
Monday, November 21 –
Wednesday, December 21**

The Westbrook Nature School is collecting donations of gently-used clothing this winter for The Dorothy Day Hospitality House, a Danbury organization that feeds the hungry and shelters the homeless. Drop donations on the front porch of Westbrook Nature School at 7 Long Ridge Road from Monday, November 21 – Wednesday, December 21.

Clothing items needed include: L-XL men's winter coats; men's sweatshirts and sweatpants; size 32-34-36-38 men's jeans; and men's work or hiking boots, size 8-10

**First Church of Christ, Congregational
Coat and Toy Drive
Now – Wednesday, December 14**

First Church of Christ is collecting winter coats, hats, and gloves (for children and adults), as well as clean stuffed animals and children's books to support the annual Dorothy Day Santa's Workshop event, which serves 1,500 children in the greater Danbury area.

Collection boxes will be in the lobby of the Sunday School building at 25 Cross Highway through Wednesday, December 14.

**Redding Social Service
Food Pantry
Grocery Gift Cards and
Donations Year-Round**

The Redding Social Service Food Pantry is always accepting grocery store gift cards or cash donations to assist Redding residents in need. Contact the Social Services Department at 203-938-9725 or 203-938-3580 to arrange a drop off or pick up. ■





Holiday Season

your days merry and bright 🍷

Holiday performances at Western Connecticut State University

Student artists celebrate the holidays to raise scholarship funds | By Pamela Brown



Western Connecticut State University (WCSU) will present two festive holiday performing arts events at their Visual & Performing Arts Center (VPAC), a state-of-the-art facility located on their westside campus, only a 25-minute drive from Redding. Theatergoers will appreciate the unique play *Season's Greetings* from December 2–4 at the Mainstage Theatre, and music lovers will enjoy *Holiday Pops*, a concert on December 10 and 11 at the Veronica Hagman Concert Hall.

VPAC hosts over 100 events annually, welcoming thousands of guests to their dynamic arts venues. The MainStage and Studio Theatres feature technology exceeding most Broadway venues and offer high-caliber programming produced by the WCSU Department of Theatre Arts. The Gallery at VPAC presents exhibitions from professional artists, WCSU students, and faculty. The Veronica Hagman Concert Hall is the hallmark space of the Department of Music and houses concerts in all genres, including jazz, orchestra, opera, and holiday events.

Season's Greetings, written by Alan Ayckbourn and presented by WCSU Theatre Arts, features WCSU students including nine principal players and seven understudies, with a sound design team incorporating interstitial moments of music. The play is directed by Tony Award-winning Broadway and TV actress Cady Huffman, best known for her Tony, Drama Desk, and Outer Critics Circle Award-winning performance as Ulla in *The Producers* on Broadway; her recurring role on HBO's *Curb Your Enthusiasm*; and her 10-season run as a judge on the Food Network's *Iron Chef America*.

"It's an honor and a learning experience to direct these wonderful, young actors," said Huffman, who is leading her first production at the University. "I love them all. Ninety-percent of being a professional actor is hard work and the constant desire to learn and get better. They all have that."

The play, recommended for ages 12 and up, focuses on how a group of people gathering to celebrate Christmas deal with squabbles, a shooting, a midnight tryst that sets off a fearful din among mechanical Christmas toys, and a chaotically incompetent puppet show.

"If you love holidays and family gatherings, you'll love *Season's Greetings*. If you loathe



Photo courtesy of WCSU

holidays and family gatherings, you'll love *Season's Greetings*. It's about bringing the family together and the mess that will most likely ensue," explained Huffman. "Board games, booze, too many cooks in the kitchen, that eccentric Uncle with a knife in his sock. All the ingredients needed for endless entertainment and the ever-present possibility for disaster."

Huffman said the final takeaway from the show is, "Love is complicated and worth it. Let's celebrate!"

Mainstage Theatre – WCSU Visual & Performing Arts Center, 43 Lake Avenue Extension, Danbury, CT. Friday December 2 (8:00 p.m.), Saturday, December 3 (2:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m.) and Sunday, December 4 (2:00 p.m.) Tickets are \$30.00 online; \$35.00 at the door. Senior and student discounts are available. Tickets available at: wcsuvpac.eventbrite.com.

Holiday Pops, an afternoon concert of holiday music for all ages, is presented by the WCSU Department of Music. It will feature performances by the Percussion Ensemble, University Choir, Chamber Ensembles, Symphonic Band, Wind Ensemble, and more. WCSU students will be key performers along with some surprise guests. Musical selections include holiday Broadway songs and traditional selections, such as music from *The Nutcracker*, with a bit of pop music sprinkled in.

"There will be something for everyone! The hope is that we have families return each year as part of

their holiday tradition," said Dr. Laurel Larsen, Assistant Professor of Music and Department Chair.

Proceeds from the concert will benefit the Ana Grace Marquez-Greene and Dave Smith Scholarships. The former was created to honor Ana Marquez-Greene, daughter of WCSU Professor Jimmy Greene and Nelba Marquez-Greene, who lost her life in the school shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School. Scholarship support is awarded to incoming Department of Music undergraduate students in her memory. The latter is named for David Smith, Professor Emeritus for the Department of Music and full-time Professor of Music who specialized in percussion. This scholarship will be awarded to incoming Department of Music undergraduate students, with preference given to students studying percussion.

A meet-and-greet in the lobby with student performers and holiday treats will follow each of the *Holiday Pops* concert performances. Audience members can also peruse the WCSU Department of Music-sponsored Holiday Ceramics Sale in the lobby from 2:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m., with all pieces created by WCSU student artists. ■

Veronica Hagman Concert Hall – WCSU Visual & Performing Arts Center, 43 Lake Avenue Extension, Danbury, CT. Saturday, December 10 and Sunday, December 11 at 3:00 p.m. Tickets are \$10.00 online; \$15.00 at the door. Tickets available at: wcsuvpac.eventbrite.com.

Deck the halls

Local spots to find the perfect Christmas tree | By Justin Reynolds

As we enter another holiday season, many families in Redding will continue a tradition that dates back some 450 years: finding and decorating a Christmas tree.

Luckily, for folks who are keen on sourcing a Christmas tree locally, there's no shortage of options in the area. If you're searching for a real tree this holiday season, below is a round-up of local farms and nurseries you may want to check out.

Maple Row Farm – 555 North Park Avenue, Easton

Ready to make tree-hunting a festive, whole-day affair? Many families set up shop in the parking lot on weekends at this sprawling farm, "tailgating" with barbecues, hot cider, and games. Maple Row offers a variety of trees, including balsam fir, Norway spruce, white spruce, blue spruce, and Fraser fir. The farm also offers pre-cut trees, wreaths, boughs, ornaments, and other holiday accessories. Starting November 19, the farm is open daily from 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. For more information, visit mrfarm.com.

Bob's Tree Farm – 66 Turkey Plain Road, Bethel

Family-owned and operated since 1980, Bob's Tree Farm offers a variety of Christmas trees, including Douglas fir, blue spruce, and white spruce. Stop by, walk around the property, and cut down your tree using a farm-provided handsaw (or bring your own!) Make sure you also bring cash or check, as the farm does not accept debit or credit cards. During December, Bob's Tree Farm is open Saturdays and Sundays from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. For more information, visit bobstreefarm.com.

Everett's Corner Tree Farm – 128 Sherwood Road, Easton

Since 1954, families in the area have found the perfect Christmas tree at Everett's Corner Tree Farm. This year, the farm is selling blue spruce and white spruce trees that you can cut down yourself with a farm-provided saw. Trees will be available on November 25–27, December 3–4, and December 10–11, for sale by cash or check only. Make sure to stop by this year, as they will be closed for the 2023 season due to low inventory. For more information, visit everettscorner.com.

Sam's Tree Farm – 138 Huntingtown Road, Newtown

For those wanting a no-fuss, laid-back experience, check out Sam's Tree Farm. A family owned-and-operated business for nearly 70 years, Sam's Tree Farm sells white spruce and blue spruce trees. The farm opens the day after Thanksgiving each year. Throughout the holiday season, it's open Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays from 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. For more information, visit facebook.com/samstreefarm.

Sabia Tree Farm – 772 Morehouse Road, Easton

Fingers chilly after picking out the perfect tree? Sabia Tree Farm always has a fire burning near its bailing station to warm your hands. Founded in 2007, Sabia Tree Farm offers pre-cut and cut-your-own Christmas trees, which range from five to 15 feet. In addition to trees, the farm sells handmade wreaths, maple syrup, and gifts made by local artisans. Sabia Tree Farm opens the day after Thanksgiving from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Through the rest of the holiday season, the farm will be open from 12:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday and from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on Saturdays and Sundays. For more information, visit sabiastreetfarm.com.

Redding Nursery – 73 Hill Road, Redding

Shop local by stopping by Redding Nursery, run by Redding's own Deputy Tree Warden Sean McNamara and his family. A staple of Redding for nearly 55 years, the nursery opens the week after Thanksgiving, with pre-cut Christmas trees, wreaths, and poinsettias for sale. For more information, visit reddingnursery.com.

Tubby Tim's Tree Farm – 399 Danbury Road, Ridgefield

If cutting your own tree sounds a bit labor-intensive, consider Tubby Tim's Tree Farm. For the last three decades, this stand has helped families in the area find the perfect pre-cut Fraser firs and balsam firs. Tubby Tim's, which also sells wreaths, ornaments, and other holiday decorations, opens the day after Thanksgiving and operates daily from 9:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. until all the trees are gone. For more information, search "Tubby Tim's Tree Farm" on Facebook.

Ambler Farm – 257 Hurlbutt Street, Wilton

Each year, Ambler Farm hosts a multi-day Greens Sale where folks can pick up freshly cut trees, wreaths, and other holiday decorations. Stop by the farm on November 26 or 27 from 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., December 3 from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., or December 4 from 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. to claim your tree and enjoy hot cider and holiday treats. For more information, visit amblerfarm.org ■



THE NATURAL WORLD

Wild turkeys in our own backyards | *By Donna Christopher*



Photos by Debora DeCarlo Rosa

The bird that many of us will have as the centerpiece of our Thanksgiving tables is a descendant of the wild turkey, one of two wild species on this continent domesticated by the Aztecs nearly a thousand years ago, according to the Audubon Society.

In the United States, five subspecies of wild turkey inhabit 49 states, not including Alaska. The subspecies which exists in Connecticut, the Eastern wild turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo silvestris*), ranges from southern Maine to northern Florida, west to eastern Texas, and north to North Dakota.

When European colonists first came to Connecticut, turkeys were plentiful, but the wild population diminished greatly from hunting, cutting down of the forest for agriculture, and harsh winters. By the early 1800s, wild turkeys were gone from the state.

To restore the population, more than 350 wild turkeys were released at 18 sites in Connecticut between 1975 and 1992. Because of this successful restoration effort, turkeys are now found in all 169 Connecticut towns, according to the official website of the Connecticut Audubon Society.

Connecticut's Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) reports that flocks of up to 100 birds have been reported in the state, but more

commonly the flocks number from ten to 20 birds. On occasion, adult toms (male turkeys) will join the flock, but more often they will form groups of their own or travel as individuals.

Eastern wild turkeys are found throughout Connecticut's woodlands, where nature observers and hunters alike are familiar with their distinct sounds – often a loud, hoarse gobble of the male and short, softer yelps of the female. Adult toms weigh anywhere between 15 and 25 pounds and measure 48 inches. Adult hens (female turkeys) are smaller, weighing between eight and twelve pounds and measuring 36 inches.

Wild turkeys inhabit a mixture of mature hardwood forests and open fields. They frequently forage in fields that border forestland. The diet of wild turkeys includes acorns and other masts (hard fruit), fleshy fruits, corn, a variety of seeds, and invertebrates.

"Their diet is very eclectic. They can eat anything from a small snake to a large insect but mostly would be seeds, acorns, hickory nuts, etc.," explained John McLaren, the Town of Redding's Open Space Manager. "They actually eat pebbles or rocks which go into their gizzard, and they are able to grind the nuts up inside of their gizzard."

Among turkey behaviors, McLaren said they nest in trees

and also spend time on the ground. "People sometimes ask me if they can fly," he said. "They're excellent flyers although they're not up to flying a long distance. They do not hibernate. They could not travel long distances in the air. Their wings are not designed for that. But they are excellent flyers and it's quite fascinating to see them fly."

Wild turkeys fare better in less-disturbed areas. However, in some areas of dense human populations, where food and cover are plentiful, turkeys have adapted and seem to survive well, according to the DEEP.

Redding, like most of Connecticut, has a relatively common and fairly stable wild turkey population, McLaren continued.

There is a regulation aimed at protecting wild turkeys in the state that includes prohibiting individuals from releasing farm or pen-raised turkeys into the wild.

"Releasing pen-raised turkeys only jeopardizes the survival of the existing wild turkey population. Birds raised in captivity are host to a reservoir of diseases and are of a poorer genetic strain. They also do not possess the instincts to survive in the wild," according to DEEP.

Few predators can catch an adult wild turkey. The turkey's well-developed instinct for survival and excellent eyesight and hearing help to keep it out

of harm's way. Hens on the nest, as well as poults (young turkeys) during their first few weeks of life, are most vulnerable to predation. Free-ranging domestic dogs can severely reduce nesting success in populated areas.

The DEEP Wildlife Division recommends not feeding wild turkeys, as this encourages the spread of disease and loss of wild instincts.

Landowners can help to encourage and maintain the state's wild turkey population through various wildlife habitat improvements:

- Leave a high percentage of mature (14-inch diameter or larger) mast-producing trees such as oak, hickory, beech, and ash.

- Create small, irregularly-shaped, one to three-acre forest openings isolated from roads and houses. The brush in these openings should be cut every one to three years, preferably in late summer; at this time there is little chance of disturbing a nest.

- Encourage the growth of grape vines, hawthorn trees, juniper bushes, and winterberry to produce food and cover.

- Leave a few edge rows of corn (preferably in isolated areas) as a winter food source.

- Leave clumps of conifers for cover, such as hemlock or white

pine. As a general rule, the best turkey habitat consists of 50% to 75% forestland with half of this in mature hardwood and 10% in conifers. An average of 10% to 40% of the land should be in openings, such as old, abandoned fields or agricultural areas.

Hunters may pursue wild turkeys during three separate seasons: Spring, Fall Archery, and Fall Firearms. Spring turkey archery and firearms hunting bag limits and season lengths are combined, whereas fall archery and fall firearms are separate seasons with their own unique bag limits and season time-frames.

"The turkey has to be tagged and has to be reported within 24 hours after it has been killed which means the state keeps a very careful accounting of the turkey populations," McLaren said.

While most Thanksgiving meals include pen-raised or domestic turkey rather than the wild turkey, the Sentinel asked members of a local Facebook group if they've eaten wild turkey and what it is like.

Many responded about having to cook the bird in a special way because the meat is dry.

One response recalled eating a wild turkey raised on a local farm years ago, noting it took "forever to roast. Every hors d'oeuvres was eaten and all guests [were] grumbling. Very tough."

Another person said because the wild bird has no fat it would be dry unless it is cooked with "apple-wood smoked bacon."

And someone responded that "Their legs and thighs are tough, and we only use them for soup. The breasts come out good in the oven but need to be cooked in some sort of liquid in an oven bag or they'll dry out."

Information about hunting for wild turkey and specific state licensing requirements can be found at portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Hunting/CT-Hunting-and-Trapping ■

Boxwood: a celebrated shrub | *By Terry Karpen*

Boxwood has been used since antiquity in gardens throughout the world. It has long been valued for its permanence in the landscape, extremely hard wood, and its medicinal value. This is a long-lived plant, with many specimens living considerably more than 100 years.

Boxwoods are native to western and southern Europe, and portions of Asia, Africa, South America, Central America, and the Caribbean. There are no boxwoods native to North America. Boxwood is the common name for the genus *Buxus*, and a family relative of *Pachysandra*.

Although there are about 90 species of boxwood, just three of them, and their hybrids, make up the majority of boxwood used in landscapes in the United States today. Boxwood was introduced to North America from Europe in the mid-1600's. According to The American Boxwood Society, the first planting was around 1653 at Sylvester Manor on Shelter Island, New York, using boxwood brought over from Amsterdam.

Boxwood has a history immersed in myths and truth: these plants were in use among the Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans. To the Greeks, boxwood signified strength. Boxwood sprigs have been found in the tombs of Romans. To dream of boxwood was said to foretell long life. Boxwood is one of the few woods heavier than water, and is used for carving, making woodcuts, and constructing precision instruments. Traditionally used in formal gardens, most commonly for hedging, topiaries, and containers, boxwood is an excellent choice for edging, screening, and mass foundation plantings. Boxwood cultivar choices offer a variety

of shapes, including rounded, columnar, upright, pyramidal or spreading, with sizes ranging from one to 20 feet tall and two to eight feet wide.

Deer do not browse boxwood due to distasteful or poisonous alkaloids in the leaves. Boxwood is one of the few evergreen shrubs not damaged by deer, and that is a reason for its widespread use in our area. Unfortunately, when a single plant variety is overused, it becomes vulnerable to disease and insect pests. In reference to a study by the University of California, entomologist William Wetzel said, "A monoculture is like a buffet for plant-eating insects where every dish is delicious." And a delicious buffet for pathogens, as well.

"Winter burn" is a common problem of evergreens, including those with "broad leaves", like boxwood. Leaves do not actually burn but rather dry up. Leaves turn yellow or brown in response to low soil moisture, freezing temperatures and blowing wind. Nurturing healthy boxwood is the best way to protect against insect, disease or winter damage, and in spite of these potential problems, boxwood remain a popular and easy to grow shrub.

Best Practices for Boxwood Health

- **Light requirements:** Boxwood will grow in full sun, but many prefer part shade.

- **Moisture:** Moist, well-drained soil is best. Boxwood do not like wet feet and are highly susceptible to root rot. Once established, they're drought tolerant and only need water after an extended period of time with no rain.

- **Mulching:** Boxwood are shallow-rooted and benefit from a thin layer of mulch to protect

the roots. A thick layer of mulch should be avoided as it may encourage roots to grow above the soil surface, putting them at risk of damage when dried out.

- **Shearing, pruning and thinning:** A common belief is that it is mandatory for boxwood to be drastically sheared into balls and flat-topped hedges for optimum maintenance. This is incorrect. Shearing encourages leaf growth only at the ends of branches, and over time, continual shearing transforms boxwood into a shell of outer leaves with a dead center. With every shearing, each branch becomes four to six new branches. This occurs because the apical (dominant) buds have

been eliminated, causing plant hormones to inhibit the buds below from growing. Because sunlight and air can't reach the interior, the plant becomes susceptible to disease. Boxwood should have a green interior, with leaves all the way up the branches. Minimal shearing (no more than once a year) is essential to a healthy boxwood.

Why prune at all? For aesthetics and health. Boxwood can be pruned by hand to shape them to improve the overall appearance. Branches that are too long can be cut back from inside the shrub. This is "selective pruning", as opposed to "shearing", which is non-selective. When shaping, taper them so that

the bottom is broader than the top, to ensure the entire plant will be exposed to sunlight.

Prune dead branches, remove any debris or fallen leaves from the interior, and thin the plant by removing some of the branches from the center of the plant. Thinning and cleanup allows sunlight and air to reach the interior of the plant which promotes new growth, helps to prevent disease, and increases the longevity of boxwood. ■

To learn more:
boxwoodsociety.org/abs_care
saundersbrothers.com/_ccLib/attachments/pages/Boxwood+Guide+copy.pdf





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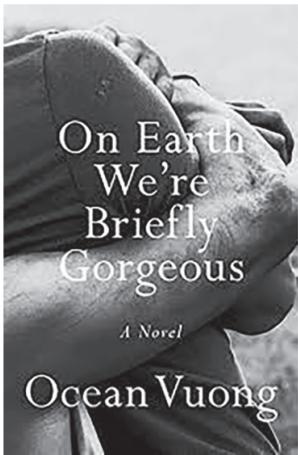
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BOOK REVIEW

On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous

By Ocean Vuong

242 pp. Penguin Books. \$17



We are each born into a world we don't know. Experience gradually leads us to a seminal question: who are we in this world and what are we to make of it — and what do we want? Ocean Vuong has written the story of a Vietnamese boy, born brown and short and gay, grown up an alien corn in a straight and white United States of torrential coping, offered a view of life awash in violence, alcohol, and drugs, life vengeful, solitary, and broken. And then puberty reveals his sexuality. Vuong quotes Shakespeare but adds a qualifier: "To be or not to be. That is the question. A question, yes, but not a choice."

On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous is a debut novel, a coming-of-age story framed as a young man's letter to his mother (who cannot read). Commandeered by poetic sentiment, his style is non-linear by design. Vuong builds his novel from fragments, structured the way children build understanding as they grow familiar in their experience of the world. In a montage of memories, thoughts, dreams, free verse, and apostrophe, alongside events which are violent, humiliating, and often surprising,

Vuong reaches that transcendent all-encompassing living moment of pure feeling, a moment the title pronounces.

The novel works like stormy weather forming. Epiphany, when it comes, strikes like lightning in the moment; the storm passes, leaving in its clamorous wake scarred evidence of growth and understanding. In his words: "All this time I told myself we were born from war — but I was wrong, Ma. We were born from beauty." "I know. It's not fair that the word Laughter is trapped inside Slaughter." "They say nothing lasts forever but they're just scared it will last longer than they can love it." "...reading is a privilege you made possible for me with what you lost." These sentences are sunshine after the storm dissipates.

Ocean Vuong was himself born in Vietnam and immigrated to Hartford, Connecticut as a young child after his family was granted asylum. He has a poet's mind. I could not read him without thinking of Bob Dylan's "It's Alright Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)". One wants to believe in the rectitude of leaders, believe in a mother's love and coherence in a world of fairness, justice, and even-dealing. "If you never know truth you'll never know love," are the words to a song of Vuong's youth. From across the breadth of time, lyrics from The Beatles of my youth define Vuong's message: "Nothing you can make that can't be made, no one you can save that can't be saved, nothing you can do but you can learn how to be you in time. It's easy. All you need is love..." ■

Review by Tom Casey

Tom is the author of *Human Error and Strangers' Gate*

LIBRARY CORNER

By Erin Shea Dummeyer

November is National Native American Heritage Month, and I am writing this column on the traditional land of the Paugusset tribe. If you are interested in learning about the native people who inhabited Connecticut in the 17th century, I recommend you pay a visit to New Pond Farm's Education Center and encampment, where there are two excellent exhibits about the people who lived here before colonists arrived.

At Mark Twain Library, we have several great books by Native American authors. Here are a few of my favorites:

- *There There* by Tommy Orange – Twelve characters from different Native communities are on their

way to the Big Oakland Powwow. Told from these different perspectives, this work of fiction explores themes important to many modern Native Americans like cultural identity, spirituality, and addiction.

- *The Only Good Indians* by Stephen Graham Jones – This work of horror fiction follows four young Blackfeet men and the consequences they face after a regrettable decision they make in their youth. While the beginning is a slow burn, it picks up to a very satisfying and scary climax. I will never think of a Sweat Lodge in the same way.

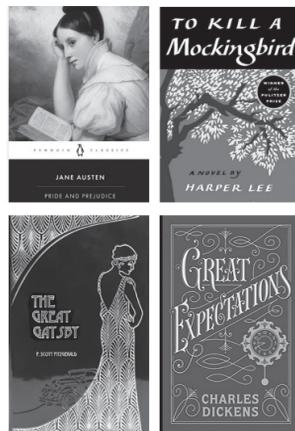
- *Braiding Sweetgrass* by Robin Wall Kimmerer – A trained

botanist and member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation, the author shares her knowledge of the earth and its medicine in this work of nonfiction. I often see it included on lists of "Best Nonfiction", and reading it is a meditative journey.

- And for the tiny people in your life, let me recommend *We Are Water Protectors* by Carole Lindstrom. This picture book by Lindstrom, who is Anishinaabe/Metis, won the 2021 Caldecott Medal. It celebrates the people who protect our Earth's greatest resource. ■

Erin Shea Dummeyer is Director, Mark Twain Library

Good books for good readers | By Margi Esten



As we head into the Thanksgiving holiday this week, and we all try to be thankful for the myriad things we should be thankful for, here are some of the books (and authors) I am most definitely thankful for.

Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen. To correct a popular thought: Jane Austen's books are NOT just charming stories of love and the tricky task of finding a husband with a good fortune. In *Pride and Prejudice*, you'll find philosophy, history, wit, and a most passionate love story.

To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee. Told through the eyes of the lovable rogues Scout and Jem, Harper Lee also created one of literature's most beloved heroes – Atticus Finch. This Pulitzer Prize-winning novel was way before its time and addresses issues of race, inequality, segregation, and one man's determination to right the racial wrongs of the Deep South.

The Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald. Jay Gatsby, another of the great characters of American literature, is the

enigmatic millionaire whose one and only passion is to rekindle his romance with the enigmatic and careless Daisy Buchanan. This book is a hypnotic dissection of the hollowness at the heart of the American dream and still completely relevant today.

Great Expectations by Charles Dickens. This literary masterpiece is an evocative story that has universal appeal following the orphan Pip's coming of age. The eccentric Miss Havisham, who has remained in her wedding dress since the day she was jilted, is one of the most memorable and iconic characters in all of literature.

Have a happy and healthy Thanksgiving. ■

"The Gift of Life" | By Rod Jacobsen



Photo by Rod Jacobsen

Rod Jacobsen (far right) with the recipient of his donor kidney, Jim Lawson, and their two wives, Susan Jacobsen (far left) and Peg Lawson.

As we enter the "Season of Giving," I'd like to share the story of how I came to give one of my kidneys to a stranger.

Fifteen percent of American adults – 37 million people – suffer from chronic kidney disease, according to the CDC. To stay alive, most of these patients need dialysis, normally requiring four hours attached to a blood-filtering machine three or four times each week, a costly and physically demanding process. Transplantation is by far the better option, but almost 100,000 patients are on the waiting list at

any one time. Many die before a suitable donor is found.

Until three years ago, I was admittedly unaware of the prevalence of kidney disease in the United States. A veteran English teacher, I was reading the research materials of one of my most dedicated students, whose senior project was focused on kidney donation, and I learned about the exciting trend of living donor transplantation. Like millions of Americans, I am a registered organ and tissue donor, and I knew that some people with end-stage renal disease are fortunate to receive

a deceased donor kidney. I also knew that close relatives who are "good matches" for their family members often willingly give one of their kidneys – at virtually no risk to themselves, as two kidneys for most of us are an evolutionary redundancy. And while a kidney transplanted from a deceased donor is of course a welcome outcome, I learned that these organs are viable for only 8–12 years, while living donor kidneys tend to last from 12–20 years.

More surprising, my student's research showed that a relatively new category of living donation is becoming more common. Sometimes referred to as altruistic, "good Samaritan," or non-directed donation, this type of transplantation has helped to revolutionize the field. Through advances in kidney disease research and the remarkable technical tools developed by the National Kidney Registry (NKR), better "crossmatching" has meant that willing donors can give one of their kidneys to someone who is least likely to reject it or who needs less medication to prevent rejection. Kidney transplant centers across the nation (Hartford Hospital among them) work with the NKR to achieve transplants that benefit the greatest number of patients, and "kidney chains"

started by one willing donor and inspiring others close to the recipient to donate have resulted in as many as 35 transplants. The fact that kidney transplant surgery – for both donor and recipient – has become so routine, with such favorable outcomes, stirred my interest further, and started me on a journey that was initially intellectual but, in time, became very personal.

Perhaps it was my impending retirement, or a nagging sense that my contributions to society had been rather meager, but after a little thought I decided to fill out an online form to determine if I might be a donor. Because I was 69 at the time and had a few minor health conditions, I assumed I would not be a candidate, but I soon learned that I might qualify. After initial blood tests – and after receiving the blessings of my wife and children – I was encouraged to move forward with the process at the transplant center. The pandemic delayed further action for some months, but at the end of 2020 I joined the active list of potential donors and began a comprehensive series of tests, scans, and interviews that ultimately resulted in a clean bill of health, both physical and mental (and all at no cost to me). The transplant team and the experts at the NKR soon found the best

possible recipient, and a date was set for surgery. The three-hour laparoscopic procedure resulted in a successful transplant to a patient in a hospital in a different state, and my recovery was uneventful.

Three months ago, I was fortunate to meet my recipient, and we continue to be in contact. His good friend, who was a willing donor but not a good match for him, engaged in a "swap" in which he gave his kidney to another patient who was. All four of us are very healthy today. Whenever I think of my transplant journey, I recognize the research of my former student, which set me on a course that has happily altered the lives of two deserving recipients and their families. And now, as an active volunteer mentor to other potential donors, I have the happy opportunity to help those who have the desire to give "the gift of life."

If you are interested in learning more, two excellent sources of information are the National Kidney Registry (www.kidneyregistry.org) and the National Kidney Donors Organization (www.nkdo.org) ■

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BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT

Want to plan an unforgettable event? Call Reed Collyer | *By Justin Reynolds*



All photos courtesy of Collyer Events

Planning an event — whether it's a wedding, cocktail party, birthday party, or an intimate dinner party — can include an overwhelming number of details to juggle. If you want to guarantee that you don't drop any of the proverbial balls along the way, you may want to get in touch with Reed Collyer.

Collyer, a Redding resident, is the owner of Collyer Events (formerly known as Collyer Catering), which has been around since 2000.

"We're a boutique catering operation for clients who want something out of the box," Collyer said. "We put an individual spin on everything we do."

In addition to catering, the

company also helps with event planning, site scouting, menu planning, event management, table-top designs, flowers, staffing, and logistics — "basically everything that comes into play when you're doing an off-site event," she explained.

Collyer Events partners with several vendors to make "all sorts of things happen," including decor, lighting, and entertainment.

"When I meet a client, they let me know the vibe they're going for, the color scheme, all of that," Collyer said. "A lot of the time, people come to you with a concept of what they want but not a set menu. Based on that, I suggest some menu items and table-top designs."

Before engaging with a client, Collyer briefly interviews them on the phone.

"We get the gist of the event, put together a custom proposal, and take it from there," she explained. "Some food items are based on common menu items we do all the time. Others are much more tailored to the logistics and the theme of whatever we're doing."

Collyer has been in the hospitality or food service business since she was 15 years old. Over the course of her career, she's worked at restaurants, managed restaurants, and worked at catering businesses.

"I loved it," Collyer said of those experiences. "I loved the problem-solving. I loved to make

the magic happen."

From 2005 to 2015, Collyer Catering was based out of a kitchen in the Saugatuck neighborhood of Westport.

"We've downsized the business considerably since then," Collyer said. "The overhead just kept going up to maintain that space. I have three kids, and it was kind of a turning point."

Today, Collyer balances her catering business, which mostly operates on weekends, with a full-time job as the Finance Director at New Canaan Library.

Collyer estimates that roughly 90% of her company's cooking is done on-site at the client's premises, but they do have access to a commercial kitchen

when they need it. The company has a pool of roughly 30 part-time workers it pulls from to staff each event.

"Our staff is well-seasoned," Collyer said. "Most have been with us five-plus years; some have been with us for over a decade. We always try to send the same staff to repeat clients so there are some familiar faces."

No matter the size and scope of your event, Collyer and her team are ready to help.

"We love small dinner parties because it's a format where we can flex our muscles and get creative," Collyer said. "But we also love the challenge and logistics of a big group."

One of the things she likes best about the catering and events business is that every single event they do is a unique experience.

"You also get to see the best parts of humanity when you're in this business, because everybody is happy and there to have a good time regardless of the type of event," Collyer said. "There aren't a lot of jobs where you get to say that."

If you're interested in hiring Collyer Events to create a memorable experience, visit collyercatering.com to learn more. You can also get in touch with Collyer by calling her at 203-536-9717, emailing her at rcollyer@collyercatering.com, or finding her on Facebook. ■

Connecticut Humane Society looks to open new facility in Georgetown | *Continued from page 1*



All photos provided courtesy of the Connecticut Humane Society
A pop-up CHS cat clinic provides veterinary services



A rendering of the new CHS facility



The site plan of the property along Route 7, just south of School Street

between keeping a pet and giving it up, Basher noted.

"People love their pets. There's no HUSKY (Connecticut Health Insurance Program) for Huskies, no Medicaid for pets," Bias said.

The CHS will employ two veterinarians at the new site, several veterinary techs, and animal care staff supported by volunteers in all areas. They will provide veterinary services including vaccines, diagnostics, spay and neuter services, and minor surgeries including mass removals, among others.

"We do anticipate that some support staff will rotate from our Newington and Waterford campuses as needed," Bias explained. The campus will not be 24/7 or a replacement for after-hours emergency medicine.

In addition to veterinary services, the CHS anticipates some animals sheltering for short times at the new facility. "Pets that go on our couch"-size pets (no farm animals for example) might need the temporary housing at the new facility," said Basher. On average, surrendered pets reside for three weeks at CHS locations.

Shelter animals in the new facility will be housed in "adaptable pods to accommodate changing needs and reduce transition stress," says a CHS brochure about the new site.

The CHS also plans to provide educational programs at the facility, including humane education classes, pet reiki, and pet talks "like Ted Talks for pets," Basher noted. Dedicated community space will serve a

multitude of public programs to accommodate a diverse group of learners: dog training classes, animal welfare professional development programs, youth humane education programming, and adult workshops are all planned. Bias added that nonprofits in the community will also be able to utilize the new spacious educational part of the new center for their own needs.

The genesis of this project began in 2014. Basher said CHS looked at 40 properties before choosing the one in Wilton. The property at 863-875 Danbury Road currently houses three old buildings, two houses, and a garage that will be torn down for building to begin. The new facility will replace the CHS's Westport site and be over twice as large.

The 18-acre property is tranquil, with a rock ledge cascading down to frame the back of the site, walking trails, and wetlands behind the property creating a canopy of calming, natural space for animals when out on their regular walks. Parking will be ample, and there will be separate entrances to the building, including a private one for surrendering a pet.

The CHS will restore the wetlands on the site by removing invasive species, replacing them with native species, and 'daylighting' wetland areas that have been filled in over the years.

In 2021, Wilton Zoning met with the CHS and the project's architects and gathered feedback from Wilton residents, some of whom raised questions on whether the new facility would create more traffic and if there would be more noise at the location from dogs barking.

Wilton Director of Planning and Land Use Management Michael Wrinn explained the outcome in an e-mail exchange with the Sentinel.

"The property is zoned residential and zoning would allow for a 10,000-square-foot building. Zoning already allows charitable organizations on residentially zoned property along Danbury Road, up to 10,000 SF gross. The commission approved a request for a zoning amendment to allow this 10,000 SF to increase, given the size of the property in question (18+ acres) {750 SF of additional gross SF of building for each additional acre of land}. The building that was approved is a total SF of 14,243," he said.

"The public was concerned. Some concerns raised were traffic, lighting, and noise from the dogs. The Commission was satisfied that by the modifications

to the plans by the applicants during the approval process and by adding a number of conditions to the approval, those concerns would be resolved," Wrinn said.

Basher explained in a follow-up e-mail that CHS had added an audio engineer to the team who measured the potential noise impacts from the animals, factoring in the noise regulations in Wilton and the road noise on Route 7.

"His findings were that barking dogs would not be an issue or create any significant noise in the area. The natural features of the property, including the slope in the rear, provide a buffer as well. Per CHS policy, dogs are not outside on their own, and there will be no indoor/outdoor kennels in this center," she said.

A traffic study conducted by traffic engineers from Hardesty and Hanover also determined the new location would not have any significant impacts on traffic conditions in the area.

Now that the plans are approved and much of the funding is in place (to date, the CHS has raised \$10,085,000 towards their goal of \$13 million), the organization is looking towards the day they can break ground.

"It's a big endeavor for us. We have most of the fundraising done. We don't have the final construction piece yet," said Basher.

They see the new facility as filling an increasingly important need to provide resources to help pets stay with the families who love them.

"The Connecticut Humane Society is the leading resource in the state for companion animal welfare, enriching the lives of families and communities through adoption services, medical care, education, and prevention of cruelty. The Connecticut Humane Society is not affiliated with any national animal welfare groups, does not receive government funding, and does not euthanize for time, space, breed, or age," Bias said.

To learn more about the Connecticut Humane Society, please visit cthumane.org ■



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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

\$ = fee applies
R = registration required

ARTS

Friday, Dec. 2 — Sunday, Dec. 11

50th Anniversary Mark Twain Library Art Show
Consult the MTL website for times and events
Mark Twain Library
439 Redding Rd.
marktwainlibrary.org
R

Saturday, Dec. 3

Lyrics Coffeehouse – David Morgan
7:30 p.m. – 9:30 p.m.
Redding Community Center
37 Lonetown Rd.
townofreddingct.org
\$

Tuesday, Dec. 6

Ridgefield Independent Film Festival – Surprising Shorts
7:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.
Ridgefield Library
472 Main St., Ridgefield
https://www.riffct.org/
R

Saturday, Dec. 10

Writing Workshop: Call & Response
1:00 p.m.
Aldrich Museum
258 Main St., Ridgefield
thealdrich.org
\$, R

Saturday, Dec. 10

Exhibition Tour Out of the Kress Vaults: Women in Sacred Renaissance Painting
12:00 p.m.
Fairfield University Art Museum
200 Barlow Rd. (for GPS location) Fairfield
fairfield.edu/museum/kressvaults/

CHILDREN, TEENS

Saturday, Dec. 10

Family Relationships in Renaissance Art
12:30 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.
Children ages 4 -10
Fairfield University Art Museum
200 Barlow Rd. (for GPS location) Fairfield
fairfield.edu/museum/kressvaults/
R

CRAFTS

Sunday, Nov. 27

Newtown Holiday Craft Festival
11:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.
Edmond Town Hall
45 Main St., Newtown
edmontownhall.org

Saturday, Dec. 3

The New Fairfield/Sherman Animal Welfare Society Holiday Boutique
10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.
All proceeds to benefit NFSAW shelter animals
The Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd
2 Colonial Rd. New Fairfield
facebook.com/nfsaw/events/

Saturday, Dec. 3

Studio Workshop: Cookie Decorating
1:00 p.m.
Aldrich Museum
258 Main St., Ridgefield
thealdrich.org
\$, R

Saturday, Dec. 3 – Sunday, Dec. 4

Christmas Sip and Shop at St. Matthew Church
12:00 p.m. - 7:00 p.m. (Saturday)
10:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. (Sunday)
216 Scribner Ave., Norwalk
Vendor info:
Email SJest2@aol.com

Saturday, Dec. 10

Redding Artisan Holiday Fair
10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.
John Read Middle School
486 Redding Rd.

HOLIDAY

Thursday, Nov. 17 — Friday, Dec. 18

Keeler Tavern Holiday Boutique in the Barn
Thursdays – Sundays,
11:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.
Keeler Tavern Museum and History Center
152 Main St., Ridgefield
keelertavernmuseum.org

Thursday, Nov. 24

The Great Turkey Escape
8:00 a.m. (3/4 mile) 8:30 a.m. (5K)
Redding Community Center
37 Lonetown Rd
https://runsignup.com/Race/CT/Redding/TheGreatTurkeyEscape
\$, R

Thursday, Nov. 24

41st Annual Thanksgiving Day 5K Turkey Trot
8:00 a.m. (Kids Fun Run)
8:30 a.m. (5K)
Boys & Girls Club of Ridgefield
41 Governor St., Ridgefield
bgcridgefield.org
\$, R

Friday, Nov. 25

Bethel Winterfest
1:00 p.m. - 7:00 p.m.
A celebration of the season for all ages
Downtown Bethel

Friday, Nov. 25

Ridgefield Holiday Tree Lighting
6:00 p.m.
Donnelly Plaza
400 Main St., Ridgefield
ridgefieldct.org

Friday, Nov. 25 — Saturday, Dec. 31

A Holiday Wonderland at the Mansion
Lockwood-Mathews Mansion Museum
(Wed.—Fri.) 12 p.m., 1 p.m., 2 p.m., 3 p.m.
(Sat.—Sun.) 12 p.m., 12:30 p.m., 1 p.m., 1:30 p.m., 2 p.m., 2:30 p.m.
295 West Ave., Norwalk
See website for times
lockwoodmathewsmansion.com
\$

Saturday, Nov. 26

Holiday Village
Foundation of Hope
12:00 p.m.— 4:00 p.m.
DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel
789 Connecticut Ave., Norwalk
foundationofhope.us
\$

Friday, Dec. 2

Holiday Tree Lighting
4:30 p.m.— 6:00p.m.
Wakeman Town Farm
134 Cross Hwy., Westport
wakemantownfarm.org

Friday, Dec. 2

Music on the Hill of Wilton Holiday Concert
7:30 p.m.
Wilton Congregational Church
70 Ridgefield Rd., Wilton

Friday, Dec. 2 — Saturday, Dec. 3

Ridgefield Holiday Stroll
Ridgefield Holiday Stroll
400 Main St., Ridgefield
ridgefieldct.org

Saturday, Dec. 3

Jingle All the Way with Music on the Hill
2:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.
Holiday carols with bell ringers and singers; jingle bells crafts for kids
Wilton Historical Society
224 Danbury Rd., Wilton
wiltonhistorical.org/events

Saturday, Dec. 3

The Mad Hatter Chorus Holiday Concert
3:00 p.m.
Church of Christ-Danbury
90 Clapboard Ridge Rd., Danbury
danburycoc.org

Saturday, Dec. 3

Redding Town Tree Lighting & Troop 306 Holiday Fair
3:30 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.
Redding Town Green
Hill Rd. / Rt. 107

Sunday, Dec. 4

Redding Historical Society Holiday Open House
1:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.
Lonetown Farm Museum
Tour the 1786 farmhouse, enjoy refreshments, and browse gifts for sale.
43 Lonetown Rd., Redding

Sunday, Dec. 18

Georgetown Holiday Fair
11:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.
Holiday parade, treats, and visits with Santa
Main St., Georgetown

Sunday, Dec. 18

Stew Leonard's Menorah Lighting
5:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.
With Rabbi Yehoshua Hecht of Beth Israel Chabad of Westport/Norwalk
Followed by live music, kosher refreshments
100 Westport Ave., Norwalk
stewleonards.com

SPECIAL PROGRAMS

Friday, Nov. 25

Rise and Renew New Moon Workshop
6:00 p.m.
Meditation, sound bath, chakra alignment
Grow Wellness
901 Ethan Allen Hwy, Suite 109
Ridgefield
Maegan.b@growwellnesstherapy.com
growwellnesstherapy.com
\$, R

Saturday, Dec. 3

Winter Walk sponsored by Friends and Neighbors of Putnam Park
11:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
Interpretive guide leads group on an historical and archeological tour of the Park
Putnam Memorial State Park
499 Black Rock Tpke.

MEETINGS

Monday, Nov. 28

OPEB Trust Board Special Meeting
5:30 p.m.
Zoom
townofreddingct.org

Monday, Nov. 28

Board of Finance
7:30 p.m.
Zoom
townofreddingct.org

Thursday, Dec. 1

Redding Safety Committee
4:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.
Zoom
townofreddingct.org

Thursday, Dec. 1

ARPA Funds Working Group
5:00 p.m.
Zoom
townofreddingct.org

Friday, Dec. 2

Er9 Boards of Education Policy Committee
9:00 a.m.
Er9 Boards of Education Office
654 Morehouse Rd., Easton
er9.org

Monday, Dec. 5

ER9 Boards of Education DEI Task Force
7:00 p.m.
Live or Zoom
Joel Barlow High School - Room A16
100 Black Rock Tpke.
er9.org

Monday, Dec. 5

Republican Town Committee
7:00 p.m.
Town Hall / Hearing Room
100 Hill Rd.
townofreddingct.org

Monday, Dec. 5

Park and Recreation Commission
7:30 p.m.
Zoom
townofreddingct.org

Tuesday, Dec. 6

Redding Board of Education
7:00 p.m.
John Read Middle School
486 Redding Rd.
johnreadsps.org

Tuesday, Dec. 6

Conservation Commission
7:30 p.m.
Zoom
townofredding.org

Tuesday, Dec. 6

Economic Development Committee
8:30 p.m.
Town Hall / Conference Room
100 Hill Rd.
townofredding.org

Wednesday, Dec. 7

Brown Bag Lunch with First Selectwoman
1:00 p.m.
Town Hall / Hearing Room
100 Hill Rd.
townofredding.org

Wednesday, Dec. 7

Freedom of Information Session
5:30 p.m.
Town Hall / Hearing Room
100 Hill Rd.
townofredding.org

Thursday, Dec. 8

West Redding Fire Commissioners
7:00 p.m.
West Redding Firehouse
306 Umpawaug Rd.
westreddingfiredepartment.org

Please note that Town Offices will close at 12:00 p.m. on Wednesday, Nov. 23 and remain closed on Thursday, Nov. 24 for the Thanksgiving holiday.





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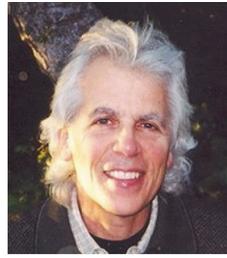
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Coldwell Banker Realty Ridgefield and Redding offices hope your day is filled with love, laughter, gratitude, and many blessings.



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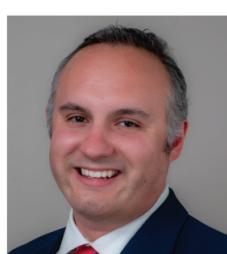
Denise Taylor
860.977.3699



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Terri Tournas
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Adrian Voss
203.241.7957



Call Mary to discuss your mortgage options.



Mary Dent

VP of Mortgage Lending

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garate.com/MaryDent

O: (203) 974-1733

Mary.Dent@garate.com

230 Greenwood Ave, #1A, Bethel, CT 06801

Applicant subject to credit and underwriting approval (20221102-1745808)
Mary Dent NMLS ID: 260216 | CT - LO-260216 | GRA NMLS ID #1598647 (Nationwide Mortgage Licensing System www.nmlsconsumeraccess.org) - CT - Lic # MCL-1598647



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