



REDDING SENTINEL

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Redding Prevention Council takes feedback and aims to build a healthier, happier town

By Rob Sample

A strong contingent of Redding residents turned out for the inaugural meeting of the Redding Prevention Council, which took place on Wednesday, January 31 at the Mark Twain Library and virtually. At its next meeting, the organization plans to get down to its mission of fostering mental wellness and preventing substance abuse among people of all ages.

That meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, March 6 at the Mark Twain Library. The meeting begins at 7:00 p.m., and all are welcome to attend.

The new Redding Prevention Council is part of a network of more than 150 similar organizations in towns and cities throughout the state. The local prevention councils are funded by the Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) and aim to improve mental health in the communities they serve, reduce substance misuse, and build awareness of where people can turn for help.

"We were really pleased with the turnout for our first meeting," said Meredith Schuchard, Executive Director of the Boys & Girls Club of Redding-Easton – and one of the community volunteers who is spearheading the formation of the Redding Prevention Council. "There were easily 25 people who attended in person at the Library – and a large crowd who joined us online for the meeting as well. We were really pleased with the response we received – and even more important, lots of Redding people gave great feedback on what they see as the priorities for the Prevention Council in our town."

This initial meeting was billed as a listening session, and Redding residents raised a host of concerns during the approximately one-hour gathering. High on the list were loneliness and isolation among people of all ages, the dangers of vaping, concerns about youth mental health, and senior outreach.

Both Schuchard and guest speaker Kathy Hanley, Behavioral Health Director for the Western Connecticut Coalition, noted that the Covid-19 pandemic sparked a wide range of mental health and substance abuse issues among people of all ages. "A lot of people lost family members during

Continued on page 4



Photo by Dana Taylor

Families sledding on Astronomy Hill at New Pond Farm Education Center after a fresh snowfall Saturday, February 17. For more images of Redding in the snow this winter, see page 8. If you have a photo you'd like to see featured here, with credit of course, please e-mail editor@reddingsentinel.org

Boiler, electrical issues close down Old Town House

By Jessie Wright



Photo by Jessie Wright

The historic Old Town House at 23 Cross Highway has been winterized after a failure in the boiler and electrical issues forced closure of the building earlier this month. Chief Building Official Shaun Donnelly noted that the boiler – which was approaching end-of-life and slated for replacement in the near term – cracked and failed this winter, limiting heat to the building. While the Building Department attempted to temper the space temporarily with electric space

heaters, electrical issues then presented themselves.

"We were getting some voltage fluctuations coming from the electrical service equipment," said Donnelly. "We figured that out between Eversource and our electrician, so now the electrical issues are straightened out."

The building has been winterized and closed until repairs can be made, which included draining all the water from the system to ensure no pipes freeze.

The Town had already included boiler and heating upgrades for the Old Town House in its list of projects to be funded through the American Rescue Plan Act, though according to Donnelly, it had originally planned to implement those upgrades following other projects on the list.

"We did have a longer-term plan to replace that boiler with either another boiler or an electric split system, and all of a sudden that became priority. That was

probably going to happen before the end of the year... and all of a sudden, that jumped to the top of the line," said Donnelly.

The Building Department is currently pricing out a new mini-split system to install in the building. Donnelly hopes that his team can install the system and open the building "within the next two to three weeks."

The Old Town House building was built in 1834 and is part of the Redding Center Historic District, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. It serves as a home to Redding's Land Use Department, including file storage and the site for Conservation Commission meetings each month. Carol Keil, part-time staff member for Land Use, is working out of Town Hall temporarily until the building is re-opened. Conservation Commission meetings will be held in the Town Hall Hearing Room until further notice. ■

REDDING'S BIG OUTDOORS

Poliak Pond trails

By Cole Tucker-Walton

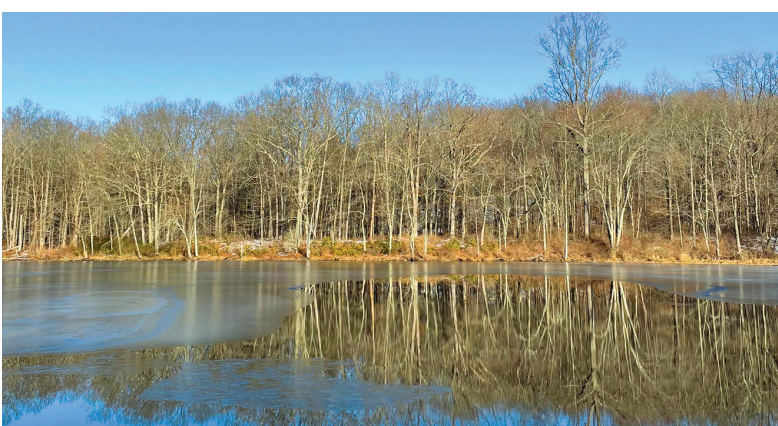


Photo by Cole Tucker-Walton

On Simpaug Turnpike, just a few yards down from a gravel parking spot, a short, shared driveway leads me across the train

tracks. Earlier, I had watched a convention of robins, blue jays, northern flickers, and bluebirds descend on my thawing lawn,

flipping up leaves with their beaks and executing Top Gun maneuvers to ward off rivals. Now, in the sunny field at Poliak Preserve, the snow is melting too. Past a brand-new kiosk, behind the glowing grey trunks of young black birch and red oak, I see the matte grey ice of Poliak Pond.

I start Janice's Loop counterclockwise, keeping the train tracks on my right and crossing a streambed. I hear a faint crackling – melting ice and snow? – and see that the skunk cabbage buds are getting plumper, even pulling back their speckled hoods.

Under a huge old black cherry

Continued on page 6

Selectmen approve proposed capital budget

By Rocco Valluzzo

Highlighting certain pressing capital projects in particular, the Board of Selectmen unanimously approved a proposed capital budget of \$1,768,000 for fiscal year 2024-25 at its meeting on Tuesday, February 20.

Some of these items could be paid for by American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds coming back to the Town from uncompleted or under-budget projects, which otherwise would be at risk of being returned to the federal government if not allocated in time. Non-profits receiving ARPA funds have formal agreements with the Town which state their grant agreement terminates on June 30, 2024.

According to Finance Director Jim Sanders, the Town should have adequate ARPA funds to purchase a 2006 Mack six-wheel dump truck for the Highway Department at a cost of \$250,000. The funds will also cover \$85,000 for a Ford F-350 pickup truck.

The Selectmen also approved \$350,000 for actual repairs to the fire sprinkler system in Town Hall. The design work will be covered by ARPA funds.

"The expectation is once we have the design, we would actually follow through with the repair," said Sanders. "This is a rough estimate. Until we get the design, we don't know the solid number in terms of the capital request."

Sanders felt another necessary expenditure was the repair of the roof over the offices at the Redding Community Center, which is estimated at \$150,000. Although this could possibly be paid for by more ARPA returned funds, he recommended including this in the capital budget if those funds are not available.

"I think initially we should at least get that on the list for capital... as we get closer to the Referendum, we'll have a better sense of how to fund that," he said. "We'll continue to look at the Community Center roof as we gain more insight."

The Board of Finance met on Monday, February 26 to review the adopted 2024-25 operating and capital budgets for both the Board of Selectmen and the Redding Board of Education. The Board of Finance will hold a public hearing on the fiscal year 2024-25 budget on Wednesday, March 20 at 7:30 p.m. (snow date Thursday, March 21) at the Redding Community Center.

While the date for this year's budget Referendum has not yet been officially set (this will happen at a meeting on April 24), it is currently planned for Tuesday, May 7, according to the Board of Finance budget calendar. ■

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GUEST EDITORIAL

The state of our state's childcare

By State Senator Ceci Maher

A recent state report confirmed what parents of young children everywhere in Connecticut can also likely confirm – our state needs to do so much more to help provide childcare for infants, toddlers, and pre-kindergarteners.

A few months ago, when the Office of Early Childhood released its Blue Ribbon Panel on Child Care, it reconfirmed that one of the biggest issues in our state remains the gulf in childcare support offered versus the needs of working families. It's an issue that requires attention, as its impacts extend well past those families of young children and impact our workforce, our economy, and the future of our state. As the Senate Chair of the Committee on Children, with the 2024 legislative session just a few weeks in, the report was not lost on me.

Before going further, I do want to highlight that in the wake of the pandemic, our state worked hard to keep childcare sites open and caring for children, supporting childcare systems. In the last few years, Connecticut invested hundreds of millions of dollars into childcare and lost just 1 percent of its childcare capacity, compared to the average state losing nine percent. Thousands of families were able to continue to access childcare, wages grew, and state leaders worked to support parents and providers alike.

As always, though, more can be done and more should be done for a multitude of reasons, not the least of which being that with increasing demands on working parents, childcare has never been more important. It allows parents to be able to accommodate non-traditional working schedules and especially supports single-parent households, which represent nearly one-quarter of Connecticut families. Without childcare, parents lose hours and sometimes jobs in order to care for their children, which harms those households and our state's economy.

According to the Blue Ribbon Panel's report, Connecticut's lack of a robust and fully available child care ecosystem is responsible for the loss of \$1.5 billion in our economy. As well, we know that investment in children in their formative years brings financial returns of up to 13 percent over time, which ensures that the tax dollars spent will in turn more than pay for themselves. A lack of services hurts families and employers alike, forcing qualified and talented workers to leave their job or quit the workforce – one in five parents has quit a job or been fired due to issues with childcare – which leaves workplaces without the full staffing levels they need to thrive. Nationally, this issue costs

parents and businesses more than \$100 billion annually.

Beyond the economic factors, childcare is vital for the development of children's brains. In the first year of life, a child's brain is creating one million synapses per second, and 80 percent of brain growth is complete by age three. Pre-kindergarten, with learning and socialization, is incredibly important for children to help them reach their full potential. In fact, states which underinvest in early childhood education often see higher long-term social costs, and these most often impact the families with the fewest resources.

It's simple: Connecticut needs more childcare to support our families, our economy, and our future generations. So how do we get there? I will be listening closely to my colleagues as we work together to develop the solutions necessary to get there. Many of them are already laid out in the Panel's four-point system of suggestions: investing in and supporting workforce development standards (bringing more staff to the industry and increasing capacity); ensuring access for all families (providing affordable care for all families, including low- and middle-income ones); developing an early childhood education system to maximize available resources; and building a funding system that's sustainable and aimed toward the future.

The Panel determined that if these goals are accomplished, as many as 20,000 additional women with young children could enter or re-enter the workforce, with exponentially more children able to access early care. In accessing that early care, children will have early childhood preparation, improving their outcomes in future education and wellness. Businesses will see better productivity, which benefits our economy and our state.

This report and the Panel's work are admirable and in direct support of our state, but accomplishing the report's fundings will be challenging when reflecting the realities of the state's budget and its spending guardrails. Governor Lamont's recent budget proposal for early childhood education funded a number of these proposals, but there are more that need to be addressed to achieve the outcomes put forward by the report. Legislators will need to find solutions to support as many of these needs as possible, and I'll provide updates as session continues.

It's never easy accomplishing hefty goals, especially in a short session which is more of a sprint than a marathon, but I'm looking forward to the challenge, as whatever successes we accomplish will benefit our state for years to come. ■

Sewer treatment plant installs new membranes

By Rocco Valluzzo

To improve output efficiency, new filtration membranes will be installed at the Georgetown Sewage Treatment Plant this week.

The current membranes are approaching the end of their lifespan. A decline in performance had resulted in the need to haul away a greater than normal amount of sludge – a cost of around \$8,000 – between December of 2022 and the beginning of March of last year.

In April 2023, the Board of Finance approved a \$300,000 allocation for the purchase of the new membranes, which arrived on January 2 and should last for ten years. According to Plant Manager Scott McFarlan, three trucks worth of sludge were removed for the month of January to prepare for the installation of the new membranes. Crusty foam on aeration tanks was removed as well.

“We wanted to make sure the preparations for the installation of membranes were taken care of in advance,” he told the Water Pollution Control Commission at its February 21 meeting. “We wanted to take more out than we usually do to provide the capacity that we’re going to need.”

A report from Veolia Water indicated that 22 of 25 preventative maintenance work orders were completed in January. No corrective maintenance work orders were issued. All the performance testing has also been completed.

“I think we have a pretty good plan together,” said McFarlan. “Even when we want to hit the peak flows, we’ll just do it at a reduced amount of time. We don’t want to inundate the new membranes with anything.” ■

Selectmen consider additional budget reductions

By Rocco Valluzzo

Continuing to look for ways to reduce the proposed operating budget for fiscal year 2024-25 further, the Board of Selectmen discussed cutting several items at its Tuesday, February 20 meeting.

Following a budget workshop on January 12, the overall proposed increase for the Town portion of the 2024-25 budget was established at 4.95%. In a special meeting a month later, the Selectmen proposed additional reductions totaling \$266,000.

Since then, the Selectmen have considered other reductions, including deferring painting at the Umpawaug Schoolhouse and the promotion of one of the police dispatchers at a lead dispatcher posi-

tion as required by union contract, which could possibly come from the police fund. These savings would reduce the proposed overall increase to 3.2%.

To help address anticipated retirements in the Police Department and the time lag to fill vacancies, the Selectmen considered adding one incremental police recruit. According to Finance Director Jim Sanders, it takes almost a year to hire a new officer, send him/her to the police academy, and then go through the training with the local police before he/she can operate on their own. If this addition went into effect on January 1, 2025, that would translate to a cost of \$63,000 for half the year.

Such would result in an overall budget increase of 3.65%. If this was made into a full-year position, the increase would be 4.04%. Sanders added that the additional officer would reduce the Police Department's overtime budget in fiscal year 2025-26.

“I cannot remember the last time we had a full complement of our officers,” said First Selectwoman Julia Pemberton, noting there are currently four existing vacancies in the Department. “We’ve not been at full staff. This year is another challenging year for overtime because of unexpected and unavoidable absences.” ■

Wells Fargo to close last remaining Bethel branch

By Donna Christopher

Wells Fargo announced to its customers earlier this month that it will close its Bethel branch at 159 Greenwood Avenue at 11:00 a.m. on May 15.

The branch will be open for use this spring until that date, said Corporate Communications Spokesman Kenrick Thomas.

“This is not an easy decision or one we take lightly. Branches continue to play an important role in the way we serve our customers in combination with our online and mobile channels and ATMs,”

Thomas said in an e-mailed statement.

“Over the last several years, we have rightsized our branch network, and we may continue to combine two older existing branches into one better situated location. Doing so does not take away the importance of our customers and the communities we serve. We apologize for any inconvenience this might cause,” Thomas continued.

A Wells Fargo branch at 1 Eagle Road at Danbury Commerce Park

in Danbury is the nearest available branch to the closing Bethel location. Redding customers may also utilize Wells Fargo branches in Newton, Ridgefield, and Weston.

Among several banks in the local area, TD Bank is the only one with a branch in Redding, located at 60 Redding Road in Georgetown. Asked for comment, Jim Aumack of TD Bank's Retail Network said the 60 Redding Road location is open for business. “We look forward to serving customers in the area,” he said. ■

LEGAL NOTICES

On February 15, 2024 the Zoning Enforcement Officer of the Town of Redding issued a permit for an outdoor space consisting of a stone patio and a pergola located

at 439 Redding Rd, West Redding, Connecticut 06896 to the Mark Twain Library Association Inc. Any aggrieved person may appeal the decision to issue the permit to

the Redding Zoning Board of Appeals in accordance with Section 8-7 of the Connecticut General Statutes as amended. ■

The Redding Board of Assessment Appeals will be meeting on the following dates in the Town Hall Hearing Room of the Town Office Building for the scheduled hearings and deliberations of eligible appeals for tax assessments

on the grand list as of October 1, 2023. New applications for appeals will not be accepted. Applicants must appear in person for their scheduled hearing. Meeting dates for March 2024 are Thursday March 7, 4-7 p.m. and Saturday

day March 9, 10 a.m. - 2 p.m. ■

*Greg Stackpole, Chairman
Redding Board of
Assessment Appeals*

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN to the residents of the Georgetown Fire District of the Annual Budget Meeting to be held on Tuesday, March 12, 2024 at 7:00 p.m. at the Georgetown Fire District Office, 61 Redding Rd, Georgetown CT.

THE CALL OF THE MEETING WILL BE AS FOLLOWS:

To take action on the 2024-2025 Fire District Budget as Proposed by the Commissioners.

Dated at Georgetown, CT this 19th day of February 2024. ■

*Will Ely
Commissioner
Elio Cavicchia
1st Deputy Commissioner
Dan Mecozzi
2nd Deputy Commissioner*

The Redding Zoning Commission has scheduled a Public Hearing for March 13, 2024 at 7:30 p.m. in person at the Town Hall Hearing Room, 100 Hill Road, Redding CT. The purpose of the hearing is to consider the following applications.

1. Application #24-01Z – 33 & 43 Lonetown Road (Onion Field) (Assessor's Map and Lot #21-13) – Town of Redding;

Agent: Drum Hill Chapter NS-DAR & Town of Redding Historic Cemetery Committee, Wilton CT 06897 – In accordance with Redding Zoning Regulations Section 5.11 request for a Special Limited Duration Permit for “Revolutionary War encampment and reenactment of by the Brigade of the American Revolution” on April 26-April 28, 2024 rain date TBD

2. Application #24-02Z - 34 Mountain Road (Assessor's Map and Lot #41-8); Owners Ronald J. DeSantis and Donna M. Livolsi. In Accordance with Redding Zoning Regulations Section 5.5, request for a Special Use Permit for earth moving in excess of 300 cubic yards. ■

*Matt Lecher, Chairman
Redding Zoning Commission*

Corrections to the February 22 issue:

In "Redding resident aims to rock the early vote" on page 2, the article incorrectly implied that new voting tabulators would be in place in time for November's general election. The State is still considering providers for the new equipment, and roll-out and training dates have not yet been set. The times for extended early voting hours in the November general election were also incorrectly listed. Extended voting hours will be from 8:00 a.m. - 8:00 p.m. only on Tuesday, October 29 and Thursday, October 31. We regret these errors. ■

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We pledge to donate all profits to local community organizations.

Hughes to run for fourth term

Housing, energy, and the environment key areas of focus

By Jessie Wright



Photo courtesy of Representative Anne Hughes

State representative Anne Hughes at the Georgetown Arts & Cultural Center, which will be the site of a rally on March 10 at 1:00 p.m. to promote voter engagement.

“Don’t do this job if you don’t like people,” laughed Representative Anne Hughes (D) on Monday, a few days after announcing her re-election campaign to represent Connecticut’s 135th house district.

Hughes, a social worker by trade, feels at home at community conversations to gather feedback from her constituents in the three towns she represents – Redding, Easton, and Weston – and hopes to continue translating that feedback into meaningful legislation in her fourth term.

“I say all the time that I am determined to increase the public’s expectation of their elected officials,” said Hughes. “Increase their expectation for responsiveness, accessibility, and to champion their voices into policy.”

As she considers some of the key issues facing voters and legislators in the upcoming term, funding essential services, addressing the state’s housing crisis, and

protecting the environment rise to the top.

“What I see in this fourth term is that we can’t count on Congress, so we really have to figure out sustainable ways of funding essential services, education, healthcare, to all of our residents,” she said.

In addition to looking for state sources of revenue to address these challenges, Hughes sees collaborating and creating a consortium of state government officials throughout the country as a way to make meaningful change on certain issues, including carbon emissions reductions, reducing gun violence, and tax reform.

Creation of affordable housing in Connecticut remains top of mind for both residents and legislators but is a complex issue for the three towns Hughes represents, which are all “watershed” towns that have restrictions on high-density development.

“From the very beginning, I’ve always tried to mobilize a

public will to step up and embrace inclusion as much as possible, and really have that be a public-led initiative,” said Hughes. While she noted that Governor Lamont and the legislature are reluctant to oppose affordable housing mandates, so far incentives to increase housing options haven’t proven effective.

“I am challenging our three towns to get creative about what we can do,” said Hughes. “We don’t expect watershed towns to have high-density housing, but we need suburbs like ours to do our part to address the housing crisis and not just outsource it to the cities.”

Hughes particularly lights up when she speaks about making meaningful change to protect the environment and enable our communities to face a changing climate.

“We need renewable energy, we need to wean ourselves off our dependence on fossil fuels, and stand up a resilient grid for a climate changing future,” she said. She noted there are bills being considered in the current legislative session that could increase the solar cap in the state. She is also determined to advocate for her district and Connecticut to receive as much of the “unprecedented” funds now available through the Federal Inflation Reduction Act as possible to address climate and environmental issues.

As she reflects on her last three terms in office, Hughes views the lessons she and her colleagues learned during the Covid-19 pandemic as valuable tools as they face the current legislative landscape.

“When a deadly pandemic hits us, it reminds us – regardless of what towns we represent – we are in this together,” Hughes said. “We need states to really pull together more than ever, and I feel like Connecticut can be a model for that.”

WPCC gives green light to nail spa

By Rocco Valluzzo



Photo by Jessie Wright

The building at 12 Old Mill Road where the nail spa will open.

The Water Pollution Control Commission approved water usage for a new nail salon in Georgetown at its February 21 meeting.

Located at 12 Old Mill Road (the other end of the building that also houses Wire Mill Saloon & Barbecue), the Redding Nail Spa is owned by Guiyun Yang.

“It’s a little bit different kind of business than what we have down there,” said Commission Chair Amy Atamian. “It’s nice to have some diversity.”

Depending on the volume of business, the estimated water usage is 35 gallons of water per day per chair, with seven chairs in the spa. Most of the water will be used by pedicure chairs, rather

than those used for manicures.

According to Yang, all the materials used for pedicures, such as sea salt and sugar scrub, are made and packaged in the U.S. No oils will be used, except for skin moisturizers.

“We just use a regular soap,” said Yang. “It’s all very safe.”

Although unsure of the exact number, landlord Al Marsili noted there is a water usage allocation for the property. He had previously appeared before the Commission with the proposal of using the upper level of the property for several apartments, which would have averaged 500 gallons per day.

LWV LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF REDDING

Student Essay Contest
Submissions due April 2

leagueofwomenvotersreddingct.essaycontest.wordpress.com

SAVE THE DATE

THE
GRANITE



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SAT. MAY 18 5 N. Main Street
1:00 PM to late Georgetown, CT

Featuring

Music, Dance, Visual Arts,
Kids' Activities, Food Trucks,
Artist Talks, Open Jam & more!

free
admission

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SPORTS

Barlow Robotics team readies for upcoming tourneys

By Rob Sample

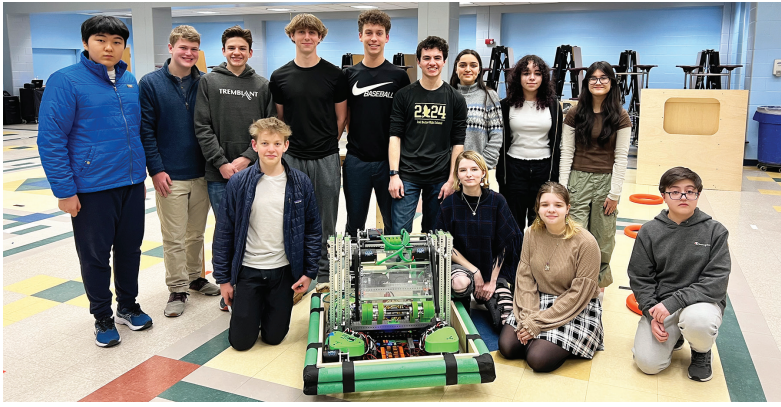


Photo by Bill Kinahan

Joel Barlow FIRST Robotics team members take a break while working on their entry robot. Standing left to right are: Yu-Min Cho, Brady Decker, Brian Weiss, Addison Vanderburg, Noah Beninati, Alex Weiss, Angela Humphrey, Giulia Dos Santos, and Abby Becker. Kneeling left to right: Sam Hartley, Emily Ploss, Melissa Ploss, and Chris Alvarado.

The Joel Barlow FIRST Robotics team is readying its participants – and, most importantly, its robot – for the regional, and ultimately, the worldwide, competitions later this year.

“The qualifying tournaments in Connecticut are taking place a bit earlier than usual this year,” noted Bill Kinahan, a retired Sikorsky engineer who acts as one of the team’s technical mentors. “The first qualifying tournament will take place this weekend, with setup on Friday, March 1 and the actual rounds of competition on Saturday and Sunday, March 2 and 3.”

That tournament will be at Hartford Public High School and the Joel Barlow team – dubbed BARlow RobAutics – will compete against 33 other entrants representing high schools in Connecticut, Rhode Island, and Massachusetts. That tournament will be followed by another qualifying event the following weekend, March 8-10, at Wilby High School in Waterbury. There, BARlow RobAutics will face 31 competitors from Connecticut and Massachusetts high schools.

The team’s performance

in the two qualifying events will determine if it goes on to compete in the New England regional tournament – and, ultimately, the international FIRST Championship. The regional tournament will take place at the Eastern States Exposition (“Big E”) fairgrounds on April 3-6, while the championship is scheduled for April 4-17 at the George R. Brown Convention Center in Houston.

“Other than wanting to win, like most years, the students on the Barlow team want to create a competitive machine that does what it needs to do,” said Kinahan. “The team’s other goal is to teach the people on the team the skills needed in robotics, including computer-assisted design, mechanical engineering, electronics, and software engineering.”

Last week, the 22 members of the Barlow team spent their February Break wiring their entry robot and doing the initial programming work. These steps are critical to having the robot perform the tasks required in tournaments.

“Last year, a number of

seniors in FIRST graduated,” said Kinahan. “Fortunately, this year, we got a good number of new freshmen on the team, as well as enthusiastic returning sophomores, juniors, and seniors.”

Senior Emily Ploss has been on the Barlow Robotics team since her sophomore year. Her freshman year coincided with the Covid-19 shutdowns, and the school did not field a team that year. She served last year as the head of coding for the Barlow team. This year, she’s doing many of the same coding tasks as well as the painstaking work of installing the wiring inside the robot.

“In 2022, which was my first year on the team, I was awed that our CAD model could result in a real robot, with shiny metal and flashing lights,” she recalled. “Now that I’m in my third year on the team, I’m still astounded by what we have accomplished thus far.”

When Ploss attended Helen Keller Middle School in Easton, she was on the school’s Project Lead the Way team. One of the team’s activities involved building small robots using kits from VEX Robotics, a Dallas-area company that creates affordable educational robotics kits. That activity and FIRST Robotics were huge learning experiences for Ploss.

“The VEX robots were quite small by comparison to what we’re doing here,” she said. “On this year’s robot, I’ve been involved in wiring – something I never thought I’d do.”

Ploss intends to major in a computer or engineering-related discipline in college, such as computer science or software engineering. She’d also welcome the opportunity to work in the robotics field professionally. “It’s definitely the future, and it’s exciting to be part of it,” Ploss said.

Redding middle school horseback rider wins prestigious essay award

By Jessie Wright



Katherine Benin

Callie Kuntz-Bauer.

A panel of readers selected her winning essay, which was based on the scholarship contest’s theme, “How do you believe horses/riding will have an impact on your future?” Benin highlighted the lessons in respect, responsibility, and service to others she has learned through horsemanship.

“I have to respect my horse,” she wrote in her essay. “He is a live animal too. Also I learn to respect my friends and my trainer. I respect my horse by not taking my frustration out on him when things go wrong. I respect my trainer by being on time for my lessons and listening to them.”

Benin also wrote how she is learning to take proper care of horses because they rely on her. “If it’s raining or if it’s late and I’m tired I still need to go to the barn and take care of my horse.” Most of all, Benin concluded, “Riding will have a positive effect on my life because the lessons I am learning about respect, responsibility, and caring for others are important. And most importantly riding is a lot of fun!”

The award comes with a High Score Awards Membership in the FW-PHA for the 2023-2024 show year, a \$500 grant for riding lessons with any trainer in the Fairfield-Westchester area, who is a member in good standing of the PHA, and all entry fees on one horse at one 2024 FW-PHA hosted horse show.

Katherine Benin, an 11-year-old student from Redding, has won the 2023-2024 Judy Richter Horsemanship Essay Award sponsored by the Fairfield-Westchester Chapter of the Professional Horsemen’s Association (FW-PHA).

The award is presented to support good horsemanship and recognizes winners in three age categories from under 12 to over 18 years old; Benin won in the 12-years-old-and-under category. Benin has trained with Sea Horse Stables, a full-service show facility at Marchant Farm in Redding, for the past six years after beginning horseback riding at age four and competing in her first horse show at age six. She currently shows in the children’s equitation and hunter divisions with her horse, Around the World, owned by

Spring Baseball at the Boys & Girls Club

Register by March 8 | By Jessie Wright



Registration is open through March 8 for spring baseball programs at the Boys & Girls Club of Redding-Easton. The spring season runs from April 22 to June 8, 2024 and is open to students ages 4-12 (turning 4 by September 1, 2024).

The league offers four divisions: TBall (for children in PreK and Kindergarten in Redding); Rookies (for 1st and 2nd graders in Redding); Minors (for 3rd and 4th graders in Redding and Easton); and Majors (for 5th, 6th, and 7th

graders in Redding and Easton). Fifth graders may choose to play with the Minors. Any player wishing to move divisions will be evaluated by a member of the Baseball Committee.

Season games will take place on Saturdays, with practices and games also held on weekdays, depending on the division. Saturday games for the TBall and Rookies divisions will be at Redding Community Center. Minors and Majors games will take place at rotating field locations in Redding and Easton.

Volunteer coaches are needed for this spring’s baseball season. Those interested in coaching can get in touch at erbaseball.leagueCT@gmail.com

Redding residents can register for spring baseball at bgcre.sportngin.com/register/form/685270650

Redding Prevention Council takes feedback and aims to build a healthier, happier town / continued from page 1

the height of the pandemic and are still hurting from that loss,” said Schuchard. “Communities everywhere have asked, ‘how do we heal from that?’”

The pandemic also heightened social isolation – and its after-effects linger to this day. “We have a special challenge here in Redding, because we lack a town square or Main Street,” said Schuchard. “That type of environment tends to separate people. They don’t see each other at places such as the supermarket, because there isn’t one in Redding.”

Hanley echoed Schuchard’s observation. “Because Redding is such a rural town, there are fewer defined neighborhoods leading to the potential for greater isolation,” Hanley said. “Our organization sees connecting people as a good way to prevent risky behavior.”

Schuchard said that because Redding is relatively affluent, people wrongly assume that there’s less of a need for service organiza-

tions. Similarly, the Boys & Girls Club is heavily associated with urban settings and lower-income communities, she pointed out. One of the Club’s key roles is in building some of that important connectivity among the young people it serves.

“Connection is a basic human need – wherever people live – and we all want healthy communities,” Schuchard said. “Coming up with community connections is the bigger part of the puzzle.” One simple way to do that, independent of any formal organization, is for people to take the initiative to periodically check in on their neighbors.

To be successful, town prevention councils must be grass-roots-driven at the local level. “The Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services helps us to facilitate groups in all our local communities in Connecticut,” Hanley said. “Each municipality is eligible for a certain amount of grant funding for alcohol, tobacco

and drug-abuse prevention, but we see it also as encompassing mental health, gambling, and suicide prevention as well.”

Hanley’s organization, the Western Connecticut Coalition, is a regional behavioral health action organization that works to enhance mental-health and substance-abuse-prevention services in 44 towns in the northwestern part of the state. In this capacity, the Coalition works closely with town prevention councils and is often instrumental in helping them get started.

Hanley was inspired by the initial Redding Prevention Council meeting – and not just because of the good turnout. “People came and had a very robust discussion,” she said. “The fact that happened when the Redding Council is so new was a good thing. That level of enthusiasm will be important for this new council in its work.”



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Bridging cultures with origami

By Pamela Brown



Holiday origami that Masako has taught to Redding community members.

For Masako Nakamuta-Vigneault, a piece of paper is the palette for a work of art. “It’s so magical how a simple piece of paper can bring so much joy. The creation is wonderful – it fascinates me,” said Masako, a 38-year Redding resident who grew up enjoying the ancient Japanese art form of origami and now appreciates introducing it to others. “It’s a different mindset learning new things. If you follow along, you will enjoy it. Most origami starts with a square paper, and when you fold, it’s point-to-point. I’m not crafty and I’m not an expert, but I enjoy sharing this part of my culture and talking about Japan.”

Origami, from the Japanese words “oru” (to fold) and “kami,” (paper), is the Japanese art of folding and cutting paper to make two- and three-dimensional objects and figures. Growing up in Japan, Masako learned origami from family and friends. “When I was little, I always had a piece of paper and made hats and everything else. It was very familiar to me,” she said, mentioning how the ancient Japanese legend of the 1,000 cranes inspired her when she was in school. The legend says that people who folded 1,000 paper cranes, a sacred bird in Japan and symbol of long life, would be granted either a lifetime of happiness and good luck, or one wish. “It was part of our culture and all the students would make birds and put them together with string and wish for peace.”

Masako teaches origami at workshops and events at venues around Redding, including the Mark Twain Library, New Pond Farm Education Center, and the



Photos courtesy of Masako Nakamuta-Vigneault

Masako with campers and their origami watermelon creations at New Pond Farm Education Center's summer camp.

West Redding Fire Department. “Any age can do it, but I love to teach the youth,” said Masako. She tries to choose the easiest pieces and seasonal-themed pieces, such as hearts, butterflies, ladybugs, bees, snowflakes, and watermelon, when she introduces origami to young children and beginners. Most people fold the paper, but Masako also oftentimes follows the ancient tradition of cutting the paper to create shapes. Some creations are basic, but some are complex, like her favorite, the top. “It’s made of three pieces and it spins. It’s beautiful. It’s not that difficult, but it takes a while to make it. Three dimensional flowers that puff up take a little time, too.”

For Masako, origami is a way to relax. “Taking a moment to just sit down and make things is wonderful. It’s a quiet and calming exercise,” she said, adding that it offers other benefits such as using your fingers for dexterity and motor skills and engaging your brain. Despite years of perfecting the craft, Masako continues to practice and watches YouTube videos to learn new shapes for the seasons and holidays, testing out ideas on her husband, Jeffrey.

As a flight attendant for over 30 years with Pan American Airways and then Delta Air Lines, Masako and her husband, also a former Pan Am flight attendant, lived in Hawaii, New York, and New Hampshire. “My husband was driving around one day and passed by Redding and fell in love. I came over and said, ‘this is it.’ It was a convenient distance to Kennedy Airport, and it was a perfect situation and we also had friends nearby. It’s wonderful,” said Masako.

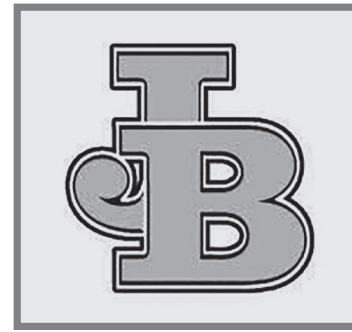
Her career provided her with the opportunity to explore the world, and upon retiring in 2008, she immersed herself in volunteering for local organizations, including the American Red Cross, working as an EMT and a volunteer CPR safety trainer, and serving as a member of the Board of Directors at New Pond Farm Education Center as Vice President. Masako also continues her 50-plus year connection to the Girl Scouts organization, leading service units and safety training for troops that serve Redding and Easton. Starting out as a Brownie in Japan and then becoming a Girl Scout, she’s been nationally recognized by the Girl Scout Council for her outstanding service.

Masako appreciates how her life and interest in origami has helped her connect with others. “People are so open-minded to learn. I think it’s so important to share, understand, and accept other cultures. I’m not an expert, but I love being a bridge to everyone, that’s why I’m involved in so many things,” she said. “Retirement made me a busier person, but when I do origami, I sit still. If I can be part of people experiencing origami and also learning about different cultures, that’s great.” ■



Barlow Beat

By Siddharth Gupta



As Barlow settles into 2024, second semester, and the long stretch of time between February and Spring Break, student activities have been plentiful.

The Debate team traveled to Fairfield Warde on January 6, where they scored eight awards. Debate then scored another eight at Coginchaug on February 3, both strong performances for the team as the CDA State Finals, which will be in Stamford on March 23, quickly approach. Debate has only one more CDA tournament – in Stamford on March 2 – between now and then, as the CDA season comes to a close.

Meanwhile, the newly formed American Red Cross Club hosted a blood drive in the lower gym on February 6. Later that week, the night of February 9 was a busy one at Barlow. The movie

Tangled played in the auditorium, with complimentary popcorn served, with an optional donation box supporting Connecticut Food-share. Additionally, the World Language Honor Societies hosted Café Internacional, a buffet of Spanish and French food, prepared and served by students of the societies. Afterwards, Coffee House, a student talent show hosted by the Tri-M Music Honor Society, concluded the night. A joint ticket for both Café Internacional and the Coffee House was only \$5.

Looking ahead, upcoming events include the beginning of the Robotics competition season, which will occur the weekend of March 2 and 3 in Hartford, and then continue in Waterbury for the weekend of March 9 and 10. Lastly, Theater’s performance dates of *Carrie*, the spring musical, have been announced, and are March 14 at 7:00 p.m., March 15 at 7:00 p.m., and March 16 at 2:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m. Tickets are \$10 for students and seniors, and \$15 for adults. As Barlow comes out of February Break this week, student activities will continue, with many exciting events on the horizon. ■

Siddharth Gupta

is a senior at

Joel Barlow High School

Police charge driver in Church Street accident

By Donna Christopher

A Bethel driver was charged with operating under the influence and failure to drive right, crossing the center line, following a two-vehicle accident on Church Street on February 14. There were no injuries in the accident.

Angel Villaseca-Marquez, 44, was held on \$1,000 bond. He is

due in court on February 29, according to police.

No further details have been released as of Tuesday, February 27 by CT State Police regarding the ongoing investigation of a death on Route 53/Glen Road reported on Sunday, February 18. ■

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BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT

Bill Rowe’s wooden creations enliven properties large and small

By Justin Reynolds



When Bill Rowe was a kid, his great-uncle owned an old inn in Hillsdale, NY.

“There was a bunch of Indiana Hickory Furniture there — rustic furniture built back in the early 1900s,” Rowe said. “When he passed away, I inherited a piece of it, and I was always looking at the furniture and trying to figure out how to replicate it.”

Soon enough, Rowe — who grew up in Fairfield and calls Easton home today — found a book on building rustic furniture.

“In the back were courses you could take, and I took one in the Adirondacks,” he said. “From that point on, I was hooked. It was so cool.”

Heading back home, Rowe picked up a little tent and tenon cutter and started whipping up wooden creations for himself.

“People were impressed,” he said. “Originally, I was building interior stuff — chairs, tables, stuff like that. Then I got into building outdoor stuff — trellises, settees, benches, bridges, gates, you name



Photos courtesy of Bill Rowe

it. It’s really fun, and I love it.”

Fast-forward to today, and Rowe — who owns a landscape design business that operates across Fairfield County and beyond — is the creative force behind Back to the Woods Rustic Creations, a local business that sells all sorts of handmade wooden structures and furnishings.

“For exterior pieces, I use red cedar because of the durability and rot resistance. I harvest it where I can; when I walk in the woods, I see chair parts,” Rowe said with

a laugh. “But I usually end up buying poles these days. It takes a lot of time to process wood and clean up all the knots. It’s just more economical to buy them at this point.”

By his own estimation, Rowe had been building rustic creations by hand for some 25 years.

“My business has basically just grown by word of mouth and advertising on Facebook,” he said. “People are finding me somehow. I got a call from the guy who created the GEICO lizard, who lives up in the Litchfield area, and built huge gates for his weekend place.”

Rowe builds his creations at his Easton home, takes them apart, brings them to the site, and reassembles them there.

“Most of the time, I’m putting things up in pretty remote areas,” he said. “I number the pieces and put them together like a little kit once I get to the site.”

Since every project is different, prices vary on a project-by-project basis.

“It depends on the cost of the materials and how long it’s

going to take me to build and install it,” Rowe said. “I’d say it takes about three days to get a bridge built and installed.”

According to Rowe, there’s exceptional demand for rustic creations in the area for both residential and commercial clients; every now and again, his landscape clients ask him to incorporate a rustic piece in their gardens, too.

“The volume is insane,” he said. “I have eight or ten projects that people are interested in doing this spring. I’m building stuff for people to enjoy. It’s not a store-bought Walmart archway or anything like that.”

If you’re interested in hiring Rowe, the process is simple: You bring him an idea, he draws a picture of the design he envisions and shows it to you, and the process continues from there.

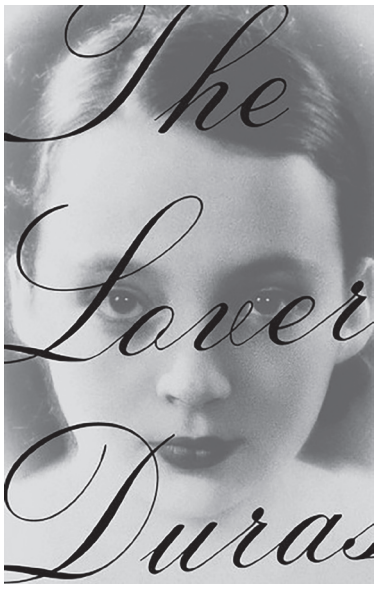
“Tell me something you want, and I’ll come up with a design,” Rowe said. “You dream it, I’ll build it. Simple as that.” ■

Interested in learning more? Search “Back to the woods rustic creations” on Facebook or text Rowe at (203) 763-9266

BOOK REVIEW

The Lover | By Marguerite Duras

Pantheon / 117 p.p. / \$12.99



There are novels for the ages and *The Lover*, by Marguerite Duras, is one of them, a fact known to readers of the book, and those who return to it year after year. There are three main reasons for her success. First, the novel is a prose poem, and the content comes as thoughts in a mind looking back, not with nostalgia, but analytically. Second, the images are memories only, and perhaps not accurately recalled and put forward. How Duras writes is suited for the queries and perceptions of a young woman who sees and feels and thinks several layers below obvious conscious understanding. Her insights are well served in the prose-poem style. Thirdly, it is a short novella of 117 pages only, long enough to tell her story, short enough to sustain the high pitch that poetry allows to emotional narrative.

"The story of my life does not exist," she writes. "There was never any center to it. No path. No line... Before, I spoke of clear periods, those on which the light fell. Now I'm talking about the hidden stretches of that same youth. Of certain facts, feelings, events that I buried." She makes a provocative promise to reveal, and then she delivers. *The Lover* shows how, at

fifteen-and-a-half, her avatar is a woman of passion, with a knowledge of love and death, the torque of heat and sobriety that are the emotional underpinning of living tension.

She came from spiritual and material impoverishment. "Never a hello, a good evening, a happy New Year. Never a thank you. Never any talk. Never any need to talk. Everything always silent, distant. It's a family of stone, petrified so deeply it's impenetrable." Or, "When you're being looked at you can't look. To look is to feel curious, to be interested, to lower yourself." These attitudes and insights into her family have almost Buddhist inflections. Marguerite Duras grew up in Saigon during the French colonial occupation. She is a precocious fifteen-year-old girl when she meets her lover, a wealthy Chinese heir, on a ferryboat crossing the Mekong River.

It is a novel written as an act of will. There is a sanity to her paragraphs that comes close to insanity. And yet the whole remains cogent, artful, vivid, real, and deeply felt. Duras straddles borderlands between extreme emotions. Reaching in style for the sublime, she finds in experience that balance of great beauty and great peril. The story of her lover — older, wealthy, racially and socially her opposite — is sacred and profane, tender and true. The story of her older brother is, oppositely, violent and crude, vicious and unyielding, a corruption of the blood tie. Both stories hold truths about life, and they are the writer's truths held secretly until revealed in old age. And, like all memories of past intensities, they are given distortions that articulate, like an aging face, the ravages of time and experience. ■

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

Redding's Big Outdoors: Poliak Pond trails / continued from page 1



Photo by Cole Tucker-Walton

(scaly bark), I look up to its highest branches for the characteristic silhouette of black knot fungus. I pass a line of imposing Norway Spruces on my right, their children not yet waist-high on my left. My gaze shifts beyond the seedlings, to the bumpy rocks and mounds of tussock sedge lining the shore. The pond is cheerful in the afternoon sun.

A few paces on, I look back to the trail and my heart stops — a wolf! On a leash. I hope I wasn't dictating too loudly. I smile at the man walking the dog; he says, "Beautiful day, isn't it?"

Around the curve, I'm suddenly among hornbeams and a healthy stand of white oaks of all ages. To the birds and bees, Union Buffet. I marvel at old highbush blueberry shrubs, young black birches, mountain laurels coming of age — all thriving in the sun that spills across the wide pond. I catch sight of the man and his dog on the opposite bank, a reminder of how slow my botanical puttering is; his cough reminds me how audible my muttered notetaking might be.

Another curve, and I enter a modest stand of mountain laurel. I hear rushing water. The path is soft and springy with yellow-green moss. Past a black cherry sprouting from its broken stump, past a little patch of privet, I cross the concrete dam on a wooden boardwalk, admiring the waterfall below me. I pause on the other side to photograph the black fruits and drooping flower buds of an alder stretching over the ice.

White blazes lead me to the right, onto Saul's Loop, into a wood of red and white oaks, beeches,

and... chestnut oaks? Their bark is pale and split into thick, soft-edged, cork-like chunks; their high branches are dark and severe against the blue.

Off the trail, lumpy wetland feathers into reeds lining the Saugatuck River. On the trail, the forest feels spacious, pleasant. The exercise is to stop and think about why. How is it different from anywhere else? Well, with only a young hemlock or two, it's not shaded by evergreens, and it's not shaded by surrounding hills. The river on two sides reflects extra light. The understory isn't obscured by invasive multiflora rose, euonymus, barberry, or bittersweet, and it also isn't crossed by native witch hazel trunks or green bursts of mountain laurel. That's not to say the forest floor is empty (lifeless); some patches are scraggly with oak, birch, and beech seedlings. Cute lollipops of striped wintergreen poke up through the snow.

The trail turns and fully reveals the Saugatuck, winding dark and beautiful between golden sedges, golden cattails, rosy bushes, and a backdrop of golden reeds. Down below me, on Aquarion watershed land, I can make out more blueberry, some shagbark hickory, and a whole hill of my recently learned maleberry interspersed with my recently learned nannyberry, all of it strung with wickedly thorned greenbrier. In the water, a single, curly-twigged tree grows on a single tussock sedge. And a whole strip of summersweet along the shore! Who could've planted it better?

Not much farther, near a great

LIBRARY CORNER

By Erin Shea Dummeyer

Last week, I drove to the General Assembly in Hartford to testify before the Planning and Development Committee of the State Senate in support of Senate Bill 148, a bill designed to make digital books and audiobooks accessible for all.

If you borrow eBooks or eAudio from our collection using the Libby app, you've probably noticed an inordinate wait time for popular books to become available for you to borrow. There is a reason for this, and the reason might astound you. You know how when you buy an eBook on Amazon it generally costs you something like \$15.99? Well, the same eBook costs the Mark Twain Library \$55. And we don't even get to keep the copy...we have to buy it again after two years. So, what's a little library to do? We buy what we can,

but it's nowhere close to meeting demand. And demand for digital content at Mark Twain Library has skyrocketed since the pandemic. In fact, it has *more than doubled*.

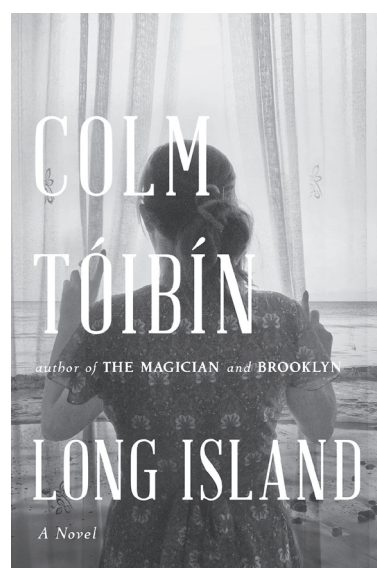
Now take a look at audiobooks. The traditional format with multiple discs in polyurethane sleeves is becoming a thing of the past. Many cars don't even come with CD players anymore, and our teenage patrons often have no way to play an audiobook on CD. Eventually, we will have to purchase all of our audio content digitally. But publishers only allow us to keep our digital audiobooks for two years and then make us re-purchase. Publishers have set these contract terms and are unwilling to give libraries a seat at the table but there *has* to be another way.

This is what Senate Bill 148

proposes: give librarians a seat at the table when negotiating digital content pricing models. We believe this would support authors because they receive royalties on a per-copy-sold basis, and a reasonable funding model would allow us to purchase more copies. Providing digital content in a way that is sustainable for libraries is also better for taxpayers, and making things better for Connecticut residents is the responsibility of our lawmakers, which is why this bill attracted the interest of this senate committee. We still have a long road ahead of us, but please know there is a group of committed Connecticut librarians trying to reduce your eBook wait time. ■

Erin Shea Dummeyer is
Director, Mark Twain Library

Good books for good readers | By Margi Esten



For the legit snow day last week, aside from the usual chores, my hope was to finish *Long Island* by Colm Tóibín. This is a sequel to

his 2009 highly acclaimed novel, *Brooklyn*. Tóibín is a beloved Irish author (yes, yet another Irish author — I can't get enough of them!) and *Brooklyn* was named as "one of the 10 best historical novels" by *The Observer*. It is the heart warming — and heart breaking — story of Eilis Lacey, who is sponsored by an Irish priest in New York to travel to America to pursue "the American Dream" sometime in the early 1950s. She is torn about leaving her mother and sister behind but anxious to pursue a career impossible to find in the small, rural town of Enniscorthy. Enter Tony Fiorella, who frequents the Irish dances in Brooklyn, and the charming romance goes from there. But this novel is actually as much about Ireland as it is about

Brooklyn. You may also know this story from the magnificent 2015 film starring Saoirse Ronan. This beautifully written and historically accurate coming-of-age story was also longlisted for the Man Booker Prize in 2009.

In *Long Island*, it is now the spring of 1976 (spoiler alert: Eilis is married to Tony) in a suburban town on the east coast of Long Island. Now in her 40s with two teenage children, Eilis still struggles as her ties to Ireland remain very strong, despite the fact that she has not returned in decades. This is a story of about longings unfulfilled and the rekindling of deep bonds to the people she left behind decades earlier, exquisitely crafted by this master storyteller. ■




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cubic boulder, a cedar plank announces Furlough Trail, which takes me toward the Land Trust's Henry and Lotte Fields Preserve. It's a short stretch, but pleasantly different — all shadows and stone, tall maples, oaks, and hickories, and Redding's own Half Dome sheltering a snowy brood of rocks.

Across a little stream, held between tall trees, thick old grapevines twist into a wild, floating glyph. The hill seems as if it might crest and crash over me. I leave it behind, over a buried Bell telephone cable, through a post-development gauntlet of barberry and multiflora rose.

I find myself in a flat, dry stretch of woods, along a high and wide stone wall, admirably intact. I'm in view of a few houses on the other side of the Saugatuck, which is much gentler this short distance upstream — narrower, and slower. It's the perfect counterpoint to the pond: shade-giving hemlocks, a flattish path along a stone wall, a docile river, parallel tracks in the snow from — what, a horse and buggy? A sleigh?

Up the shallow slope and around a bend, I come out on George Hull Hill Road, into the sun. Crossing the gravel parking spots, I stop to

lean on the steel-railed bridge and smile up at the big maple and tulip trees. There's a sign pointing to McCormack, but I turn around.

Back on Saul's Loop, I continue counterclockwise and enter a stand of red oaks sharing the canopy with tall black birches. One red oak keeps watch over a plundered remnant of stone wall. It's huge — at least three feet in diameter. Its roots, each as thick as a slender torso, are covered in moss and cradle ferns.

A late afternoon chill pierces my scarf as I curve up a slight hill. I pause at a substantial viburnum — it's not nannyberry — I'm not sure what it is, with a few shriveled red berries still hanging on, and fuzzy branches and buds. (Linden viburnum, I later learn.) There are lots of highbush blueberries, too, and young beeches, young oaks — a whole hill of white oak saplings.

Past a pale stone pyramid covered with a paler green lichen, the trail delivers me to the bank of Poliak Pond, just a little farther down Janice's spongy, green Loop from where I left it. I can hear the occasional car, see each one clearly — but I still feel wholly buffered from the road.

The trail crosses a concrete pipe between the pond and a smaller

body of water to my right. The shady stream is full of cattails. I watch them through a thin screen of gray dogwood (crimson branches) and summersweet (little seedpods held up like rattles). Behind me, a diesel train rumbles toward Danbury and blows its titanic horn. A few tufts of cattail fluff waft toward me, catching the light.

I linger over the twigs and buds of a red maple. They're strikingly different from sugar maple, a difference that was less pronounced only a month ago: now they're smooth, shiny, and a vibrant red, like cherry candy. My focus shifts out behind the branches in my hand: a crazily twisted highbush blueberry curves out over the pond.

More blueberry bushes line the short path back to the field. Another train rumbles by, this one headed to South Norwalk. What a perfect little loop around the pond, hidden just behind the tracks! No vending machine, though, so I stop down the road for a ginger ale and a story for another time. ■

Cole Tucker-Walton
is a member of the
Redding Land Trust
Board of Trustees

OBITUARY

Julia Anne Barroga July 8, 1957 – February 12, 2024



Julia Anne Barroga, 66, of Oakland, passed away on Monday, February 12, 2024. Beautiful inside and out, Julia Anne Barroga (maiden name Bamford) was born at Georgetown University Hospital in Washington, D.C. on July 8, 1957.

She was the daughter of the late Ronald William Bamford and Eva

Frances (McIntire) Bamford.

Ronald McIntire, Julia's grandfather, was a delegate in the Maryland State Legislature for Garrett County from 1947-1950. He was the owner of McIntire Hardware, a furniture and hardware store in Oakland.

Julia's grandmother, Adella, was a local farm girl. Her family owned thousands of acres of farmland in Garrett County.

After moving to Connecticut, Julia and her family would travel every summer to Deep Creek Lake to her grandmother's lake house. Julia could swim in the lake before she could walk.

Julia grew up primarily in Redding, where she attended John Read Middle School and graduated from Joel Barlow High School in 1975.

She had many interests and

accomplishments, including singing, playing guitar, ballet dancing, and horseback riding.

After high school, Julia worked as a journalist for Connecticut's Weston Forum. She also had several other jobs, among which was as a fashion consultant and model.

Julia eventually made her way to California, where she met her husband and gave birth to their three sons. The family was raised in Santa Cruz, CA.

Julia started story hour at the La Selva Beach Branch Library in the 1980s. While raising her sons, she went back to school, studied early childhood development, and then became a preschool teacher at Community Interplay in Watsonville, CA.

Julia also volunteered with outreach programs for migrant workers' children. She served

as a deacon at La Selva Beach Community Church for many years. She also fought and won the battle to ban the use of highly toxic fumigation of flower crops in the middle of her California neighborhood.

Julia was a double threat — both brains and beauty. Julia stood out as a loving mother, educator, dancer, spiritual healer, activist, animal lover, musician, writer, model, avid gardener, antique specialist, and accomplished equestrian.

Over the last few years, Julia rekindled her faith in God and Jesus.

Julia loved traveling, but even more so loved instilling a sense of home. She dedicated her life to raising her three boys.

Julia is survived by her three sons, Devin Drew Barroga of

Maryland, Ian MacIntyre Barroga of Maryland, and Andrew James Barroga of California; one brother, Christopher Bamford; two sisters, Cynthia Bamford and Sandra Bamford; former spouse, Kenneth James Barroga; nephews, Felipe Barroga of Hawaii, Christopher Anderson of California, James Anderson of Washington, Dustin Bamford of California, and Keegan Bamford of California; and nieces, Christine Kress of Hawaii and Claire DeRama of Hawaii.

Julia's family is in the process of planning Celebration of Life events. Information will be provided at a later date.

Condolences may be extended to the family at newman-funeralhomes.com (along with reading of Julia's unabridged obituary). ■

The Aldrich breaks ground on sculpture garden and campus renovation

By Jessie Wright



Photo by Jessie Wright

Matt Pugliese, Eric Diefenbach, Diana Bowes, Eddie Marshall, and Cybele Maylone at the groundbreaking ceremony for The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum's new Sculpture Garden.



Rendering by STIMSON

A rendering of the the Sculpture Garden and campus renovation project at The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum in Ridgefield. The project, due to be completed this fall, will add native plantings, ADA-accessible walkways, an outdoor amphitheater, and a 50% increase in space available to artists and community members to the Museum's three-acre property.

Increased community access to the arts and inspiring outdoor space are at the center of an ambitious new renovation project at The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum in Ridgefield.

A cheerful group of Board members, community members, and government officials gathered on Monday, February 26 to break ground on the new Sculpture Garden behind the building, which will provide free, ADA-compliant access to the grounds and increased space for art exhibitions and events.

While outdoor exhibitions have been part of the Museum's programming since its founding 60 years ago, its outdoor space has been challenging due to a lack of accessible walkways, seating, and shade. The renovation of the Museum's three-acre property seeks to provide free and accessible access for community members stretching from Main Street to the back of the grounds.

"This project will dramatically

transform our campus, giving artists new possibilities here, giving the public access here, and will improve the ecological health of the site," said The Aldrich Executive Director Cybele Maylone.

The renovations were designed by landscape architecture firm STIMSON out of Cambridge, MA, with an eye towards remediating invasive species, encouraging native plantings, and creating spaces for the contemporary art museum's changing collections and installations.

The project will include the addition of 40 mature trees, planting of native species, improved stormwater management, installation of accessible walkways and seating, and the creation of an outdoor amphitheater for programming. The Museum estimates the project will create 50% more available space for artists and the community to utilize.

The Board of Trustees approved a \$3.25 million fundraising goal in 2022 for the undertaking. The

State has supported the project with two grants — a \$500,000 Good to Great grant and an Urban Act Grant through the Department of Economic and Community Development. Additional fundraising is still underway.

"This is a great project," said Matt Pugliese, Deputy Commissioner of Connecticut's Department of Economic and Community Development, "You can see with the two awards that the State of Connecticut has made towards this that it shows what the State values."

The Aldrich expects construction to conclude this fall, with a grand opening on November 17 with the group exhibition "A Garden of Promise and Dissent", which will showcase the works of over 20 artists in both the Museum's indoor and outdoor galleries. ■

To learn more, visit thealdrich.org

Community arts and events space prepares for preliminary opening in May

By Donna Christopher



The Granite Church building at 5 North Main Street.

Leaders of the community arts and music venue to be housed in the historic Granite Church at 5 North Main Street in Georgetown continue to fundraise for the renovations to the building ahead of opening this spring. The venue, which has plans to also house a cafe and offer visual arts and theater, will be re-named The Granite.

The name change is to "not confuse people about it being an active religious organization," explained Founder Richard Wenning, who also serves as the Executive Director for BeFoundation which purchased the historic building in 2022.

The non-profit is now working on plans for "The Granite Underground" space, which will become a bar/lounge/cafe in the lower level, according to Wenning.

"One of the most exciting things about this whole venture is how many people have come, and continue to come forward volunteering, participating, and partaking in The Granite," Wenning said. Residents reach out nearly every week asking if they can use space for their specific initiative, and a Creative Advisory Committee to help guide programming filled up quickly.

The Granite's central themes are "community" and "a place to gather" and will be celebrated with an opening event on May 18. Once the heat, water, and bathrooms are ready ahead of the event, The Granite will then be available for community use as a private event space for up to 50 people.

Wenning said there is more work ahead to "fully rehabilitate the building to allow for better access and larger occupancy."

Efforts continue to raise \$1.5 million in private donations and \$1.5 million in public funding through state and local sources for The Granite and The Granite Underground. Spring 2025 is when major renovations are anticipated to include a new entrance and ADA-compliant access to the building.

Wenning said, "That is dependent on state funding. The Board of Selectmen chose not to award ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) funds to the project, so that has set us back about a year on the building rehabilitation to get to full public use with a larger capacity." ■

For more information, visit thegranitechurch.org or social channels @thegranitechurch

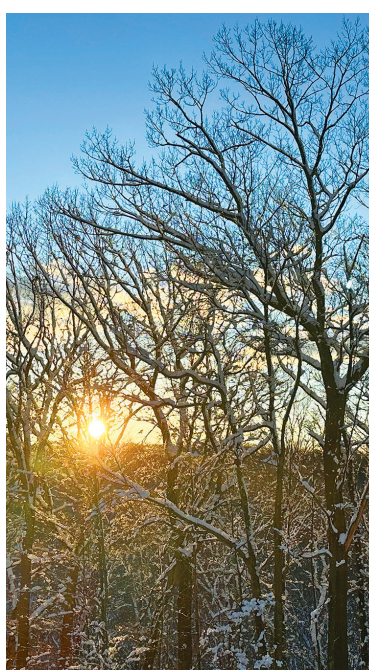
REDDING HISTORICAL SOCIETY
LONETOWN FARM AND MUSEUM

Public Open House with Guided Tour
43 Lonetown Road, Redding
March 9, 16, 23 / 1:00 - 4:00 PM

Members and children Free
Non-Members \$10

Waking to a winter wonderland

Following a Nor'easter on Tuesday, February 13, Redding residents awoke to another several inches of fluffy snow on Saturday, February 17. We hope you enjoy some of the best photographs *Sentinel* readers submitted of the wintry scenes throughout town. ■



Top row (left to right): Photo by Mary Bailey - Sky over Poverty Hollow Road. Photo by Ed Staunton - Maple tree taps for syrup making against a snowy backdrop. Photo by Hugh Holt - Little River Preserve after Saturday's snowfall. Middle row (left to right): Photo by Dana Taylor - A winter view of Lonetown Farm. Photo by Donna DeMusis Dekle - Sun after a snowstorm. Photo by Lisa Richter - The Hopewell Woods Road entrance to Collis P. Huntington State Park. Bottom row (left to right): Photo by Dana Taylor - The Saugatuck Reservoir. Photo by Marjorie Derven - A yard on Cross Highway blanketed in snow.

THE NATURAL WORLD

Foundation plantings *Part one* | By Terry Karpen



Photo by Terry Karpen / Entry garden

A primary consideration with most homeowners is to plant a soldier-like formation of plants to surround the house. There is usually an unquestioned assumption that this is the proper composition – and more so when a homeowner is involved in a makeover planting. However, the first detail of garden and landscape design is never to be influenced by the existing plantings and layout.

The style of planting shrubs to hide a house's foundation originated in the late 1800s, when new suburban communities of large Victorian homes were built with

high front and side foundations. A common layout was an expanse of at least 30 feet of lawn sweeping up from the sidewalk into a five-foot planting bed overflowing with rhododendrons, yews, and hollies.

Decades later, in the 1920s, landscape architect Frank Waugh, a contemporary of F. L. Olmsted Jr., advocated this style of planting in his popular publication on foundation planting, and this further influenced the unquestioned acceptance of the practice.

Suburban growth accelerated rapidly after World War II, and housing developments were

constructed by developers who built acres of inexpensive “tract housing” throughout the country. “Mass migration to suburban areas was a defining feature of American life after 1945. Before World War II, just 13% of Americans lived in suburbs. By 2010, however, suburbia was home to more than half of the U.S. population. The owner occupied, single-family home, surrounded by a yard, and set in a neighborhood outside the urban core came to define everyday experience for most American households,” explained Becky Nicolaides and Andrew

Weise in their research paper, *Suburbanization in the United States after 1945*.

In this described suburban setting, foundation plantings of rows of shrubs became obligatory in American landscapes. And usually, the proportion of the size of the plants was suited for the large Victorian houses and not a match for the newer, smaller houses. Unfortunately, this scheme continues to be the norm.

James Rose was one of the leaders of the modern movement in American landscape architecture. He had an ability to perceive humor about “the ugly foundation that ‘cries out’ to be covered.” He was critical of foundation plantings as a symptom of the problem. In his book, *Creative Gardens*, he wrote, “The effort spent on treating them specifically is patchwork, and as patchwork, it usually succeeds in attracting more attention than the original problem. Statistics will bear me out that millions are spent each year in attempts to cover this specific mistake with foliage of all kinds, yet with the house looming out of the ground, it looks like parsley at the base of a turkey. Except that the ugly foundation is an inexcusable fault in building construction, once you have it the problem is similar to that of having a large nose: you either live with it, resort to reconstruction in the form of surgery, or do something to attract attention to other parts. You do not hang a bell on it to cover it up.”

Landscape design is more than just arranging plants along the base of the house. A broader approach is to consider all the details that will put the house into the landscape in a way that will make a larger composition out of the whole

property. The goal is to create unity between house and landscape. Garden and landscape designer Kathryn Herman says, “A well-crafted garden is one that respects the architecture of the house and plays to its stylistic theme. A home with a strong symmetrical facade will do well with formal gardens, while a rambling asymmetrical house is better served by gardens that are less formal.”

There are an enormous variety of plants and design ideas to choose from at the present time, rather than an arbitrarily imposed planting for the sake of fashion. Think layers for the planting design, and always consider four seasons of interest. Even so, plants, “like parsley at the base of the turkey”, are not the only available solution. Foundation plantings might make sense if you're trying to hide an ugly foundation, but it is not necessary to plant a line of shrubs all the way across the foundation. The front of the house can be designed as an entry garden that incorporates the walkway, lawn, and driveway. A house in harmony with its surrounding landscape should feel welcoming and bring comfort, beauty, and pleasure. There are practical and beautiful solutions for all garden and landscape challenges, and there's still more to come in the next article. ■

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

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

\$ = fee applies
R = registration required

This Week's Featured Events

Conversations in a Brave Space: LGBTQ+ Beyond the Letters

Thursday, February 29
7:00 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.
Presented in partnership by Mark Twain Library and Redding League of Women Voters.
Mark Twain Library
439 Redding Road
marktwainlibrary.org **R**

Troop 306 Gourmet Pancake Breakfast

Saturday, March 2
9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.
West Redding Firehouse
306 Umpawaug Road
zeffy.com/en-US/ticketing/e5c2d514-7a7a-441e-8505-505049b98910
\$, **R**

Lyrics Coffeehouse – Pat Wictor

Friday, March 8
7:30 p.m.
BYOB and enjoy an evening of live music by local musicians.
Redding Community Center
37 Lonetown Road
townofreddingct.org/parks-and-recreation/upcoming-events/lyrics-coffee-house \$

Want to feature an upcoming event?

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

ARTS

Saturday, February 24 – Sunday, March 24

The Ridgefield Guild of Artists' Focus On: 3-Dimensional
12:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.
Wednesdays – Sundays
34 Halpin Lane
Ridgefield
rgoa.org/focus-on-3-dimensional

Thursday, February 29

Irish Session in the Snug
6:30 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.
Open music session for musicians and listeners alike.
Nod Hill Brewery
137 Ethan Allen Highway
Ridgefield
nodhillbrewery.com

Thursday, March 7

Paint and Sip
7:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.
Enjoy refreshments and create a painting inspired by New Pond Farm's landscape.
New Pond Farm Education Center
101 Marchant Road
newpondfarm.org
\$, **R**

Friday, March 8

Lyrics Coffeehouse – Pat Wictor
7:30 p.m.
BYOB and enjoy an evening of live music by local musicians.
Redding Community Center
37 Lonetown Road
townofreddingct.org/parks-and-recreation/upcoming-events/lyrics-coffee-house \$

Sunday, March 10

The Essex Octet
3:00 p.m.
Eight virtuosos presented by Danbury Concert Association.
WCSU Visual & Performing Arts Center
43 Lake Avenue Extension
Danbury
danburymusic.org
\$

Sunday, March 10

Spring Poetry Series
4:00 p.m. – 5:30 p.m.
Readings by poets Gail Carson Levine, Nicole Caruso Garcia, Phillip K. Lu, and Susan Campbell Bartoletti.
Byrd's Books
178 Greenwood Avenue
Bethel
byrdsbooks.com/event/spring-poetry-series-march-10th-4pm
R

Sunday, March 17

Save the Date: Syncopation Art Show Opening
3:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.
Enjoy art and jazz at this gallery opening event.
Georgetown Arts & Cultural Center
5 Main Street
gtownarts.com

CHILDREN | TEENS

Sunday, March 3

Activism in Poetry Workshop (Grades 5-8)
1:00 p.m. – 2:00 p.m.
Mark Twain Library
439 Redding Road
marktwainlibrary.org
R

Tuesday, March 12

Storytime for Children Ages 1-5 with an Adult
10:30 a.m. – 11:15 a.m.
Nature story and related activities
New Pond Farm Education Center
101 Marchant Road
newpondfarm.org
\$, **R**

Saturday, March 16

STEM at New Pond Farm – Egg Drop
10:30 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.
Grades K-4
New Pond Farm Education Center
101 Marchant Road
newpondfarm.org
\$, **R**

CRAFTS

Sundays, March 3, 10, and 17

Knitting Series: Make a Fringe Scarf!
11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
Three-part series for middle, high school, and adults.
New Pond Farm Education Center
101 Marchant Road
newpondfarm.org
\$, **R**

Sunday, March 3

Knitting by the Fire: Cable Knit Cowl
3:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.
Two session course
New Pond Farm Education Center
101 Marchant Road
newpondfarm.org
\$, **R**

Sunday, March 24

Needlework Drop-In
2:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.
New Pond Farm Education Center
101 Marchant Road
newpondfarm.org

FOOD | WINE

Saturday, March 2

Barlow Girls & Boys Lacrosse Pancake Breakfast
8:30 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.
ReLAX Clinics for grades K-8 running from 9:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m. (girls) and 10:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m. (boys)
Joel Barlow High School
100 Black Rock Turnpike
\$

Saturday, March 2

Troop 306 Gourmet Pancake Breakfast
9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
Registration now open.
West Redding Firehouse
306 Umpawaug Road
zeffy.com/en-US/ticketing/e5c2d514-7a7a-441e-8505-505049b98910
\$, **R**

Tuesday, March 5

Cooking with the Thirsty Radish – Breakfast Buns & Brunch
7:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.
Virtual event
Mark Twain Library
marktwainlibrary.org
R

Saturday, March 9 and Sunday, March 10

In the Kitchen, cooking – Granola Yogurt Parfaits
10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. on Saturday (Grades 6-12)
2:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m. on Sunday (Grades 2-5)
New Pond Farm Education Center
101 Marchant Road
newpondfarm.org
\$, **R**

HEALTH | WELLNESS

Thursday, March 7

Sit to be Fit: A Chair Yoga Series with Viki
12:30 p.m. – 1:15 p.m.
Virtual
Mark Twain Library
marktwainlibrary.org
R

Saturdays March 2 and March 9

Guided Mindfulness & Stress Reduction
8:15 a.m. – 9:00 a.m.
A 45-minute guided mindfulness and stress reduction exercise. Pay what you can.
Georgetown Collective
28 Main Street, A
georgetowncollective.org/events
\$, **R**

NATURE

Tuesday, March 5

Rewilding Your Yard
11:00 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.
New Pond Farm Education Center
101 Marchant Road
newpondfarm.org
\$, **R**

Friday, March 8

Stargazing
6:30 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.
Part science, part folklore, enjoy a low-tech night of stargazing with adults and families with school-aged children.
New Pond Farm Education Center
101 Marchant Road
newpondfarm.org
\$, **R**

Saturday, March 9

Woodcock Walk
5:45 p.m. – 6:45 p.m.
New Pond Farm Education Center
101 Marchant Road
newpondfarm.org
Free for members.
\$, **R**

Monday, March 11

Let Us Give to Nature
11:30 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.
Light lunch and talk by Clan Mother Shoron Wuapakuay Piper, Tribal leader of the Golden Hill Paugusset Native American Tribe.
Redding Community Center
37 Lonetown Road
reddinggardenclub.org/monthly-meetings
R

RELIGIOUS SERVICES

Bethlehem Lutheran Church
Sundays at 10:00 a.m. (in person) or 10:15 a.m. (Zoom)
44 Portland Avenue
bethlehemplutheranct.org

Calvary Independent Baptist Church
Adult and Child Sunday School at 10:00 a.m. / 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 11:00 a.m.
201 Long Ridge Road, Danbury
longridgeumc.com

Sacred Heart / St. Patrick Parish

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

St. Patrick Church:

Fridays during Lent:
7:00 p.m. Stations of the Cross
Saturday Vigil Mass: 5:30 p.m.
Sunday Mass: 8:30 a.m. & 10:30 a.m., 5:00 p.m.
Weekday Mass:
Monday – Friday at 8:30 a.m.
Mondays and Thursdays
Eucharistic Adoration: 7:00 p.m.
169 Black Rock Turnpike
sacredheart-stpat.org

SPECIAL PROGRAMS

Thursday, February 29

Conversations in a Brave Space: LGBTQ+ Beyond the Letters
7:00 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.
Presented in partnership by Mark Twain Library and Redding League of Women Voters
Mark Twain Library
439 Redding Road
marktwainlibrary.org
R

Thursday, March 7

Founders Circle – first meeting
6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.
Join female-identifying founders to share ideas and make connections.
Georgetown Collective
28 Main Street, A
georgetowncollective.org/events
\$, **R**

Friday, March 8

The New England Vampire Panic (Teens and Adults)
6:30 p.m. - 7:30 p.m.
Mark Twain Library
439 Redding Road
marktwainlibrary.org
R

Saturdays, March 9, 16, and 23

Redding Historical Society Lonetown Farm and Museum Public Open House with Guided Tour
1:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.
Members and children free;
Non-members \$10.
Lonetown Farm and Museum
43 Lonetown Road
Call (203) 938-9095 with questions.
\$, **R**

Sunday, March 10

The Future of Innovation – John Kao
4:00 p.m. - 5:30 p.m.
Presented by the Wilton Historical Society and Wilton Library.
Wilton Library
137 Old Ridgefield Road, Wilton
wiltonhistorical.org/public-programs/history-lecture-series
R

MEETINGS

Monday, March 4

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

Monday, March 4

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

Tuesday, March 5

Redding Board of Education
7:00 p.m.
John Read Middle School / Community Room
486 Redding Road
er9.org

Tuesday, March 5

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

Wednesday, March 6

Brown Bag Lunch with First Selectwoman
12:00 p.m.
Redding Community Center
37 Lonetown Road
townofreddingct.org

Thursday, March 7

Redding Safety Committee
4:00 p.m.
Virtual
townofreddingct.org

Thursday, March 7

Board of Assessment Appeals
4:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.
Town Hall / Hearing Room
100 Hill Road
townofreddingct.org

Thursday, March 7

Democratic Town Committee
7:30 p.m.
Town Hall / Hearing Room
100 Hill Road
townofreddingct.org

Saturday, March 9

Board of Assessment Appeals
9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
Town Hall / Hearing Room
100 Hill Road
townofreddingct.org

Monday, March 11

Freedom of Information Workshop
5:00 p.m.
Town Hall / Hearing Room
100 Hill Road
townofreddingct.org

Tuesday, March 12

Georgetown Fire District Meeting
5:00 p.m.
61 Redding Road
townofreddingct.org

Tuesday, March 12

Georgetown Fire District Annual Budget Meeting
7:00 p.m.
61 Redding Road
townofreddingct.org

Thursday, March 12

Redding Fire District 1
7:00 p.m.
186 Black Rock Turnpike
townofreddingct.org

Tuesday, March 12

Planning Commission
7:30 p.m.
Town Hall / Hearing Room
100 Hill Road
townofreddingct.org

Wednesday, March 13

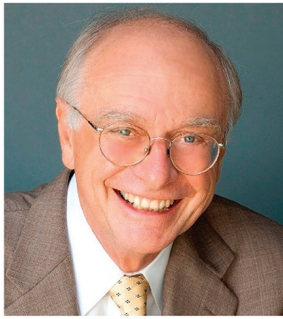
Commission on Aging
9:00 a.m.
Heritage Center
37 Lonetown Road
townofreddingct.org



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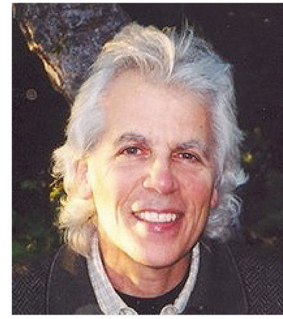
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Kim Cuniberti
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Tim Dent
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