Langley Refutes Charges of Secretly Taping Phone Call

By Rick Pezzullo

Putnam County Sheriff Robert Langley is refuting charges from his election opponent that he secretly recorded a phone call with a local supervisor and then used the conversation in his political campaign.

At a press conference on Oct. 15, Kevin McConville, who is looking to unseat Langley on Nov. 2, called on the Putnam County District Attorney’s Office and New York State Attorney General to investigate the sheriff for alleged criminal misconduct relating to a call sometime in the summer with Carmel Supervisor Ken Schmitt.

McConville maintained Langley used a county-issued cell phone on the 18-minute call with Schmitt to discuss the election and potential employment as a reward for political support.

“The subject matter of the call was entirely political in nature, and did not involve the business of the Sheriff’s Office, or county or town government, in any way,” McConville stated.

The recording of the call was later obtained under the Freedom of Information Law (FOIL).

“Langley could have hung up immediately after hearing from Schmitt that the call was political in nature, and Langley could have...

continued on page 2

Supporting a Superhero Teacher in Brewster

Teachers, staff and administrators at John F. Kennedy Elementary School (JFK) in the Brewster School District dressed in pink on Superhero Day during Spirit Week to show support for teacher Megan Gersch, who was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2019 and recently found out it returned.

“To say I am touched is an absolute understatement,” Gersch said. “To know that I was chosen to represent my county on a state level was, and still is, such a great honor. It’s an opportunity that few kids get, so I truly felt like the luckiest 16-year-old in the world.”

Every few months, the Youth Council is called with Smith to consider specific issues facing policymakers. Normally, the proposals are presented in front of an audience, but, due to COVID restrictions, they currently record their proposal and send it to the state for approval and overview. Drejaj’s first meeting as part of the Youth Council took place over Zoom in late August.

“I’ve had a passion for politics and our governmental system since sixth grade, and it’s been what I wanted to pursue ever since,” Drejaj said. “This was an amazing opportunity for me to finally experience a taste of what I could be doing when I finish college and pursue my political dreams. I’m really looking forward to being an advocate for the youth of this county.”

Drejaj learned about the Council through the Putnam County Youth Court, a court diversion program in which volunteers hear the cases of first-time offenders between the ages of seven and 17. An official with the program told her about the Youth Council and recommended her for it.
Odell Presents $167M 2022 Budget to Putnam Legislature

By Rick Pezzullo

Putnam County Executive MaryEllen Odell presented a $167.1 million proposed 2022 county budget to the Legislature earlier this month at the Putnam County Courthouse in Carmel.

The budget, which is within the New York State property tax cap, includes an increase of $3.8 million or 2.3% over the 2021 budget.

“This budget proposal respects the taxpayer, meets the needs of our employees and retirees and includes a 4% increase to the outside agencies such as libraries, museums, the arts and Cooperative Extension that enhance the quality of life in Putnam County,” Odell said. “Last year, during the height of the covid crisis, these agencies received no increase in funding. This year, again next year.”

The 2022 budget proposal anticipates $65 million in sales tax revenue, a conservative estimate that takes into account the uncertainties of a national economy hit by supply chain challenges and inflation.

“The Legislature is expected to vote on a final 2022 budget by November.”

Putnam Health Commissioner Nesheiwat Honored for COVID Work

By Rick Pezzullo

The New York State Association of County Health Officials has recognized Putnam County Health Commissioner Michael J. Nesheiwat, MD, for his leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Dr. Nesheiwat was also honored for his dedication to public health and outstanding service to the community during NYSACHO’s Annual Public Health Leadership Conference in October.

“I’m glad to learn that Dr. Nesheiwat got the recognition from his peers that he so greatly deserved,” County Executive MaryEllen Odell said. “He and his staff worked non-stop to successfully protect our county residents from an unknown public health threat. His guidance and expertise were invaluable during a very difficult time.”

While grateful for the acknowledgement, Dr. Nesheiwat said: “It’s all about teamwork.”

He wrote an email to his staff noting that the recognition really belonged to the entire Putnam County Department of Health, and that when he accepted the award, he did so on their behalf.

“During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, and continuing today, you each proceed to be such an integral part in Putnam’s response to the pandemic,” Nesheiwat wrote. “While conducting your everyday regular county duties, that protect and ensure the health and safety of Putnam County residents, you also investigated cases, conducted COVID tracing and ran highly efficient and successful vaccine PODS.”

Langley Refutes Charges of Secretly Taping Phone Call

continued from page 1

called back Schmitt on a personal phone outside on his personal time. But Langley stayed on this political call for almost 19 minutes using his taxpayer-funded office, his taxpayer-funded recording equipment to gather campaign material,” McConville said.

On his Facebook page Oct. 16, Langley dismissed McConville’s claims.

“I find it a little hilarious in saying that I recorded those phone calls. The Sheriff’s Office records phone calls. I don’t record the calls,” Langley remarked during an unspecified event. “There is nothing here other than a normal, standard operating procedure. All law enforcement records phone calls. It’s nothing new.”

Langley further explained the phone call was obtained legally through FOIL by a resident in Putnam County looking for information on another matter.

“I follow the law. If you respect the rule of law, you release it. If you have no respect for the rule of law, then you hold it back and violate the law,” he said. “I complied with a FOIL request through our office. That’s how the information got out there. It wasn’t put out there. It wasn’t given away.”
School COVID Testing Program Yields Few Cases in Westchester

By Martin Wilbur

The first month of weekly COVID-19 testing of students, teachers and staff in Westchester’s schools designed to avoid shutdowns has yielded a miniscule fraction of positive cases.

County Health Commissioner Dr. Sherlita Amler and First Deputy Commissioner Renee Recchia reported that there were 22 positive cases from the first 22,000 tests administered. The program started the week of Sept. 20.

“By doing surveillance screenings, we may be able to identify people who are asymptomatic positive individuals who would be able to spread this disease, find them, isolate them, get them out of the classroom, and by doing that, prevent spread so we don’t have large, disruptive quarantines that occur in schools,” Amler said.

Last school year, some districts were forced to shutter their buildings once the fall and winter COVID spike struck, leading some angry parents arguing that their children were falling behind because online learning was inferior.

Under the testing program, participating schools initially tested their entire student body and staff during the first week, then may test up to 20 percent of their population each ensuing week. Teachers who are unvaccinated are mandated to be tested weekly, but not students who are old enough to receive vaccines.

Only two or three districts opted out of the program, but they are getting their testing completed through other means, Recchia said.

What has been helpful is that two of the three outfits that are conducting the tests use the PCR saliva test where an individual spits into a vial. The third testing company uses the nasal swab, Amler explained. Participation might have been lower had the test required the nasal swab.

“(Parents) have concerns about putting their children through that, and so the good news is that’s not done,” Amler said.

County Executive George Latimer said the testing program is key to keeping schools open this year to the greatest extent possible.

“We know that children don’t perform as well with remote learning or hybrid learning,” Latimer said. “In-class learning is the best possible way to do this, so we’re committed to do that but we’re committed to do it in a way that’s intelligent and pragmatic.”

The testing program is being paid for by $15 million in federal funding, Recchia said. It was estimated that if there was maximum weekly participation, the funding for the tests would be used up by the end of the calendar year, she said. However, it appears the districts will be able to get through nearly the entire school year.

COVID Case Decline Continues

The trend in the steady reduction in Westchester COVID-19 cases has continued over the past couple of weeks as the county has reached a 90 percent vaccination level during the past month, Latimer said.

As of Sunday, there were about 1,350 active cases, now just under half the number of the late August peak and more than 300 less than two weeks earlier.

Another highly encouraging sign is that there have been no COVID-19-related deaths in Westchester for 12 consecutive days as of Sunday.

“If we can continue to go without a COVID death in Westchester County, then I would consider that the best of all possible outcomes, whatever the statistics are,” Latimer said.

The county has seen 2,338 fatalities related to the virus since the start of the pandemic.

There have been nearly 750,000 adults 18 years old and up who have received at least one vaccine dose and almost 670,000 people are fully vaccinated.

Westchester joins Manhattan and Nassau County as the only counties in the state to reach 90 percent, Latimer said. The three counties had been the first to reach 80 percent vaccination status in the state several months ago.

Declines in COVID-19 cases are evident in most areas of the state. New York City had a 1.1 percent positivity rate while the seven-county Mid Hudson region stood at 2.4 percent on Sunday, according to the state’s COVID tracker. Long Island had the second lowest rate on Sunday at 2.2 percent.

The positivity rate statewide was 2 percent on Saturday but ticked back up to 2.6 percent on Sunday.

By individual counties, Westchester declined to 0.9 percent on Sunday. Only Manhattan had a lower rate on Sunday at 0.7 percent, although the sparsely populated Hamilton County had no positive cases from 15 test results. The Bronx also stood at 0.9 percent.

All other counties in the Mid Hudson region had at least a 2.7 percent positivity rate on Sunday, with Putnam at 3.5 percent.
Affordable Housing, Recreation Among Priorities in 2022 Capital Plan

By Martin Wilbur

Westchester County Executive George Latimer proposed a $476.4 million capital projects budget for 2022 last Thursday, with commitments to develop more affordable housing, tackle climate change locally and invest in the parks system.

Latimer, joined by various department heads, has also planned a $28 million commitment to improve potable and fire water suppression systems at Westchester County Airport.

“The capital budget is really a statement of strategic investments,” Latimer said. “This is as much about our future as our present.”

Of the more than $476 million in projects, nearly $292 million will be for general county purposes, $152.4 million for sewer and water projects and $41.1 million toward refuse in addition to the planned expense at the airport.

The county will make the largest investment in affordable housing in its history, Latimer said, with a $50 million commitment for land acquisition and infrastructure improvements in 2022. The effort will help attract and keep a diversified workforce in Westchester.

Planning Commissioner Norma Drummond said Westchester recognizes its need to provide incentives for the construction of housing for people of all income levels. The $50 million far exceeds anything the county has proposed in the past. During the last two years, the county made investments of $10 million toward land acquisition and infrastructure.

“We’ve got developers lined up, we’ve got developers ready to use the funds, so we’re really looking forward to having the ability to provide these funds in the future,” Drummond said.

Several years ago, there had been a report that the county needed about 11,000 additional units of affordable housing to meet the current demand. Latimer estimated that between what has opened this year and other plans in the works accounts for roughly 2,500 units.

Environmental conservation is also high on the list of priorities for the county next year. Proposed is a $31.9 million appropriation for the purchase of electric hybrid buses for the Bee-Line bus fleet, $4.3 million to electrify Westchester’s two bus garages and $1 million for the installation of electric charging stations at county facilities.

In addition, another $1.1 million has been proposed for improvements at Hiltop Hanover Environmental Center in Yorktown. Nearly $50 million would be appropriated for parks improvements, most of it for structural upgrades to Playland Ice Casino and the neighboring amusement park.

The investment is being made as Standard & Poor’s (S&P) gave the county’s current AA+ rating a stable outlook. That’s the same rating that S&P has given the county while Moody’s reported a A1 rating, a notch below the coveted AAA.

Last week’s unveiling of the capital budget comes about a month before Latimer will release the main portion of Westchester’s spending plan. Latimer estimated that while upgrading its standing with the ratings agencies, the administration has reduced the backlog of capital projects by about $400 million, from just over $1.7 billion to a little more than $1.3 billion, said Larry Soule, the county’s budget director. Westchester has been able to achieve that while upgrading its standing with the ratings agencies.

Soule said Fitch recently removed its negative outlook for Westchester with a current AA+ rating with a stable outlook. That’s the same rating that S&P has given the county while Moody’s reported a A1 rating, a notch below the coveted AAA.

The capital projects budget, which Latimer estimated will account for about 40% of the budget, includes 

- $2 million for the construction of a new Westchester Police Department headquarters.
- Nearly $50 million for structural improvements to the County Center in White Plains. Boykin said the investments in critical infrastructure and other assets attracts families to the county.
- Another $60 million is being invested into the wastewater recovery facilities in Mamaroneck and Yonkers, Latimer said.

Over the past four years, the administration has reduced the backlog of capital projects by about $400 million, from just over $1.7 billion to a little more than $1.3 billion, said Larry Soule, the county’s budget director. Westchester has been able to achieve that while upgrading its standing with the ratings agencies.

Parks Commissioner Kathy O’Connor said she and her staff are excited at the county’s pledge to maintain its recreational facilities.

“For many, many years, they’ve been neglected, so we’re playing catch up, but this capital budget for 2022 will really get us off the ground,” she said.

Another $60 million is being invested into the wastewater recovery facilities in Mamaroneck and Yonkers, Latimer said.

The Board of Legislators must approve the capital budget and the operating budget by late December.
Excluded Workers Call on Hochul to Expand Funds as $2.1B Runs Dry

By Bailey Hosfelt

Westchester elected officials, community members and undocumented workers held a rally in front of the Martin Luther King Jr. statue in White Plains on Oct. 12 to call on Gov. Kathy Hochul and state lawmakers to expand the Excluded Workers Fund (EWF)’s cash flow.

The $2.1 billion fund, which was approved by the state in the spring, provides undocumented New York residents who were not eligible for and did not receive COVID-19 economic relief from the state or federal government the ability to recoup lost income.

On Oct. 8, Hochul announced that the funds were nearly exhausted. That same day, the Department of Labor closed the fund to new applicants.

According to the Department of Labor website, applications already submitted will be processed in the order they were received. However, for claims submitted after Sept. 24, there is no guarantee funds will be available.

“Given the demand, given the success of this program, it is clear that $2.1 billion will not be enough,” said Janet Fry, deputy executive director of the Mamaroneck-based Community Resource Center. “We knew about this before the state budget passed, and we are sure of it right now.”

“Gov. Hochul, please hear the voices of this community full of workers who need those funds now for their survival,” Fry added.

Roberto Zumba, the worker center coordinator at Neighbors Link in Mount Kisco, said all people should have an opportunity for financial recovery.

“Thousands of people were excluded despite paying into the social safety net,” Zumba said. “The social safety net needs to include me and all my neighbors.”

Many excluded workers who participated in a 23-day hunger strike last spring to advocate for the funds spoke about how crucial it was for their survival, calling on Hochul to expand funding so more workers’ lives could be helped.

Fry said funds were used by many to pay debt accrued during the pandemic, purchase laptops for children to attend virtual classes, help workers remove themselves from unsafe working conditions and allow survivors of domestic violence to move away from their abuser and rebuild.

“It wasn’t easy to get the first $2.1 billion, but we heard today that it saved people’s lives,” state Sen. Shelly Mayer (D-Yonkers) said. “And we have more people’s lives to save.”

In Westchester, Mayer said 2,738 people who applied have already received their funds. However, 13,357 eligible Westchester residents applied before the applications were shut off, and many are now waiting in limbo to see if the Department of Labor will process their claims.

State Sen. Jessica Ramos (D-Queens), the most common symptoms include:

- pain, tingling, burning, weakness, or numbness in arms, hands, legs or feet
- sudden, sharp, stabbing or shocking pain sensations
- loss of touch sensation
- clumsiness and trouble using hands to pick up objects or fasten clothing
- loss of balance and falling

Fortunately for Albert, Signature Acupuncture Studio is using the time-tested science of Acupuncture and technology originally developed by NASA that assists in increasing blood flow and expediting recovery and healing to treat this debilitating disease. After a series of treatments, Albert was taking stairs with stride!

“We have a lake house, and it’s upstairs. This morning I walked right down the stairs and got in the car,” Albert shared. “I remember thinking ‘that’s become mighty easy for me’, I didn’t have to hold on to the handrail or anything! It’s life-changing to have this mobility back!”

Finally! A local acupuncturist is helping cancer survivors live lives free from the constant pain and suffering associated with Peripheral Neuropathy!

Albert S. of Westchester, NY survived testicular cancer only to be living life in constant pain. He felt as though he were walking on pins and needles, becoming weaker and weaker every day. “I was beginning to be worried that one day I would be wheelchair-bound.”

Nearly half of patients who undergo chemotherapy will develop Chemotherapy-Induced Peripheral Neuropathy or CIPN.

The most common symptoms include:

- pain, tingling, burning, weakness, or numbness in arms, hands, legs or feet
- sudden, sharp, stabbing or shocking pain sensations
- loss of touch sensation
- clumsiness and trouble using hands to pick up objects or fasten clothing
- loss of balance and falling

For over 5 years Taisha, Licensed Acupuncturist, has been reversing the effects of CIPN and other varieties of Peripheral Neuropathy, including that caused by diabetes without invasive surgeries and medications that come with uncomfortable side effects.

If you’ve recently beat cancer only to find that you’re living a life in constant pain and discomfort or you’re struggling with the same symptoms as a result of either Idiopathic Neuropathy or Diabetic Peripheral Neuropathy, Taisha and the incredible team at Signature Acupuncture Studio can help!

Signature Acupuncture Studio success stories can be viewed by finding us on Google, or on our website at signatureacupuncture.com.

Signature Acupuncture is now accepting new patients but only for a limited time. To determine whether or not you are a good candidate for her personalized and comprehensive treatments an initial consultation is required.

Call (914)222-5644 today to schedule!

"HER TREATMENTS ARE LIFE CHANGING"

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Board of Legislators Approve Declaration of Climate Emergency

The Westchester County Board of Legislators unanimously passed a declaration of climate emergency on Monday, urging state and local governments to follow suit.

The resolution cites the catastrophic global and local impacts of climate change, including devastating flooding from extreme weather, as well as many of the recent steps that county government has taken to reduce the county’s carbon footprint. Those steps include replacing fossil fuel buses and fleet vehicles with hybrid and electric vehicles, supporting food scrap recycling and installation of electric vehicle charging stations, among other initiatives.

It pledges to issue a revised Westchester Climate Action Plan with new recommended action steps and an effort to support local, state and national governments address the emergency.

“I would like to thank all legislators who have long been a staunch advocate for county action on climate change,” said Board Chairman Ben Boykin (D-White Plains). “I’d also like to thank County Executive George Latimer for sponsoring this resolution and for his leadership in pushing for a cleaner and greener Westchester County. We have much work to do, but with this resolution we’re saying to the world that Westchester County is serious about climate action."

Last week, in his $476 million proposed capital budget for 2022, Latimer included $31.9 million for the purchase of electric hybrid buses for the Bee-Line bus fleet, $4.3 million to electrify Westchester’s two bus garages and $1 million for the installation of electric charging stations at county facilities.

Majority Leader MaryJane Shimsky (D-Dobbs Ferry) said the debate should not be about economic growth versus climate change.

“With this resolution, we are putting to rest any debate in Westchester over those false choices, she said. The extreme impacts of storms and flooding and the health effects of air and water pollution that we are living with today illustrate clearly that future economic growth and the future health and well-being of Westchester require our action on the climate crisis now.”

To read the full text of the resolution, visit https://bit.ly/3q941Cn

Excluded Workers Call on Hochul to Expand Funds as $2.1B Runs Dry

continued from page 5

Rivera added. “We cannot turn our backs on that need.”

Board of Legislators Majority Leader MaryJane Shimsky (D-Dobbs Ferry), said that so many essential workers put their own and their family’s lives on the line when COVID-19 hit.

“This helps everyone, and I hope that the state legislature and the governor will find a way to put more funds into this vital and badly needed program,” Shimsky said.

County Legislator Nancy Barr (D-Rye Brook) commended how far the EWF initially state legislature and the governor will find their own and their family’s lives on the line when COVID-19 hit.

“Manuel Ospina, a construction laborer and member of Don Bosco Workers in Port Chester, said that during the beginning of the pandemic, he was unable to find any work.

“During those times, it became really hard to make even $200,” Ospina said.

“And of course, I got late with the rent and everything.

The fund, Ospina said, will help him get back on his feet, especially after Hurricane Ida. The basement where Ospina lived took on eight feet of water.

“I’m basically homeless,” Ospina said, sharing that currently he’s staying in his friend’s living room.

Expanding the EWF is essential to help workers like him make a long-term recovery, he said.

“We live from our paycheck,” Ospina said.

“What are people going to do without any kind of assistance? Just because they’re undocumented doesn’t mean they cannot be helped.”

Learning Center, Sweet Shop to Move Into Downtown Chappaqua

Two new businesses have reached an agreement to operate out of space on Chappaqua’s South Greeley Avenue in the near future.

Admiral Real Estate Services Corp. announced Monday that Mathnasium, a math learning center, will be joined by Frannie’s Goodie Shop and Longford’s Ice Cream, which will partner to rent out another space at 75 S. Greeley Ave. in the hamlet.

When they move in, that will leave three remaining vacant spaces at the same address that had also been the site of the former ICD Contemporary Jewelry.

Mathnasium, which was established nearly 20 years ago, helps students by addressing the disconnect between their learning skills and the curriculum they are taught in school.

The new Frannie’s Goodie Shop/ Longford’s Ice Cream store brings a much-anticipated ice cream and sweet shop to the downtown. Frannie’s also has a location in Mount Kisco.

Both businesses will have street parking in the front and a municipal parking lot in the rear of the property.

No target dates were given for when the two spaces will be filled.

Joan Simon of Admiral Real Estate Services Corp. represented the landlord, Developers Consolidated Realty, LLC. Mathnasium was represented by Garrett Aries of ESR Commercial.

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Cover Image Description: A page from a newspaper with text about the Westchester County Board of Legislators approving a declaration of climate emergency. The text also mentions the expansion of the Excluded Workers Fund and new businesses moving into downtown Chappaqua. A contact section is also included for a Medicare Resource professional.
New York Medical College Receives $250G for Disaster Preparedness

Assemblyman Tom Abinanti (D-Pleasantville) joined with New York Medical College leadership in Valhalla last week to announce a $250,000 grant for the Center of Excellence in Precision Responses to Bioterrorism and Disasters within the Center for Disaster Medicine.

The funding will support the center’s training of local health care professionals, emergency responders and law enforcement in emergency preparedness for disasters, terrorism and public health emergencies.

“Today we are here to acknowledge and give thanks to the state legislature for an additional appropriation to make the first step in becoming a national center for disaster medicine,” said Dr. Salomon Amar, vice president for research at New York Medical College and senior vice president for research affairs for the Touro College and University System.

Dr. Robert W. Amler, vice president for government affairs and dean of the School of Health Sciences and Practice, thanked Abinanti, for his longstanding supporting of Health Sciences and Practice, thanked County Department of Emergency Services’ commissioner, said gave the center for training hospitals for mass casualties, but not training in the standard approach, but breaking down the standard approach and saying, nice, orderly arrival isn’t what happens. We have chaos at the scene.”

Markenson said.

“Another [training] the center does in economic development is not only to prepare [businesses] but talk about continuing operations and how they can continue to operate through these events.”

Richard G. Wishnie, Westchester County Department of Emergency Services’ commissioner, said gave the center for Disaster Medicine is not only a prominent center for research in New York but throughout the country.

“We believe that an expanded mission for the center will make it a national attraction that requires a modern facility, that will then attract students from around the nation,” Wishnie said.

Assemblyman Tom Abinanti, left, visits with the leadership of New York Medical College last Wednesday to present a $250,000 state grant to the college that will help it train health care professionals, law enforcement and other emergency responders to prepare for dealing with disasters, terrorism and public health emergencies.

Disaster Medicine reinforced how vital the research and training conducted by the center has been.

“For the past 15 years, this center has really been unique in serving the role of conducting interdisciplinary research, training, technical assistance and educational activities all related to emergency preparedness,” he said. “To see how far NYMC has come is just amazing.”

Dr. David S. Markenson, the center’s medical director, highlighted the impact the Center has had on regional emergency preparedness and how new facilities are needed to facilitate the increased demands for the center’s services.

“The Center has really had a platform to prepare for all hazards. To be creative, to be forward-thinking, whether it’s training for disasters, terrorism and public health emergencies.

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“The Center has really had a platform to prepare for all hazards. To be creative, to be forward-thinking, whether it’s training for disasters, terrorism and public health emergencies.
New Castle’s Form Based Code Financial Analysis Seriously Lacking

I am a longtime apolitical Chappaqua resident, having moved here in 1995, and I am increasingly concerned about the politics apparently driving the discussion of the adoption of the Form Based Code. Last week’s article, “New Castle, Chappaqua Schools at Odds Over Funding Projections,” outlines a key problem. It is not clear to me what the motivation of several of the Town Board members may be, but I have concluded that the Board of Education clearly knows best about the potential financial impact on our school system.

Call for Volunteers Needed to Advocate for Long-Term Care Residents

October is National Long-Term Care Residents’ Rights Month, a time to acknowledge the contributions and sacrifices many long-term care residents have made to better our community and to call attention to the rights of residents in nursing homes, assisted living, adult care facilities and family-type homes.

The theme for Residents’ Rights Month 2021 is “Reclaiming My Rights, My Home, My Life” to acknowledge the impact of COVID-19 this past year on residents and their families. It emphasizes the recognition of the long-term care facility as the residents’ home and underscores residents’ rights to dignity, choice and self-determination.

The Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program, a dedicated advocacy program available to anyone residing in a nursing home or other long-term care facility, is serving Westchester, Rockland and Putnam counties, and is sponsored by the Long Term Care Community Coalition (LTCCCC). If you or a loved one need an advocate in long-term care, please call 914-590-3406 or e-mail judy@ltccc.org.

We need now, more than ever, dedicated volunteers to advocate for nursing home and other long-term care residents. Please consider volunteering in your area to advocate for this vulnerable population. As a volunteer certified ombudsman, you can help ensure that the voices of long-term care residents do not go unheard.

To learn more about making a difference as a volunteer with the Ombudsman Program, visit https://nursinghome411/ltcop/volunteer.

Judy A. Farrell
Program Director, Tri-County LTC Ombudsman Program

Dedicating Park to Jean Craighead George Was a Special Moment

On Oct. 10, we welcomed Jean Craighead George Park into the Town of New Castle Park family. We were joined by her children Craig, Luke and Twig George and many of her neighbors, friends and colleagues.

Parks have a unique way of connecting people to both one another and to nature. Jean lived up the hill from the park, her backyard touches mine, and I am proud of the work I did to kick off this project.

Today, it is still rare to see parks dedicated to women. Central Park did not get its first statue of a woman until 2019. New Castle took a great step to honor our neighbor, an award-winning author and conservationist, who taught us to appreciate and protect the natural world.

A group of dedicated volunteers have begun the work of removing invasive vines. The New Castle Department of Recreation & Parks has joined the effort and have brought out the big trucks that have accelerated the work.

However, there is still lots of work to be done. If you would like to get involved or follow the project, please join our Facebook Page at https://www.facebook.com/ JeanCraigheadGeorgePark.

Jen Bounds
Chappaqua

Jen Bounds is a Democratic candidate for New Castle Town Board.
Not Ready for a Cannabis Store for Billions of Years

By Michael Gold

Pleasantville isn’t ready for a cannabis café. It won’t be ready for about five billion years, when the sun will burn out and life on Earth will cease to exist.

It doesn’t matter where the cannabis café would be located, what security measures are put in place to prevent minors from entering or how much tax revenue it might generate.

Adults seeking cannabis can get into a car and drive to a cannabis shop in another town. Any store or warehouse a kid can walk to in town is a place a kid can hang around in front of. While that’s OK for a comic book store, it’s not for this.

Pleasantville has certain Norman Rockwell-like qualities that could easily be degraded with the arrival of a cannabis shop. It’s the type of town where parents pull their little children in red wagons to the Saturday market. Kids peacefully walk to school. We say hello to other people walking on the streets and talk with our neighbors on the weekends. The tree-lined streets exude a sense of quiet and peacefulness. It feels like a little slice of heaven.

As a longtime District 2 resident, Erika has always been a compassionate community member. She understands the importance and power of giving back and strives to make life better for those around her. Whether that’s helping to design and construct the vegetable garden of Katonah Elementary School or founding Action Together Northern Westchester, a local grassroots activist organization focusing on social justice issues.

Being the change you want to see is near to my heart and few people fully encompass that more than Erika. I have known her in a personal and professional capacity for years and can attest to her tireless commitment to public service. She is a pragmatic problem solver who is ready and able to take on the big challenges our COVID recovery requires.

Erika’s nonprofit leadership experience, in depth understanding of our education system and thorough knowledge of Westchester County government, make her the clear and most qualified candidate to be our next county legislator.

If there’s even the slightest chance that just one kid could figure out an illicit strategy to get into a cannabis café in this town or finagle a way to get an adult to buy them pot, that’s one too many.

Every parent knows that they need to communicate the message to their kids that drugs are not OK. They provide an escape, yes, but you know what? When you come down from that high, you still face the same problems and issues. The solution is not to escape, but to work at the challenges in your life. If you need a temporary break from school or your house, take a walk around town. Play ball with your friends. Read a book.

And whatever drug you take may get you addicted, until all you think about is getting high again and all you do is get another hit. It will ruin your life.

Allowing a cannabis shop in this serene village is the wrong message to send to our children.


Letters to the Editor

Pierce is Best Candidate to Continue to Help Westchester From District 2

Erika Pierce should be our next county legislator for District 2. Retiring County Legislator Kitley Covill has served the district for two terms and her careful and smart leadership needs to be continued. Erika is the candidate to do just that.

She served as Kitley’s legislative aide from 2018 until earlier this year. She has gained unparalleled insight into the job, from running the office to researching and drafting important local legislation. Erika’s curiosity, integrity, intelligence and impartiality make her uniquely qualified to take on this role and be effective immediately upon taking office.

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Tattered American Flags on Pleasantville’s Bedford Road Must Be Replaced

Have you seen the American flags displayed along Bedford Road in Pleasantville? If not, I invite you to please go and look at them. They are a disgrace! The American flag is not just a flag. It represents our nation and the millions of American soldiers who fought for this great country of ours – from Lexington and Concord to Afghanistan. These brave soldiers fought and died defending it. We do them a gross disservice in allowing these tattered and torn flags to remain in place.

Please request that they be replaced ASAP if they cannot be replaced immediately, please respectfully remove them and allow the Marine Corps League to take them to be respectfully taken out of service.

Allowing these flags to remain in place is a black mark on Pleasantville, and a disrespectful tribute to our veterans. I would hate to see these flags remain on the poles when Veterans Day comes on Nov. 11. It would cost less than $2,000 to replace the flags and poles with new ones. Surely that is not asking too much.

Please don’t dishonor your veterans by keeping the flags up for Veterans Day. God bless America.

Guest Column

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Please don’t dishonor your veterans by keeping the flags up for Veterans Day. God bless America.
Guest Column

By George Pappas and Marlene Sauer

Wallace Pond, located in the northern and often forgotten section of Cortlandt Manor, is plagued with troubles that the Town of Cortlandt can resolve by taking ownership of the situation and of the Wallace Pond dam.

For decades, the issues have remained unresolved and top of mind for residents as they relate to the town’s unscrupulous actions involving (1) transfer of ownership of the Wallace Pond dam in the early 1980s (and after the state Department of Environmental Conservation notified the town that they would need to remediate the dam’s serious and significant deficiencies) to an unsuspecting property owners association; (2) lack of maintaining the water quality of Wallace Pond which they still own; and (3) the condition and rating of the dam.

Last December, the DEC reclassified and downgraded the Wallace Pond dam to a Class C rating. This new high-hazard rating (potential downstream damage in the event of a breach) means that repairs are now mandatory or the dam could potentially be removed and Wallace Pond would be drained. The Town Board has been danging this potential threat as an incentive for neighborhood residents to vote in their “we-want-to-help-you” proposal, which calls for the residents to assume the cost burden of repairing the dam instead of the town reclaiming ownership and paying for the dam’s repair.

Cortlandt Town Board members publicly stated “over their deadbodies” will the Wallace Pond dam be taken down. However, their proposed solution would unfairly redistribute, create division and burden a smaller number of residents in our neighborhood if a special parks district was voted in. A parks district would allow the town to inflect an annual tax assessment of thousands of dollars per household for 30 years and assign perpetual responsibility for the maintenance of the dam that is owned by a defunct property owners association that individual neighborhood residents are not responsible for.

The town’s stance is only the residents in the immediate area of Wallace Pond benefit from it and, therefore, are responsible for the cost. This logic is flawed since Wallace Pond is located in a critical watershed area and all town residents have the economic opportunity to enjoy and benefit from its environmental significance. Wallace Pond also has historical significance as it was used for ice harvesting prior to refrigeration. The town claims that they have no interest in Wallace Pond as a community resource. How can that be, especially when they own the pond?

Neighborhood residents are unified in rejecting the Town Board’s unfair proposal and want the town to reclaim ownership of the dam and pay for the repairs to remedy this situation. The town should work cooperatively with Westchester County, the state and FEMA to obtain infrastructure and environmental grant funding. The Lake Island dam in Eastchester and Lake Suzanne in Rockland County prove that this is possible.

The Town of Cortlandt is already receiving significant amounts of grant money and, as highlighted by the town on public television, is benefiting from several million dollars in realized savings due to program restrictions during COVID-19.

With their smiling faces and crossed arms, the Town Board’s campaign slogan is Cortlandt Forward. Forward okay, but the Town Board has a responsibility to correct haunting situations from the past and preserve Wallace Pond as a town resource for wildlife and constituents alike.

George Pappas and Marlene Sauer are residents of Cortlandt’s Wallace Pond neighborhood.

Letters to the Editor

Transparency Needed to Ensure Chappaqua Rezoning Plan is in Public Interest

New Castle Acting Supervisor Jeremy Saland has made multiple public requests that explain who is privatelylobbying the town for favorable development regulations. He claimed that no one has lobbied him or other town leaders. I am writing to respond, and to publicly call for much needed transparency.

Freedom of Information requests reveal written correspondence between the town and numerous developers and their representatives that have not, until now, been publicly disclosed. The communications contain insights against the Chappaqua Board of Education for “fighting back” against the 997-apartment development plan for Chappaqua, and claims that the impacts of the development will be much smaller than the town has publicly acknowledged. Town officials deride community residents standing in principled opposition to the town’s development plan as “NIMBYs.”

Town records reveal that Mr. Saland, former supervisor Ivy Pool, Councilwoman Lauren Levin and the-Councilwoman-elect Lori Morton met privately, away from Town Hall, with high-level associates of Joseph Tavolacci, the developer of a newly constructed three-story building in Chappaqua. His representative, William Spade, who made the arrangements, had told them in advance to expect that they would be lobbied to increase the height limit for buildings in Chappaqua to four stories, which is contrary to the town’s Comprehensive Plan.

The public was never noticed either before or after, and no meeting minutes were published. New York State’s Open Meetings Law prohibits three or more Town Board members from meeting to conduct town business in private, let alone together with private interests to be lobbied about pending legislation.

Mr. Spade also privately lobbied the town in pursuit of other lucrative legislative changes relating to properties owned by his clients including eliminating retail requirements and reducing setback requirements, which was then quietly introduced by the town, without public discussion of the merits.

Mr. Saland should know how lobbying works. His father, a former state senator, privately hired lobbyist paid to represent development and construction interests. Mr. Saland should have publicly disclosed his family ties to developer interests, because this knowledge would help the public interpret his support for this pending developer-friendly legislation.

Scott Vine
Chappaqua

Esposito’s Business Acumen Would Help the Town Thrive in Years Ahead

Before COVID-19 I had no idea who Sergio Esposito was. During the pandemic lockdown, I watched Supervisor Matt Slater’s town COVID-19 updates, which were great and very informative. This is where I found out about Mr. Esposito.

I have watched him explain what businesses needed to do to survive. I’ve watched him talk about the PPP loan process and how it would help the local business owners. I’ve watched him talk about establishing a list of restaurants that provided takeout and a pledge from the restaurants to the town’sניקous actions. He also provided us with information on the stimulus packages and what was going on in Washington to help every one of us. He worked with the town to help restaurants get outdoor dining established so they could survive.

Sergio Esposito really cares about the town, people and all the businesses that make this town a great place to live. Being a small business owner himself, I feel that Sergio Esposito would be a valuable member of the Town Board. He will help keep this town thriving with business because of his concerns to help everyone succeed.

Patricia Costello
Yorktown

Esposito Has Clear Understanding of What Yorktown Businesses Need

I want to personally thank Sergio Esposito for advocating for our town, our citizens and our small businesses, especially mine. Sergio was instrumental in formulating the “outside dining” legislation, which allowed my business to survive. I remember talking about it with him by phone and he even came to my business to explain and get my input on what I would like to have seen in the new legislation.

Sergio Esposito listened to my concerns and my recommendations, and shortly thereafter, he appeared at Town Board meetings and supported the entire legislation that he helped formulate. As a side note, many of my suggestions were in the proposed legislation. Thankfully the new legislation was enacted! Sergio even showed up one day with Supervisor Slater and brought along News12 for an interview regarding the proposed redevelopment for the Yorktown Green shopping plaza. The man is unstoppable and truly dedicated.

Sergio Esposito is the only candidate that understands what our business sector needs and can get the job done.

Bob Crossett
Owner
Yorktown Grille
Residents of White Plains and local history lovers are invited this Sunday to attend a pair of simultaneous celebrations that have been as much as three centuries in the making.

Not only is the White Plains Historical Society holding its annual commemoration of the Battle of White Plains, which has its anniversary several days later on Oct. 28, but it will also observe the 300th anniversary of the Jacob Purdy House, where George Washington is known to have stayed in 1776 and 1778.

John Vorperian, president of the White Plains Historical Society, said with the Purdy House’s milestone anniversary this year, it made sense to combine the two events, where 1721 meets up with 1776.

“The point is that we’d like to do something where the public is aware,” Vorperian said. “The Battle of White Plains we do every year to commemorate (and) the board had felt this was the appropriate way to go, so that’s what we’re going to do on Sunday.”

The celebrations last from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Jacob Purdy House, located at 60 Park Ave. in White Plains, with a flag-raising at noon. There will be groups of re-enactors, not only representing the patriots but also British redcoats, along with two blacksmiths and women re-enactors who portray the importance that they played during the American Revolution, Vorperian said.

One re-enactor who usually dresses as Martha Washington will come as a washerwoman, someone who would be found at a Revolutionary War camp, he said. Women often came and gave support to the rebels.

“This is something that I’ve been hammering away at as president, to look at history in a more global perspective,” Vorperian said. “Yes, Washington is one of the fathers of our country, but we get to look at who else participated in the Revolution and the role of women.”

There will be a fife and drum corps and the White Plains High School marching band will also perform at the event. Tours will be given of the Jacob Purdy House, where visitors can walk the same spaces that Washington did on his visits, although groups will be limited to six to eight people at a time.

While some may think of history occurring in far-off places, Vorperian said White Plains and its surroundings were a hotbed of activity during the Revolution. In addition to being home to the battle, where Washington’s troops were able to repel the British, the city was the first place in New York State that held a public reading of the Declaration of Independence at the armory on North Broadway, he said. That site now has senior apartments.

White Plains was also split in its loyalties, with roughly a third of its inhabitants loyal to the crown and another third supporting the patriots. The rest of the citizenry just tried to stay out of the way. There were even taverns that were known to be pro-crown or pro-patriot. Hatfield’s Tavern, a pro-King George spot, was burned down by rebels.

“Here in Westchester, and White Plains in particular, there was no safe side to be on,” Vorperian said. “People just tried to get through it all.”

The split also fractured the Purdy family, which bought the house and about 132 surrounding acres from its original owner and builder Samuel Horton. Jacob Purdy was living in the house at the time of the Revolution, Vorperian said. The Purdys who were loyalists fled to Canada, and the White Plains Historical Society has formed a friendship with the Annapolis Royal Historical Society in Nova Scotia, where they settled.

The house stayed in the hands of the Purdys until shortly after Jacob’s death in 1823. Then 10 years later, it was reacquired by Jacob Purdy II until it was bought by James Ferris in 1866.

Vorperian is hopeful that if families bring their children there will be at least a couple of youngsters who will fall in love with history.

“My hope is if it means one, two, maybe three youngsters turn and say, ‘Hey I want to go to college and I want to major in history, I’ll be all the more enthused and happy about this,’” he said.

The event is free for anyone who attends.
**Sonia Gitner**

Sonia (Auerbach) Gitner, a longtime Yorktown Heights resident, died Oct. 14 at NewYork-Presbyterian/Hudson Valley Hospital following a recent stroke. She was 88.

Gitner was born in New York City on Feb. 18, 1932, the daughter of the late David Auerbach and Tillie (Rubin) Auerbach. She was a graduate of Walton High School in the Bronx, attended City College School of Business, and after raising her family, graduated from Mercy College in Dobbs Ferry, class of 1979, with a degree in business administration.

Sonia married the late Stanley Gitner of Brooklyn on Jan. 27, 1951. She is survived by three sons, Fred of New York City, Barry of Morgan Hill, Calif., and Henry (Debra) of Chicago, Ill.; grandchildren of her extended family and friends, both near and far, with whom she kept in contact by telephone across the U.S. and Canada, sharing in their joys and sorrows, and her friends and all of the people she touched during her 63 years in Yorktown.

A gathering for family and friends was held Sunday, Oct. 17 at 10 a.m. at Yorktown Funeral Home, 945 E. Main St. (route 132), Shrub Oak, NY 10588, followed by a graveside service and burial at 11:30 a.m. at King David Cemetery, 101 Mill St., Putnam Valley, NY 10579.

In lieu of flowers, the family has requested that contributions in memory of Sonia be made to one of the following: Yorktown Jewish Center.

**Melvin Berger**

Known around his hometown of Mount Kisco as a tireless community servant who helped countless citizens battling alcoholism, drug addiction and homelessness, Melvin “Mel” Berger will be truly missed. He peacefully passed away on Oct. 6.

Born on June 28, 1938, Mel grew up in the middle-class Bronx enclave of Pelham Parkway, as the eldest of four sons to George and Elaine Berger. He and his brother Stuart studied pharmacy at Columbia University and soon opened a series of small pharmacies around Westchester County.

Mel settled in Hartsdale where he helped raise his three sons, Michael, Craig and Jonathan. He first came to Mount Kisco as a co-owner of Mount Kisco Pharmacy, a business he would ultimately run and own by himself for over two decades. After a divorce, he moved to Mount Kisco where he met and partnered with Cheri Nawell, and helped raise her two young children, Megan and Bob, as his own. He would remain a proud Mount Kisco resident for the rest of his life. As a local pharmacist, he saw first-hand the negative effects of drug and alcohol abuse in his community and founded Mount Kisco’s Drug and Alcohol Abuse Prevention Council. Consequently, he helped pioneer the successful drug court to divert young drug and alcohol offenders away from prison and into recovery programs. Later, he would collaborate with local places of worship to create the Emergency Shelter Partnership to provide winter shelter to the area’s growing homeless population, many of whom were laborers from Central America who couldn’t find work in the colder months.

Mel was so loved and respected in the community that his children often joked that he was the unofficial mayor of Mount Kisco. In addition to his passion for community service, he was an avid fan of classic country music and his beloved New York Mets.

He is survived by his five children and eight grandchildren.

**Gertrude Farrington**

Gertrude (Guggie) Farrington, 107 years old, formerly of Ridgefield, Conn., passed away peacefully in Valhalla. Born in 1914, Gertrude lived a long life that allowed her to excel at her professional career at Texaco and pursue her passion for gardening.

She graduated from the College of New Rochelle in 1936, a significant achievement since only 8 percent of females in the U.S. graduated from college at that time.

Gertrude had a long and remarkable career with Texaco. She started in 1944 as a stenographer in the Personnel Department. In 1963, she became the first female officer of Texaco when she was appointed assistant secretary of the company. She retired from Texaco in 1973. Gertrude and her husband, Wesley, shared a lifelong passion for gardening. Gertrude was a member of the Ridgefield Garden Club where she was instrumental in the restoration and maintenance of Ballard Park’s parterre gardens. Gertrude kept a diary from 1978 to 1992 that detailed her daily life, gardening activity, bird sightings, world events and Notre Dame football games. Her diary was accepted into The Smithsonian Institution’s Archives of American Gardens, and turned into a learning lab titled “Explore One Woman’s Experience in Civic Life, 1978-1992.”

Gertrude is survived by her sister, Kelly Davis; 10 nieces and nephews; 12 great-nieces and great-nephews; 22 great-great nieces and great-great nephews; and two great-great-great nephews.

Visitation will be on Monday Oct. 25 from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Beecher Fooks Funeral Home in Pleasantville, where funeral services will be held. A burial will follow at Mount Calvary Cemetery in White Plains.

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**Local Author to Speak on Churchill’s 1932 Visit to Westchester**

When Winston Churchill spoke in Westchester County will be the topic of a talk this Saturday, Oct. 23 at 2 p.m. at Cortlandt Town Hall.

Jointly sponsored by the Van Cortlandtville Historical Society, the Yorktown Historical Society and Croton Friends of History and hosted by the Town of Cortlandt, the program is open free to the public.

Author and historian Anthony Czarnecki of Cortlandt Manor will present in a PowerPoint program what the iconic British prime minister said in an historic lecture on “The World Crisis” at the then newly-opened Westchester County Center in White Plains in 1932. It was at the end of a memorable two-month lecture tour of the United States by Churchill and it was eight years before he emerged on the world stage.

“This year marks the 75th anniversary of Winston Churchill’s famous ‘Iron Curtain Speech’ in 1946, which followed the multinational military victory that defeated Nazi Germany during World War II,” Czarnecki said.

Based on his article published in Westchester Historian Magazine in 2014, Czarnecki will elaborate on the meaning of Churchill’s lecture in White Plains, including an almost tragic incident that happened to him upon his arrival in Manhattan that involved a Yonkers resident.
By Martin Wilbur

The pandemic has changed so many lives, including how and where we work. Until the last year-and-a-half, nursing was a profession that seemed to always attract enough young adults to the profession.

But COVID-19 has seemingly changed all of that, with many hospitals and other health care facilities reporting shortages. This Sunday morning, the Mount Kisco Lions Club will be holding a three-mile walk within the village to raise money for a scholarship for a local high school student who plans to pursue a nursing program in college and for a current health care worker who would like to go back to school and become a nurse.

Gail Smilkstein, president of the Mount Kisco Lions and a retired registered nurse, is reconstituting the walk to raise money for the scholarships after the effort lapsed for the past 12 years. She said the prospective nursing candidates need all the encouragement that can be mustered to entice students into the field.

“People are leaving the nursing field, people aren’t going into the nursing field because of COVID and we really need nurses,” said Smilkstein, who worked as a school nurse for the bulk of her career at Sleepy Hollow High School, along with several other schools around the county.

Candidates for the high school scholarship will be selected from Fox Lane, John Jay or Kennedy Catholic high schools, she said. The two recipients will receive $1,500 each.

The walk, which kicks off at 9 a.m. from the front entrance of Northern Westchester Hospital, will follow a three-mile loop around the village. After leaving the hospital grounds, it will head down Moore Avenue, before turning onto Lexington and then South Moger Avenue, and finally onto Main Street to head back to the hospital.

The route will remain on the sidewalks so there will be no road closures or impact on traffic. Smilkstein expects a fair number of nurses from the area to take part.

Participants are asked to secure donors to sponsor their walk for a flat rate and to pay before the walk. Smilkstein said a station will be set up at the gazebo on South Moger Avenue to answer questions from passersby and solicit additional donations from the public. A second table may also be set up near Jacobson’s Pharmacy on East Main Street.

Participants may park behind the pharmacy or at the Boys & Girls Club. Smilkstein said since 2009 the Mount Kisco Lions have focused their energies on other charities, organizations and causes. But with the pandemic straining the nursing field in many areas, it seemed the proper time to restart the walk, she said.

“We would like to raise as much money as we can because it will carry over to next year if we make extra money, and we’ll give (out) funds the next year,” Smilkstein said. “If it’s really a very well supported thing then we will.”

The walk will be held from 9 a.m. to noon rain or shine. For more information or if anyone has questions, they may call Gail Smilkstein at 914-483-7106.
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**Brewster**

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Halloween Celebrations Close By in the Hudson Valley

Boasting crisp seasonal air and vibrant scenery, New York is one of the best destinations to experience Halloween. From quirky small-town festivities and a hotel offering otherworldly experiences to a theme park’s inaugural family-friendly Halloween experience, the state offers something for everyone to celebrate the spookiest time of the year.

Below are some of the best locations to celebrate Halloween in the Hudson Valley.

**Roxbury:** Nestled in the heart of the Catskills Mountains, Roxbury offers small-town charm and one of the nation’s most immersive and fantastical hotels that offers over-the-top Halloween thematic accommodations. From the spooky Dracula’s Fangs Tower Cottage featuring old-world Transylvania gothic décor, a grand winding staircase, a vampiric throne chamber and red velvet curtains to the beautifully ornate Victorian-inspired 1848 mansion room where a friendly young ghost is said to preside over the room, The Roxbury at Stratton Falls is just the ticket for a unique Halloween experience.

**Goshen:** Off the heels of its grand opening in August, LEGOLAND New York offers its not-so-spooky Halloween extravaganza, Brick-or-Treat. Available every Saturday and Sunday in October from 3 to 6 p.m. the park is “tricked” out in Halloween decor, featuring special events including costume contests and parades, spooky fun exhibits, dance parties, special Halloween shows, meet-and-greets with LEGOLAND Halloween characters, goodie bag giveaways and of course, trick-or-treat stations. After a “bricktastic” fall day at the park, families can conveniently retreat to the new LEGOLAND New York Hotel, the first and only LEGO-themed hotel in the Northeast, located just steps away from the theme park’s iconic entrance arch.

**Croton-on-Hudson:** Along the Hudson River is Croton-on-Hudson. Starting in late September and running through Nov. 21, Historic Hudson Valley puts on The Great Jack O’Lantern Blaze that’s known for being one of the most eye-catching events in the entire state. Made up of thousands of lit up magical pumpkins, you won’t believe the spectacular displays that are put together at Van Cortlandt Manor every year.
Jefferson Valley Mall
10.29 5-9 PM

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The Recent and Sad Demise of Interest in Antiques

When my wife and I first got married, way back in the dark ages of 1965, we were anxious to fill our first apartment with interesting furnishings.

Because I had gone to college at William & Mary in the historic town of Williamsburg, Va., I was really into antiques. My wife Margaret was totally a modern kind of gal and the furniture she brought to our first apartment was her bedroom set from her parents’ home, which was strictly modern.

What I brought to our first home was a collection of antiques I had been gathering since I first arrived in New York City three years before. During that time, there were many antiques shops in New York City, especially along lower 3rd Avenue, and I spent almost every lunchtime visiting them and adding both furniture and accessories to my first bachelor apartment, which was located in the historic landmark neighborhood, Brooklyn Heights.

My future wife was impressed when she visited my place for the first time. I further indoctrinated her to furnishings of the past by suggesting for our honeymoon that we visit Colonial Williamsburg, then Charlottesville, Va. (specifically the home of Thomas Jefferson).

Isn’t it interesting how one can align with another’s interests once exposed to them? Not only did Margaret jump on the bandwagon of antiques discovery and purchase, but she soon far surpassed my interest.

For many years we acquired pieces both big and small, filling an 18th century home we eventually bought in Yorktown Heights, a large six-bedroom house where there was plenty of room to house our collection.

However, when it came time for us to downsize a half-dozen years ago from that 3,900-square-foot home to an 1,800-square-foot condo in Trump Park, we endeavored to unload the bulk of our collection, first through an open house sale, then by inviting local antiques dealers to buy from us wholesale. The sale directly to the public didn’t produce much and the antiques dealers didn’t even bother to show up.

As a result, the buyers of our home lacked out with a lot of furniture and accessories left behind, which they, moving from a smaller apartment, were grateful to inherit.

Very honestly, I couldn’t understand how the interest in antiques could slack off so dramatically in recent years. I had to look up the reasons on the interest and was not all that surprised to find that, by some estimates, antique furnishings have decreased in value by 45 percent over the past 15 years. Once-hot commodities struggle to find buyers and, when they do manage to sell, can see up to a 70 percent drop in price.

The reasons given for the current lack of interest include the fact that baby boomers are downsizing their homes and flooding the market with antiques and other furniture. Add to that the fact that many more people are buying open concept homes, which don’t require as much furniture.

So, while there are far fewer people who are interested in relics from the past to incorporate into their homes, I will continue to take pleasure in indulging my own love for antiques. Further, if and when I find a little treasure I want to adopt from former owners, I can have it at a cheaper price.

Bill Primavera is a real estate associate with William Raveis Real Estate and founder of Primavera Public Relations, Inc., the longest running public relations agency in Westchester (www.PrimaveraPR.com), specializing in lifestyles, real estate and development. To engage the services of The Home Guru and his team to market your home for sale, call 914-522-2076.
Foursome of W’chester Women Honored During Hispanic Heritage Month

By Martin Wilbur

Four Latina women in Westchester were honored last Thursday by state Sen. Peter Harckham (D-Lewisboro) for outstanding contributions to their communities in commemoration of Hispanic Heritage Month. Ruth Ayala-Quezada, Dinora Pacheco, Karine Patiño and Diana Loja were featured at a special ceremony at Sleepy Hollow Village Hall. Hispanic Heritage Month recognizes the accomplishments of the many Hispanic communities throughout the United States.

Ayala-Quezada is the owner of Carmel Taxi in Sleepy Hollow. A native of Peru, she arrived in the United States in 1986 with her parents, who a few years later bought the old Ernie’s Taxi in Mount Kisco.

Having worked for her parents learning how to dispatch taxis while going to school served her well when it came to open her own business. She has worked with her sisters, and they take turns working and watching each other’s children, Harckham said.

“I’m very proud of my heritage and I’m proud to represent my community, and with hard work, dedication and being humble, you can succeed,” Ayala-Quezada said.

Pacheco was born in the Dominican Republic and her desire to help people led her to become a nurse, including serving on the health care staff of the Dominican president. After immigrating to the United States, she met her husband Freddy and moved to Peekskill.

She co-founded the Peekskill Hispanic Community Corporation, which helps feed families that face food insecurity, conducts certification classes and raises funds for international crises. Pacheco currently serves as its president.

“During the pandemic the organization has fed dozens of families through its dozens of food distributions and it’s volunteered to deliver food door to door to people who were quarantining,” Harckham said.

Pacheco’s dedication was evident when in one of her first roles with the Hispanic Community Corporation she helped find homes for 24 families displaced by fire.

Patiño, an attorney specializing in immigration and criminal law, was born to Ecuadorian immigrants in Sleepy Hollow and has lived her entire life in Mount Kisco. She volunteered for Neighbors Link and worked with the old Mount Kisco Police Department in the Police and Community Together partnership that trained about 200 officers in cultural competency.

Patiño also joined Putnam County Legal Aid Society in 2017 and served on Westchester County’s Police Reform and Reimagining Task Force. She is running uncontested in two weeks for Mount Kisco village trustee and will become the municipality’s first Latina board member.

Hispanics comprise nearly 40 percent of Westchester’s population but are severely under-represented in many careers, including law and government, Patiño said. Hispanic women make up only 2 percent of the nation’s attorneys, she said.

“I hope to be not only a source of inspiration for younger generations, but as a source of support for my community and for the younger generation,” Patiño said.

Loja immigrated at 12 years old from Ecuador with her parents. Today she serves as a liaison between municipalities, communities and businesses to connect the public to cultural and educational workshops, social events, government assistance programs and nonprofit outreach.

As a liaison for the Village of Sleepy Hollow, Loja is passionate about providing assistance to residents on such issues as job opportunities, food assistance, shelter and loan applications. Loja launched her own Spanish news media platform to capture some of the pressing issues impacting the Latino population.

“It is for me a privilege to be Hispanic, number one,” Loja said. “This county has diversity of culture.”

Each woman received a special proclamation from Harckham for their achievements.
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*U.S. News and World Report

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The Chelsea at Greenburgh has been a godsend for our family. This absolutely beautiful venue is such a welcoming haven for our mother and for our family each time we visit. We always wanted our loving mother to transition to a place that is welcoming, caring and safe. We found this at The Chelsea at Greenburgh. The amazing staff members are so supportive. Our mother thoroughly enjoys the variety of engaging events each day plus the social aspect. - Joan B

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Police Blotter

Croton-on-Hudson Police Department

Oct. 4: Patrol responded to Half Moon Bay Drive at 5:22 p.m. on a report from a resident who stated that she received a letter in the mail from an unknown source that had very derogatory language about their spouse. There was no report taken at this time.

Oct. 5: Croton EMS responded to Veterans Plaza at 10:59 p.m. for a party who locked themselves in the bathroom and was in need of medical attention. Patrol, along with another law enforcement agency, were able to get the party out of the bathroom. The individual was transported to the hospital.

Oct. 7: Patrols responded to Croton Point Avenue at 1:03 p.m. on a report of a party loitering on their property while yelling obscenities. The area was checked and the party was located at the train station. They were interviewed, appeared disoriented and Croton EMS was notified to respond. The subject refused to be seen by medical personnel and left the scene on foot.

Oct. 10: Patrol responded to Maple Street on a report of a disorderly group of juveniles at 10:18 p.m. It was discovered there had been an altercation between two parties. One of those parties had left the scene prior to the officers’ arrival. Parents were notified and a report was to be filed.

United Way to Host Human Trafficking Learning Session Oct. 28

The United Way of Westchester and Putnam is co-hosting an hour-long live learning session with United Way Worldwide’s Center titled “Understanding Human Trafficking: The Intersections & Complexities” on Thursday, Oct. 28 at noon.

The event will include a team of survivor leaders who are experts in the anti-human trafficking movement. The session will provide an overview of the issue of human trafficking and information on how we can strategically and collectively combat it in our community.

Human trafficking is a widespread and often invisible crime that occurs worldwide and in our own backyards. It is the act of compelling someone into work or commercial sex acts through force, fraud or coercion.

Although it is illegal everywhere, human trafficking happens everywhere, including in our community. Whether or not we recognize it, this is an issue we all touch directly in our professional and personal lives.

Fortunately, we are positioned to drive a powerful, unified strategy to combat human trafficking together as a community.

All are welcome, but advance registration is necessary. To register or for more information, visit https://www.uwwp.org/human-trafficking-session/

County Police/Mount Kisco

Oct. 14: Officers responded to the Holiday Inn parking lot on Holiday Inn Drive at 2:08 a.m. on a report of a man sleeping in a car. The man, who appeared intoxicated and disoriented, told officers he was depressed and was planning to drive to Denver. Officers took him to Northern Westchester Hospital for a mental health evaluation.

Oct. 14: A 56-year-old man was issued a summons for drinking alcohol from an open container in the Blackeby parking lot off South Moger Avenue at 9:40 a.m.

Oct. 15: A Yorktown resident reported at 12:48 p.m. that his brother apparently used his identity while receiving a traffic ticket in Mount Kisco. The Yorktown man said he could provide proof that he was at work on the day and time the summons was issued and that his brother provided his personal information to an officer issuing the ticket in Mount Kisco and to Yonkers police in a separate matter. The case was turned over to detectives for additional investigation.

North Castle Police Department

Oct. 10: A Wampus Avenue resident reported at 5:24 p.m. that earlier this date that an older couple was walking their dog and permitted it to defecate on her lawn without picking it up. A minor argument ensued when the complainant confronted the couple about cleaning up after their dog. She wanted the incident as a matter of record because of a concern the couple will return and harass her.

Oct. 12: The Bedford dog control officer reported finding a white and black Shih Tzu in the area of Bedford Banksville Road at 9:12 a.m. He would like to be notified if anyone reports a dog missing fitting that description.

Oct. 12: A caller reported at 9:30 a.m. that his car was possibly vandalized on High Street with car parts left on his property. The responding officer gathered information; a report to follow.

Pleasantville Police Department

Oct. 9: Report of criminal mischief on Hopper Street at 11:30 a.m. after a car was keyed. The matter is under investigation.

Oct. 12: A Honda Pilot was reported stolen from Mountain Road at 5:56 a.m. The keys were left in the car and it was unlocked.

Oct. 13: An unlocked car was ransacked on Broadway at 10:12 p.m. Loose change was reported missing.

Oct. 14: A Croton-on-Hudson resident was pulled over on Pleasantville Road after driving erratically. A summons was issued and an appearance in village court was scheduled.

Crossword

Across
1. Hamburg’s river
5. Posthumous Pulitzer Prize winner James
9. Hair tangle
10. Academic types, abbr.
11. Not a fish supplement, but a way to heat your home and save $$
12. Markers
13. They desert causes
15. Prickly seed case
16. Fall month, abbr.
17. Attention grabber
20. Cat calls
22. Wing
23. Sheepish computer memory?
25. Vinny Gambini” would eat at this Mahopac restaurant
29. Toward shelter, nautically
31. Makes one
32. Cub Scout units
33. Flight section
34. Hearththrob Brad
35. Going __ crazy

Down
1. Approval
2. Neighbor of Cambodia
3. Englishman, abbr.
4. “Enchanted” role for Anne Hathaway
5. Per person
6. Halloween correspondent?
7. Part of some e-mail addresses
8. Count followers
9. Absorb
11. Jamie Foxx’s vehicle in “Collateral”
14. “Magnum, P.I.” star Selleck
18. Most cunning
19. What patients need, for short
21. Not so crazy
24. Not in-box filler
26. Not theirs
27. Condo, e.g.
28. Spanish affirmatives
29. Payroll processing company
30. Waikiki wear

Answers on page 25

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**continued on page 26**
Samhain: A Fitting Time to Reflect and Reconsider Roots

Before another word is read, a solid goodbye to a giant of Irish traditional music, Paddy Moloney, a founding member of The Chieftains, who left us on Oct. 11, a young 83. We’ll give him his full due in a future article.

For now, “Slainte, Padraig!” Safe home!

Given the time of year, it’s fitting to reprise an earlier topic, the Celtic festival of Samhain, what we today call Hallowe’en. Aptly described in Frank Delaney’s eminently readable study, “The Celts,” as “the greatest Celtic festival,” Samhain (pronounced SOW-in, with the “ow” as in “how”) is a perfect time for us to reflect and reconsider our roots, and the beliefs our forebears held close to their hearts.

With the coming of the Christian era, Samhain, along with other Celtic feasts and festivals, was “redecorated,” in this case becoming the Christian Feast Day of All Saints (Nov. 1), also called All Hallows Day. In fact, the term in use today – Hallowe’en – signifies the Eve of All Hallows. Let’s look more closely at Samhain and its lingering presence today.

Sundown on Oct. 31 marks the beginning of the feast. It continues into the following day, Nov. 1, and ends with the setting sun that day. The Celts kept time differently than we do. For them, the 24-hour day began and ended at sunset, rather than our midnight.

Samhain is one of the four major Celtic seasonal festivals, the others being Imbolc (Feb. 1), Beltaine (May 1) and Lughnasna (Aug. 1). Samhain marks the end of the harvest season, the beginning of the Celtic winter, the birth of another year and the beginning of the storytelling season, which would run until spring. At Samhain, we move from the “light” half of the year, to the “dark” half. Samhain continues to exhibit a magnetic hold on the popular imagination, and has morphed into an almost universally celebrated event throughout the Western world: Hallowe’en.

What happens during this almost 24-hour period from dusk to dusk? The boundaries between our world of the living and that of the dead are lifted, and free passage is afforded to the spirits inhabiting the far side, whether good or evil. It is a time for honoring ancestors, inviting them to step through the portal and take a seat at the hearth. We solicit their aid in warding off malevolent spirits who may have slipped through, with the aim of wrecking havoc among the living for the duration of the feast.

One method of protection is to don evil-looking garb, bizarre costumes and ghoulish masks to fool evil spirits into thinking that someone is already well at work spreading mayhem and havoc. Food is prepared as an offering, both for the living and the dead. Portions left uneaten will be shared later with those less fortunate.

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Enter Christianity, and a convenient transformation occurs. The Feast of All Saints is on Nov. 1, and the day after, the Feast of All Souls. Why Oct. 31 wasn’t similarly commandeered is a mystery, but may speak to the depth of Samhain’s starting hours in the people’s psyche – strong magic not to be toyed with. And on these Christian feast days, we still honor the dead, saints or sinners, just as the ancient Celts did.

On their eve, the custom of wearing disguises to ward off evil spirits endures, a solid favorite of young and old alike.

Irishcentral.com lays out a nice blessing to sum it all up, deftly balancing a blend of beliefs:

“At all Hallow’s Tide, may God keep you safe
From goblin and pooka and black-hearted stranger.
From harm of the water and hurt of the fire,
From thorns of the bramble, from all other danger,
From Will O’ The Wisp haunting the mire;
From stumbles and tumbles and tricksters to vex you,
May God in His mercy, this week protect you.”

Pleasantville resident Brian McGowan was born and raised in the Bronx and is a second-, third- and fifth-generation Irish-American/Canadian, as his immigrant ancestors followed several paths to the New World. Reach him at brian.m.mcgowan1952@gmail.com or on Twitter (@Bmcsowgan52). He is the author of two books “Thunder at Noon,” about the battle of Waterloo, and “Love, Son John,” about World War II. Both are available at Amazon.com.

Halloween Organ ‘Spooktacular’
Set for October 31

On Sunday, Oct. 31, Halloween night at 7 p.m., Dr. Sandor Szabo, music director and organist will perform a short organ concert featuring a spooky selection of well-known organ music such as “Toccata and Fugue” by Bach, “Dance Macabre” by Saint-Seans, excerpts from “Nutcracker Ballet,” “Gynt Suite” and “Suite Gothique” by Boelmann. The free concert will take place at Sacred Heart Church, located at 417 Broadway in Dobbs Ferry. Open to all ages. Come in costume and enjoy this festive music before or after trick-or-treating.

Organization Holds Essay Contest on Housing’s Role Influencing Future

Lifting Up Westchester, a nonprofit agency committed to helping individuals experiencing homelessness and hunger achieve self-sufficiency, announced last week its fifth annual high school student essay contest.

Open to all pupils attending school in Westchester grades 7-12, students are invited to explore the role housing plays in influencing their personal future, the future of their community and how it impacts all of Westchester.

This year’s essay challenges students to reflect broadly on the issue of housing in Westchester. Today, there are 1,800 individuals living in shelters every night in the county. There are tens of thousands of Westchester residents living in homes where their tenancy is unstable. Even more individuals and families have to couch surf or live within overcrowded quarters just to have a roof over their head.

There are negative physical, mental health and educational consequences for those experiencing inadequate housing and all forms of homelessness. The pandemic has exacerbated the housing problem for a much broader socioeconomic group who lost jobs and/or had salaries reduced at the same time that rents and mortgages have risen faster than income and earnings.

“We know that stable, adequate housing is a critical foundation on which all other individual and family success can be built,” said Anahita Kotval, CEO of Lifting Up Westchester. “This year’s essay contest challenges our students to reflect deeply on how we can ensure adequate housing for all our neighbors.”

The essay contest was established in 2017 in memory of Beth Massey Rubens, a lifelong teacher, tutor and mentor who had a love for language arts.

First-, second- and third-place cash prizes will be awarded in each of the three grade groups: seventh and eighth grades, ninth and 10th grades and 11th and 12th grades. New this year is an ESL category. Any ESL student in grades 7-12 can choose to enter this category.

First prize in each category is $500, second place is $250 and third place is $100.

The contest, which kicked off last Friday, is accepting students’ submissions through Jan. 17, 2022, at 5 p.m. Students can enter the contest through the dedicated portal at http://s.alchemer.com/s3/2022-LUW-Essay-Contest and upload their essays. Winners will be announced in late February.

Students, teachers and parents can learn more about how the contest works and review the judging process and criteria by visiting https://www.liftingupwestchester.org/essay-contest.

Crossword

Answers

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<tr>
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<th>across 11</th>
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<td>ELBE</td>
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By Brian McGowan
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Located in Peekskill, NY is accepting resumes for the following positions: 2 Part-Time Sales Associate Positions. These positions have been made available by the provisions of a grant to Lily of the Valley Floral Design from the New York State Office of Community Renewal CDBG. Low to moderate income persons as defined by HUD will be given first consideration in hiring. Interested applicants should email their resume to pannilyvalley@lilyofthevalleyfl.com or by mail to: Lily of the Valley Floral Design, PO. Box 629, Peekskill, NY 10566. Resume and cover letters must be received by Thursday, October 28, 2021.

MISCELLANEOUS

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A nonprofit organization in Westchester, NY is seeking sealed bids for sales and installation of security related enhancements. This is a New York State Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services grant funded project. The project includes (i) installation of one or more: technology (such as CCTV, access control, alarms, sensors, X-ray machines, magnetometer), security film, doors, locks, windows, bollards, booth, planters, barriers, lighting, fencing, privacy fencing, gates, (ii) training programs, and (iii) security personnel. Bids will be accepted until 5:00 PM on December 5, 2021. Work is expected to commence by the week of January 31, 2022 and be completed by August 31, 2023. All interested vendors will be required to demonstrate preliminary qualifications and licensing for this work, acknowledge receipt of the proposal documents, and provide company name, business address, telephone, fax and email address, and primary contact name. Selection criteria will be based on knowledge of surveillance and security, adherence to project work schedule, prior experience, references, and cost. Specifications and bid requirements can be obtained by contacting us at Westchestergrants@gmail.com

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TV INTERNET PHONE

Todd Elementary School Welcomes In-House STEAM Teacher

Todd Elementary students are in luck. Not only does their school have its very own STEAM teacher this year, but she comes to Briarcliff Manor with background in International Baccalaureate (IB), an inquiry-based learning program.

The new teacher, Amira Lahlouh, hails from Canada, where she spent six years working as an elementary school teacher and regularly used science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics in her classroom.

“I always did different STEAM-related activities that I integrated into the subjects that I taught,” she said. “This fits well with the IB program because STEAM is all about inquiry-based learning.”

Lahlouh has done various professional development workshops but also learned on her own.

“My degree is in mathematical sciences and I have always loved math and science but STEAM is a passion of mine,” she said.

Before Lahlouh arrived at the district, various teachers did STEAM activities. Now, however, with Lahlouh, they have been organized as one subject that encompasses many subjects within the curriculum.

“I am trying to integrate STEAM to the existing curriculum and working with the teachers to do activities that will enhance the work that they are already doing,” Lahlouh said. “I have done that when I worked back in Canada, too; I helped other teachers integrate STEAM activities into their curriculum.

“I can always find ways to integrate subjects like coding or makerspace into the program. It makes it more exciting because it adds another dimension of learning.”

Recently, Lahlouh visited Ana Correia’s second-grade class to work on coding and spelling.

“I taught the students how to code blue bots which is fairly simple and a great way to introduce coding for the younger grades,” she said. “We used the blue bots to spell different words – we started with simple words, so the students would code the blue bots to spell the word cat, for example.”

Once the students learn how to code with the blue bots, they can use coding as one of the options when they have various stations in the classroom.

“If one of the stations is word work, students can choose to use coding as one of the options to practice spelling,” Lahlouh said.

Lahlouh works in both the students’ classrooms and her own classroom to have the students engage in the various activities.

Recently, for example, kindergarten students came to her room to do an activity where they were tasked with creating a structure that will prevent an ice cube from melting,” Lahlouh said.

She acknowledged that not all schools have a dedicated STEAM teacher and thinks it is fortunate to have such an opportunity for students.

“There has been a bigger push for it recently in the area because there has been a push in New York State, so more schools are starting to get STEAM teachers. I am fortunate to have been hired to do this work at Todd,” Lahlouh said.

Lower Taxes

As a Peekskill City Councilman, Joe worked to turn the city’s failing fiscal position around that had seen out of control spending and borrowing. This is the same focus that Joe will bring to Westchester County government.

Public Safety

As a former Town of Cortlandt Court Officer and Peekskill Auxiliary Police Officer, Joe knows the critical importance of public safety. While serving in City government, Joe was the council liaison to the Police and Fire Departments as well as the Office of Emergency Management, an organization he had served as a volunteer for over a decade. His commitment to public safety and law enforcement is critical to the communities of Northern Westchester.

Small Business

Joe knows small business. He is the owner of Reliable Sewer and Drain for close to 30 years and has championed the cause of small business to create jobs and opportunity throughout the area. As a member of the Peekskill Yacht Club, Joe sponsors annual boat rides for Peekskill’s disadvantaged youth. Joe Torres is the right person at the right time to represent the Towns of Cortlandt and Yorktown and the City of Peekskill.

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- Software Developer & System Architect
- Laboratory Informatics Business Analyst
- U.S. Naval Research Laboratory Researcher
- Experience in a wide range of industries

Business Owner
- Lab Objects Corp, Daly Web Inc

Community Minded
- Parent, grandparent, Mahopac home owner for 16 years, STEM and local business advocate, and Keep Putnam Beautiful sponsor

April’s Goals for Carmel

Effective & Efficient Government
- Maximize transparency & public interest
- Ease tax burden on families & seniors

Business Growth
- Expand water, sewer, and broadband to
  - Support small businesses
  - Benefit remote workers and students
  - Keep seniors safe and connected in their homes

Sustainable Infrastructure
- Strengthen Infrastructure against severe weather
- Take advantage of climate smart grants
- Form a Sustainable Infrastructure Task Force

Digital Surveillance Data Polices
- Address how collected digital surveillance data is accessed, shared, and retained

Vote for A Better Carmel
Vote for Change

Town of Cortlandt Halloween Events

Halloween Dog Parade
Costumes suggested and treats for all participants!
Cortlandt Dog Park
130 Sprout Brook Road
Cortlandt Manor
Saturday, October 30th
2:30 PM - 3:30 PM
FREE

Please register at tim@townofcortlandt.com.
For more information call 914-734-1056.

Hobgoblin Parade
A special Halloween parade is open to everyone in costume from ages 2-14. Trophies and candy will be given to all children in costume.
Cortlandt Youth Center
3 Memorial Drive, Croton on Hudson
Hockey Rink
Saturday, October 30th
1:00 PM Sharp
FREE

Please contact Lesley Popkin for more information at lesleyp@townofcortlandt.com or 914-734-1057.
Is Your Palate Able to Discern a Biodynamic Wine?

By Nick Antonaccio

Over the past few weeks, I’ve been focusing on the virtues of organically produced wines, those that are simpatico with the natural order of agriculture, grown and produced in a symbiotic relationship with the multitude of environments that influence the aroma, taste and enjoyment of a glass of wine.

We’ve also explored the various phrases in today’s lexicon to describe the process by which wines are produced. The use of many of these words and phrases are not regulated, or government-defined, leaving many consumers in a quandary when confronted with “natural,” “organic,” “sustainable” or “biodynamic” on a label or in descriptive material.

Last week we took a deep dive into one of those descriptors, biodynamic, the ultimate expression of being one with nature. It has been espoused that this practice is one that will sustain the land, the winery workforce and protect mankind from the debilitating effects of big industry’s practices.

But through all this, we’ve yet to delve into the ultimate expression of these various organic practices: the finished product.

In my opinion, these naturally produced wines are more representative of the land on which the grapes are grown, are more representative of the surrounding elements that influence the final grapes harvested and bring out the purest expression of the land and the grapevines as nature intended.

How is biodynamic different from organic? It is a farming philosophy, not a farming practice. It incorporates elements of astronomy and benevolent co-existence with pests, all in an effort to sustain a mutually rewarding relationship with Mother Earth. For example, some practitioners will plant vines and harvest grapes by the phases of the moon in order to be in harmony with the earth’s natural cycles; others will bury a cow’s horn filled with cow manure in the vineyards on the autumnal equinox, believing that this will enrich the soil over the winter in preparation for spring growth. Still others will burn insects and weeds and spread the ashes in the vineyard to ward off other pests.

This may sound like a harkening back to the Dark Ages, when occult practices prevailed, but think of it as a renaissance or an enlightenment that rejects modern day chemistry and crop management practices focused on the bottom line.

A short history of vineyard management may help here. In Western Europe, grapes have been grown for thousands of years, well before the modern-day influences of the petrochemical industry. The introduction of chemicals into the vineyard was hailed as a miracle for grape vigor and consistency.

However, over the past century a noticeable change took place in the wines being produced. Multigenerational French family-owned wineries noticed a change in the flavors, aromas and the balance of fruit and acid in their wines. It seemed as if the wines were losing their natural characteristics. Thus, an organic movement began in the late 1970s.

By the mid-1990s, many of these French winemakers decided that organic products still fell short of creating the truest expression of their wines. So they decided to employ the biodynamic practices that had served their forefathers so well.

The result? In 1997, Domaine Leflaive, a famous winery in Burgundy, France, held a tasting. Two wines were blind-tasted and the tasters expressed a clear preference for one of them. Unbeknownst to the tasters, both wines sampled were from the same vineyard and same vintage, but from different plots in the vineyard; one had been farmed organically and the other biodynamically.

The tasters stated that one wine had much better balance and acidity and lacked the extraneous aromas and flavors of the other wine, a purer expression of the fruit. Which wine was the overwhelming favorite? The biodynamically-produced wine.

Numerous other winemakers have followed. I encourage you to seek out these wines and to urge your local wine merchant to stock them. You can be the first to enjoy the ultimate green product. Spread the word.

Nick Antonaccio is a 45-year Pleasantville resident. For over 25 years, he has conducted wine tastings and lectures. Nick is a member and program director of the Wine Media Guild of wine journalists. He also offers personalized wine tastings and wine travel services. Nick’s credo: continuous experimenting results in instinctive behavior. You can reach him at nantonaccio@theexaminernews.com or on Twitter @sharingwine.
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