

# REDDING SENTINEL

FEBRUARY 12, 2026

REDDING, CONNECTICUT

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\$3

## Education Committee to take up school funding, cellphone bans

By Theo Peck-Suzuki

Connecticut lawmakers haven't adjusted the baseline per-pupil state funding for public education in over a decade. This year, they'll consider raising the base rate — and tying it to inflation.

Education Committee Co-chair Rep. Jennifer Leeper, D-Fairfield, said that's "priority No. 1" for her, potentially resolving a source of growing financial pressure for public schools. On top of that, Leeper said she wants to phase out local school districts' financial responsibility for students who attend "choice" schools outside of the district, which would give districts

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Photo by Liam Staunton

The glow from warming lamps illuminates a chicken coop in Redding Center during a deep cold spell. If you have a photo you'd like to see featured here, e-mail [editor@reddingsentinel.org](mailto:editor@reddingsentinel.org).

## Frigid temperatures underscore need for Energy Assistance Program

By Rob Sample

With heavy snow and long durations of temperatures in the single digits and lower, this winter has been giving everybody's heating systems — and budgets — a workout. That includes the four dozen households in Redding who rely on the Connecticut Energy Assistance Program (CEAP) to remain warm during conditions such as these.

"Thirty-eight households in Redding applied for energy assistance through the State's Department of Social Services, and another 10-15 Redding households applied for it through the Community Action Agency in Danbury," said Redding's Department of Social Services Director Angelica Fontanez. "With conditions this cold, a lot of our clients are already going to be exhausting their benefits."

With the way the CEAP works, households who qualify will receive an initial stipend of \$295-\$645 to pay for their initial oil delivery — which usually takes place sometime in November. The amount depends on household size, income, and heating type. The funding goes directly to the heating provider. Should the household require

additional assistance before the winter ends, an additional \$800 in assistance can be made available.

The latter amount depends on funding from the State, which subsidizes the program. In years of heavy demand, it is possible for the funding to run out. Priority is given to households with minor children, senior citizens, and people with disabilities. In 2025, 11 children under the age of 1, 45 children aged 1-4, 213 children aged 5-17, and 137 seniors aged 65 and older received assistance from Connecticut's Department of Social Services in Redding.

"Families who qualify for Department of Social Services assistance usually will also qualify for energy assistance," Fontanez explained.

The State administers CEAP cooperatively with social services departments in towns and cities, and the funding is distributed via a network of agencies based in larger municipalities. Locally, the Danbury-based Community Action Agency coordinates fuel assistance for the 26 towns in Western Connecticut.

"Because of the extreme cold, we've begun receiving calls this week from people who have exhausted both their initial and emergency heating assistance," noted Fontanez. In such cases, the Town will assist such households in obtaining an additional 150 gallons of fuel to make it through the winter.

"Once you're approved for heating assistance, you will need to remain with the same provider for the whole season," said Fontanez. "And for households who rent, if the landlord has a contract with a particular vendor, you'll likely need to remain with that vendor."

So, in these cases it makes good sense to follow the adage, "it pays to shop around" before the winter season hits. Several popular websites will provide you with oil prices by the gallon from companies that operate in Fairfield County, including [fuelsnap.com](http://fuelsnap.com), [fuelwonk.com](http://fuelwonk.com), and [cheapestoil.com](http://cheapestoil.com); for prices of electricity and natural gas, go to [energizect.com](http://energizect.com).

It can take five days from the time you're approved for additional

*Continued on page 3*

## What does Connecticut law say about immigration enforcement?

By Jessie Wright and Donna Christopher

With the surge of immigration enforcement leading the headlines across the country the last several weeks, Connecticut residents may be wondering what State laws and local policies require during federal immigration enforcement activities. Here is a brief look.

### The Trust Act

The Trust Act, passed in 2013 and updated in 2019 and 2025, outlines the circumstances under which local and state officials are allowed to work and communicate with the federal government to detain undocumented immigrants.

The law generally limits the expenditure of state resources on federal immigration enforcement and does not allow state or local law enforcement to arrest someone solely on the basis of a detainer. A detainer is a request from U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to hold a person for up to 48 hours so ICE can pick the person up. There are exceptions to that prohibition, including if the detainer is for someone convicted of a Class A or B felony, if ICE produces a judicial warrant, or if the person is on a terrorist watch list.

In 2025, a bill was passed that included 13 more crimes for which police or law enforcement may comply with an ICE detainer, including sexual assault, injury or risk of injury to a child, strangulation, burglary with a firearm, possessing child sexual abuse material, enticing or sexually exploiting a minor and violating a protective order.

The 2025 updates to The Trust Act also added the provision that individuals may sue towns or cities that cooperate with federal immigration authorities in a way that goes against state law and expanded the definition of law enforcement officials to include members of the Board of Pardons and Paroles, state's attorneys, and juvenile probation officers.

Some, including the current Department of Justice, have characterized Connecticut as a "sanctuary state" based on its policies. Governor Lamont has pushed back on this characterization, and a review by the Department of Justice in 2017 "found no evidence that the State of Connecticut is currently out of compliance with 8 U.S.C. 1373," a federal regulation that prohibits states putting limitations on sharing immigration status information with federal enforcement agencies. Some of the changes enacted in 2019 and 2025, however, specifically bar law enforcement from sharing certain nonpublic data, like home addresses, with federal immigration authorities without legal process.

"Connecticut is not a 'sanctuary' state. That term has no legal definition, and it is not an accurate description of our laws and practices. Labeling Connecticut a 'sanctuary' ignores the reality that our approach mirrors that of many other states that have adopted clear rules for cooperation with federal immigration

*Continued on page 3*

## REDDING'S BIG OUTDOORS

### Scouts weather rain, heat, and even snow during camping excursions

By Rob Sample

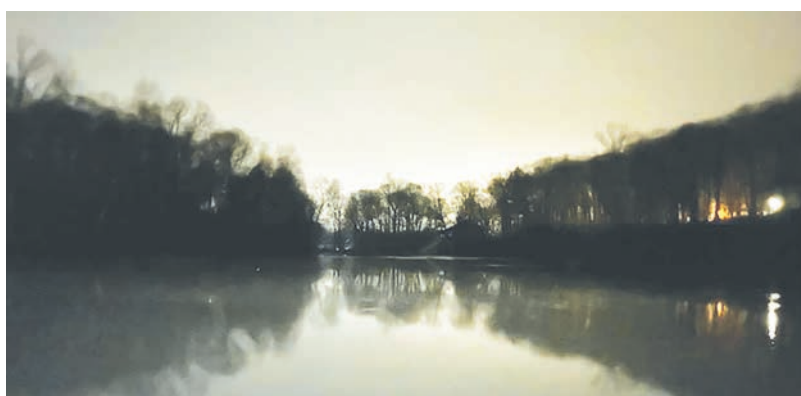


Photo by Henry Morris

The view from Cullen's camp site in Newtown.

Between cold temperatures and heavy snowfall, the winter of 2026 has proven to be one for the record books. For a group of teens from Redding's Scout Troop

15, however, it has been all in a season's...camping.

Yes, you read that correctly. These intrepid Scouts go camping at least once each month, rain or shine

or snow. And they usually camp outside — though last weekend, February 5-6, was a rare exception due to dangerous subzero temps.

Seventeen-year-old twins Henry and William Morris, who are juniors at Joel Barlow High School, might possibly be called the leaders of the pack. They're both Eagle Scouts; William is senior patrol leader for Troop 15, while Henry is assistant patrol leader and they've been involved with the troop for seven years. While in middle school, they both spent two weeks camping and hiking at the Philmont Scout Ranch in New Mexico, ascending to heights greater than 11,000 feet.

Suffice to say, a little snow

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## EDITORIAL

# Better to have loved and lost?

This is not about Valentine's Day, although it is a bit of a love story. The recent reporting about the significant change to the *Washington Post's* strategy and associated deep cuts to sections and staff got us thinking about reference points. If *WaPo* had never existed, if we hadn't known their scope and strength, if they hadn't played such an outside role in our country's history, the soon-to-be new newspaper – okay, media company – might have been an interesting entry into the national political conversation.

But just as we can't unhear a bell ringing, we can't forget what a force the *Post* was in its prime. This was the paper that broke the Watergate story and published the Pentagon Papers, after all.

Those days are long gone, and the media landscape is vastly different now. Many newspapers have failed or changed beyond recognition. Corporations and holding companies have bought up once-potent media organizations just as players in other industries have bought up small businesses and combined them into behemoths.

Now, though, start-ups and small local businesses in all categories are proliferating and showing surprising strength against Big Corporate. Many are in the tech space but also in clothing, food, home goods, the arts. The things that nourish us.

Communities all around the country also are remembering what it was like to have a credible source of local news, and they're beginning to do something about it. News media start-ups of all sorts – print, digital, for-profit, non-profit – are not just reporting the news but making it. There are not yet enough new outfits to make up for the ones we've lost, but it's a start.

We launched the *Sentinel* four years ago. Since then, we've informally helped a couple of towns launch newspapers. Now, suddenly, there are two more in our own backyard. One is a scrappy start-up like the *Sentinel*. The other is taking a more structured and well-funded approach. We are delighted to help them learn from our mistakes. We don't want to spoil their launch plans, so won't tell you which towns. Yet.

If these towns, like Redding, hadn't loved and lost their hometown papers, they wouldn't be pursuing these new ventures which will feed their residents' need for all things local. We wish them well and will report as they begin operations. ■

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

We welcome Letters to the Editor. Please be clear, civil, and concise. E-mail [editor@reddingsentinel.org](mailto:editor@reddingsentinel.org) with submissions.

### To the Editor,

We wish to extend a heartfelt "thank you" to our town's first responders who assisted us during especially treacherous weather conditions.

On the night of the 15" snowstorm, our family experienced a medical emergency requiring a 911 call. We were beyond impressed with the orchestration and coordination between the police, Highway Department, multiple fire departments, and paramedics. The ambulance was escorted by a Highway Department plow clearing the way - a testament to the teamwork involved to make sure residents receive the help they need, no matter the weather conditions.

We feel fortunate to live in a town with such devoted first responders, and a Highway Department crew willing to ensure help can arrive in a timely manner, even in the middle of snowstorms.

Thank you to everyone who made certain our son received the help he needed - we are grateful for you all. ■

*The Horan Family, Archers Lane*

### To the Editor,

Every day, Mark Twain Library comes alive thanks to the dedication and passion of its staff. During our upcoming Staff Appreciation Week, February 23–27, the Board of Trustees is proud to celebrate the exceptional staff who make our library such a vibrant and welcoming resource for the Redding community.

Our librarians and support staff truly are the heart of Mark Twain Library. They bring creativity, professionalism, and genuine care to their work each day, serving our community with enthusiasm and dedication. Thanks to their efforts – and the generous support of our donors and volunteers – the library continues to fulfill its mission as "the destination for discovery, enrichment, and connection – where books are just the beginning."

We invite our community to join us in expressing gratitude to this outstanding team: Erin Dummeyer, George Avidon, Lisa Cederbaum, Dave Daignault, James Falotico, Lisa Goldstein, Eileen Guiney, Mary Hoskinson-Dean, Janet Ivaldi, Midge Loery, Maggie McIntire, Sandi O'Reilly, Ken Rietschel, Elaine Sanders, RYanne Shemanskis, Cecilia Staunton, Kathryn Zimmerman, and Dolly Zurzuski. ■

*The Board of Trustees, Mark Twain Library*

## POLICE BLOTTER

### Police activity February 2 – 8 | By Donna Christopher

Police assisted during four citizen calls, four fire department calls, and six emergency medical service calls. They processed one firearm permit. One wire fraud was reported.

#### Low-flying helicopter

A resident on Lonetown Road reported a low-flying helicopter on February 3. The aircraft was determined to be Eversource conducting thermal inspections of the high-tension wires.

#### Noise complaint

A noise complaint on Old Stagecoach Road on February 5 for gunshots was reported. Police made no contact, and nothing was found.

#### Suspicious incidents

Police responded to Putnam

Park, where they found a driver had pulled over because he was tired.

In a different call, they responded to Little Egypt Road where a suspicious vehicle checked out okay.

A reported suspicious vehicle in the parking lot of John Read Middle School on February 5 around 3:20 p.m. left when the school safety officer approached it.

A caller on Old Redding Road reported that her surveillance camera caught a suspicious female on her property around 9:30 a.m. who dropped off a door tag with no number on it. Police were unable to identify the female.

Police responded to a report of a mother-in-law missing. She was located safe at a friend's home in New York.

#### Traffic

Police stopped 51 motor vehicles in the one-week time period, issuing two summonses, 20 infractions, 12 written warnings, 16 verbal warnings, and took no action in one instance. The infraction rate was 43%.

Five drivers with disabled motor vehicles required assistance on the following roads: Giles Hill Road, Black Rock Turnpike, Cross Highway, Redding Road, and Uncle Johns Road.

A two-car collision on Redding Road on February 4 resulted in property damage but no injuries.

Two one-car motor vehicle accidents occurred on February 7; a car hit a stone wall on Marchant Road, and a vehicle hit a pole on Umpawaug Road. ■

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## LEGAL NOTICES

### Notice of Balloting Regarding Proposed Establishment of Redding Historic District #1 Pursuant to Section 7 147b of the Connecticut State Statutes

Ballots were sent via First Class Mail on Thursday, January 15, 2026, to each property owner of the proposed historic district eligible to vote in such balloting. Completed ballots must be signed and dated, inserted in the provided inner envelope, and returned to the Town Clerk in the outer envelope having the words "Official Ballot" on the outside. The ballots must be received by the Town Clerk no later than 5:30 p.m. on Tuesday, February 17, 2026. ■

*Michele R. Grande, Redding Town Clerk*

The Redding Board of Assessment Appeals will be meeting Saturday, February 28, 2026 at 10:00 a.m. in the Conference Room of the Town Hall to set hearing dates and review appeals applications from the tax assessments on the grand list as of October 1, 2025. Anyone wishing to make an appeal must obtain an application from the Tax Assessors office or Town website, fill out the required information, and return it to the Tax Assessors office by Monday, February 23, 2026. Once the application is received, a hearing date will be scheduled for all eligible applicants. Only applications completed and returned by February 23, 2026 may be considered for a hearing. ■

*Greg Stackpole, Chairman, Redding Board of Assessment Appeals*

At a meeting of the Redding Conservation Commission on February 3, 2026, the following action was voted:

App'l #26-01, Catherine Mannix, 32 Dorethy Rd. Approved with conditions an application for renovations, deck with ramp, repair footing drains and add leader drains to energy dissipator within the regulated area.

The above-referenced file is available for inspection at the Redding Land Use Office. ■

*David R. Pattee, Chairman, Conservation Commission*



### SENTINEL FEBRUARY BREAK PUBLISHING SCHEDULE

The *Sentinel* will not be published on Thursday, February 19  
due to February School Break

Subscribers will receive the next issue on Thursday, February 26.

Contact us at [publisher@reddingsentinel.org](mailto:publisher@reddingsentinel.org) with any questions.

### Correction to the February 5, 2026 issue:

On page 3, "Applications now open for Redding Republicans' Matthew L. Berry Memorial Scholarship" omitted that qualified applicants for the scholarship must be legal residents of Redding *and* graduating seniors from Joel Barlow High School. We regret this error. ■

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## Fuel overflow closes Town Hall | *By Rocco Valluzzo*

Due to a tank overflow during a fuel oil delivery, Town Hall was closed on Wednesday, February 4 and Thursday, February 5.

According to Chief Building Official Shaun Donnelly, approximately one gallon of fuel oil was deposited on the floor at the rear of the basement at Town Hall on

Monday, February 2. As a result, an odor traveled into some of the offices of the main level via the sprinkler pipe chase.

Out of caution, First Select-woman Julia Pemberton asked employees at Town Hall if they could work at home on Wednesday and Thursday.

The oil company has since removed about six gallons of fuel oil from the oil fill and vent piping. Donnelly added that the system is working properly and some offices are currently being ventilated to remove the odor. ■



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## Redding Board of Education approves 2026-27 budget | *By Anne Young Albanese*



At the February 3 Redding Board of Education meeting and budget workshop, the Board unanimously approved a proposed 2026-27 fiscal year budget of \$27,570,525, which is an increase of 3.96% over the current fiscal year. The budget, which funds the district that includes Redding Elementary School and John Read Middle School, now will be submitted to the Board of Finance for approval as part of the Town's combined budget process.

Dr. Jason McKinnon, Superintendent for Redding, Easton, and

Region 9 school districts, arrived at the February meeting with a proposed budget of \$27,637,227, or 4.21% increase. During the workshop, he suggested additional savings with little to no negative impact on the schools. The district saved \$75,263 on non-certified staff pensions, due to additional money that was provided by the State. The purchase of certain supplies also was moved to the current fiscal year for a savings of \$29,232. Because of the district's strong health insurance reserve, the health insurance increase was dropped from 4% to 2%, for a savings of \$67,470. In addition, some funds were deducted from the Central Office budget, lowering Redding's share of the cost. The Board then added \$30,000 to the budget to expand

the schools' field trip programs next year.

While some of the budget numbers have changed from their initial proposed amounts, the areas driving the budget have remained the same. Special education is still the largest cost center. For the most part, these costs are driven by State and Federal education requirements. Another large cost center is the expenses that are districtwide. These include insurance and other expenses that cover both schools.

The Board of Finance will hold a public hearing on Tuesday, March 18 at 7:30 p.m. on this budget and the Selectmen's budget before finalizing and approving the numbers that will be voted on at the referendum in May. ■

## Accelerated rehabilitation term to end for animal cruelty case | *By Jessie Wright*

A Redding property owner may have criminal animal cruelty charges dropped next week if Danbury Superior Court finds she has successfully completed the terms of a two-year accelerated rehabilitation program.

Nancy Burton has been facing animal cruelty charges for the severe neglect of more than 65 live goats and dozens of dead goats found and seized from her property on Cross Highway by the Connecticut Department of Agriculture in March 2021. Prior to that date, the Redding Police Department had received over 120 complaints regarding the goats and violations of local ordinances. The State Department of Agriculture had received five complaints related to the animals' condition and lack of care.

Though Judge Maximino Medina of Danbury Superior Court had initially offered a 30-day accelerated rehabilitation program to Burton, after which she may have been allowed to own animals again after only one month, Attorney General William Tong implored the court

to provide an opportunity to hear victims' testimony including statements from the State, the neighboring property owners, and the Town of Redding. After that hearing was held in October 2024, Judge Medina set the accelerated rehabilitation timeline to its maximum of two years.

Judge Medina set four conditions for the accelerated rehabilitation. Burton could not own any animals for two years (inclusive of the time since the first accelerated rehabilitation hearing in March 2024 to February 18, 2026). She could not violate any local or state laws regarding animal safety. She could not interfere with any animal control officer in the State of Connecticut, and she was required to undergo psychiatric or psychological counseling as deemed appropriate by the office of probation.

In March 2025, Burton was found not to be in compliance with attending the required psychiatric or psychological counseling. While Burton contended that the required sessions were presenting a financial

hardship to her, the court rejected her request to change them to a community service requirement, noting that financial hardship could not be a substitute for complying with the court's order.

At that time, Judge Medina ordered Burton to continue seeing a therapist for one session per month for the next six months. He also ordered her to keep probation informed of the dates of the therapy sessions that were kept.

On Wednesday, February 18, 2026 the accelerated rehabilitation period will end. A hearing is scheduled for that day at 10:00 a.m.

Since the charges were initially filed, the Town of Redding has discussed an update to its Zoning Regulations to allow for the issuing of fines for zoning violations. The change was given a positive referral from the Zoning Commission and discussed most recently at the October 2025 Board of Selectmen meeting. A special town meeting to vote on the matter has not been held. ■

## Cold bursts pipe fittings at RES | *By Anne Young Albanese*

The snowstorm that dropped close to a foot-and-a-half of snow on Redding over January 25 and 26 led to schools and municipal offices closing on January 26, and delayed school opening by three hours on January 27. Along with the snow, Redding has experienced extremely cold weather, leading to frozen pipes and leaks across town.

For the most part, the school buildings have held up very well and kept students warm in single-digit weather. While there have been no major issues, Redding Elementary School (RES) had some frozen pipe fittings in the crawl space in the 1948 section of the school.

"Foundation window openings allowed frigid air to enter into the space, which ultimately caused the fittings to burst," explained ER9 Director of Facilities and Operations, Mike D'Agostino.

As is often the case with burst pipes, well water was the biggest concern. When the fittings burst, one of the RES wells lost all water pressure. To fix the issue, the facilities staff stayed late into the evening, working with water professionals to complete all the repairs. (This was after they had spent a full day at the school clearing snow.) This allowed the well to recover overnight, allowing school to open the next day.

While the efforts of the facilities team fixed the leaks, the three-hour delay gave the well additional time to refill. While this was not the only reason for the delay on January 27, it did contribute to it.

While the administration has not received the invoices for the repairs that required outside assistance, the incident is expected to be covered within the operating budget. ■

**What does Connecticut law say about immigration enforcement?**  
*continued from page 1*

authorities. These rules keep communities safe, respect due process, and allow police to focus resources where they are most needed," said Governor Lamont in a statement last August.

The Trust Act does not entirely prohibit law enforcement from complying with an ICE detainer by communicating with ICE about individuals who are already in custody, clarified Janelle Medeiros, Special Counsel for Civil Rights from the Connecticut Attorney General's Office in a January 2025 memo. If a person is otherwise in custody, law enforcement may communicate with ICE about their release so long as they show a detainer to the person prior to communicating with federal immigration authorities. The Trust Act also does not prohibit sharing arrest information with the FBI and other federal law enforcement agencies.

Part of the impetus for enacting the legislation over a decade ago was to foster trust between law enforcement and immigrant populations.

"When residents feel safe interacting with law enforcement, they are more likely to make reports when they are witnesses to crimes in our communities or are personally victimized by harassment, intimidation, violence, or otherwise illegal conduct," reads a memo from the Attorney General's Office.

### Redding Police Department policies

Under both Connecticut law and the Redding Police Department's policy, the Redding Police Department complies with the Connecticut Trust Act, according to Police Chief Robert Kalamaras.

"Redding Police do not detain individuals, honor ICE detainers, notify ICE of custody status, or otherwise assist federal immigration enforcement unless one of the limited conditions set out in The Trust Act is met," he explained.

Those conditions include the presentation of a valid federal judicial warrant, a qualifying criminal conviction as defined by statute, or involvement in an active federal terrorism investigation.

### School district policies

The Redding and Region 9 Boards of Education said last summer that they were updating the schools' security and safety plans to include protocols for interacting with a federal immigration authority who appears in person or contacts the school or district. The protocols follow applicable laws and the Connecticut State Department of Education's guidance.

Each school is required to have at least one administrator at each school who is designated to interact with federal immigration authorities. These administrators must request and record a federal immigration authority's identification, including the name, badge or identification number, telephone number, and business card. The federal immigration authority must also have a warrant or other materials and specify the type of behavior the authorizing documents permit. The administrators need to consult with legal counsel or guidance developed by legal counsel regarding all types of interactions that might occur. Any other school personnel interacting with immigration officials must send them to the designated administrator. ■

**Frigid temperatures underscore need for Energy Assistance Program**  
*continued from page 1*

assistance to when you'll receive your delivery, so remain mindful of how much fuel is on hand. Avoid running out of fuel entirely, as this will require your fuel vendor to reset your furnace or oil burner which will result in an additional cost for a service visit. And, running out on a Friday will usually mean a fuel delivery won't happen earlier than the following Monday.

If your household is having difficulty staying warm this winter, contact Fontanez at (203) 938-3580 to see if any energy assistance might still be available for you. Beyond fuel stipends, Fontanez is

often called upon to provide additional assistance in accessing the resources that are available. "Some Redding residents have difficulty using the telephone and are unable to make the call for help – in such cases, I do that for them," she said.

It's also important to note that the third tier of energy assistance – which is available through the Town after the household has exhausted initial and emergency assistance – is made possible through private donations. If you'd like to help, visit [reddingct.gov/government/services/social-services](http://reddingct.gov/government/services/social-services) to donate. ■

**People qualifying for CT Department of Social Services Assistance in 2025**

Age	Redding Residents
Under 1	11
1 - 4	45
5 - 17	215
18 - 64	621
65+	137

## SPORTS

## Falcons shoot for higher seed

Girls basketball | By Rocco Valluzzo



Photo by Rocco Valluzzo

Paige Jarvis scored four points for the Joel Barlow High girls varsity basketball team in a game against Bethel on Thursday, Feb. 5. Barlow won 52-34.

Having secured spots in both the South-West Conference and state Division III tournaments, the Joel Barlow High girls varsity basketball team is now shooting for at least one home game in each.

Currently 12-5 overall, the Falcons took a step in that direction when they hosted Bethel on Thursday, February 5. A strong third quarter in particular put them in good shape for a 52-34 win on Senior Night.

"We knew they were a very aggressive and good team so we

knew we would have to bring it," said Barlow senior guard Mia Tartaglia. "I think it was a great team win, and we brought the aggressiveness for it."

Both sides concentrated on defense early, as each was held to fewer than 10 points in the first quarter. Tartaglia's five points led the Falcons in the quarter. The hosts received two from Amelia Winter and one on Gwenn Miller's free throw, trailing by just a point (8-9) after one frame.

A bump in the road came Barlow's way as the second quarter got underway, as it was held scoreless for the first five minutes. Meanwhile, the defending SWC champ Wildcats managed to score 10 straight points. Kaya Huedepohl hit a free throw to start the run, which did not stop until 2:57 remained when Tartaglia sank a free throw of her own as Barlow trailed 10-19. A three-pointer by Miller helped the Falcons climb back into it as they eventually cut the deficit to five (19-24) by halftime.

In the second half, Barlow shifted into high gear on offense as well as defense. Sienna Trietti's free throw with 6:02 left in the frame was followed by a 10-2 run by the Falcons, including a put back by Tartaglia with 4:40 to

put them on top (26-25); Miller, Paige Jarvis, and Emma Ogden all hit shots as the Falcons built a 37-27 lead going into the fourth quarter.

"We had them to three points in the third quarter, which was insane," said Barlow Head Coach Joe Carollo. "That third quarter was huge."

Barlow's defense also held the Wildcats to fewer than 10 points the rest of the way and only one field goal. Although the Falcons gave several starters some rest, they still stayed out of reach with six points (including a three-pointer) by Sara Fenzel.

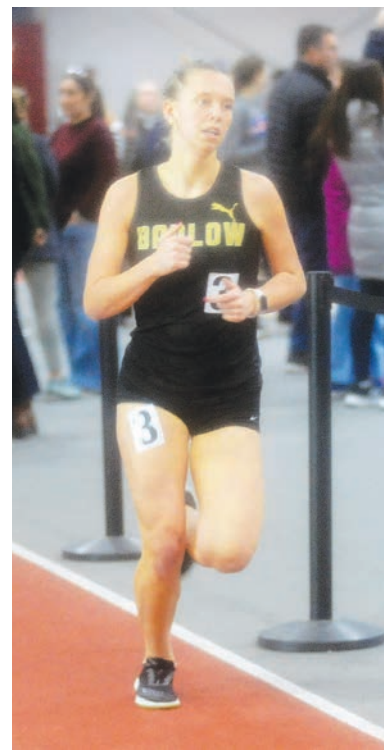
Tartaglia led the Falcons with 21 points, 12 rebounds, and had six steals. She also was selected to play in the 63rd annual JCC Schoolgirl Classic, an all-star game for senior high school players to be held next month.

Miller (one three-pointer) also scored in double digits with 12 and had five steals on defense. Ogden sank six, while Ava Gillon and Jarvis each had four. Fenzel scored three (one three-pointer), and Amelia Winter sank two.

Barlow visits Masuk on Thursday, February 12 at 7:00 p.m. and goes to Stratford on Tuesday, February 17 at 6:00 p.m. ■

## Barlow is fourth and tenth in conference

Indoor track and field | By Rocco Valluzzo



File photo by Rocco Valluzzo

Joel Barlow High's Stephanie Bardani was sixth in the 1,600 meters at the South-West Conference girls indoor track championships on Saturday, February 7. Barlow was fourth out of 14 teams with 45 points.

## Girls team

A few standout performances kept the Joel Barlow High girls indoor track team in contention at the South-West Conference championships.

The Falcons earned points in a number of events on Saturday, February 7 at the Floyd Little Athletic Center in New Haven. This included four medals, as they took fourth overall out of 14 teams with 45 points.

Weston was the winner with 62, followed by Pomperaug with 55. Newtown, which won last year, was third with 49.33.

As was the case during the regular season, the Falcons saw some success in the relay events, earning a couple of medals. The first was in the 4x800, in which Stephanie Bardani, Clara Mehner, Vivian D'Amico and Kate Duggan combined to finish in 10:33.65, good for the silver behind Newtown.

Earning points for Barlow in the 1,000 meters, Mehner was sixth in 3:18.94, a personal record. Duggan took the bronze medal in the 600

with a third-place time of 1:41.68, less than half a second behind Weston's Isabella Fournier.

Barlow's lone gold medal was in the 55-meter hurdles. Phoebe Cora Smith, who was runner-up last season, shaved more than a third of a second off her time since then to win it in 8.59, beating defending champ Lincey Bazile of Bunnell.

Going the distance in the 1,600, Bardani posted a personal record with a 5:45.01, good for sixth. The Falcons took the same spot in the 1,600 sprint medley relay with Nelsa Bassette, Riley Bacco, Amara Sanchez and D'Amico running a 5:07.69.

A silver medal went Barlow's way in the 300 with Olivia Taylor finishing in 42.05. Smith also scored in seventh with a 44.17. The latter was also part of the 4x400 relay team that also included Jessica Russo, Bardani, and Duggan that captured the bronze medal in 4:22.79.

Barlow had one athlete earn points in the field events. By clearing seven feet, six inches, D'Amico was fourth.

## Boys team

While the Barlow boys faced a tougher field of competitors, they managed to improve their placing from last season. Scoring 14 points, they were tenth of 13 teams.

Their first points came in the 4x200 with Andrew Gutowski, Lucas Jandura, Kaelen Kunar, and Ethan Peters running a 1:36.42 to take fourth, 0.02 seconds behind Masuk to just miss a medal. They also scored in the 1,600 sprint medley relay with Ile-Eso Aihokhai, Bauer Heres, Brian Rudd, and Max Mehner combining for a 4:12.20, good for seventh.

Barlow's remaining points came in the field events, which included Andrew Gutowski getting the bronze medal in the shot put with a toss of 44' 9.25", a personal record. Kunar cleared 5' 10" for fourth in the high jump, beating Bethel's Connor Clayton based on number of attempts.

The Falcon teams return to New Haven on Friday, February 13 for the state Class M championships at 3:30 p.m. ■

## Trojans prove difficult to catch

Boys swimming | By Rocco Valluzzo

Keeping pace with its opponent would be a tall order for the Joel Barlow-Bethel High boys swim team in its meet against Weston.

The host Falcons had to fight for every top-three place they could manage on Friday, February 6. Weston would wind up taking most of them en route to an 75-84 win at the Brookfield YMCA.

The Trojans took two of the top three in a number of events, including the 200-yard medley relay to start the meet. Chace Hansen, Gavin Woering, Connor Zhu, and James Jandura earned points for Barlow-Bethel with a second-place time of 1:49.99.

Weston claimed the top two places again in the 200 free. Third went to Akhil Sharma in 2:24.66 and Wolf Tozzi followed in fifth with a 3:14.63.

The Falcons' lone win was in the 200 individual medley with Zhu claiming first in 20:09.41, beating

his closest challenger by more than 10 seconds. Third went to Woering in 2:20.41.

Cracking the top three in the 50 free, Jandura swam a 24.08, good for second. Brendan Kong also scored with a 26.32, taking fourth.

Weston's depth was also a factor in the 100 butterfly, which helped it take a 27-51 lead after five events. Hansen was third here in 1:02.79, followed by Sam Goldman in fourth with a 1:04.72.

Three Weston swimmers breaking the one-minute mark in the 100 free proved tough to beat as well. Tyler Schwabe's 55.67 was good for fourth, and Sharma finished in 1:02.71 for fifth.

Weston not only had speed, but endurance, going one-two in the 500 free as well. Points went to Woering in 5:24.84 for third, and Zhu followed in 5:33.78 for fourth.

Along with Jandura and Hansen, those two swimmers formed the

200 free relay team that finished in 1:40.59, good for second. Following the event and with victory secured, Weston opted to swim the three remaining races unofficially.

Despite receiving no points, the Trojans also took first in each of the remaining contests. Hansen's 1:04.29 was good for second in the 100 backstroke, and Jandura was fourth in 1:08.90. Matt Schwartz also swam the event and was sixth in 1:14.88.

For the 100 breaststroke, Kong took fourth in 1:21.20 and Dylan Cruzado's 1:34.51 was good for fifth. Completing the meet in the 400 free relay, Schwabe, Goldman, Sharma, and Kong swam a 4:06.74 for second while Cruzado, Luis Perez, Tozzi, and Dane Cole were fourth in 5:29.45.

Barlow-Bethel, now 2-6 overall, competes in the South-West Conference championship on February 26 at the Masuk High pool. ■

## Joel Barlow sports results and schedules



## Boys basketball

Results:  
February 2: Joel Barlow 69 / Pomperaug 51  
February 5: Joel Barlow 54 / Bethel 51

## Record:

Joel Barlow 8-8

## Next games:

February 12: home versus Masuk at 7:00 p.m.  
February 17: home versus Stratford at 7:00 p.m.

## Girls basketball

Results:  
February 2: Pomperaug 40 / Joel Barlow 36  
February 5: Joel Barlow 52 / Bethel 34

February 6: Joel Barlow 49 / Harding 16

## Record:

Joel Barlow 12-5

## Next games:

February 12: away at Masuk at 7:00 p.m.  
February 17: away at Stratford at 6:00 p.m.

## Hockey

## Results:

February 2: JBWA 3 / Spartan Ice Hockey 2  
February 4: Wilton 6 / JBWA 2

## Record:

JBWA 2-10-1

## Next games:

February 14: away at Daniel Hand at 4:00 p.m.  
February 18: away at East Haven Co-op at 6:30 p.m.

## Indoor track and field

## Next meet:

February 13: away at Class M championships at 3:30 p.m.

## Boys swimming

## Results:

February 3: Joel Barlow-Bethel 82 / New Milford 80  
January 6: Weston 84 / Joel Barlow-Bethel 75

## Record:

Joel Barlow 2-6

## Next meets:

February 26: away at Masuk at 5:00 p.m.

## Wrestling

## Results:

February 4: Weston 51 / Joel Barlow 30

## Record:

Joel Barlow 3-4 (SWC)

## Next matches:

February 14: away at Bunnell at 7:00 a.m.

Check up-to-date game and meet schedules at [arbiterlive.com/School/Calendar/11297](http://arbiterlive.com/School/Calendar/11297)

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# Student scientists shine at Science Fair

By Anne Young Albanese



Photos by Anne Young Albanese

Redding Elementary School students showed off their experiments and shared lessons learned on Friday, February 6 at the school's annual Science Fair. There were nearly 100 exhibits this year, according to Principal Melissa Labroschiano.

Maddie Dutra (top left) created "Maddie's Carnival," an experiment based on the swing ride found at many amusement parks. Her project explored how a motor works. She focused on the engineering behind the project. She received a certificate for Most Creative Display.

Siblings Margaret and Benjamin Funk (top right) tested tin foil, felt, parchment paper, and air to see which would provide the best insulation to keep snow frozen. They discovered that the tin foil-protected snow melted the fastest. The snow without any

insulation was the second fastest to melt. The third shortest melting time was with the parchment paper, and the best insulator was felt. They received a certificate for the Best Oral Presentation Award.

Penelope Colon and Greta Ostrover (bottom right) tested which part of a dog was the germiest. They discovered that dogs' mouths are the dirtiest. They won a certificate for Petri Dish Pioneer Award.

Violet Hinchey (bottom left) explored tooth stains – what causes them and how to get rid of them. Violet used eggs to represent teeth since they are both made from calcium. She put the eggs into ginger ale, root beer, water, electrolyte, maple syrup, and seltzer. The most discolored egg was in the root beer. In order, the others were

maple syrup, ginger ale, electrolyte, seltzer, and water. She then tested four different toothpastes on the eggs. She discovered that "Toothpaste can remove stains, but there will still be a little mark from the stain." She received a certificate for the Enamel Integrity Award.

Harper Robinson (middle left) also explored melting snow, but her experiment was to see what liquid would cause snow to melt the fastest. She discovered that seltzer made it melt the fastest, and cold water made it melt the second fastest. The third fastest liquid was Fanta. The fourth fastest was flat sugar water, and the liquid that made the snow melt the slowest was salt water. She won a certificate for the Best Hypothesis Award. ■



## Community news in brief

By Jessie Wright

### Boys & Girls Club recognizes Connecticut roots

The Connecticut Alliance of Boys & Girls Clubs held a press conference on Tuesday, February 10 to introduce legislation recognizing Connecticut as the birthplace of the Boys & Girls Clubs movement in America. What began in 1860 in Hartford as informal hospitality for disadvantaged youth has grown into a national organization serving all youth through programming and leadership training.

The Boys & Girls Club of Redding-Easton is one of 14 Boys & Girls Clubs now active in Connecticut (with 57 sites throughout the state) and helps to continue the legacy that was started over 150 years ago. The legislation aims to honor that history and recognize Connecticut's role in a movement rooted in compassion and opportunity.

"[We are] very excited to be able to share this news!" said Executive Director Meredith Schuchard. "Our Club is celebrating 87 years of service to the Redding community this year."

### The Granite secures grant for bluegrass programming

The IBMA Foundation announced last week that The Granite is one of 11 project grant recipients in 2026. The IBMA Foundation aims to build and promote a bright future for bluegrass music through educational, literary, artistic and historic preservation activities.

The Granite, which recently finalized its status as a 501(c)(3) non-profit arts venue and community space, hosts monthly bluegrass nights in addition to youth music education. A new series has been developed for 2026 that will include coached and uncoached jams, workshops, and professional band performances.

Bluegrass programming this month includes an "Old Time Jam" on February 18 at 7:30 p.m. and the monthly installment of "Bluegrass Nights" on February 26 from 7:00 p.m. – 10:00 p.m. For professional bluegrass tunes (and other modern sounds), check out On the Trail's concert on February 27 at 7:00 p.m.

### National Charity League recruits new members and partners with Redding Garden Club

At its meeting on February 4,

National Charity League Redding Area Chapter members voted to add Redding Garden Club as one of its many official philanthropic partners.

National Charity League is an organization for mothers and daughters to perform volunteer work together and promotes leadership development and community impact. Peggy Jorgensen, President of Redding Garden Club and one of the founding members of the Redding Area Chapter of National Charity League spoke at the meeting, highlighting several of the opportunities for members to be involved in – from civic beautification efforts to new initiatives like reinvigorating the pollinator garden at Joel Barlow High School

"It's not just about gardening," Jorgensen said. "It's about having a good time."

The Redding Area Chapter is currently recruiting new members. Girls entering seventh through ninth grade and their mothers are eligible to join. There will be an information session on Tuesday, February 24 at the Easton Public Library at 7:00 p.m. for prospective members.

### Redding Garden Club accepting scholarship applications

The Redding Garden Club is now accepting applications for the \$2,000 Mary Clinton scholarship award.

This year, the Club has broadened the applicant pool to include graduating seniors from Redding with interests in environmental sciences, horticulture, floral design, marketing, photography, and/or social media. Students may be enrolled in public, private, or home-school.

Applicants must complete 10 hours of volunteer work supporting environmental-related activities, an essay of at least 500 words reflecting on their volunteering experience, and a letter of recommendation from a teacher, guidance counselor, or employer.

The application is due on April 22, 2026 (Earth Day). Download the application packet at [redding-gardenclub.org/about](http://redding-gardenclub.org/about) or contact Ann Crocker at [annsam@yahoo.com](mailto:annsam@yahoo.com) or (203) 788-4133. ■



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### Pilates Fusion

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10 - 11am

Restore your body, mind, and heart in this cozy Pilates Fusion class. The low-impact, mindful movement experience is suitable for all levels and combines gentle strength and balance for a full-body recharge. Led by founder of Chi Chi Life, Lauren Chiarello Mika.



**Register at [newpondfarm.org](http://newpondfarm.org)**



### Redding's Big Outdoors: Scouts weather rain, heat, and even snow during camping excursions / continued from page 1

doesn't faze them – nor their six fellow camping enthusiasts from Troop 15. What's unusual in recent years is for the grounds to be white for most of December and January and, it appears, February as well.

"During the fall, winter, and spring we'll camp for one or two nights, on weekends, but we usually have a weeklong campout during the summer," said William.

"This past weekend, the temperatures were supposed to go down to seven below at Camp Sequassen – that's a little too cold for us," said Henry. This past weekend also featured high winds, elevating the risk of exposure to the cold. Accordingly, the campout was moved to a large cabin at Sturges Park in Ridgefield. The Scouts got their outdoors workout earlier

Saturday by skiing at Mohawk Mountain upstate in Cornwall.

"When it gets below 20 degrees, we have to weigh the risk of camping outdoors and err on the side of caution," said Troop Leader Joe Downey, "though our Scouts have camped outside when it is 10 degrees."

December's campout took place at Camp Sequassen in New Hartford, while the January event was at Cullen's youth camp in Newtown. Besides camping outdoors, the Newtown facility offers Scouts an opportunity to build their own camping shelters. This exercise is optional, and the Cullen camp has an assortment of lean-tos for those who opt out.

Both Morris twins opted to build shelters, which involves surveying

the woods for branches from which to fabricate an A-frame, or chopping down saplings to serve this purpose. Once they each assembled enough poles for their respective shelters, they lashed them together with rope, formed multiple sections of the "A," covered the structure with a tarp, and fastened the tarp securely to the A-frame.

"In cold weather, we'll build a campfire to stay warm, though when it's hot it's quite pointless," said William.

There is nonetheless plenty of work to be done, even for camping indoors. Sturges Park's cabin has a wood stove – which provides both heat and a cooking surface – and the Scouts had to forage for kindling wood.

"We take turns cooking,"

explained Henry. "I cooked at the last campout, so another Scout was responsible for cooking this time. The people who aren't cooking have clean-up duty – which is harder because there's no hot water there."

For camping outdoors in winter, both Scouts said it's important to bring a sleeping bag rated for the level of temperatures they're going to experience. "A sleeping bag rated at zero is going to be too warm if the temperature goes up to 30 degrees," noted William. "A bag rated at 20 degrees is a good one to bring for most situations."

Other essentials include extra blankets for use inside one's sleeping bag; hand and foot warmers; extra clothing in case things get wet; and head coverings.

"If you get wet, you'll freeze – I've had that happen!" said William.

The Philmont experience in New Mexico involved trekking 73 miles over 12 days, camping each night, and waking at 4:00 a.m. to reduce the time spent hiking in full sun. Both twins described Philmont as a life-changing experience, equipping them with the ability to camp under any conditions.

But they also said the cooperative nature of Scouting is what truly matters.

"In Scouting, you learn early to cooperate and to pitch in," said Henry. "That way, you get things done in an efficient way. In the Scouts, we know that we're all working together... and that lifts all of us up." ■

# Anonymous Society plans move to Bethel

By Donna Christopher

Anonymous Society, a West Redding art gallery that opened just under two years ago, is moving to Bethel.

The move will pair Anonymous Society, owned by artist Nicole Bricker, with Jim Felice Studios, a Bethel-based studio owned by sculptor Jim Felice at 12 Francis J. Clarke Circle.

The collaboration will allow Bricker to dedicate consistent time to her own studio practice while continuing the gallery's exhibitions, mentorship programs, artist services, and art placement services for businesses. As an artist, Bricker works in painting, collage, print-making, and sculpture, often using themes drawn from her Minnesota upbringing and personal archives.

The Redding gallery's lease ends in April, when the move will become official.

When Anonymous Society opened opposite the train station in West Redding in the summer of 2024, the location initially seemed ideal. However, visitor patterns showed that attendance has been driven primarily by scheduled events rather than daily walk-in traffic.

While the West Redding area carries significant daily vehicular traffic, it does not operate as a destination area that encourages stop-in activity, Bricker said, which challenged a walk-in gallery model. Low visibility signage in the neighborhood, lack of commercial anchors like cafés, and navigation and access challenges within the corridor contributed to the difficulties in enticing visitors.

A central focus of Anonymous Society now is its mentorship program and artist support services. Bricker said the gallery became

a gathering place for artists and art lovers but also revealed that many artists need more support than traditional gallery representation provides.

"I found artists want more than just selling their work," she said. "I provide services and continue curating exhibitions, and the model now emphasizes helping artists build sustainable, business-ready creative practices."

Balancing administrative responsibilities with studio time also has been challenging, she said.

"In the last six months, it's been hard for me to make my own artwork," Bricker said. "As an artist, that's the most difficult part. You need a balance between earning income and making your own work."

In addition to exhibitions and artist services, Bricker has been working with local businesses to place artwork where it can be seen and purchased directly from artists. She is also teaching workshops through Ridgefield Guild of Artists.

Anonymous Society's first Bethel opening is scheduled for March 5. The inaugural exhibition, "In the Middle of It," is a juried group show exploring continued creative work during periods of uncertainty. It will include painting, sculpture, and mixed media focused on persistence and sustained creative engagement. Submissions are being accepted through the gallery website at [anonymoussocietyart.com](http://anonymoussocietyart.com) through February 14, and an opening reception is scheduled for March 5 from 6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.

Anonymous Society also will support exhibition programming connected to Jim Felice's Trailer Box Project, including a spring gallery exhibition and the annual

outdoor sculpture show.

Bricker said the move reflects a renewed focus on both her own art and the gallery's mentorship initiatives. Once the lease ends in April, she plans to spend more time working from her home studio.

"I can meet people when needed, and gallery hours will be consistent Monday through Fridays from 12:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.," she said. "It's about supporting each other," she said of the partnership with Felice. "This partnership allows shared resources and coordinated programming. It's a strong collaboration."

Jim Felice started his Trailer Box Project exhibitions in Danbury to showcase art outdoors and outside of "white walls and traditional galleries." He has carried the art tradition to his Bethel studio. The next show will open in April, featuring sculpture and gallery work on display through November.

The collaboration with Anonymous Gallery will benefit both artists and other artists by providing a centrally located venue for their respective exhibitions. An opening reception with food and music at Jim Felice Studios for the spring show is planned.

"It's about the process of creating, and I'm grateful for what I have," Felice said. "It benefits artists, because we're centrally located, and we're collaborating to support one another."

Because Felice works at the studio daily, the public also can view art outside of regular gallery hours at times. Coordinated exhibition schedules will allow visitors to see work in both galleries in one visit. ■

Learn more at [anonymoussocietyart.com](http://anonymoussocietyart.com)

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## Student T-Shirt design contest for Swim Across America

By Jessie Wright

Celebrating two decades of "making waves to fight cancer," Swim Across America – Fairfield County is inviting middle and high school students to participate in its commemorative "Make Waves" T-Shirt Design Contest. The winning artwork will be featured on the back of the 2026 official event shirt, which is worn by hundreds of swimmers, volunteers, and supporters throughout the season.

The contest marks the 20th anniversary of the organization's annual swim and fundraising event, which is scheduled for Saturday, June 20 at 96 Cummings Point Road in Stamford. Event Director Nancy Carr noted that because local teens make up such a large portion of the event's participants, the design contest is a "fun, new way for them to get involved and build excitement" for the milestone year.

Beyond being worn at the event, the commemorative shirts serve a special mission: they will be donated to pediatric cancer patients at Yale Cancer Center and Memorial Sloan Kettering. These donations will be accompanied by a visit

from the organization's mascot, DASH the Dolphin.

This year, the organization also has set an ambitious \$1 million fundraising goal to support the Alliance for Cancer Gene Therapy (ACGT). Since 2007, Swim Across America – Fairfield County has donated over \$6 million to ACGT, where 100% of those funds go directly toward clinical trials and critical cancer cell and gene therapy research.

### Contest Entry Details:

- Eligibility: Open to all Fairfield County middle and high school students.
- Design Requirements: Must be an original creation (drawing, painting, collage, or photograph) sized to fit 8.5" x 11" paper. No AI-generated designs will be accepted.
- Deadline: March 15, 2026. ■

*View the full contest details and submit designs at [swimacrossamerica.org/tshirt](http://swimacrossamerica.org/tshirt)*



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# Veteran *Sesame Street* performers to bring Revolutionary tale to life

*Sybil's Ride at Ridgefield Theater Barn* | By Pamela Brown



Photo courtesy of Feisty Elephant

The story of Revolutionary War heroine Sybil Luddington is coming alive in a local theatrical production. *Sybil's Ride*, a world-premiere family play featuring puppets, is a co-production of the Ridgefield Theater Barn and Feisty Elephant Productions. The show runs February 20 – March 1.

"This isn't a usual kind of play you'd see around here," said Annie Evans, a Redding resident who had a 27-year career writing for *Sesame Street* and who wrote the script in honor of the nation's 250th anniversary. "This is an original play with puppetry and a story you've never seen before about events that happened right here in the Fairfield County area in 1777."

The creative team includes Evans's husband and Feisty Elephant productions partner Marty Robinson as Puppet Master, Pam Arciero as Director, and Tyler Bunch as Principal Puppeteer, along with several local actors. "The show is written, directed, designed, and performed by veteran *Sesame Street* performers and writers," Evans noted.

Evans's script intertwines the past and present with emotional depth through the stories of two 16-year-old girls living centuries apart named Hope and Sybil.

"Hope is fearful for her father's

diabetes as she is telling him about her school project about Sybil. In 1777, Sybil is worried about her Colonel father who is being hunted by the British," explained Evans. "Each finds their own courage by the end of the play, with Sybil doing her ride and Hope helping her dad when he has an emergency."

The story is aimed at families with children ages seven and up, though anyone who is a puppetry enthusiast or appreciates live theater will find something for them. Sound effects will be plentiful alongside visually breathtaking scenery created by scenic painter/designer Claudia Nerreau. A variety of imaginative puppets, including marionettes, shadow puppets, hand puppets, and an almost full-scale front of a horse will help bring the story to life. "There's a huge composition book, rattan horse puppets, old-fashioned talking portraits, huge maps, and timelines that are both funny and amazing. There's a lot of humor in the play, since that is how I write," said Evans.

Live actors will be playing major parts, and three puppeteers will be performing smaller parts/puppets. "I believe puppetry adds to the dimension of storytelling since they're a representation of something, adding theatricality and symbolism to a narrative. Also, for family theatre, it engages a younger audience since they have a natural affinity and understanding of puppets and puppetry," said Evans.

Pamme Jones, Executive and Artistic Director of Ridgefield Theater Barn, is thrilled to be working with the Feisty Elephant team for a second premiere at the venue.

"Having a partnership with Feisty Elephant helps us bring this kind of programming to the community at large. They're masters of their art and have such a beautiful way of conveying stories to children. I think children will be entranced and adults will

be blown away by the artistry and creativity. And, we get to know Sybil Luddington and her story during this year of commemoration in the United States," said Jones. "It's going to be magical – wonder, delight, a little taste of theater magic." Jones added the theater's recent physical expansion allows Ridgefield Theater Barn to be a true community arts space. "Ridgefield Theater Barn believes that theater IS community. Our core values are inclusion, respect, and joy. *Sybil's Ride* is a beautiful presentation that embraces those values – so do Pam, Annie, and Marty. We respect each other deeply and honor our respective strengths and always seek to foster connection and community."

Evans discovered Luddington's story while reading a book about forgotten women heroes. "It intrigued me that she was only 16, had ridden farther than Paul Revere and in the rain. The more I researched and learned that many historians doubt her story, the more I wanted to write about her," said Evans. "Also, since it is a local story with the British landing at Compo Beach, marching up to burn Danbury, and eventually ending up at the Battle of Ridgefield (all places I frequent often!), I felt it was a great story for a local writer to tackle."

Despite some of the heavy subject matter, Evans had fun writing the play. "I tried to push the theatricality and humor so that the more serious parts of the story – the burning of Danbury, the mustering of the militia, etc. – would have more impact but also be surrounded by puppets and elements that allowed you to laugh and be transported by the magic of theatre," she said. "It will be an hour of history, laughter, creativity, fun, and maybe a few tears." ■

To purchase tickets and for more information, visit [ridgefieldtheaterbarn.org](http://ridgefieldtheaterbarn.org)

## Notes from a neighbor

*Stick it to me* | By Carter Wiseman



Photo licensed through Shutterstock

I don't travel on airplanes much, but when I do, I like to pass the time during delays browsing the airport gift shops that sell local merch. I already have enough baseball hats and water bottles, so I am now concentrating on refrigerator magnets.

I realize that I was late to this medium. I used to think refrigerator magnets were just for securing shopping lists and school pick-up schedules in a place where they could not be missed before the school bus arrived. My recent airport stays make it clear that this is a much more important form of communication. After deciding not to buy any single-malts or perfumes in the duty-free shops, I move directly to the magnet racks. I now skip the obvious choices: the Statue of Liberty in New York, the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco, the red telephone booth in London.

I now look for more interesting stick-ons. At JFK in New York, I was drawn to a map of the city's

subway system. In San Francisco, I couldn't resist the magnet in the shape of an Alcatraz inmate in his striped uniform. In Banff, Canada, the moose staring back at me over his rump was too good to pass up. I found one of my favorite magnets on a family trip to Idaho. It was an image of Big Foot, the mythical relative of Scotland's Loch Ness Monster. Big Foot, sometimes known as Yeti, is a hairy critter said to roam the forests of the American Northwest. Like Nessie, he has eluded capture, but his legend endures.

I liked the Big Foot magnet so much that I decided to pass it on to my dentist, who had told me that she and her husband had just bought a new refrigerator. It also seemed like a good fit, since my dentist had shown a slightly irrelevant streak whenever we talked about the collapse of Western Civilization. She thanked me warmly and may even have added an extra floss-dispenser to my usual dental goodie-bag on leaving the office. But there was a problem: Her new fridge has a stainless-steel door, the kind magnets do not stick to.

I briefly thought that I might offer her one of my old filing cabinets, to which I have attached my overflow magnets. But my dentist probably has all her files on her phone. So, I fell back on a trusty hack: duct tape. It sticks to everything. I plan to bring a fresh roll to my next check-up. ■

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### Education Committee to take up school funding, cellphone bans / continued from page 1

still more money to work with.

"My hope is that it will be a House priority bill," Leeper said.

Leeper said her other priorities include passing a statewide bell-to-bell – all day – cellphone ban and enhancing funding programs to compensate student teachers.

Co-chair Sen. Douglas McCrory, D-Hartford, did not respond to a request for comment.

Committee Ranking Member Sen. Eric Berthel, R-Watertown, said he hopes to pass legislation that would improve the 2023 Right to Read law, which required schools to adopt curricula aligned with the "science of reading" – methods for teaching reading through five key skills: phonemic awareness, phonics, oral reading fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. Berthel said he and Leeper worked with advocates to address concerns about the law as it was originally passed. He said Education Committee leaders now recognize that schools need more support from the State to hire specialists who can implement Right to Read curricula effectively and provide tutoring.

"There was a lot of controversy, and a lot of our districts that already had high-performing readers at K-3 said, 'Why are you forcing me to spend a lot of money to buy this new curriculum?'" Berthel said.

Ranking House member Lezlye Zupkus, R-Prospect, said she'd like to see the General Assembly focus on "mandate relief" – that is, rolling back the "hundreds and hundreds" of legal requirements public schools in Connecticut are subject to. She cited two in particular: a requirement that districts electrify their bus fleets by 2030 and rules requiring trash composting. "We have kids graduating from high school that cannot read. We have issues in our own public schools.

We should be focusing on that," Zupkus said.

#### Fixing the foundation

Critics have argued that failing to tie baseline State funding to the inflation rate has cost school districts millions, perhaps billions, of dollars.

Since 2013, the State's foundation amount for school funding has remained at \$11,525. That's ostensibly how much it costs to educate one student in Connecticut.

From there, the Education Cost Sharing grant formula adjusts this per pupil expenditure based on how many students a district serves from low-income households. It particularly focuses on pupils who are eligible for free or reduced-price meals or who speak English as a second language. It also considers a city or town's wealth in two ways, looking at the value of its taxable property as well as the income of its residents. Hoping to encourage cooperation and efficiency savings, Connecticut also provides a bonus to towns that send students to regional school districts.

According to the School and State Finance Project, Connecticut's baseline funding rate of \$11,525 wasn't calculated based on an analysis of "the actual costs associated with educating a general education student." More pressing, the rate hasn't been raised since 2013 – even though costs have increased.

If it had been tied to inflation, as tracked by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, that \$11,525 in 2013 would be nearly \$16,000 today. That's a potential funding gap of millions of dollars per year in a single lower-wealth district.

Democrats have indicated their readiness to raise the foundation amount this year for the first time

in 13 years. In addition, they want to tie the foundation amount to inflation so it continues to rise alongside costs each year. Supporters say doing so would prevent the kind of funding gap that now exists from forming again.

In addition to that, Leeper said she wants to start phasing out the tuition districts pay when a student chooses to enroll elsewhere – in a magnet or charter school, for example. The State cost share would rise in tandem and eventually take over local districts' portion of costs associated with that student.

Leeper said these funding changes would free up funding and allow districts to direct it toward hiring staff – a common need.

"They could have more reading specialists and interventionists. They could have smaller class sizes because they can hire more teachers. They could have paras [support staff] in more classrooms ... more social workers," Leeper said.

Berthel said tying the ECS formula to inflation might be too much of a challenge for the Appropriations Committee, which he also sits on, to get done this year. "I just don't know that our budget in the current cycle that we're in would support that," Berthel said.

Nor is it clear that tying the foundation amount to inflation would be as effective as it sounds. For example, Berthel said, school costs don't always align with standard measures of inflation.

"If we bake that into the law and the policy, maybe there'll be years when the cost-of-living index is really low, but schools have additional exposure because of some other factor that's not represented in that cost-of-living index," he said.

As for phasing out the local share when students enroll out-of-district, Berthel said he could "go

either way" but expressed some hesitation. "I don't think we should necessarily be doing that on the backs of every taxpayer in Connecticut," he said.

The problems with the ECS formula go much deeper than these changes can address, Berthel said. To truly go in and fix it, he said, would require enormous changes at substantial political cost.

"There may be a legislator or two in the building that now would have to go back to their district and say, 'Hey, I agreed to support fixing the ECS formula, but now it results in, let's say, 10% less funding for our schools,'" Berthel said.

#### A 'bell-to-bell' ban

Last year, the General Assembly passed a law requiring local boards of education to adopt a policy regulating cellphone use. The policy had to be based on official guidance from the State Board of Education, which recommended removing phones from elementary and middle school classrooms entirely while requiring high school students to keep them off and out of sight.

That stops short of the full statewide bell-to-bell ban Leeper said she's pushing for this year.

"Even the proximity to your phone means a kid's thinking about their phone. So, if it's in your backpack, you're thinking about it, even though it's away," Leeper said. "If it's actually fully out of sight and away and you know you can't access it, it frees kids' brains up from thinking about the phone, and who maybe messaged them, and what they missed."

Research from the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania suggests that teachers have better experiences with stricter cellphone policies in place. Teachers

in New York have also reported classroom improvements since the state implemented its own bell-to-bell ban last year, according to an article from Spectrum News.

The Connecticut Education Association and AFT Connecticut, the state's two major teachers' unions, both support a bell-to-bell ban.

Leeper, who served on the Fairfield Board of Education before being elected to the General Assembly, said it can be challenging for school boards to implement policies if parents are opposed. Making the policy statewide could take some of that pressure off, she said.

However, the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education President Meg Scata said she thinks a statewide ban is unnecessary. She said districts are addressing the problem locally already, and some students – for example, multilingual learners or those receiving special education – need their phones for instructional purposes.

Passing a statewide bell-to-bell ban now, she said, would be like "closing the barn door after the horses are out."

Both ranking members expressed views similar to Scata's.

"Banning, another mandate. I'm for schools having a policy, but let them have their own policy," Zupkus said.

Berthel shared an example he heard from a parent of a child with Type 1 diabetes. The child's phone is connected to a device that monitors blood sugar and can alert the parents if the child has a crisis. That might not work if the phone is shut off or not accessible. ■

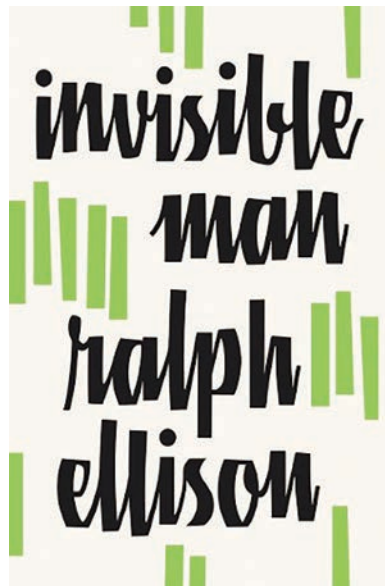
This article originally appeared in *CT Mirror*

## BOOK REVIEW

## Invisible Man

By Ralph Ellison

581 Pages / Vintage / \$9.79



*Invisible Man*, by Ralph Ellison, was published in 1952. Ellison was one of the first American Black writers of literary fiction to be considered classic. *Invisible Man* was the only novel Ellison wrote. It was the only novel he needed to write. But he needed to write it. And America needed to read it. It won the National Book Award in 1953. Black History Month makes it appropriate to revisit admired writing in the field.

Racism, antisemitism, misogyny, and other social blights eventually come under artist's scrutiny. Ellison wrote, as a Black man and as an artist, about the Black man's experience in America. *Invisible Man* retches with violence and injustice. It seems to insist relentlessly that if the past is not alive in you, the future will be given to you by your enemy and be empty. It is a novel of beginnings and growth, absorbed with past and future. Every child is born into a world they must learn. Ellison wrote about the Black man's incredulous discovery of racism as a fact of adult life he will have to confront. It is an uneven and perilous path to discovery, and it is only the beginning. Ellison lets you feel what he felt, and wants the reader to experience what he experienced, to know what he knows about injustice. And perhaps comprehend empathy.

"What riot?" one of the white men called to him [a policeman]. "There's no riot." "If I say there's a riot, there's a riot," the officer said."

That is a white man's dictate. Against this kind of systemic power there is no argument or redress. The invisible man of the title is an

intelligent human being who comes to maturity confronting an incredulous insight: that he is unseen, and that he will always be unseen and misperceived because of the color of his skin. He is given no name. The underlying theme of *Invisible Man* is clear. How would something like this make a person feel?

In this seminal novel, Ralph Ellison is an artist author who chooses fraught scenes that escalate into chaos and flames to articulate his growing rage. Thomas Wolfe and Ralph Ellison had a certain kind of writing in common, a spontaneous, volcanic style. Wolfe wrote like a child about adulthood as it stretched out before his awakening mind. Ellison wrote about the adulthood and racism he was fated to experience, where mendacity was codified into behaviors that were repugnant to an awakening mind. *Invisible Man* is an account of events unacceptable to a thoughtful sensibility. Though they were very different writers thematically, Wolfe and Ellison were peers in age and, as artists, seemed drawn through their writing and art, to their proper destinies, articulated by themselves. Ellison's unnamed character moves from betrayal to betrayal until caught up nearly unaware in the figurative belly of the beast.

In addition to Ralph Ellison, James Baldwin debating William F. Buckley Jr. at Cambridge College or speaking of the Black man's experience in America brings a contemporary writer's understanding to a debate about the place of racism in modern society. This debate, overwhelmingly won by Baldwin, was influenced by Ellison's novel and the protests of the day.

In 1964, the Civil Rights Act was signed into law by President Lyndon Johnson. This was designed to end segregation and the oppressive legalities of Jim Crow post-Civil War America one hundred and one years after Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. *Invisible Man* is a novelist's protest of injustice that resonates to this day. ■

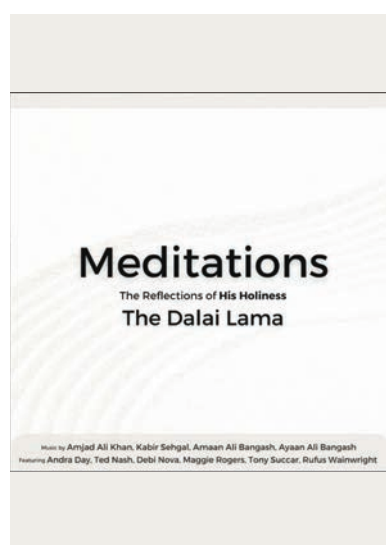
Review by Tom Casey, author of *Human Error*, *Strangers' Gate*, and *Unsettled States*

## Redding producer takes home fifth Grammy Award



Photo courtesy of Grammy Museum

Paul Avgerinos, a Redding-based musician, sound engineer, and producer, attended the Grammy Awards on Sunday, February 1 after being nominated for three awards this year. *Meditations: The Reflections of His Holiness - the Dalai Lama*, a project Avgerinos engineered, mixed, and mastered, won the Grammy for Best Audiobook, Narration, and Storytelling Recording. Other nominations in the category included projects by host Trevor Noah, Supreme Court Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson, actress Kathy Garver, and singer Fab Morvan.



Audiobook album cover

## LIBRARY CORNER

## Celebrate America 250 at the Library

By Erin Shea Dummeyer and Maggie McIntire

After months of planning, Mark Twain Library is commemorating the 250th anniversary of the signing of the United States Declaration of Independence with an abundance of educational and entertaining programs throughout 2026. We have a special landing page that lists public programs honoring this anniversary located at [marktwainlibrary.org/250ammtl012026](http://marktwainlibrary.org/250ammtl012026). The page allows patrons to pursue their own independent study during

this milestone year, and includes a listing of our live programs, along with reading and resources. We are grateful to the Redding's League of Women Voters for partnering with us on this initiative.

We have an impressive list of adult programs throughout the year. We kicked things off for America's birthday with a visit from Redding's Co-historians Brent Colley and Bruce Nelson who talked about life in Redding leading up to, and

during, the Revolution. We have 10 additional programs in the works — incorporating history, music and food — culminating in June with a special Conversations program where members of the committee and the public will conduct a formal reading of the Declaration of Independence. In the course of human events, the Library is helping to make 2026 a memorable year to celebrate our history and founding values. ■

## Good books for good readers | By Margi Esten

I generally shy away from the "books to read before you die" listings but, I stumbled on this one and found a few suggestions I feel I should pass on — just as good books to read!

*Sherlock Holmes: The Complete Novels and Stories, Volume I* by Arthur Conan Doyle introduces us to the cool, calm, collected and brilliant Sherlock Holmes and his partner, Dr. Watson. This collection includes the famous "A Study in Scarlet," "The Sign of the Four," and "The Hound of the Baskervilles" — need I say more?

*Trust* by Hernán Diaz engages us in a quest for truth while confronting deceptions and exposes the ease with which power can manipulate facts. An immersive story, it takes place in the 1920s, a decade of endless wealth and excess. *Trust* was a Pulitzer Prize Winner.

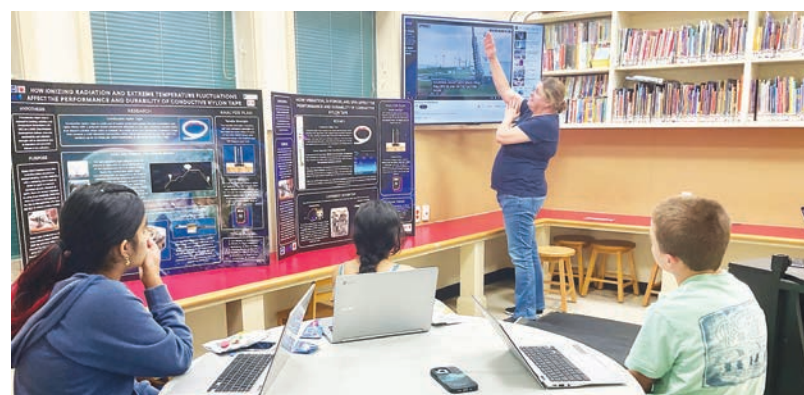
*Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley is arguably the most famous horror story in world literature — a tale of a mad scientist and his monster. It is a moving masterpiece.

*Atonement* by Ian McEwan is a novel of love, war, childhood, class, guilt, and forgiveness. This

story within a story within a story is a simply brilliant piece of fiction.

*The Year of Magical Thinking* by Joan Didion is an intensely personal portrait of a marriage as the author attempts to make sense of the "weeks and then months that cut loose any fixed idea I ever had about death, about illness...about marriage and children and memory ...about the shallowness of sanity, about life itself." ■

## Local teens on "Team Twain" send experiments into space | By Lisa Goldstein



Caroline Hunter leading the group in prep work last summer.

A group of two dozen teenagers, largely from Redding, sent experiments on two NASA missions to determine how materials on Earth would fare in space. The students culminated this year-long program last weekend at Mark Twain Library, where they examined and reflected on their results after the experiments returned from space.

"So, it survived?" asked Eric, a current seventh grader at John Read Middle School who took part in the program. The experiment did survive, and on this particular Saturday in early February, Eric and his fellow "Team Twain" teammates were conducting several tests to find out how the trip into space impacted their experiment.

The students, who range in ages from 11-17 and attend various schools in the area, including public, private, and homeschool, met multiple times a week in the spring. They were tasked with creating an experiment that fit into small cubes to see if it would function in a setting beyond Earth, such as on the Moon or on Mars. The experiment the students designed incorporated a piece of conductive nylon tape, the kind used to make electrical connections in crafts or to seal EV car battery packs and provide electrical isolation.

The program, held at and sponsored by Mark Twain Library, was run by the non-profit organization Cubes in Space, which provides students access to space to design, research, and test experiments on NASA missions. The local students started working together last March, guided in the intensive program led by Redding instructor Caroline Hunter.

"My hope was to show them real-world consequences and real-

world deadlines," explained Hunter. "Also, the kids are capable, and this allowed them to show their capability."

When the program launched at the Library in early 2025, Hunter said she expected just a handful of participants but was "flabbergasted" at the incredible turnout. "These students are so busy, I wasn't sure how much time they would be willing to commit. It shows me they are really interest-driven."

The team spent last spring creating their cube and organizing their pitch to NASA. In late June, NASA launched a rocket into space with 80 small cubes on board representing students from around the world, one of which "Team Twain" designed. In August, NASA sent a balloon into space attached to a box carrying another 120 cubes with the same purpose, also carrying the "Team Twain" experiment.

Seventh-grader Ruby convinced her parents to watch the rocket go off on that early June morning at NASA's Wallops Flight Facility in Virginia. "My dad always likes to take a good road trip, and my mom just wanted to see the rocket launch," she said. Ruby reported to the group that the experience was so fast "people who blinked didn't see it" and she made sure to leave with a T-shirt and stuffed animal from the gift shop.

Back in Redding, after analyzing their data, from weighing the tape, measuring its width, and testing the conductivity, the students determined that the conductive nylon tape did not in fact lose its stickiness despite its exposure to radiation. The results surprised the group, since their hypothesis predicted that the tape's adhesion would diminish. They were not



Photos by Lisa Goldstein

The students gathered to analyze the data from their experiment this month.

all convinced those results gave a full report, however. "The whole point was to determine if it would work in space over a long period of time," explained 10th-grader Sophia. The rocket remained in space for just five minutes, and the balloon stayed outside the atmosphere for roughly 8-12 hours.

The overall experience piqued a passion in Leia, a Barlow ninth grader, that she didn't think she had. "We go a lot more in depth about space here than in school," said Leia. "I'm definitely more interested in it now that I have been able to experience it and play a part in it rather than watch other people work in it." On their final meeting day, many of the students were already planning for their next space endeavor. "We think from the data we have now that it could be used in more extreme circumstances," said Leia.

According to its website, since 2014, Cubes in Space has flown 1,650 experiments representing 2,900 educators and over 28,000 students from 79 countries. Hunter, who has instructed area students in science at a local charter school, had worked with Cubes in Space prior to bringing the program to Mark Twain Library. Hunter collaborated with the Library to bring this special program to the Redding community thanks to a grant from a generous donor. The Library was thrilled to be able to provide this unique hands-on program. "Mark Twain had a fervent interest in new technology, investing in things like a self-pasting scrapbook and a typesetting machine," said Library Director Erin Dummeyer. "He would be quite tickled to learn that his library is sending things into space!" ■

## BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT

# An independent bookstore moves in next door

By Justin Reynolds



Some Books opened in October, and features thoughtfully selected used books and publishing from independent presses.

Staring at screens for hours a day is the new normal for most Americans. Maybe the antidote is as simple as picking up a book — in an actual store, filled with things you can touch and hold in your hands.

That's the idea behind Some Books, an independent bookstore that opened last fall at 346 Ethan Allen Highway, in the same building as Ridgefield Vintage & Coffee. The store offers a curated selection of used fiction and non-fiction books hand-picked by owner Justin Rose. Soon, they'll also feature new titles from independent presses.

"Reading is an analog experience," Rose said. "If you shop for books online, you have to know what you're looking for. When you browse bookshelves, the books find you."

Rose is also passionate about what bookstores should be. The way he sees it, many independent bookstores reflect the personal viewpoint of their owners too strongly, which sometimes alienates customers.

"I wanted to create a space that feels welcoming to everyone," Rose said. "We're more minimalist here and don't want to get wrapped up in any one ideology. Yes, my interests guide our selection, but my interests are eclectic. I just want to focus on books. This store is for readers — for people who love to read."

So, what kind of books do they sell?

"We don't carry popular releases — there's no James Patterson or anything like that," Rose said. "We've got a lot of coffee-table books: design, architecture, art. They're vintage and some are collectible. Our contemporary releases are going to be a little more niche than what you'd find elsewhere. We're focusing less on American fiction and more on international works."

Rose moved to Westchester with his partner, also named Justin (great name), in 2023. They own a home in Redding and plan to relocate full-time once their New York property sells.

"May or June, I hope," he said with a laugh.

A few months after moving to Westchester, Rose and his partner were exploring their new surroundings when they visited Ridge-

field Vintage & Coffee, owned by Charles Moschos. The couple loved the space, noticed a bookshelf in the corner, and struck up a conversation with Moschos. Though it took about two years to come to fruition, that's when the "eureka" moment occurred.

Rose, originally from Charleston, SC, admits he didn't know much about the region before setting up shop. In just a couple months, he's been impressed by the "hidden creative class" in the area — like-minded people who appreciate the arts and local businesses.

"This is my first small business, my first retail store," said Rose, a photo editor and art director by trade who has worked with fashion magazines like *W* and *Vogue Italia* and 100-year-old independent publishing house W. W. Norton & Company over his career. "This is kind of a fantasy of mine. It's a great opportunity, and I love what Charles does. I figured let's try this and see what happens."

In addition to selling books, Rose plans to host reading series and author talks. In the near future, he intends to announce a partnership with a local liquor store — "you know, words and wine" — a chance to enjoy books and beverages in a cozy setting. Stay tuned. ■

*Some Books is open 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., Thursday through Sunday. For more information, visit [somebooks.co](http://somebooks.co)*

# Scam aware The new frontier in fraud

By Anthony Freyberg

Artificial intelligence isn't just making scams easier — it's making them convincing, dynamic, and highly adaptable. Scammers are now using AI-generated, realistic voices, videos, and texts to impersonate trusted people, brands, and officials. What were once crude, suspicious e-mails have become polished, personalized deception.

Traditional impersonation scams — where a fraudster pretends to be a bank, government agency, utility, or business — are evolving. Rather than simple spoofed phone calls or e-mails, cyber thieves now infect social media, including chat apps, and fake sites, creating seamless deception across channels. Refund text scams from utility companies, fake debt collectors, Medicare fraud, and final expense scams currently are among the most common. Investment scams also remain a top source of financial loss, especially

where crypto and digital assets are involved. Fraudsters promise unrealistic returns, use AI to simulate trading, or spin up fake companies and securities.

Law enforcement agencies have cautioned about rising romance scams, often timed around holidays or events like Valentine's Day, with victims losing significant sums to perpetrators posing as romantic interests. Scammers send messages claiming unpaid fees, prompting recipients to click links. These schemes surged dramatically in 2025 and persist into 2026. Pet lovers should also be aware of fake online pet and puppy seller scams. Scammers create convincing ads, websites, or social media posts claiming to sell puppies, kittens, or other pets (often popular breeds). They lure buyers with *low prices* or *availability claims*, then request upfront payment via wire transfers,

gift cards, cryptocurrency, or apps like Zelle/Venmo — and disappear without ever delivering an animal.

It is very important to develop a verification-first mindset. The traditional red flags like spelling errors are now obsolete. It can't be stressed enough — verify, verify, verify! Cross-check links manually and never give money or credentials to an unknown contact. Use the tools already built into messaging apps and browsers (like scam warnings or anti-phishing detection). It's worth a little bit of effort to save yourself from being ripped off. Government consumer agencies like the FTC, FBI and many consumer portals regularly update warnings and FAQs. Reporting scams also helps increase law enforcement's ability to respond and all of us to stay scam aware. ■

# On the Valentine's Day menu with...

## Maisie Todd Wallick of Doom City Bakery

By Pamela Brown

Nothing says Valentine's Day like a delicious treat, so a sweet "kiss" is on the menu this month.

Maisie Todd Wallick, owner of Doom City Bakery, offered a delectable recipe to celebrate the love-filled day.

"Meringue kisses are perfect for Valentine's Day, as the name suggests. They're pretty and elegant, make lovely gifts, and of course, they're delicious. And they are gluten-free," said Wallick. Wallick has a cottage baking license and, along with baking for clients and friends, bakes coffee shortbread for Quartertone Coffee (made with their coffee) dipped in dark chocolate along with caramels and other cookies on a rotating basis. She also bakes for New Pond Farm in their commercial kitchen and leads cooking programs there.

"I love baking, especially cookies. They're lovely little ways to bring instant joy. They go right to the heart," she said.

These crispy, airy puffs are mini meringues, perfect with hot cocoa. "I can't think of a better pairing — it's basically a marshmallow. They're cookies made from egg whites and sugar and sometimes a few other ingredients for texture, color, and/or taste," said Wallick. "I've been making meringues since

I was a teenager and have tried so many recipes! It's surprising how many recipes are out there, actually, given how few ingredients are involved."

Wallick encouraged bakers to experiment with different extracts or powders, such as espresso and cinnamon; colorings; and piping tips when whipping up their own.

Valentine's Day is one of Wallick's favorite holidays. "Anytime you have an excuse to celebrate love, I say do. I grew up surrounded by bakers, and I always appreciate the effort people put into feeding each other. It's an expression of love, pure and simple," said Wallick, who also has fun with packaging her creations. "I like the cookies to feel like a gift even before you've had a bite. I appreciate beauty for beauty's sake, and love when someone takes the time to make something beautiful just because they can. There's not enough of it in the world, so taking the time to put into presentation almost feels like an act of rebellion. And I guess I like that kind of beautiful mischief!"

How will Wallick be spending Valentine's Day? "Most likely at home, eating these meringue kisses, with my family. It's true!" she laughed. ■



Photo by Maisie Todd Wallick

### Meringue Kisses

(Adapted from the *Meringue Girls*)  
Makes approximately 24 cookies

Note: The ratio is two parts caster sugar (if you don't have any, give regular cane sugar a spin through a food processor for a minute or so) to one part egg whites.

#### Ingredients:

3 large eggs, room temperature and separated  
223 grams of caster sugar (equals around 1 1/8 cups sugar)  
1 teaspoon of vanilla paste  
Piping bag and round or star 1/2 inch tip  
Parchment paper

#### Instructions:

Preheat oven to 400 degrees Fahrenheit and place a rack in the center.

Lay a piece of parchment on a baking tray and carefully pour the caster sugar into a mound.

Separate the egg whites from the yolks VERY carefully. (Important: no egg yolks can mix with the egg whites. Not a bit!) Measure 110 grams into a stand mixer with a whisk attachment (an electric hand mixer takes a bit longer).

Place the sugar into the oven and set a timer for 6 minutes. You want to try to avoid the edges caramelizing, so watch carefully. Take the warm sugar out of the oven and place tray near mixer.

Turn oven down to 210 degrees. About halfway into the sugar warming, start whisking the eggs with the mixer until they look like a very bubbly bath — not yet stiff but like soft clouds. A spoonful at a time, add the warm sugar to the egg whites. When you've added it

all, scrape down the sides so there are no grains of sugar on the sides. Whisk on full speed until the peaks are glossy and stiff. You should be able to turn the bowl upside down without it budging, drag a spatula through the middle without it filling back in, and, most importantly, when you rub a bit of the meringue in between your fingers, it should feel smooth, not grainy.

Gently fold in the vanilla paste. Place the tip in the piping bag and place the bag in a tall glass and fold the bag over the glass, like cuffing a pant leg. This keeps the bag open while putting in the meringue. Gently scoop the meringue into the piping bag.

Unfold the bag and gently squeeze the meringue to the bottom, tapping the bag a bit to remove air bubbles or gaps and twist the top. Then snip the end and ease the tip into place.

Place a piece of parchment over a silicone mat or tray (if you have a mat for macarons, the circles make perfect guides). Gently squeeze the meringue to fill a one-and-a-half-inch circle, slowly lifting it to get that perfect tip at the top.

Bake the meringues at 210 degrees for 30-35 minutes. Turn off the oven and let the meringues stay in the oven for 5-10 minutes. Remove from the oven and gently lift one up. It should come up cleanly. Let cool on the sheet, then package.

Note: Meringues are sensitive and sometimes crack or "weep" (when crystallized sugar oozes out of the cracks) but don't worry. "They will still taste delicious," Wallick said. "Just sift a bit of cocoa on top, and I promise they will still be devoured." ■



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# THE NATURAL WORLD

## “Giving a dam” about beavers | *By Ilona Struzik*



Photo by Warren Garst  
A snow-covered beaver

Beavers are more than buck-toothed dam builders – they are powerful ecosystem engineers with benefits that often go unnoticed. They are one of the few animals known to significantly alter their environment, not just for their own benefit but for the benefit of others. Beavers are a keystone species, meaning they maintain an ecosystem that many other species are highly dependent on. The removal of beavers and their dams can trigger a cascading ecological effect, disrupting habitat and reducing populations of fish, birds, amphibians, and plant life.

The North American beaver, *Castor canadensis*, is an herbivorous mammal in the order Rodentia. It is the largest rodent in North America and the second-largest rodent in the world, behind the capybara. Beavers are mainly nocturnal and semiaquatic. They have waterproof fur, big, iron-rich teeth, webbed hind feet, and large, fat-storing tails that they slap on the water to warn predators (or curious humans). Beavers were hunted for their fur to near extinction in the 1700s-1800s. Their population has

since rebounded, thanks to wildlife management reintroduction efforts and government regulations.

Beavers are native here in Connecticut and protected in most states. They are family-centered and live in multigeneration units called colonies. Beavers build complex homes on the water for overwintering made from rocks, sticks, and mud. These homes, called lodges, contain chambers for sleeping, storing food, and even for shallow pools where young beavers learn to swim. Beavers allow otters, muskrats, and voles to use their lodges (rent-free!).

When thinking of a beaver, the first thing that usually comes to mind is a beaver dam. Dams can flood pastures, leading some farmers to view beavers as a nuisance. Why do beavers even build dams? They build elaborate dams to manipulate water flow. When a dam is built, it slows the flow of water, raises the water level, and creates interconnected ponds that provide nourishment and protect beavers from predators. These biodiverse ponds come alive with many types of fish, amphibians, birds, and plants.

When beavers move on from an area, the leftover ponds become beaver meadows. These meadows, a.k.a. animal-made wetlands, act as sponges. They naturally reduce flooding by soaking in and holding excess water. Conversely, beaver meadows raise groundwater reserves that lessen the impact of drought. When beaver meadows dry up, native trees like aspen, birch, and alder flourish in the area. Trees felled by beavers will eventually decay and become nesting

sites for birds, including great blue herons and wood ducks.

Beavers play a valuable ecological role that is mutually beneficial to wildlife and to us. Beaver ponds and wetlands increase water quality, filter pollutants, and help mitigate periods of drought, flooding, and wildfires. Beaver ponds are major sources of biodiversity, which creates more balanced and resilient ecosystems. One study site in New York showed reduced mosquito populations in areas with beavers. Beavers have also influenced how humans build dams and design flood prevention systems. Beaver dams increase populations of endangered cold-water fish such as Chinook salmon and rainbow trout – a benefit to anglers! Understanding these common backyard creatures encourages us to recognize their complex purpose in our shared landscapes. The more we learn about wildlife in our backyard, like the beaver, the more we can appreciate them and work towards coexistence when challenges arise.

The Nature Book Club, a partnership between Redding Land Trust, Mark Twain Library, and New Pond Farm, discussed beavers during its January meeting featuring *Beaverland* by Leila Philip. If you'd like to learn more about beavers, check out this well-researched, wonderful book. Redding Land Trust is also planning a hike with the Redding Community Hiking Club this spring that will include a visit to a beaver lodge. Stay tuned! ■

*Ilona Struzik is a Redding Land Trust Trustee and has a degree in biology and environmental science*

## If trees could talk

XOXO | *By Janice Rotchstein*



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Owls in love

Before you wrap those chocolates, tie the dozen roses, and chill that wine, I need to tell you something.

St. Valentine had little to do with the holiday you cherish. Geoffrey Chaucer, the medieval English poet, is most responsible. And his poem that inspired our traditional celebrations had nothing to do with humans. Rather, the verse heralded the mating season of birds.

No, I didn't drink any of the wine I chilled. I came upon this revelation while looking for a clever inscription to write on my card. That's when I dropped my pen.

A priest named Valentine was martyred on February 14 around 270 A.D. He had disobeyed the Roman emperor's decree by marrying Christian soldiers. Centuries later, Valentine was canonized, but not to symbolize love or courtship. Rather, he was named the patron saint of epilepsy and beekeepers.

Enter Chaucer. In 1381, he wrote "The Parliament of Fowles" – set in February on "Seynt Valentynes day" when every "foule cometh ther to chese his make".

Eventually other poets, including John Donne and Shakespeare, put a romantic spin on Chaucer's

rhyme as did Victorian card makers and eventually Hallmark.

Intrigued by this revelation, I opened my "Peterson Field Guides, Eastern Birds." Sure enough, some do mate in February while others are beginning courtship dances, grooming feathers, or feeding one another. How is that possible, I asked – when many trees are leafless and the weather can be chilly?

I was in for another surprise. Species of eagles, hawks, owls, ravens, crows, and robins are known to winter in our town's conifers – from white pines to red cedars; junipers to firs; hemlocks to yews. Others like northern cardinals, downy woodpeckers, tufted titmice and white-breasted nuthatches often live within deciduous trees' holes or crevices.

So, while these avians are preparing to have affairs with each other, they've been enjoying cozy, symbiotic relationships with trees. For example, in exchange for shelter and food, birds help prevent pest infestations by feeding on insects nestled in the trunk; their droppings nourish roots by adding nutrients to the soil, and by scattering discarded seeds, they ensure biodiversity.

Well, now that I am clued in to the real force behind Valentine's Day, I'd like to propose a toast: Here's to Chaucer and all the trees in my backyard which are busier this time of year than I could have ever imagined! ■

*Special note: Discover nature's romances as you take a stroll through Redding's Open Spaces and Land Trust properties: [reddinglandtrust.org](http://reddinglandtrust.org)*

*If you have a tree story you'd like featured in this column, e-mail [reddingtreeconservancy@gmail.com](mailto:reddingtreeconservancy@gmail.com)*



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# CALENDAR OF EVENTS

\$ = fee applies  
R = registration required

## This Week's Featured Events

### Love & Heartbreak: Valentine's Day Concert

**Saturday, February 14**  
8:00 p.m.  
String quartet covers of your favorite classic and pop love songs  
The Granite  
5 North Main Street  
thegranitechurch.org  
\$

### Israel Putnam: The Man & The Myth

**Thursday, February 19**  
7:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.  
Presentation by author Robert Ernest Hubbard  
Mark Twain Library  
439 Redding Road  
marktwinlibrary.org  
R

### Winter Camp Day

**Saturday, February 21**  
12:00 p.m. – 2:00 p.m.  
S'mores, smiles, summer vibes for families with kids 3-14  
Riverbrook Regional YMCA  
404 Danbury Road  
Wilton  
wiltonymca.org  
R

### Want to feature an upcoming event?

E-mail us at [advertise@reddingsentinel.org](mailto:advertise@reddingsentinel.org) for more information.

## MEETINGS

**Thursday, February 12**

**Gilbert & Bennett Wire Mill Advisory Committee**  
6:00 p.m.  
Town Hall / Conference Room and Virtual  
100 Hill Road and Zoom

**Thursday, February 12**

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

**Thursday, February 12**

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

**Tuesday, February 17**

**Board of Selectmen**  
7:00 p.m.  
Town Hall / Hearing Room  
100 Hill Road

**Tuesday, February 17**

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

**Wednesday, February 18**

**Water Pollution Control Commission**  
7:30 p.m.  
Virtual

**Thursday, February 19**

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

**Monday, February 23**

**OPEB Trust Board**  
6:00 p.m.  
Virtual or Town Hall / Hearing Room  
100 Hill Road

**Monday, February 23**

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

**Tuesday, February 24**

**Region 9 Finance & Operations Committee**  
5:30 p.m.  
Joel Barlow High School / Library Learning Commons  
100 Black Rock Turnpike

**\*\*Town offices will be closed on Monday, February 16 for Presidents Day**

## CHILDREN | TEENS

**Tuesday, February 24**

**National Charity League Information Session**  
7:00 p.m.  
Mothers and daughters (grades 6-8)  
Easton Library  
691 Morehouse Road  
Easton  
E-mail [membershipreddingarea@nclonline.org](mailto:membershipreddingarea@nclonline.org)  
R

**Saturday, February 21**

**Winter Camp Day**  
12:00 p.m. – 2:00 p.m.  
S'mores, smiles, summer vibes for families with kids 3-14  
Riverbrook Regional YMCA  
404 Danbury Road  
Wilton  
wiltonymca.org  
R

## HEALTH | WELLNESS

**Thursday, February 12**

**Love Letters – A Meditation & Mindfulness Session**  
6:30 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.  
Mindfulness session followed by letter-writing to future selves  
Mark Twain Library  
439 Redding Road  
marktwinlibrary.org  
R

**Tuesday, February 24**

**Optimizing Vitality**  
12:30 p.m.  
Program with Dr. Wendy Hurwitz  
Heritage Center  
37 Lonetown Road  
RSVP to [mstillman@reddingct.gov](mailto:mstillman@reddingct.gov) or (203) 938-9725  
R

**Wednesday, February 25**

**Yoga Sound & Healing**  
7:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.  
Meditation, gentle movement, and breath work  
New Pond Farm Education Center  
101 Marchant Road  
newpondfarm.org  
\$, R

## HOLIDAY | SEASONAL

**Saturday, February 14**

**Drop-In Community Crafting: Pocket Hearts**  
10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.  
Drop by and create soft pocket hearts to keep or share  
The Georgetown Owl Market  
19 Main Street  
georgetownowl.com/market

**Saturday, February 14**

**Pretty in Pink '80s Valentine's Bash**  
6:00 p.m. Crafts and nail designs  
8:00 p.m. Movie screening  
Celebrate the 40th anniversary of *Pretty in Pink* with an '80s-themed craft and screening of the movie *Greenwood Features*  
269 Greenwood Avenue, Bethel  
greenwoodfeatures.com/  
pretty-in-pink-80s-valentines-bash  
\$

**Saturday, February 14**

**Love & Heartbreak: Valentine's Day Concert**  
8:00 p.m.  
String quartet covers of your favorite classic and pop love songs  
The Granite  
5 North Main Street  
thegranitechurch.org  
\$

## NATURE

**Thursday, February 19**

**Spring Flower Workshop: Grow Anemones and Ranunculus at Home**  
6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.  
Hands-on workshop by Redding Flower Farm Shops at Auburn Landing  
28 Main Street  
reddingflowerfarm.com  
\$, R

**Saturday, February 28**

**Backyard Syruping for Adults**  
10:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.  
New Pond Farm Education Center  
101 Marchant Road  
newpondfarm.org  
\$, R

**Saturday, February 28**

**February Open Day**  
11:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.  
New Pond Farm Education Center  
101 Marchant Road  
newpondfarm.org

## SPECIAL PROGRAMS

**Mondays – Fridays**

**The Breakfast Club**  
7:30 a.m. – 8:30 a.m.  
Ongoing Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, every weekday  
Christ Church Episcopal  
184 Cross Highway

**Thursday, February 19**

**Israel Putnam: The Man & The Myth**  
7:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.  
Presentation by author Robert Ernest Hubbard  
Mark Twain Library  
439 Redding Road  
marktwinlibrary.org  
R

**Friday, February 20**

**Refreshments with Friends**  
12:00 p.m. – 1:00 p.m.  
Heritage Center  
37 Lonetown Road

## RELIGIOUS SERVICES

**Bethlehem Lutheran Church**

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

**Calvary Independent Baptist Church**

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

**Christ Church, Episcopal**

Sundays at 9:00 a.m.  
184 Cross Highway  
christchurchredding.org

**First Church of Christ, Congregational**

Sundays at 10:00 a.m.  
25 Cross Highway  
firstchurchredding.org

**Long Ridge United Methodist**

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

**Sacred Heart / St. Patrick Parish**

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

**Georgetown Oratory of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus**

Saturday Vigil Mass: 4:00 p.m.  
Sunday Mass: 9:00 a.m., 10:30 a.m., and 12:00 p.m. (Latin)  
Tuesday and Thursday: 8:30 a.m.  
Wednesday: 6:00 pm. (Latin)  
Holy Days: 8:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m.  
First Fridays and Saturdays: 8:30 a.m.  
Confessions:  
Saturdays 7:00 a.m. – 8:15 a.m. and Wednesdays 5:15 p.m. – 5:45 p.m.  
Eucharistic Adoration: Saturdays 5:00 p.m. following Vigil Mass  
30 Church Street

**Temple B'nai Chaim**

Friday, February 6  
Family Shabbat  
5:00 p.m.  
82 Portland Avenue  
templebnaichaim.org

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