

REDDING SENTINEL

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Historic Review Committee seeks clarification on Wire Mill Cafeteria

By Anne Young Albanese

The Historic Review Committee held a special meeting on Thursday, March 26 to consider keeping or waiving a 180-day demolition delay period for the Cafeteria building at the former Gilbert & Bennett Wire Mill site. The Town's current plan has the building being demolished to allow vehicular access into the site.

The role of the Historic Review Committee is to determine whether to keep or waive a 180-day demolition delay for historically significant buildings and structures in town. The delay is to allow the Committee to gather information

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Photo by Jen Wastrom

Crocuses, colorful harbingers of spring, have awakened throughout yards and along the sides of roads around town. If you have a photo you'd like to see featured here, e-mail editor@reddingsentinel.org.

Tighe & Bond unveils plans for Sport Hill and Long Wall bridges

By Rocco Valluzzo

With construction scheduled to start next year, the Town's engineering firm of Tighe & Bond presented designs for two new bridges at a special meeting of the Board of Selectmen on Monday, March 23.

The bridges will replace those on Sport Hill Road and Long Wall Road that were destroyed by the August 2024 storm that dropped nearly eight inches of rain on Redding. Costs are \$2,067,500 and \$2,563,750 respectively.

According to Senior Project Manager Jonathan Ives, the new Sport Hill Bridge will be wider by six feet, featuring two 12-foot

travel lanes (24-foot total width) to meet Department of Transportation minimum requirements and match the southern approach to the bridge. It will also feature a pre-cast box culvert design with a natural stream bed to satisfy environmental permitting and utilize a curved road section to avoid impacting existing historic stone walls on adjacent properties.

The Army Corps of Engineers prefers a 16-foot span, or a 1.2-times bankfull width (the width of a stream channel at the elevation where water just begins to overflow into the active floodplain). However,

the design is limited to a 12-foot span between supports to prevent excessive water discharge that would cause flooding on downstream private properties.

"So, what we end up with for Sport Hill Road, is a project that's about 600 feet long," said Ives. "It was what was needed to make the profile adjustments that we needed to make, to meet minimum design criteria for the roadway."

The Long Wall Bridge project is significantly shorter, only about 300 feet in all. Ives noted the project is maintaining the exact alignment of

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Board of Finance approves municipal, school budgets

By Rocco Valluzzo

Despite some concern regarding projected capital expenditures over the next several years, the Board of Finance approved the proposed budgets for the Board of Selectmen and the Redding Board of Education for fiscal year 2026-27 at its Monday, March 23 meeting.

Totaling \$18,454,366, the Selectmen's operating budget is increasing 3.95%, or \$701,962, over the current fiscal year. Key drivers for the increase include inflationary pressures, a 15% rise in health insurance premiums, and road repair costs.

"It's hard to imagine in this year, in this region, that you would not see 3.9%," said Board member Rob Dean. "If you look at other towns, I think you would see something comparable. Nobody likes the fact that the cost of doing business in this country is going up as compared to incomes, but I think that's kind of a median level."

While the Selectmen's capital plan earmarked \$3,715,625 for road and bridge repairs for 2026-27, there was greater concern for a coming "bulge" in capital expenditures over the next five years, namely \$5,777,813 projected for fiscal year 2027-28.

"I'm not feeling great about any of the budgets, to be honest with you," said Board member Jenifer Wyss. "And the reason being is that we've all seen the capital requests that have been made, and it's hard for me to stomach both the capital requests plus the operating budget."

The Redding Board of Education's operating budget for the upcoming fiscal year totals \$27,570,525, a 3.96% increase. This is primarily driven by non-discretionary contractual obligations, including faculty compensation, transportation, and utilities.

Its capital plan included a number of projects to be completed during the summer, such as replacing student lockers at John Read Middle School and refurbishing fifth grade restrooms. Action on these was deferred to the Board of Finance's next meeting to explore alternative funding.

"The Board of Ed has a non-lapsing account, and you could make the choice of, like the student lockers or the restrooms, to fund that from the non-lapsing account," said Finance Director Jim Sanders. "So, there is a second source of money that's available for projects like these."

While the Region 9 Board of Education's overall budget increase is modest at 2.78%, Redding's share of \$13,449,692 represents an increase of \$990,972 (7.95%) for the town. This is due to an increase in the percentage of Redding students (now at 49.94%) attending Joel Barlow High School or requiring services from the Region 9 school district and a decrease in those from

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REDDING'S BIG OUTDOORS

Eagle Scout adds resources for hikers on Norwalk River Valley Trail

By Rob Sample



Photos by Dani Simson

A kiosk will provide maps and information to hikers on the Norwalk River Valley Trail.

When you wander some of the open space areas of Redding, you might forget that you're just over an hour from New York City. Jace Simson, an Eagle Scout from Redding, recently completed a project to make a section of trail that goes through Redding cleaner and more enjoyable for all.

Simson, a high school junior who lives in Redding and attends the Fairchild Wheeler Interdistrict Magnet High School in Bridgeport, built a kiosk and erected a dog-waste station along the Redding section of the Norwalk River Valley Trail (NRVT). This was part of the community service component of earning the Eagle Scout designation. The trail, envisioned as a 30-mile connected path connecting Norwalk, Wilton, Redding, Ridgefield, and Danbury, has several sections completed, including 1.2 miles in Redding from Picketts Ridge Road to Fire Hill Road.

Simpson completed the kiosk and dog-waste station in late 2024 and became an Eagle Scout in August of 2025. He has been in Scouting since he was in first grade and joined Troop 15 in Redding in 2019; he transferred to Troop 125 in Wilton in 2021. "Between living in Redding, being part of a troop in Wilton and attending school in Bridgeport, I get around!" he quipped.

Planning the project was relatively simple, Simson said, because such kiosks are common among both Scouts and trail enthusiasts. A wealth of plans can be found online. "It's all public information," he said. "I proposed the project

to the NRVT, they liked it, and I determined where we would build the kiosk."

Simson decided a natural spot for his project would be the start of the Redding trail section, adjacent to 34 Picketts Ridge Road. The dog-waste station includes baggies and wastebaskets, providing a convenient feature for hikers who enjoy the company of their four-legged friends. The kiosk is built with a roof and a bulletin board for the NRVT to post informational signage.

"It's been suggested that we put up warning signs about bears and snakes, as well as a map of the trail," said Simson.

In addition to a team of Scouts from Troop 125 and others, Simson had a handy resource in that his neighbor, David Lynch, owns Wilton Woodworking. With his crew of Scouts, Simson got to work.

"Mr. Lynch helped me with a lot of the woodcutting beforehand," said Simson. In planning the project, he aimed to have as much of this done as possible before the team began work at the site, but some parts still had to be cut by hand while they were there. These included parts of the roof and rafters.

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EDITORIAL

Time to talk (and act on) trash



Each year around Earth Day, Redding hosts a community-wide roadside litter pick-up day. Sometimes billed as “Help Build Mount Trashmore,” residents are encouraged to pick up safety vests, gloves, and bags from Town Hall, head to an assigned road, and clean up litter, bringing it back throughout the day to the Town Green with the reward of an ice cream bar and hopefully a slight glow of civic pride. This year is no different; residents are invited to participate on Saturday, April 18 from 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m., rain or shine.

It’s an admirable tradition, but the volume of trash collected in just three short hours shows what a chronic issue roadside litter is throughout town. Town officials have expressed that there has been a fair amount of public comment in recent years about the issue, but they also have noted that this interest hasn’t necessarily translated into action.

It is unlikely that most readers of this editorial are tossing empty liquor bottles and plastic bags out their car windows on a regular basis – preaching about the importance of not littering seems like a waste of ink. But as one recent Letter to the Editor noted, Redding is a town that prides itself on its scenic roads. This is our town, these are our neighborhoods – what can we do to tackle this problem in a sustainable, year-round way?

Two key challenges present themselves here: the need for a centralized leader or responsible party to spearhead and coordinate clean-up efforts, and safety.

Maintaining something like a network of roads takes coordination – Town plows don’t just go out randomly when it snows – they systematically work their way through Redding. There are already several residents who take pride in cleaning their property lines and nearby roads, but there is currently no way to track (or reward) their efforts or harness their commitment to serve the wider town beyond one clean-up day a year.

One idea could be to look for inspiration from one of the more successful volunteer networks in town, with some parallels to roadside clean-up – the Trail Tenders. People interested in maintaining Redding’s hundreds of miles of open space trails reach out to the lead Trail Tender, Stuart Green, who serves as a hub of coordination, assigning trails, organizing trainings, and even developing a “trail maintenance report” form where Tenders submit a short report of work they’ve done, noting issues that need attention or places where more resources may need to be directed. There are anywhere

from 50-60 active Trail Tenders working throughout the year, taking ownership over their assigned sections of trail and maintaining a treasured shared resource for us all. The group also has the benefit of a certain camaraderie – though much of the maintenance happens individually, people team up to tackle more challenging projects and benefit from gathering at an annual social event and trainings throughout the year.

If there is someone in town interested and willing to take on the role as coordinator, perhaps they could follow the blueprint that has already proven so effective.

However, many of the roadways most affected by roadside litter are major thoroughways – Cross Highway, Umpawaug Road, Simpaug Turnpike – with curves, no shoulders, and vehicles speeding through town on their way elsewhere. Even the most earnest potential volunteers may be dissuaded to regularly participate for safety reasons. To tackle this, certain resources – in other words, spending some money – would likely have to be provided. Safety vests are a good start. Perhaps investing in some of those large, orange signs or cones that announce to cars that roadside work is being conducted. If there are designated monthly clean-up days – on weekends, when traffic is lighter – might a Redding Police Department patrol car station themselves at the start of some of the major roads, lights on? Is there also potential for a few designated Transfer Station permits to be funded to dispose of roadside litter collected by the volunteer network?

All these ideas take money, but the Town has a designated fund, outside its operating budget, that could go towards exactly something like this. In 2021, Connecticut instated a 5-cent “nip tax” on small alcohol bottles sold in the state – proceeds from the tax go back to the towns in which the bottles are sold, with the intention of being put towards efforts to mitigate environmental litter and to fund local clean-up efforts. To date, Redding has received around \$8,700 from the tax and has avoided spending any of it to stockpile the money to have a greater impact on whatever initiative it chooses to fund.

The tax proceeds don’t necessarily have to go to litter clean-up – the law allows municipalities to spend the funds on other waste reduction initiatives, like awareness campaigns or expansions of the Town’s recycling or composting programs. But as I picked my way along the right-of-way in front of my house last weekend, gathering beer cans, fast food containers, and at least six little glass “nip” bottles, the potential to have a direct and immediate impact on our town felt clear. ■

If you are interested in exploring this idea further or brainstorming other ways to keep Redding litter-free, e-mail editor@reddingsentinel.org or submit a Letter to the Editor

LEGAL NOTICES

At the regularly scheduled meeting of the Zoning Commission held on March 25, 2026 at 7:00 p.m. in person the commission reached the following decision:

Application #25-14Z – 70 Cross Highway (Assessor’s Map and Lot #22-54) Owner Edward & Stacey Steinmetz: Agent Tim Draper T&M Lawn & Landscape Bethel, CT – In accordance with Redding Zoning Regulations Section 5.1.2 request for a Special Use Permit for a detached garage with accessory apartment on 2nd floor. **Approved** ■

*Matt Lecher, Chairman
Redding Zoning Commission*

Notice to Taxpayers and Legal Voters of Redding Fire District No. 1

The annual budget meeting will be held April 6, 2026 at 7:00 p.m. at the Redding Ridge Firehouse 186 Black Rock Turnpike, Redding, for the purpose of:

- 1) Adopting a budget of \$1,509,661 with \$1,387,661 raised by taxes for the fiscal year July 1, 2026 to June 30, 2027.
- 2) Adopting a mill rate of 1.673
- 3) Approve a Capital Reserve spending plan of \$55,000. ■

Bennett Pardee, David Hermenze, Aileen Mozdzer / Commissioners

NOTICE OF ANNUAL TOWN BUDGET MEETING

The Legal Voters in the Town of Redding, CT and those entitled to vote therein are hereby warned and notified to meet at the Annual Town Budget Meeting to be held in the Hearing Room of Town Hall in Redding, CT on Thursday, April 23, 2026 at 3:00 p.m. for the following purpose:

To set the date and time for the Annual Town Budget Referendum for fiscal year July 1, 2026 to June 30, 2027. Pursuant to the provisions of CGS 7-7 as amended by Public Act 81-228, the Board of Selectmen voted at its meeting duly warned and held on March 23, 2026, to remove the vote on 2026-27 budget and any capital expenditures from the call of said meeting and send to a machine vote.

To do any and all things legal and necessary to accomplish the above-named purpose and take any other action that may legally and properly come before the meeting. ■

*Redding Board of Selectmen
Julia Pemberton, Diana M. Carlino, Michael Thompson*

Pursuant to Sec 7-344 of the State of Connecticut General Statutes, the Town of Redding provides below the FY2026-27 Budget Expenditures as approved on March 23, 2026 by the Board of Finance, to be voted on at a public referendum to be held on Tuesday, May 5, 2026. Anticipated Revenues for the Fiscal Year July 1, 2026- June 30, 2027 as detailed below, will be reviewed and updated as necessary, when setting the Mill Rate.

Expenditure detail may be found on the Town website www.reddingct.gov or the Town Clerk’s Office

	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	
EXPENDITURE SUMMARY	ACTUAL	BUDGET	BUDGET	\$ Change
Board of Selectmen	\$ 17,966,827	\$ 17,751,404	\$ 18,453,366	\$ 701,962
Board of Education	25,352,665	26,521,323	27,570,525	1,049,202
Region 9	11,987,042	12,458,720	13,449,692	990,972
Total Expenditures	\$ 55,306,534	\$ 56,731,447	\$ 59,473,583	\$ 2,742,136
REVENUE SUMMARY				
Taxes to be collected	\$ 55,347,826	\$ 56,465,177	\$ 58,922,797	\$ 2,457,620
Town Charges for Services	1,377,045	1,353,836	1,339,955	(13,881)
Licenses and Permits	387,211	315,000	340,000	25,000
State Aid	470,541	423,188	487,538	64,350
Prior Years Taxes, Interest and Liens	823,452	650,000	650,000	0
Supplemental Vehicle Tax	449,958	420,000	420,000	0
Investment Income	1,412,196	700,000	550,000	(150,000)
Rental Income	76,056	65,106	65,106	0
Less: Tax Refunds	(71,322)	(90,000)	(90,000)	0
Less: Fire/EMT Tax Credit	(122,334)	(140,000)	(150,000)	(10,000)
Less: Elderly Benefit	(2,344,000)	(2,506,000)	(2,545,000)	(39,000)
Less: WPCC Advance	(405,645)	(424,860)	(416,813)	8,047
Less: Transfer to Capital Funds	(250,000)	(500,000)	(100,000)	400,000
Total Revenue	\$ 57,150,984	\$ 56,731,447	\$ 59,473,583	\$ 2,742,136

The Town of Redding also provides estimated Capital Spending for the Fiscal Year July 1, 2026 - June 30, 2027 as approved by the Board of Finance on March 30, 2026, and to be voted on at a public referendum to be held on Tuesday, May 5, 2026:

Board of Selectmen expenditure not to exceed **\$2,208,000**, including road improvements (\$1,400,000), Town facilities improvements (\$688,000), Public Works equipment (\$120,000), and Public Safety CAD/RMS systems upgrade (\$200,000); Redding Board of Education expenditure not to exceed **\$482,376** for school facilities improvements; and Georgetown Sewer Plant expenditure not to exceed **\$220,000** for facilities improvements. These projects will be paid from Unassigned Fund Balance or other sources as determined by the Board of Finance. ■

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Anne Young Albanese Justin Reynolds
Pamela Brown Rob Sample
Donna Christopher Rocco Valluzzo

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Zoning approves accessory apartment on Daffodil Field

By Rocco Valluzzo

With the vote split at 2-2, the Planning Commission issued a positive referral on Tuesday, March 24 to the Zoning Commission for a special use permit for a detached garage with an accessory apartment on the second floor at 70 Cross Highway.

As per procedure, in the event of a tie vote, the ruling is in favor of the applicant(s), in this case owners Edward and Stacey Steinmetz, who live across the street at 67 Cross Highway. The applicants wish to provide an accessory dwelling unit (ADU) for their son and his wife on the property where Stacey's mother resides.

The proposed garage structure is 28 feet x 20 feet, and approximately 700 square feet. The second floor ADU will be approximately 680 square feet. The ADU contains two bedrooms and one bath.

The property also is home to what many in Redding know as the "Daffodil Field." Every spring, more than 40,000 daffodils bloom in the field, planted and divided by the property's former owner, Bud

McQuade, as a tribute to his wife. The Steinmetzes, since taking ownership of the property, have allowed members of the public to park and walk through the private field during the weeks the flowers are in bloom. The proposed structure's location does not interfere with any of the flowers.

The Planning Commission's referral was on the condition that all the Town of Redding Zoning Regulations are met, fully and accurately, including the maximum grade of the driveway. Planning Commission Chair Laurie Heiss and Regina O'Brien, the dissenting voters, felt that the proposed structure is not subordinate as required to the main structure and that the building would degrade the view of a significant and critical piece of open space on Cross Highway, a designated Scenic Road.

"The Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD) is very specific in support of ADUs," noted First Selectwoman Julia Pemberton. "It's offering an alternative way to provide different housing

options, so it's very clear the POCD is in favor of ADUs or something that is supported by the POCD."

Having received the positive referral, the Zoning Commission unanimously voted to approve the application at its meeting the following day. The commissioners decided that the proposed structure was subordinate for three reasons: the proposed structure is a smaller footprint than the main house on the property; the proposed structure has less square footage than the main house on the property; and the proposed structure's distance from the road makes it appear subordinate since the main structure is much closer to the road.

Zoning Enforcement Officer Mike Moran will have all specifications on file for review for the next 15 days and for concerns to be filed. He added that once the structure is built, an independent engineer hired by the applicants will review the structure to confirm that it has been done to specification and according to Zoning Regulations. ■

No Kings protest draws 100



Photo by Jessie Wright

Redding-based Super Seniors for Democracy, REBS, Ridgefield Resisters, and Indivisible Fairfield County brought out nearly 100 local protestors on Saturday, March 28 to the intersection of Route 7 and Branchville Road to protest the Trump administration and its policies. The protest was one of over 45 "No Kings" protests held across Connecticut that day, with thousands participating.

Community Garden faces uncertain future

By Donna Christopher

An exploration project is underway to determine the extent of septic fields underneath the Community Garden, since it was discovered that part of the property behind the Lonetown Farm Museum is over Redding Elementary School's septic leaching fields, with some areas as close as only 10 inches over septic pipes. The area had been used by residents for some 40 years for gardening, with a steady waitlist to receive a plot. A fence replacement project for the garden, scheduled for this spring, has been put on hold.

The Town cannot say if or when there will be a Community Garden for residents, First Selectwoman Julia Pemberton said last week.

It is not advisable to plant anything where a septic system is in place, a takeaway so far from State environmental officials in communication with the Town's Health Department, Pemberton said.

Alternative ideas among Town officials include finding another

suitable location for a Community Garden, but that is unlikely to happen this spring.

There has also been talk of having raised beds, but that would require gardeners to bring their own soil and place a barrier beneath the garden box. But before an idea like that is considered, the property needs to be evaluated. Currently, the Town is working with a contractor to provide an as-built (an official, approved diagram) of the septic system on the site.

There are sketches, but no access so far to the concrete distribution boxes, one behind the Museum and the other between the stone wall and the entrance to the property. "Cars should not have been parking there," Pemberton noted. Flags are in place to mark areas where septic fields so far are known to be.

The capital funds that had been approved for the fence project won't lapse. The Town's focus currently is to identify and map the septic system at the site. ■

POLICE BLOTTER

Police activity March 16 – 29

By Donna Christopher

Traffic

There were 62 motor vehicle stops in the two-week period. Police issued two summonses, 24 tickets, four written warnings, 30 verbal warnings, and took no action in two cases. The infraction rate was 42%.

There were two accidents involving only one vehicle and four two-car accidents. None of the

incident resulted in injuries.

Disturbance

In a reported disturbance on March 25 on Limekiln Road, police located a party involving approximately 100 teenagers from out of state at a short-term rental property at 2:26 p.m. The gathering was shut down, and attendees were

transported from the area by bus. One juvenile was treated and transported to Danbury Hospital for medical evaluation.

Wire Fraud

Somone on Black Rock Turnpike reported on March 17 that someone was trying to cash fraudulent checks using his business information. ■



Celebrate America's 250th Birthday

Join us for cocktails and a screening of the Academy Award-winning film, *Glory* (1989), the heroic true story of the Massachusetts 54th Regiment, whose courage inspired the powerful first movement of Charles Ives's *Three Places in New England*.

WHEN:
April 23 at 7:00 PM

WHERE
Greenwood Features, 269 Greenwood Avenue, Bethel, CT
7:00 PM – Cocktails & Conversation
8:00 PM – Film screening

TICKET PRICE: \$30
Includes cocktail hour & movie screening; drink and snack included!

All proceeds benefit the Redding Celebrates America 250 Concert on May 30, featuring Charles Ives's music performed by the Greater Bridgeport Symphony — joined by talented students from Joel Barlow High School — in a special educational and community celebration of our nation's 250th anniversary right here in Connecticut!

Please support this inspiring local event that brings professional musicians and students together. Donations appreciated — join us for history, heroism, and American music!

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SPORTS

Falcons are young but experienced

Boys volleyball season preview | By Rocco Valluzzo



File photo by Rocco Valluzzo

Junior Kyle Sobelman is one of several experienced players returning to the 2026 Joel Barlow High boys varsity volleyball team. The Falcons will also count on some underclassmen to help them achieve their goals.

A roster that balances the loss of experienced leadership with a surge of talented underclassmen will determine how well the Joel Barlow High boys varsity volleyball team will contend in the South-West Conference and at the state level during the 2026 season.

With incremental growth and leveraging their positional depth, the Falcons will focus on daily improvement and immediate opponents to prevent the young squad from looking too far ahead to June.

Numbers have remained consistent for the Falcons, who have 31 players in the program, 14 of whom will be on the varsity squad. Since practice started on March 21, Head Coach Kevin Marino has already

assigned several of them to specific roles.

Ultimately, the Falcons hope to once again contend for South-West Conference (SWC) and state titles, which was the case last season. Finishing with a 21-6 record, the team once again advanced to the SWC championship and lost to Masuk, but did take home the state Class M title by beating New Canaan.

Barlow has graduated a number of players since then, including former captains Mark Meschi (All-SWC), Erik Schmid (All-SWC), and James Pereira (All-Patriot Division), all of whom were hitters. Mike Murcia, another hitter, has also graduated.

"We definitely lost a lot of big

leaders," said Marino. "But I've got kids ready to step up and a couple guys who were on that state championship run who are going to be big contributors this year."

Back from that team are senior captain Ben Barnett and classmate Ryan Puglio. The former will be at middle hitter, and the latter is a libero. Moving up to varsity is senior Terry Slater, a hitter and defensive specialist.

From the junior class are Stinson twins Sam (All-Patriot Division) and Alex, who will handle setting and outside hitting duties respectively.

Juniors Kyle Sobelman, a setter last season, is now an outside hitter, as is classmate Sam Hartley. Barlow also has junior right-side hitters Skye Fiuczynski and Arjun Nambiar and libero Jackson Ohnemus. A few sophomores will also see varsity time, such as Miles Prusa, Max Anstett, Tom O'Dowd, and Dean Melnyk.

This diversity in the line-up will allow the team to remain flexible as it faces a challenging non-conference schedule at the start of the season, including five opponents from the Fairfield Country Interscholastic Athletic Conference. It also has a tough league schedule with the likes of Masuk, Newtown, and Pomperaug.

This year, the state tournament will have three divisions, with Barlow now in Class S. There will be some formidable teams here as well, such as Woodstock Academy.

"We would obviously love to be back on top of the SWC after losing in the finals last year," said Marino. "But the goal here is the same every year, which is to be hopefully in a position where we're competitive and to put banners up on the wall."

Barlow opens the season on Saturday, April 4 when it hosts St. Joseph of Trumbull at 11:30 a.m. ■

New coach will stress team unity

Girls lacrosse season preview | By Rocco Valluzzo



File photo by Rocco Valluzzo

Gianna Onofrio is one of four seniors on the Joel Barlow High girls varsity lacrosse team this season. With a new Head Coach, the Falcons hope for success in the 2026 season.

Along with a new Head Coach, the Joel Barlow high girls varsity lacrosse team will be working toward a new culture in the 2026 season.

Megan Kreitler, who was hired at the end of last August, hopes to have the Falcons play more as a unit as opposed to individuals. Once this is accomplished, she said, the results will show on the field.

"That's one of the biggest changes," said Kreitler, whose team started practice on March 20. "It's

going to be a lot of differences, for sure."

Kreitler is no stranger to Barlow lacrosse, having coached the JV team last year. She replaces Melissa Bronte, who led the Falcons for a number of seasons with appearances in both the South-West Conference (SWC) and state Class M tournaments.

A former player at Shelton High, Kreitler later played for the University of Bridgeport. She has also coached youth lacrosse and officiated at the high school level.

Kreitler inherits a program that finished with a 10-9 record last season. The Falcons qualified for the SWC playoffs as well as the Class M tournament, reaching the quarterfinals.

They have graduated several players since then, including Ruby Ludwig (All-SWC) and Allie Ogden (All-Patriot Division) on attack. Defenders Maggie Valenti and Helena Zima, both All-SWC honorable mentions, have graduated, as has goalie Bella Sgritta.

"We're definitely going to miss all of them," said Kreitler. "They were an asset to the team."

The Falcons have about 30 players in the program, which includes varsity and JV teams. The former will be a young group with only four seniors, including captains Teagan Candee and Gianna Onofrio.

Candee will be on attack and Onofrio is a midfielder on the defensive side. Classmates Charlotte Jaramillo and Hannah Emerito will be on attack and defense respectively.

Barlow has a talented junior class that includes captain and midfielder Caroline Lippoth (All-Patriot Division). Back on attack is Emma Ogden.

Dre Chapin will see time in goal and Lila Fellows is back on attack for the Falcons. New to the team is Bridget Rexford, who Kreitler thinks will also contribute.

Some underclassmen will also see varsity time. Kreitler expects freshman goalie Lillian Friedman to be an asset as will Jessica Russo in the midfield, particularly in the draw circle.

"There's a lot of, a lot of talent, a lot of hard decisions when it comes to playing," said Kreitler. "But it's going to be a great season."

Barlow opens the season on Saturday, April 4 when it visits Fairfield Warde at 10:00 a.m. ■



Players vie for starting positions

Baseball season preview | By Rocco Valluzzo

With the 2026 season about to get underway, the Joel Barlow High varsity baseball team is counting on certain key players to help it take on the competition.

In the meantime, the Falcons are competing for starting positions. Several pre-season scrimmages will give them a glimpse of how they stack up against the competition before they open the season on Monday, April 6 at Greenwich at 4:15 p.m.

"All the guys are expected to earn their spot every day," said Head Coach Matt Griffiths, whose team took to the diamond a week ago. "There's always some competition. It makes everybody better at the end of the day."

Posting a 20-7 record last season, the Falcons reached the South-West Conference championship for the third straight time, surrendering their title to Bethel in extra innings. They later reached the state Class M quarterfinals before losing to Stonington.

Four key players have graduated since then, namely former captains Will Gregor, T.J. Baer, Billy Bardani, and Logan Kady, each an All-SWC selection. Gregor was a key part of Barlow's pitching rotation as was Baer, who was also an outfielder. Bardani started as catcher and Kady was at second base. Also gone is Connor Thomas (All-Patriot Division), who pitched in relief.

"We didn't lose a lot last year, but certainly big, big shoes to fill," said Griffiths. "Luckily, we had a good core returning this year. So, despite the tough losses, we are coming in with a good amount of experience at the varsity level."

The Falcons will keep 17 players on the varsity, with several in familiar roles.

Senior captain Jimmy Kennedy (All-SWC honorable mention) is back and will be Barlow's top pitcher. Classmate and captain Gavin Marriott will play center field and could also see time on the mound.

Behind the plate is senior Drew Gutowski. In right field will be Ethan Goldstein, also a senior.

From the junior class is Desmond Kady, who will be part of Barlow's pitching rotation and will be at shortstop when not on the mound. Cole Johnson will also see time as a pitcher and in the outfield as well. At first base, Barlow will have Ryan Kelly.

In addition, the Falcons also have a few sophomores who could see varsity time this year. These include pitchers Quinn Kirik, Eli Kress, and Steve Cherginsky, who was injured last season. Other sophomores are outfielder Brennan Maryott, Cash Cady, and Brendan McDermott.

Offensively, the Falcons have a good mix of speed and power, according to Griffiths. He also hopes they can score enough runs to take more of the pressure off the pitchers than they have done in the past.

"I think defensively we're going to be very good, and offensively as well," he said. "So, I think if we can compete on the mound and throw strikes, we'll compete every day."

The SWC is competitive, and Griffiths expects nothing less this season. The Falcons plan to take it one day at a time, which has worked well for them in recent seasons.

"We'd love to get the SWC title back, but we really try not to look too far forward," said Griffiths. "But I'd be lying to you if I told you that wasn't our ultimate goal." ■



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Redding's Big Outdoors: Eagle Scout adds resources for hikers on Norwalk River Valley Trail / continued from page 1



Photo by Dani Simson

A team of Scouts hard at work constructing the kiosk.

Simson had about 15 other Scouts helping him complete the work, which took three four- to five-hour days. "We originally planned for two, but needed a third day to get it done," he said. "The bulletin board had to be custom cut at the site. We did not want to take the chance that we'd cut it beforehand and have it be off by a fraction. Additionally, the legs for the kiosk took a lot longer than expected."

In addition to providing a community resource, the projects aim to equip Scouts with management skills – and there were plenty of opportunities for that. Some of the helpers were younger Scouts, Simson said, and they were not allowed to use power tools. Thus, he had to come up with sets of things they could perform by hand and still make a valuable contribution to the end product. ■

Redding Neighbors & Newcomers appoints new board

By Pamela Brown



Lauren McMahon Smith will be leading Redding Neighbors & Newcomers after moving back to town last year.

Taking the reins of Redding Neighbors & Newcomers is part of a homecoming for Lauren McMahon Smith. Her family moved back to town last year, and they are now close by to her parents, who still live in her childhood home. Smith was recently named President of the Board and is looking forward to devoting her time, passion, and energy to continue making the organization a vibrant and thriving non-profit.

"When we moved back to town, we attended an RNN summer pella party, and I met so many nice people. I know being a newcomer can be daunting at times and I thought, 'How can I become more involved with Redding Neighbors & Newcomers?'" recalled Smith. "I grew up in Redding. It has retained its beauty and charm, and I am so happy to be living here again. I am a country girl at heart! Everywhere I look there is beauty to be found."

RNN, a social organization that offers new and longtime residents of Redding and surrounding towns the opportunity to make connections through events and interest groups, also appointed Pamela Friedman as Secretary and Cynthia Simeone as Treasurer. "We're a great team," said Smith. Jess Tyson, the group's outgoing president who served over two years, will remain a member. A new Board is voted in every two years.

"I love the idea of a community club for residents to get to know one another and share activities. I also have fond memories of our Redding youth group and realize how important a sense of community brings to all ages," Smith said, adding, "Redding is a quaint, peaceful country town, but without a town center buzzing with activity it's refreshing to be able to get to know others in town with a club like RNN. We have 11 social groups led by six wonderful members. Groups such as book club, cooking club, hiking club, Bunco, coffee hour, children's playgroup,

and mahjong club are among our most sought-after activities."

According to Smith, it's her deep love of Redding that made her a strong candidate for the position. "My enthusiasm is a plus. I also have a natural outgoing personality and a genuine interest in getting to know others in all walks of life." Smith brings a background of leadership to RNN. "I held a leadership role at our family healthcare publishing company for many years in my career, and I am skilled at bringing teams together with shared goals," she noted. As the new President, in addition to chairing the Board of Directors, Smith will have various responsibilities, including presiding over meetings and Board actions, overseeing RNN's calendar and event scheduling, reviewing funds, appointing club leaders and committee chairs, delivering RNN's annual report, and more.

"I will continue the tradition of being a mainstay in the community for our existing members and new residents in terms of forming long-lasting friendships and a flourishing calendar of events," said Smith, who appreciates the way RNN stays deeply involved in the community through presenting and being part of creative events. "RNN offers an array of diversified clubs and hosts a variety of events. We have an up-to-date website and always participate at treasured town events like the Cupcake Tent at Frog Frolic, Redding Garden Club Plant Sale, and the Congregational Church Fair. We always co-sponsor a Concert on the Green and are a long-term sponsor of the Mark Twain Library Art Show."

Friedman noted RNN is dependent on the boundless efforts of its club leaders. "They dedicate their time on a monthly basis to ensure our programming is available to RNN members and the general community. Members, in addition to our club leaders, are always welcome to volunteer in different capacities. This not only includes our monthly events but also our annual events like our holiday party, summer adult event, Halloween party and others," she said.

Smith also pointed out RNN isn't just for Reddingites. "Several members are from neighboring towns like Ridgefield, Newtown, and Bethel. We offer a one-month trial membership for those who want to make sure the club is a good fit or that our calendar of events works with their own schedule. Our membership is always open; you can join at any time," said Smith who hopes to increase RNN's visibility. "I'm hopeful that we will continue to grow membership and have a positive impact in the community. ■

Learn more at reddingneighborsandnewcomers.org or e-mail Lauren at president@reddingneighborsandnewcomers.org

John Read Middle School Science Olympiad team comes together after tragedy

By Anne Young Albanese



Photo by Anne Young Albanese

Students in the John Read Middle School Science Olympiad program weathered a challenging first year together.

This was the first year that John Read Middle School had a Science Olympiad program, putting together two teams to compete in events testing science, technology, math, and engineering skills and knowledge. The students were up against competitors from other schools whose team members had more experience.

Then, tragedy struck. One of their team members, seventh grader Luke Sorce, passed away in an

accident in January. While the entire school community was affected, it was exceptionally hard for the Science Olympiad group since some of the members were close friends of Luke's.

"It was pretty rough," seventh grader Liam Duggan said. "For a few weeks afterwards, I didn't really, like, I don't even know if we had practice. I didn't really come to them. The last thing I had on my mind was Science Olympiad."

Duggan did return to the team and worked to make up the time he had missed. He said he felt the loss affected the entire team because it was hard on everyone.

"[Luke] was a very great teammate. People were very sad to see him go," seventh grader Jack Correa said. "It was very tragic what happened. That everything got taken away from him at such a young age." Correa said that he felt that his teammates helped him get through it.

In March, the two John Read Middle School teams competed in the Science Olympiad state tournament in Coventry. One of the teams placed second and was the top public-school team. The entire club celebrated its success, with its other team coming in 11th out of 17 teams.

John Lo will be coaching the team again next year. There is room on the team for additional students. Those who are interested should e-mail the Principal, Jennifer Desmarais, at jdesmarais@er9.org.

In addition, Lo is starting a team at Joel Barlow High School. Those who are interested in participating should reach out to Dr. Katherine Nuzzo, a science teacher at the high school, at knuzzo@er9.org. ■

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Historic Review Committee seeks clarification on Wire Mill Cafeteria / continued from page 1



Photo courtesy of APS

The Cafeteria building at the former Gilbert & Bennett Wire Mill site.

and explore preservation alternatives to demolition and to gather photographs and other evidence from a site for the historical record.

The Town would like to move ahead with the demolition of the Cafeteria building while it replaces windows in a nearby building that is historically significant. The window replacements have approval and need to move ahead. Postponing the demolition of the Cafeteria would be more expensive than doing both projects simultaneously.

The Town was required to hire a historic preservation firm to determine which buildings on the Wire Mill site could be demolished and which needed to be preserved.

The State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) then sent a representative to walk the site.

SHPO stated that the Cafeteria building could be destroyed, but its stone foundation was of more historic interest. They also noted that numerous buildings on the site had been accepted on the National Register of Historic Places, but the Cafeteria was not considered a contributing resource to the designation.

The Town also hired an architectural preservation firm that specializes in preserving historic sites to review the state of several buildings. Architectural Preservation Studio (APS) submitted a report

that recommended keeping the Cafeteria. The firm's report said that "This building is one of the most structurally sound, and due to its size, least expensive to repair buildings in the Gilbert & Bennett Wire Mill site." Since the site has lost several buildings through decay or previous demolition, members of the Historic Review Committee felt that the destruction of the building should be carefully examined.

The Committee discussed other options to preserve the contrast of its cinder block structure with the other old traditional brick mill buildings. The Committee identified other architectural options, including preservation, partial preservation, or renovation.

The 180-day demolition delay was not waived at the meeting, but the Committee agreed to convene again and act once it receives clarification from SHPO about the building's stone foundation. There is a time constraint, because the Town has received grant funding for the work, which must be completed within two years.

The Committee is chaired by Raymond D'Angelo, with Regina O'Brien and Matt Lecher as members and Sherry Karraker as alternate. ■

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Board of Finance approves municipal, school budgets / continued from page 1

Easton (down to 50.04%). The Board of Finance takes into consideration the Region 9 budget numbers, but does not officially approve them, as Region 9 is governed by its own Board budget approval process.

"For the last couple of years, we have had budgets that have been a bit under the rate of inflation," said

Board of Finance member Karen Gifford. "And it's catching up with us, I guess, is the way I would put it. And that, together with the reallocation of students at Barlow, makes this tough."

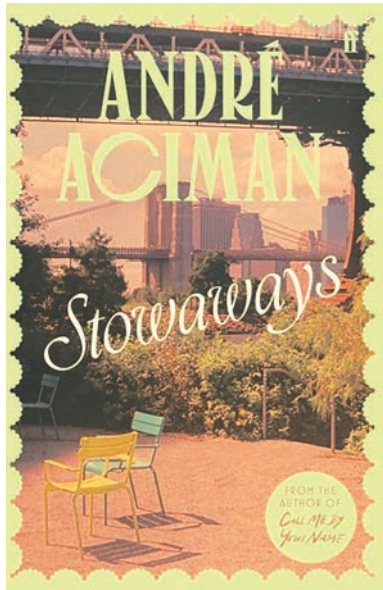
Voters will consider the approved budgets at the budget referendum, currently scheduled for Tuesday, May 5. ■

BOOK REVIEW

Stowaways

By André Aciman

112 pages / Faber and Faber / \$12.99



Stowaways, by André Aciman, is a love story, of sorts. A story of friendship, of sorts. A story about death, kind of. A man named Paul has died. An acquaintance of his, Julien, had appeared many times in the deceased man's journal. A woman is also in the journal – it was bequeathed to her, given to her by the man's daughter. The woman in the journal e-mails Julien, a stranger to her, advising him of the death, and proposing a meeting. Paul claimed in his journal to have loved her since a time when they were lovers years before. When she and Julien meet, she speaks: "... I held back because something stood in his way as well...you could never tell if what bound us was stronger than what kept us apart." A single quotation from the novella takes the entire back cover: "Maybe we love people because they won't let us know them." This is the author's theme. Probably.

And so, *Stowaways* is the story about a man and a woman meeting for the first time after the death of a man who wrote about them both in his journal. Julien knew Paul as an acquaintance. Carol knew him as a former lover. Use of technique (in this case a MacGuffin) is a matter of authorial style. The MacGuffin in *Stowaways* (a person, place or thing that might be central to story but never appears) is a dead man. Julien describes their chance morning meetings at Starbucks: "What he was asking was something vague, like reluctant sympathy, or an understated nod that means to say *no* but says it evasively enough

to sound like *Maybe later someday but not now.*" Detecting the nature of Paul's attraction to Julien, Carol says: "And maybe this is what love is: finding someone who allows us to access not the life we've been given and asked to live, but the life we're owed."

Equivocation emphasized is part of nuance here, but is it also the author's premise? Not quite. There is also this: (author's italics) "*We're seldom who we are with those we know.*" If this is true, can full disclosure of secret love be a ruse to deeper concealment? Possibly. What the reader discovers is a novella of social inquiry comprised of two characters packed with serious questions for a dead man. *Stowaways* is extremely well conceived, well written, and honest; it is therefore a pleasure to read.

There are early clues to the true underlying story as the characters speculate on the dead man's romantic motives in claiming to love Carol and Carol's convincing insight that, in fact, the dead man loved Julien, who is married to a man. "...we were no more than two individuals who've missed a bus they never really meant to take."

The questions author André Aciman presents revolve around love and acceptance. We are given a backward social conditioning, and its guidance is nowhere near final. There is subtext in *Stowaways* that explains quietly the dire consequences of self-driven social isolation, whatever the reason, whether unconscious or overt. "I think he was in love, but his mind and his heart were never aligned." This may be the final non-conclusive judgement; "...we didn't want to know what we might have missed, nor did we want to know what might have turned into one big nothing." Finally, even if it comes as an opaque, mixed message, Aciman, in *Stowaways*, asserts unambiguously that fear is the enemy of love. ■

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

LIBRARY CORNER

From purchase to patron

By Erin Shea Dummeyer

I have written before about how book selection is done at Mark Twain Library, but the process it takes for the physical copy to make it onto our shelf is far less complicated. After a list of books is ordered, I upload the catalog records of those books to our online catalog. This means patrons can start placing holds on a book before it even gets here. In many cases, patrons can even place a hold on a book months before it is purchased. For example, Ann Patchett's divine next novel *Whistler* doesn't come out until June, but the holds list is already growing.

Once the book arrives here from Brodart, our main book supplier, a staff member opens the package

and confirms that everything that was shipped is indeed in the box. Then the books are divided between staff members depending on whether they are fiction or non-fiction. Books from Brodart come "processed," meaning they already have a mylar cover, barcode, and spine label on them. Staff members confirm these items have been processed correctly and that the book's record in our online catalog is accurate. They also check to see if the book has any holds on it so they can go to the first person in line. Then the book is scanned and placed on the "new" shelf. Books are considered new for three months and live on our "new" shelves during that time. At the

beginning of each month, a staff member re-categorizes "new" books to "old" and moves them into our regular stacks.

The process from purchase to patron is really quite simple. Things get complicated during the publisher-to-book supplier portion of the supply chain, but there could probably be multiple columns written about that process, with some investigative journalism required as well. For now, we try to focus on what we can control, which is getting those books to our patrons as quickly as we can, once we receive them. ■

Erin Shea Dummeyer is Director, Mark Twain Library

Blooming Books

Celebration of America's 250th anniversary



Photos by Debora DeCarlo Rosa and Sharon Epstein

Redding Garden Club and Mark Twain Library teamed up to celebrate America's 250th anniversary with a special literary-inspired floral display at Mark Twain Library, with a special open house event on March 25. Nearly 30 different flower arrangers put together flower bouquets inspired by their favorite books having to do with our nation's history. From *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* to *The Grapes of Wrath*, the colorful flowers brought these significant stories to life.

Tighe & Bond unveils plans for Sport Hill and Long Wall bridges / continued from page 1

the roadway and its exact width (20 feet) since it is a dead-end road serving a limited number of houses.

The project will be built in two stages (downstream to upstream) to maintain traffic access for the approximately 13 houses on the road. The new bridge will be over an 11-foot-wide culvert to meet the 1.2x bankfull width requirement (based on a 9.1-foot stream width). Construction is expected to take one full building season, or approximately eight months.

"It's about five feet tall by seven feet wide, so it is a pretty healthy size of pipe," said Ives. "It's a tributary of Little River, which

flows into the Saugatuck Reservoir downstream."

Because of the size of the river that flows and the size of the opening under the old bridge, the structure was not acting like a dam as the Sport Hill Road Bridge was. As a result, Ives said the size of the culvert could be increased to meet the 1.2 bankfull width requirements.

Demolition of the existing bridge cannot begin until all permits for the new structures are secured. Procurement for the precast box culvert requires a six-month lead time, meaning the projects must go to bid by fall 2026 to allow for an April 2027 start.

Both projects require Army Corps of Engineers Nationwide Permit 14, which is for crossings of waters associated with the construction, expansion modification, or improvement of linear transportation projects such as roads and highways.

The project team will continue the coordination process with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to secure supplementary funding alongside the State Local Bridge Program. It will also initiate the local permitting process this week, starting with the Conservation Commission followed by the Zoning Commission. ■

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Notes from a neighbor Pieces of the past

By Carter Wiseman

For too many years, my wife and I had put off having our bathroom repainted, but in recent months the peeling over the shower could not be ignored. So, I made the call, and the painters arrived.

To give them room to work, we had to move a small bureau, a vanity, and the table holding toothbrushes, cosmetics, and my shaving gear to the next room, which I refer to for tax purposes as my office, but others would call a man-cave. This focused my attention on the cave's extensive bookshelves, where many of my souvenirs live. I have organized my books mostly by subject and author. But when the move happened, I thought I might try

chronology. In any case, I quickly realized that I had pulled on a long thread.

It was like buying a new necktie; the suit, which had looked fine until then, suddenly seemed in need of replacement. And the shoes. Maybe the books should be arranged by geographic location? More disturbing than the books were the objects sprinkled among them. Each has a story, and a place in the room where it has rested undisturbed (and undusted) for many years. The paint job meant serious dislocation.

Among the victims were two dolls that belonged to my mother as a child. Then there was a rack of tobacco pipes. I gave up smok-

ing them when our children were little, but each one summons a fond memory. There is the Savinelli, bought with a birthday check from my father when I turned 25. There is the curved black Peterson, which invokes Sherlock Holmes. And there is the carved white meerschau bought on a hitch-hiking trip through Istanbul.

Another treasure that had to move is the oval black-and-white international license plate that used to grace my VW Karmann-Ghia when I got out of the Army in Germany. It saw me through border checks on trips to Paris and Florence. A more recent resident among the displaced objects is a glass wine

pitcher from a family trip to Italy.

Once the painters began work, I surveyed all the book-shelf refuges and wondered how I would return them to their original roosts. More troubling was the question: Should some not return? If so, which?

This triggered some painful memories of sorting through my father's things after he died. He used to smoke Chesterfields in a wooden cigarette holder. I never liked cigarettes, but sniffing that little item – still redolent of my childhood – brought back a flood of memories. I still have the holder, but who apart from me would make a home for the smelly thing?

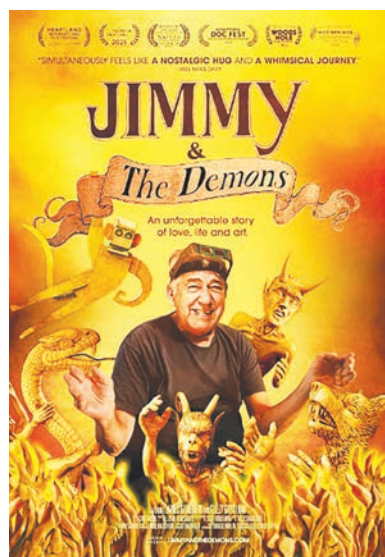
I have lost a few friends to illness lately, and have heard from their spouses about how hard it is to part with things that have no meaning to anyone else, but mean a lot to the survivors. Surely that is why the faithful crowd travels to Assisi to view the bones of St. Francis.

Needless to say, I am not in that saintly league, so I have been thinking about saving my kids the trouble of picking through my relics, and start the culling in advance.

Not just yet, though. Who knows? One of them might want that old license plate, or Dad's cigarette holder. Who am I to make the decisions for them? ■

Jimmy & The Demons gets theatrical release

By Jessie Wright



Last September, a packed auditorium at The Ridgefield Playhouse watched *Jimmy & the Demons*, a documentary film about Redding's own Jimmy Grashow and an unexpected commission that turned out to be a magnum opus sculpture at the end of a remarkable six-decade-long artistic career. Grashow passed away only two days later after a battle with pancreatic cancer.

"I felt compelled to document this process of an artist following a calling to swerve radically away from his safety net of past and

proven works," said award-winning Director Cindy Meehl, also a Redding resident, in a statement on why she felt drawn to the project. "I wanted to listen to him all day philosophize about life and how his work gives him sanctuary. I believed that all who reflect on their own work and mission in life could relate to Jimmy's unpredictable journey."

Jimmy & The Demons debuted at the 2025 Tribeca Film Festival and has since won numerous awards at film festivals across the country. The film is now receiving its theatrical release, scheduled to be shown at a few select theaters starting April 3. There will be showings at Quad Cinema at 34 West 13th Street in New York City on Friday, April 3 at 7:15 p.m. and Sunday, April 5 at 3:00 p.m. Those showings will also include a Q&A with Grashow's wife, Guzzy, and Meehl. ■

For more information and tickets, visit quadcinema.com/film/jimmy-and-the-demons

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OBITUARIES

Garner W. Lester September 1943 – February 2026



Garner W. Lester, a 30-year resident of Redding, passed away unexpectedly on February 1 in the loving embrace of his wife, Pam. He was 82 years old. A remarkable person whose kindness and presence touched so many lives, it seemed his primary life purpose was to deeply know all those people he met – either briefly or for a lifetime. He was often referred to as the man who “never met a stranger,” as evidenced by a conversation with his best friend since third grade just a week prior to his passing.

Born in Jackson, Mississippi to Elizabeth Wilkins-Lester and Garner McConnico Lester, this southern boy (who retained a slight drawl throughout his life) had a gift for conversation and connection, always making time to stop and chat on dog walks, at the supermarket, or just about anywhere. He had “thousands” of family stories to share and used these to discover commonalities and to make friends.

Garner lived his early years in Jackson, attending Provine High School and later, The University of Mississippi (Ole Miss), graduating with a degree in Mathematics. It was here he married his first wife, Betty Jane and welcomed his first child, Wallace. He then entered the army as a Lieutenant in the Corps of Engineers and was stationed in Germany for two years.

Soon after his discharge from the military, he was recruited by Procter and Gamble in their sales division where he rapidly climbed in rank. Sales was a natural for Garner. This career led Garner's family, now numbering five with

the addition of Jerelyn and Suzanne, around the country with very frequent relocations. From P & G, Garner moved to the H.J. Heinz company and eventually to Marketing Corporation of America in Westport as a Senior Sales Consultant.

He met and married his current wife, Pam, at MCA in the company's software division and welcomed her daughter, Kimberly, as his own. Pam and Garner expanded the Lester family further by adopting two children from Paraguay – Dianna and Melissa.

When he retired from the corporate world and then business consulting, he reinvented himself at the Riverbrook YMCA, where he was a one-on-one personal trainer, in the pool guiding arthritis exercise for seniors, at the Redding Heritage Center and The Greens in Wilton, coaching the improvement of balance and mobility.

Garner was a very active Dad and the kids' number one “cheerleader,” encouraging his six children to keep moving – skiing, swim

team, camping, biking, soccer, lacrosse, outdoor leadership and music. He even had a family band at one point called *First Step!*

Garner was an expert at making time for fun in his busy life. Music was central to this joy from his teens through his early 80s. He was never without some version of a band, playing lead guitar and booking gigs. His most recent, *Catfish*, played “feel good music” throughout Fairfield County, and at Senior Living facilities in Norwalk, Wilton, and Redding.

Garner is survived by his wife of 38 years – Pamela Lester – his six children: Garner W. Lester Jr., Jerelyn W. Lester Thomas and husband Kevin Thomas, Suzanne H. Lester and husband David Porinchu, Kimberly A. Edwin and husband Jeffrey Edwin, Dianna C. Yellin and husband Seth Yellin, and Melissa E. Lester. He also leaves behind his nine grandchildren: Cassius Tunis, Josephine Tunis, Maeve Lester, Avery Lester, Lynex Montgomery, Mason Yellin, Kobe Yellin, Samuel Edwin, and Matthew Porinchu in

addition to his sister-in-law Carol S. Royce and brother-in-law Tom Siebrasse and their families. He is predeceased by his parents and sister, Elizabeth Foster.

A private family memorial service will be held at the Lester home in late May in celebration of his life, with Reverend Tracy Mignone officiating.

For those who wish to honor Garner's life, donations are gratefully received at DAWs.org (Danbury Animal Welfare Society), New Pond Farm (newpondfarm.org) and CT Foodshare (ctfoodshare.org), in lieu of flowers.

We leave you with one of Garner's favorite quotes:

“When you walk to the edge of all the light you have and take that first step into the darkness of the unknown, you must believe that one of two things will happen. There will be something solid for you to stand upon or you will be taught to fly.”

– Faith, by Patrick Overton. ■

Mary Lou Mortimer October 30, 1934 – March 17, 2026



Mary Lou (White) Mortimer passed away peacefully on Tuesday, March 17, 2026, at the age of 91, following a nearly ten-year journey with Alzheimer's disease.

Born on October 30, 1934, in Danbury, Mary Lou was the daughter of T. Edgar and Willetta (Morlock) White. She was predeceased by her beloved husband, Murray A.

Mortimer of Old Greenwich, who passed away in 1986.

Mary Lou was educated in the Danbury school system and graduated from Danbury High School in 1952. She went on to attend the University of Connecticut in Storrs, where she studied education and foreign languages, graduating with high honors. During her time there, she served as President of the Women's Student Government Association – an achievement she cherished throughout her life – and was recognized in Who's Who in American Colleges and Universities. A natural leader, she brought energy, intelligence, and dedication to every endeavor. It was also at UConn that she met Murray Mortimer, whom she would later marry.

After their marriage, Mary Lou and Murray briefly lived in Wilton before settling in Redding, in 1956, where she remained for the next 70 years. In 1962, they welcomed their son, Edward Scott Mortimer.

Mary Lou began her teaching career at Darien High School in 1960, where she taught French and Spanish and was actively involved in school life, including theatrical productions. She later taught at Notre Dame Academy in Ridgefield before beginning a long and impactful tenure at John Read Middle School in 1972. Over the course of 28 years, she helped build and lead the foreign language department, teaching both French and Spanish. She was deeply respected and beloved by her students and colleagues alike, known not only for her excellence as an educator but for her genuine care for each student as an individual. She embraced all aspects of school life – from field trips and assemblies to extracurricular activities – and was always willing to participate wholeheartedly, including once joining a faculty basketball team to play against the Harlem Wizards. Her enthusiasm and commitment

left a lasting impression on generations of students. In 2000, she was honored by the State of Connecticut General Assembly for Excellence in Education. Even after retirement, she continued to return to John Read for many years to substitute teach. She was dedicated to education.

Beyond her professional life, Mary Lou had a deep appreciation for the outdoors, creativity, and community. She loved spending time at the beach, especially at Sherwood Island State Park and the Shore and Country Club in Norwalk, and treasured trips to Nantucket and Gloucester. She also enjoyed traveling in the American West, where she developed a meaningful appreciation for Native American cultures.

A creative spirit, Mary Lou found joy in arts and crafts, including macramé, découpage, and jewelry-making, and she was an avid collector of Hummel figurines.

She took great pride in her gardens, which reflected her love of nature and attention to detail. Following the loss of her husband, she devoted herself to volunteer work, particularly with hospice organizations in Danbury, Redding, and Ridgefield, offering compassion and support to those in need. She was also actively involved in local professional and civic organizations, always seeking to contribute positively to her community.

Mary Lou is survived by her son, Edward Mortimer (Joanne) of Old Greenwich and by her five nieces and nephews: Robert Schmiedel of Ridgefield, Thomas Schmiedel (formerly of Danbury), Kenneth Schmiedel of Texas, Richard Schmiedel of Danbury, and Patricia Schmiedel of Trumbull.

In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions may be made to the Alzheimer's Association of Connecticut or to a local hospice organization. ■

BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT

The Given Inn: A “third space” comes to Georgetown

By Justin Reynolds



Photo by Justin Reynolds

After years helping other stores and retail chains open their doors, Natasha Smith is fulfilling a long-held dream of operating her own business.

A café designed to feel like an inn is coming to Georgetown.

After more than 20 years of helping other people turn their dreams into reality, Natasha Smith is finally pursuing the business venture closest to her heart.

On Saturday, April 4, The Given Inn will open its doors for the first time at 4 Old Mill Road, in the space previously occupied by Old Mill Market & Café. The event – a “quiet opening” – will run from 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

“The Given Inn is a family-friendly café offering the first level of an inn experience,” Smith explained. “We’re encouraging people to stay awhile and connect, serving the community as a third space.”

Can’t make it to the quiet opening? The café also is planning celebrations on April 10 and April 11, also from 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

The Given Inn will offer specialty coffees (including Our Given Inn Blend, a proprietary blend made of beans from Brazil and Haiti), teas, and light bites (think charcuterie boards, soup, paninis, crudité, and pastries), along with a selection of books, flowers, and artisanal gifts. There’s also a vinyl record player; patrons are encouraged to browse through records or bring their own and spin some tunes. Whenever guests stay at Smith’s house, they leave with handwritten letters. To inspire guests to write letters themselves, The Given Inn also has a stationery station.

Over the last year, Smith has thoroughly renovated the space, adding Bohemian-themed accent lighting, accent walls, and wood paneling, among other upgrades.

“It’s a more elevated experience,” she said. “The menu and the vibe are different [than Old Mill], but the love for community, thoughtfulness for providing healthy food, and enthusiasm for being a good neighbor are the same.”

During her career in finance and business development, Smith has helped open over 30 businesses, including Popeyes restaurants, Dunkin’ stores, health centers, and beauty salons. While she’s thankful to have been an integral part of those projects, she’s now taking the leap to open a brick-and-mortar space that’s entirely her own.

Smith, who lives in Newtown with her husband and three sons, has been working on The Given Inn’s business plan for 10 years.

She’d been looking for a space in Newtown but couldn’t find the right fit, eventually leading her to Georgetown.

“I saw this beautiful house and said, ‘Oh my gosh,’” she recalled. “There was an automatic click between myself and the landlord, and now we’re here.”

Smith is excited to bring something new and unique to the Georgetown village, which has seen steady growth in recent years.

“I love the neighborhood,” Smith explained. “There is so much beauty here, and it is so vibrantly quaint. It’s an oxymoron, because it’s also a happening area.”

As part of the mission of being a third space, Smith plans to host all sorts of events at The Given Inn: writer’s workshops, book clubs, candle-pouring classes, jewelry-making classes, you name it.

“We have a lot of different things lined up to bring communities together,” she said.

The Given Inn is the start of what Smith sees as a much longer journey.

“I am taking my business knowledge along with my passion for curating memorable experiences, and my calling to make people feel warm and welcome with hospitality, and building the first phase of my big vision, which is to own and operate an inn,” she said. “This is just the beginning.” ■

For more information, visit thegiveninn.com

Land Trust welcomes spring at annual meeting

By Susan Clark



Photo by Stuart Green

Cole Tucker-Walton discusses the new edition of *The Book of Trails* at the annual meeting on March 29.

A capacity crowd gathered at Highstead Barn on Sunday, March 29 for the Annual Meeting and spring event of Redding Land Trust. Members sipped refreshments and nibbled on small bites before Land Trust trustees took the floor to recap the last year and provide information about events to look forward to in the coming year.

In the first order of business, two new trustees, Tom Hamilton and Iona Struzik were voted onto the Board by the assembled members, and trustees Silvia Erskine, Bruce Given, and Cole Tucker-Walton were given new three-year terms. Stuart Green was announced as the new Open Space Manager.

Co-president Erskine remembered John McLeran, who passed away in January. McLeran was for many years the Open Space manager jointly for the Land Trust and the Town of Redding – and one of the most knowledgeable nature-lovers in town, always ready to share his excitement about the world around us.

Treasurer Bruce Given reported that the Land Trust had a very good year financially due to the strong investment environment and a generous gift from the Mahony family. Co-president Gordon Loery

informed attendees that a new 12-acre donation at 6 Lonetown Road has been received but noted there is no public access yet.

In other news, trustee Marjorie Derven explained that the first Photography Show featuring images of open space throughout town was so successful that the second one is now underway. Submissions close April 20 and winning photos will be hung at Mark Twain Library in June. This year, there are categories for all ages – adult, late teens, and under-fourteen-year-olds.

The Community Hiking Club outings will be more frequent given their popularity. Themed walks will increase as part of this series. On April 11, the hike will be at Putnam Park as part of Redding’s America 250 celebrations.

Cole Tucker-Walton previewed the next edition of *The Book of Trails*, volume 5, which will be published later this year. The annual summer gathering for the Land Trust will once again be held in August. ■

To learn more about Redding Land Trust and to become a member, visit www.reddinglandtrust.org



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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

\$ = fee applies
R = registration required

This Week's Featured Events

2026 Torch Club Egg Hunt

Friday, April 3
11:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.
Egg hunt begins around 12:00 p.m. for kids 8 and younger, meet the Easter Bunny
Boys & Girls Club of Redding-Easton
170 Cross Highway
bgcre.net/2026-egg-hunt
\$, R

Lunch and Klezmer Music Concert

Thursday, April 9
12:00 p.m. Lunch
12:30 p.m. Concert
Pastrami sandwiches and live music by Nu Haven Kapelye
Redding Community Center
37 Lonetown Road
E-mail mstillman@reddingct.gov
\$, R

The Secret Lives of Artists Part II

Thursday, April 9
7:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.
Meet a panel of celebrated artists living in our community
Mark Twain Library
439 Redding Road
marktwinlibrary.org
R

Want to feature an upcoming event?

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

MEETINGS

Monday, April 6

Redding Fire District #1 Annual Budget Meeting
7:00 p.m.
186 Black Rock Turnpike

Monday, April 6

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

Monday, April 6

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

Tuesday, April 7

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

Tuesday, April 7

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

Tuesday, April 7

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

Tuesday, April 7

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

Wednesday, April 8

Region 9 Board of Education Curriculum Committee
8:30 a.m.
Joel Barlow High School
100 Black Rock Turnpike

Wednesday, April 8

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

Wednesday, April 8

Brown Bag Lunch with the First Selectwoman
12:00 p.m.
Town Hall
100 Hill Road

Wednesday, April 8

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

Thursday, April 9

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

Thursday, April 9

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

Thursday, April 9

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

Monday, April 13

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

*See meeting agendas and minutes at reddingct.gov/agendas-minutes

ARTS

Friday, April 3

Rachel Sumner & Traveling Light
7:00 p.m.
Performance by winner of 2025 Telluride Bluegrass Festival
The Granite
5 North Main Street
thegranitechurch.org/events
\$

Saturday, April 4

Charged Field Opening Reception
4:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.
Group exhibition with 19 artists
G-Town Arts
5 Main Street
gtownarts.com

Thursday, April 9

Lunch and Klezmer Music Concert
12:00 p.m. Lunch
12:30 p.m. Concert
Pastrami sandwiches and live music by Nu Haven Kapelye
Redding Community Center
37 Lonetown Road
E-mail mstillman@reddingct.gov
\$, R

Thursday, April 9

The Easton School of Artists Opening Reception
4:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.
Easton Public Library
6:30 p.m. – 9:00 p.m. Greiser's
Celebrate works from 16 Easton artists
Easton Public Library
691 Morehouse Road
Easton

Thursday, April 9

The Secret Lives of Artists Part II
7:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.
Meet a panel of celebrated artists living in our community
Mark Twain Library
439 Redding Road
marktwinlibrary.org
R

Friday, April 10

She Sings Dylan
8:00 p.m.
Female-fronted take on Bob Dylan's catalog
The Granite
5 North Main Street
thegranitechurch.org/events
R

Wednesday, April 15

Bus Trip to NYC to See Wicked
9:00 a.m. Leave Redding
Community Center
2:00 p.m. Performance
Meet at Redding Community Center
37 Lonetown Road
ctreddingweb.myvscloud.com
\$, R

CHILDREN | TEENS

Now through Wednesday, April 22

Applications open for The 2026 Mary Clinton Scholarship
Redding high school seniors pursuing studies in a number of environmentally-related fields can apply for a \$2,000 award through Redding Garden Club
reddinggardenclub.org

Tuesday, April 7

Topstone Family Story Time
10:30 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.
Co-sponsored with Park and Recreation, weather permitting
Topstone Park
72 Topstone Road
marktwinlibrary.org
R

Tuesday, April 7

Birdhouses (Grades 5+)
4:00 p.m. – 4:45 p.m.
Build your own birdhouse, all materials included
Mark Twain Library
439 Redding Road
marktwinlibrary.org
R

Wednesday April 8 – Thursday, April 9

Early Dismissal Days: Animal Adventures (Grades K-4)
12:15 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.
Hands-on fun at New Pond Farm
New Pond Farm Education Center
101 Marchant Road
newpondfarm.org
\$, R

FOOD | WINE

Wednesday, April 8

A Taste of 1776: Flavors of the Revolution
6:30 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.
A culinary journey to America's founding
Mark Twain Library
439 Redding Road
marktwinlibrary.org
R

HEALTH | WELLNESS

Thursday, April 2

Quantum Hypnosis – An Introduction
7:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.
Redding-based practitioner will introduce Quantum Hypnosis Healing Technique to participants
Mark Twain Library
439 Redding Road
marktwinlibrary.org
R

Saturday, April 18

Healthy Kids Day
10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.
Community event with activities, vendors, and more
Riverbrook Regional YMCA
404 Danbury Road
Wilton
wiltonymca.org

HOLIDAY | SEASONAL

Friday, April 3

2026 Torch Club Egg Hunt
11:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.
Egg hunt begins around 12:00 p.m. for kids 8 and younger, meet the Easter Bunny
Boys & Girls Club of Redding-Easton
170 Cross Highway
bgcre.net/2026-egg-hunt
\$, R

NATURE

Thursday, March 19 – Monday, April 20

Submissions open for Redding Land Trust Photography Show
Submit photos of Redding's open space for a chance to be showcased in juried show in June
reddingctlandtrust.org/photoshow
\$, R

Saturday, April 4

Think Outside the Bait Box
2:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.
Hosted by Newtown Conservation Commission, learn about rodenticide poisons and policies regulating their use
Newtown Community Center
8 Simpson Street
Newtown

Tuesday, April 14

Mapping Redding's Big Outdoors: The Book of Trails, Updated
7:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.
Explore the first new print edition by Redding Land Trust charting open space and trails in 21 years
Mark Twain Library
439 Redding Road
marktwinlibrary.org
R

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

Wednesdays

Progress Not Perfection
6:00 p.m. – 7:15 p.m.
Weekly Al-Anon meeting for family and friends of alcoholics
St. Patrick's Church / Conlisk Hall
169 Black Rock Turnpike

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
cibredding.org

Christ Church, Episcopal
Maundy Thursday Worship: Thursday, April 2 at 6:00 p.m.
Good Friday Liturgy: Friday, April 3 at 6:00 p.m.
Easter Sunday Worship: Sunday, April 5 at 9:00 a.m.
Egg Hunt following worship
184 Cross Highway
christchurchredding.org

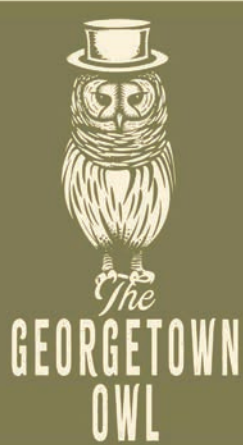
First Church of Christ, Congregational
Easter Sunday Worship: Sunday, April 5 at 9:00 a.m. and 11:00 a.m.
Egg Hunt at 12:00 p.m.
25 Cross Highway
firstchurchredding.org

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:
Holy Thursday: Thursday, April 2 at 8:00 p.m., Adoration to follow
Good Friday: Friday, April 3 at 3:00 p.m.
Holy Saturday: Saturday, April 4 at 8:00 p.m.
Easter Sunday: Sunday, April 5 at 8:30 a.m. and 10:30 a.m.
169 Black Rock Turnpike
sacredheart-stpat.org

Georgetown Oratory of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus
Maundy Thursday: Thursday, April 2 at 6:00 p.m. (Latin)
Good Friday: Friday, April 3 at 3:00 p.m. (Latin)
Stations of the Cross: Friday, April 3 at 6:00 p.m.
Holy Saturday: Saturday, April 4 at 6:00 p.m.
Easter Sunday: Sunday, April 5 at 9:00 a.m. and 10:30 a.m.
30 Church Street
georgetownoratory.org

Temple B'nai Chaim
Friday, April 3
Shabbat at Home (no service on site this Friday)
82 Portland Avenue
templebnaichaim.org



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Branch Vice President
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joe.porricelli@cbrealty.com



Jennifer Margnelli
Assistant Brokerage Manager
646.245.1383
jennifer.magnelli@cbrealty.com

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